

Charter of Rights for Women in Disaster Situations

2010

Recommendations by Pakistani Women

Outcome document of a National Advocacy & Action Strategy Consultation Series by PODA
Endorsed by over 5,000 rural women from all parts of Pakistan presented to NDMA, government ministers and women parliamentarians at the 3rd Annual Conference on the International Day of Rural Women - on 15th October 2010 held at Lok Virsa, Islamabad- Pakistan

Introduction: Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), a Pakistani women's rights NGO, organized a series of Advocacy and Action Strategy consultations throughout Pakistan during August and September 2010 in collaboration with the National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM now UN Women) to highlight the critical issues that are raised by rural women activists working for flood relief in all parts of Pakistan. These Consultations were held in Islamabad (August 30), Hyderabad, Sindh (September 6), Multan, Punjab (September 18) and Peshawar, Khyber-Pukhtoonkhwa (September 28) and Quetta, Balochistan (October 13, 2010). Each consultation brought together over 100 participants including rural women leaders, working women directly with flood affected communities, representatives of human rights organizations, members of the civil society, lawyers, academia, writers, poets, humanitarians, government officials, United Nations and international organizations working for Flood Relief in Pakistan. The agenda in all consultations included testimonies and reports from the field, open discussions and strategizing for future policy and action priorities. The overarching purpose of these consultations was to amplify the voices, priority needs and recommendations of women. As a result of these consultations, a 'Charter of Rights for Women in Disaster Situations' was developed shared and presented at the 15th October Conference and signed on by all the conference participants including women ministers, parliamentarians, government officials and rural women leaders themselves. The Charter was also presented to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and to the United Nations. The final text of the Charter is presented below:

We, the women of Pakistan and our supporters in the country and the world over, present our vision for women's role in disaster mitigation and peace through the following recommendations:

Realizing that there are four stages while responding to any natural disaster; Rescue, Emergency relief, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction, we highlight that in all these stages women and children have specific needs that require special attention and response for which following recommendations are prepared keeping these four stages in view.

1. In the process of loss assessment and rehabilitation the Government and foreign aid organizations must consult women's rights organizations and the affected women themselves.

2. At the district level, a committee of representatives of the district administration, the NGOs and civil society organizations should be formed with 33% representation of women.
3. In emergency relief stage, the families headed by women should be accommodated in camps on a priority basis. They should be helped in registration and access to assistance.
4. During the relief work, women's safety, their gender-specific special needs, and privacy should be respected and facilitated.
5. Children's food requirements are different from adults and pose special burdens on women therefore the urgent needs of children such as milk and appropriate nutritious food should be ensured so that the women in disaster situations can take care of their children and themselves.
6. Proper sanitation is essential for women's health. Therefore sufficient number of mobile latrines and proper drainage system should be provided in camps to prevent spread of diseases.
7. Large water tanks, drums, water purification tablets should be provided in sufficient quantity.
8. Lady Doctors should be provided in mobile health units for care of sick and pregnant women.
9. Protection of women and girls should be planned and complaint mechanisms should be provided in camps and host communities to ensure compliance of laws against sexual harassment and ending violence against women as such crimes increase in disaster situations.
10. Disaster may cause severe mental and psychological stress among women therefore they should be provided special counseling and access and facilitation for mental health care.
11. Women need their National Computerized Identity Cards (CNICs) to avail relief and rehabilitation services and compensation for damages therefore women who do not have or have lost their CNICs should be provided assistance on urgent and priority basis.
12. Legal aid and awareness of legal rights should be made available to women and girls.
13. Most men and women displaced due to floods are from the lower and deprived strata of the society. A large number of women among them are farm labourers. Their sustainable rehabilitation is not possible unless they are given ownership of lands for their own cultivation.
14. Women should be given ownership rights of lands and livestock. A number of models can be considered in this regard. For example cooperative farming or distribution of livestock and 2 acres of land to each household. Men and women in a family can be given joint ownership after mutual consultation.
15. Women who are engaged in home based industry face huge losses in natural disasters and since home-based industrial workers are not recognized as workers in our country their losses are not compensated. There is a need to form a policy for protection of such workers and also given compensation for their losses on an immediate basis. They should be provided cloth, thread, and other material so that can they continue their work.

16. The education department and health department should immediately appoint teachers and lady health visitors in camps so that education and health problems could be solved.
17. Media should highlight the problems of women on a priority basis. Sensationalism should be avoided and positive activities should be highlighted.
18. It should be ensured that education of students and special children is not affected. Affected students should be given scholarships and grants. They should be provided uniforms, books and bags.
19. Foreign donors should not give aid in loans; rather it should be given in the shape of grants and donations. In view of the present disaster and conditions it is the responsibility of donor agencies that they write off their loans.
20. In flood affected areas some people own large landholdings while the majority of the rural population is landless farm workers and agricultural laborers who do not have a source of livelihood of their own. So it is necessary that in any future disasters this poor class should be made financially strong. Therefore, we demand that land reforms process should be initiated along with the rehabilitation work and land should be distributed among the flood victims. This will provide sustainable rehabilitation.

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