



Missing Voices: An intersectional approach to understanding gender and disaster risk

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Vulnerability to disaster risk is shaped by gender inequality, gender norms and social marginalisation. Disasters often impact marginalised gender groups more, and further entrench gender inequality which in turn undermines development goals. Research on community experience of disaster, and work to reduce disaster risk, often disregards gender, or considers gender in a tokenistic and simplified way, perhaps through a simple gender disaggregation of quantitative data. These approaches homogenise women, failing to recognise the intersectionality and diversity of gender and other identities which shape vulnerability and disaster risk. Such simplified analyses also tend to adopt a binary cisnormative approach to gender, erasing communities outside of a gender binary.

In new research in Nepal and Peru, we have taken an intersectional approach, enhancing more traditional collection of quantitative and qualitative data with targeted ‘missing voices’ interviews. Missing voices interviewees included elderly women, women with disabilities, single mothers, transgender women, women who were pregnant or with young babies, women with young children, women with visual impairments. We adopted an approach of working through trusted intermediaries and snowball sampling, to engage and build trust with individuals with multiple intersecting areas of vulnerability or social marginalisation. In contrast to the typical approach to interviews adopted in the NGO sector, we piloted an approach of telephone interviews, with peer introduction and a series of telephone contacts.

We reflect upon the challenges and advantages of this approach, contrasting the openness of the narrative and interviewee willingness to share sensitive information on experiences of marginalisation, exclusion, abuse or violence. We consider how to document and share first person narratives, and the power of sharing voices who are often overlooked in discussion on disaster and disaster risk.

The work is underpinned by a gender transformative approach. We explore the differences between a gender unaware, a gender aware, a gender sensitive and a gender transformative approach to Disaster Risk Reduction.