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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN POST DISASTER RECONSTRUCTION: PERSPECTIVES ON POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

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ABSTRACT. There has been an increase in the occurrence of natural disasters and their impact has aroused the interest of many stakeholders to incorporate different strategies on disaster management. Although disasters may end many opportunities and lives, the lives of survivors do not cease in the disaster affected areas. The impact of natural disasters and the consequent partial reconstruction efforts have specifically presented many challenges to women. In this context, the main research investigates the empowerment of women during post disaster reconstruction particularly in Sri Lanka.

Among the factors that influence women's empowerment, existing policies and frameworks is one of the important factors that can play a major role within the post disaster reconstruction in Sri Lanka. Hence, in order to gain an understanding of the existing framework of women's empowerment, this study investigates the national and international policies and frameworks that exist within the post disaster context in Sri Lanka. The study found that even though polices are gender neutral, they are not gender sensitive. In addition, it was found that having a single policy or framework for the whole country is unlikely to be a success, therefore, any frameworks should have room to be adopted to the local situation.

KEYWORDS: Disaster; Empowerment; Frameworks; Sri Lanka; Women

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is confronted with greater challenges to protect the earth from increasing global temperature which is currently projected to rise up to 6.3 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century (United Nations Environment Program, 2009 cited Eilperin, 2009). In addition, it is predicted that sea levels may rise by up to nearly a metre. The current number of occurrences of natural disasters and the scale of their damage are drawing the attention of various organisations to build disaster resil-

ient communities. This is mainly due to the vulnerabilities and needs of communities that can only be identified through a process of direct consultation and dialogue with the communities concerned since those are the communities who can understand local realities and contexts better than outsiders (Haghebaert, 2007).

Although disasters and devastations are not new to Sri Lanka, the extent of devastation to properties and lives in one single event on 26th of December 2004, had an impact not only within the country but around the world.

Even though Sri Lanka had experience of dealing with natural disasters such as floods, landslides and occasional cyclones, the Tsunami took many by surprise by its scale of devastation. McEntire et al. (2010) stated that vulnerability is based on factors related to liabilities and capabilities which have both physical and social elements. In the process of building disaster resilience, the built environment plays a major role during post disaster reconstruction which can provide many opportunities for rebuilding the social and economic status of the community (Thurairajah et al., 2008).

Haigh and Amaratunga (2010) state that the environments with which people interact most directly are often products of human initiated processes and this idea has been neglected in the arrangements to protect or restore the environment. The lack of involvement of both men and women in disaster management has exposed them to more potential dangers (Childs, 2006). Recent study by Lawther (2009) emphasised the importance of community involvement in post disaster reconstruction. A notable aspect of the post disaster reconstruction phase has been the lack of inclusion of women and other vulnerable groups into rebuilding and community development. Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe (2003) state that disasters affect women and men differently due to the different roles and responsibilities undertaken by them, and the differences in their capacities, needs and vulnerabilities. In most of the instances, although disaster management efforts are designed to benefit both men and women, in practice a larger share of benefits and resources goes to men while women continue to remain marginalised (Delaney and Shrader, 2000).

Among the factors that influence women's empowerment, existing policies and frameworks is one of the important factors that can play a major role within post disaster reconstruction (Gomez, 2006; Centre for Women's Research, 2006). Hence, it is important to understand the existing frameworks on women's empowerment in post disaster reconstruction in order to shape the gender balance in post disaster settings. Within this context, this study firstly examines the way the concept of empowerment has been viewed within development studies and, secondly, analyses the national and international policies and frameworks that exist within the post disaster context in Sri Lanka. The research also investigates the issues on policies and frameworks. This study has been based on a theoretical as well as practical ideas obtained through a comprehensive literature review and interviews carried out among experts in practice in Sri Lanka.

2. EMPOWERMENT: IN DEVELOPMENTAL SETTINGS

The concept of women's empowerment is a fuzzy concept as used by many organisations and researchers. Historical textual analysis and interviews with researchers and officials in development organisations disclose its flexibility and capacity to carry multiple meanings. While explaining the reasons behind the concept of empowerment, Humphries (1996) states that it is used to avoid social exclusion, polarisation, marginalisation but it is not used towards inclusion. In the efforts to utilise the concept for a broader social change agenda, policy makers and other officials juggle these different meanings in order to keep that agenda alive. However, the concept needs to be defined properly in order to achieve its primary objectives without manipulations. Hence, in order to gain an understanding of the ways the concept has been viewed, and the measures considered for its implementation within many countries, the following sections review the concept within developed and developing countries.

2.1. Empowerment: the construct

The concept of empowerment has been defined in numerous ways within the literature. Within organisational management it has been used to empower the employees, while in developmental studies it has been used to empower marginalised or vulnerable people. Within the developmental contexts, Wang and Burris (1994) state that empowerment is about increasing capability, especially for marginalised people and groups who are farthest down the ladder in the power hierarchy and who have least access to knowledge, decisions, networks, and resources. In a study on empowering Russian adults at the individual and household level, empowerment is viewed as taking actions that selectively empower those with little power to redress power inequality (Lokshin and Ravallion, 2005). This project was aimed at addressing inequality of personal power and inequality of economic welfare. According to a study in USA, empowerment is viewed as expanding assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable for institutions that affect their lives (Moser and Moser, 2003).

As per the report on poverty elimination and empowerment of women in the UK, empowerment has been defined as individuals acquiring the power to think and act freely, exercise choice, and to fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society. A study emphasised the need to have equality of opportunity and equity of outcomes for women's empowerment (Department for International Development, 2000). In another study within the UK, women's empowerment has been viewed as a process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing (Mosedale, 2005). It identified the problems that can be addressed through empowerment such as women's gender identities that disempowered them in public roles, and the need for change that expands options not only for themselves but for also for women in general.

Within developing countries, Roy and Tisdell (2002) refer women's empowerment as a process by which women can gain power to diminish the forces of institutional deterrents considerably to their development within rural India. In Nepal, government and non-governmental organisations funded projects are running to develop communities which include educational development, child welfare, women empowerment and health services. A study on empowering women through a community development approach views empowerment as a multidimensional and interlinked process of change in power relations to expand individual choices and capacities for self-reliance (Mayoux, 2003 cited Acharya et al., 2007). According to a study on rural women in Bangladesh, Parveen and Leonhäuser (2004) describe empowerment as an essential precondition for the elimination of poverty and upholding of human rights, in particular at the individual level as it helps to build a base for social change.

2.2. Empowerment: measures and factors

As shown in study in USA, the empowerment of local communities was achieved through community participation (Moser and Moser, 2003). In this study the need to consider a community's perceptions about indicators of empowerment and conditions prevailing in the surrounding has been highlighted (Moser and Moser, 2003). The need to consider the surrounding conditions was emphasised since the context within which the indicators act, can have an effect on the ultimate results. A study on empowering Russian adults at individual and household level concluded that perceptions of power and welfare are significant but seemly weak in association between them in level and over time. It used Cantril

ladder to rank respondents' power by themselves (Lokshin and Ravallion, 2005). It is a nine step scale used for measuring power and welfare. As an example for power scale, the first step stands for people who are completely without rights, and the ninth step stands for people who have a lot of power.

A report on poverty elimination and empowerment of women in the UK (Department for International Development, 2000) identifies the factors that influence empowerment of women as:

– Acquiring knowledge and understanding of gender relations and the ways in which these relations may be changed;

– Developing a sense of self-worth, a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life;

– Gaining the ability to generate choices and exercise bargaining power;

– Developing the ability to organise and influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order.

In this context empowerment of women was intended to address lack of commitment to improve opportunities for women, lack of income, limited access to services and opportunities for human development, lack of voice in political life and decision making and social subordination and exclusion (Department for International Development, 2000). The report highlighted aspects that need to be considered for the support for gender equality and women's empowerment: economic and social policy; women's economic empowerment; education; women in public life; trade and globalisation; reproductive and sexual health; rights of the child; violence against women; basic services and infrastructure.

In a study within rural India, Roy and Tisdell (2002) state that the right to land is an important factor for women's empowerment as it is a more permanent source of income and

it indicates that the person has a long-term interest in preserving the fertility of the land and therefore will be interested in investing in land. Furthermore, when income is higher this will increase the person's capacity to spend on consumption of food, housing, education, health and other necessities. It was found that when women work on someone else's land as paid labour or on her family land as an unpaid labour they do not have an opportunity to invest and cannot have a significant voice in family's expenditure plan.

In order to address females submission, silence, sacrifice, inferiority and obedience, problems in female illiteracy, and lesser mobility of women in employment in Nepal, a research project considered the concept of empowerment of women through facilitating self-help group activities which are truly self-reliant, literacy programmes, group savings and credit programmes (Mayoux, 2003 cited Acharya et al., 2007). A study on rural women in Bangladesh (Parveen and Leonhäuser, 2004) found 6 indicators to measure a cumulative empowerment index such as contribution to household income, access to resources, ownership of assets, participation in household decision-making, perception on gender awareness, and coping capacity to household shocks. The study addressed women's problems such as a limited role in household decision making, limited access and control over household resources, low level of individual resources, restricted mobility, inadequate skills and knowledge leading to vulnerability, heavy domestic workload, etc.

In Sri Lanka, the concept of empowerment is gathering momentum in addressing women's difficulties, especially to those who are more vulnerable in disaster situations. Many non-governmental organisations are working on women's empowerment in order to address women's safety and health related issues and to enhance their status with regard to their assets, income and employment. In addition, difficulties of women who work in garment fac-

tories within the free trade zone in Sri Lanka also need to be explored further since violence against them in their working and living environment indeed appear to be a major problem. Women who work at unskilled level in garment factories face health and verbal issues. Factory women who participated in a research (Hancock, 2006) rated violence against women as a major way in which to measure women's empowerment is a reflection of the problem itself at the societal level and provides new and constructive ways in which to conceptualise and measure women's empowerment. Although a government's one of the ministry has an interest in women's empowerment, there is no legislation specifically on women's empowerment. However, increasingly the enhancement of the position of women within society has been recognised and actions have been taken to reduce the gender based violence which act as a major barrier to women's empowerment.

In order to overcome the difficulties experienced by rural women with regard to their lesser access to human, capital and information resources and their very limited role outside the confines of their homestead, improvement in female participation was proposed as a solution in Kashmir within Pakistan (Weinberger, 2001). The study stated that participation meant enabling poor people to take part in a process that strengthens their own abilities and possibilities which is often regarded as a human right, allowing for equity and empowerment. In this study participation was viewed as a function of bargaining power. Further, incomplete information, cultural, ethnic and economic restrictions often influence the decision-making processes of women and hence have a bearing on women's empowerment. In addition, social networks play a major role in women's empowerment. It further states that in order to improve the participation of women two categories of participation approaches can be used: group centred participation where the costs and benefits of participation are con-

nected to the uncertainty that surrounds the behaviour of fellow individuals and the decision to participate is based on an individual analysis of cost and benefit.

A study on microfinance-based intervention on women's empowerment in South Africa (Kim et al., 2007) recognised violence against women as an explicit manifestation of gender inequality and an important risk factor for a range of poor health and economic development outcomes. Violence perpetrated by a spouse or intimate partner is the most common form of gender-based violence. This causes direct injury or loss of life and it increases vulnerability to a range of health problems. The study found that reductions in violence resulted from different approaches such as enabling women to challenge the acceptability of such violence to expect and receive better treatment from partners, to leave violent relationships, to give material and moral support to those experiencing abuse, to mobilise new and existing community groups, and to raise public awareness about the need to address both gender-based violence and infections.

In order to reap the benefits of the concept of empowerment it is important to have a mechanism that can facilitate the process of empowerment. The existing policies and frameworks fulfil an important role in shaping these mechanisms in practice. Within this context, the following sections examine the existing policies and frameworks on women's empowerment and gender balance.

3. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

This section focuses on the national and international policies and frameworks for the treatment of gender inequality which have been adopted by or enforced within Sri Lanka. Similar to the importance of fairness in laws within the international area, gender fairness has gained in importance within many fields.

The fairness of an international law, as with any other legal systems, will be judged first by the degree to which the rules satisfy the participants' expectations of justifiable distribution of costs and benefits, and secondly, by the extent to which the rules are made and applied in accordance with what the participants perceive as the correct process (Frank, 2002). Frank (2002) identified two aspects of fairness, the substantive (distributive justice) and the procedural (right process). In which the later has a primarily procedural perspective and the former has a primarily moral perspective. In order to have an effective system, decisions must be arrived at discursively in accordance with what is accepted by the parties as right process. The law promotes distributive justice not merely to secure greater compliance, but primarily because most people think it is right to act justly. Discussions on fairness tend to be productive when the allocation of rights and duties occurs in circumstances which make allocation both necessary and possible.

The push towards equal opportunities policies gathered momentum in both the UK and the USA in the 1970s and 1980s, to the point where employers and educational institutions were obliged to declare themselves publically (Humphries, 1996).There are many international frameworks under development and the popular international framework to address inequalities against women is Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW implemented by the UN General Assembly and has been often referred as an international bill of rights for women and it was the first detailed statement on women's rights at the international level. CEDAW consisting of a preamble and 30 articles. This was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and came into force on 3rd September 1981. The convention identifies what constitutes 'discrimination against women' and establishes an agenda for countries to stop any such discrimination. The convention defines 'discrimination against women' as

"Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field"(CEDAW, 1979).

Under this convention, the accepting member countries commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women. One of the reservations about CEDAW is it does not have any specific clauses on violence. However, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) filled this gap. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 in December 1993. In addition, the power of the CEDAW committee has substantial jurisprudence that informs domestic courts and member states. CEDAW can advise the governments to abolish any laws and practices that discriminate against women and establish adequate legal protection for women. Sri Lanka has ratified both CEDAW and DEVAW along with the Convention on Torture, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. Further, under the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment there are two women's statutory institutions which focus solely on women's affairs and development. These are the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka and the National Committee on Women.

The State of Sri Lanka passed a Domestic Violence Act in October 2005. This act aims to provide immediate relief to victims of violence and has been resorted to by many women to obtain protection orders against their abusers. Under this act, the definition of domestic vio-

lence does not make provision to avoid discrimination in economic assistance to households. In other words, since The Women's Charter of Sri Lanka was adopted by the government on the 3rd of March 1993. This is the main policy statement of the country regarding the rights of women. The Charter aims at eradicating sex based discrimination and achieving gender equality. The Charter establishes standards to be observed under seven broad areas:

– Political and civil rights;
– Rights within the family;
– Rights to education and training;
– Rights to economic activity and benefits;
– Rights to healthcare and nutrition;
– Rights to protection from social discrimination;
– Rights to protection from gender based violence.

Although the Charter imposes obligations on the state to tackle violence against women procedurally it is not a legally binding document and can not be reinforced in a court (People's Report, 2007).

In addition, the Population and Reproductive Health Policy formulated in 1998 contains several provisions relating to violence against women such as the review and changing of laws and practices that are prejudicial to the reproductive health of women, and the strengthening of laws and enforcement procedures to eliminate violence and sexual exploitation against women. Further, gender audits were carried out by International Labour Organisation with four constituent organisations in Sri Lanka: the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Employers' Federation of Ceylon and two trade union federations, Ceylon Workers Congress and Sri Lanka Nidahas Sewaka Sangamaya. The audits facilitated to form linkages with the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and Plans of Action. This rigorous exercise drew attention to various measures and strategies that could be used to address gender equality issues in the national context of Sri Lanka (International Labour Office, 2006).

The government of Sri Lanka formed the Task Force for Rebuilding the Nation (TAFREN), later in November 2005 replaced by the Reconstruction and Development agency (RADA) to coordinate the reconstruction process. Later, the RADA Livelihood Division formulated Divisional Livelihood Development Planning. Although RADA focuses on community participation, it does not mention specifically on women's issues. After the Tsunami, the state passed three laws related to the reconstruction stage. They are: Tsunami (Special provisions) Act No. 16 of 2005; The Registration of Deaths Act and Disaster Management Act. A Tsunami Housing Policy was formulated by RADA in April, 2006 to establish a framework for the distribution of state land and cash allocations to the Tsunami affected people. This policy facilitates the process of distribution to vulnerable groups, single women and multichild households. Within disaster situations, the plans developed by the National Centre for Disaster Management do not have any reference to gender issues up to now.

4. FINDINGS: POLICIES AND FRAMEWORKS

One of the main, sustainable means to overcome the marginal condition of disaster victims is through an adjustment process, allowing them to fulfil their basic human development needs (Jeyantha and Gunesekara, 2006). Literature on disaster management recognises that, when designing protection programmes and rebuilding the affected communities it is essential for planners to broaden the concept of women's status from the narrow conceptualisation as daughter or mother or wife (Intermediate Technology Development Group, 2001; Enarson and Morrow, 1998). This can enable post disaster reconstruction to provide physical, social, political and environmental development opportunities for women.

This paper is based on the research which is carried as part of the PhD study titled 'empowering women in post disaster reconstruction'. The first phase of data collection of the study gathered experts' opinions on the current state of women's empowerment, factors affecting or enabling empowerment, current frameworks and policies, etc. However, this paper focuses on the current frameworks and policies within post disaster settings in Sri Lanka.

During this phase of data collection, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document reviews. The interviews were chosen as a method of data collection for this phase due to their appropriateness and flexibility. Kvale (2009) stated that interviews are a more suitable method of data collection for capturing experiences and meanings of the subjects in the real world. While explaining about interviews Kvale (2009) stated that,

'The research interviews is an inter-view where knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the inter-viewee' Kvale (2009).

Further, interviews allow participants to convey their own situation in their own words from their own perspective to the researcher. In this phase, semi-structured interviews were used as they can allow for the collection of both structured information and also participants' views and opinions. This phase of data collection gathered information from experts who are working in the fields of disaster management, women's development or empowerment, construction industry. Further, interviews can facilitate the researcher to ask spontaneous questions as the first phase seeks to collect a rich and wider area of field information, and can provide a comfortable environment for the interviewee. The analysis of the interviewees' responses was processed through a procedure outlined by Hall and Hall (1996). This process involved three activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The interviews were firstly recorded and later

transcribed. Finally they were analysed using content analysis. This section of the paper presents the findings on the current state of policies and frameworks related to women's empowerment and other gender related policies within post disaster settings. In addition, it identifies the issues of planning and implementation of those policies or frameworks.

4.1. State of policies and frameworks

According to the study, it was found that, in addition to the provisions in human rights constitutions, Domestic violence was cited as an area requiring important legislation for handling gender based issues in Sri Lanka. Further, the amendments that were brought to penal courts in order to reduce gender related issues also contributed towards gender balance. Within the study, a director of the women's empowerment unit in a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which is heavily involved in women's development (not only within post Tsunami settings but also within general day to day life) said that although the Domestic Violence Act (Prevention of Domestic Violence Act [Sri Lanka], No. 34 of 2005) was implemented in 2005 by bringing together the NGOs and political parties, the knowledge of the legal provisions within the act have not been disseminated to the rural female population. Further, it was found that the knowledge of the Acts tends to remain within the capital of the country rather than to the other parts of the country. However, after identifying this issue, this particular NGO took the initiative to translate the important provisions within the act into a simpler and understandable language for the community. This study found that gender awareness has risen after the Tsunami. Warning systems were introduced soon after the Tsunami and it was noted that women were included in awareness programmes. This highlights the positive development towards gender balanced approaches.

A Women's Charter which was developed in 1993 provides guidance on activities related to gender balanced development. Although it serves as a policy document, it is not a legal document. This study highlighted that although the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka and the National Committee on Women were created under the Ministry, the expected results have not been achieved. Most importantly, the experts emphasised that although a Bill on women's development was developed, it has not been passed in the parliament. Even though it was agreed by both the ruling and opposition political parties at that time, it has not been passed. The study highlighted that the attitudes of the people who were involved in the process of approving the Bills promoting women's development and the bureaucratic nature of the organisation were some of the reasons behind the delay.

The study identified that although Universal franchise was introduced in 1933 women's representation within the political arena and at administrative levels is minimal. In Sri Lanka, less than 5% women are in the parliament, less than 3% of women are selected in the provincial government, while less than 1.7 % of women are in the local government. This indicates that women do not have the power to exercise any influence. One of the participants, who has experience of women's empowerment, and also has contributed towards policy development stated that, *"whatever is done outside won't matter unless there is some influence"*. This indicates the need to improve female representation in influential positions at policy making.

The organisations that were working on post Tsunami reconstruction identified certain issues through community consultations. One of the main issues was that women were marginalised while the distribution of land and property took place. This led to modifications to the property rights to allow both men and women to jointly own the properties which were given from the state or private sector. This shows the need for community participation, especially for marginalised people, the need for adjustments of procedures, and most importantly the interest and the dedication of gender sensitive activities within the administrative divisions.

Soon after Tsunami, a financial grant was given to the affected families. However, there were reported cases where mostly men spent this grant on drinking and left the families in desperate situations. Later this was identified and the financial grant was given jointly to men and women. Although legally there is no gender bias with regard to land rights, due to cultural beliefs and customs women were mostly given movable assets like cash while men were given land and immovable properties. Within Sri Lanka, the Roman Dutch law is gender neutral and is not biased towards men or women. However, when it comes to the disposal of properties, in certain regions, parents give their movable properties to daughters and immovable properties, such as like paddy fields, to sons. Under Islam law, properties are given to girls. Within the eastern provision, the Mukkuwa law, which is applied to a certain community of people, has considered the rights and conditions of women and has given more power to women in terms of properties. Due to this provision, women who owned land before the Tsunami received their legal entitlements after the Tsunami. However, due to the inconvenience of collecting their rights from the divisional secretariat many women allowed men to handle this and some have lost their rights due to mishandling. The study highlighted that in the southern side of the country mishandling of property rights has happened due to women's immobility or ignorance.

After the Tsunami, a Cabinet paper was drafted on gender mainstreaming in Tsunami activities. This consists of opportunities for equal participation, equal allocation and dis-

tribution of resources, provision of joint ownership for land and housing, and initiations on actions to prevent gender based violence. Apart from the policies on women's development in disaster management, the introduction of a Breast feeding policy, which gives a year of paid leave and another year unpaid, facilitates women to continue their career.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is one of the major influences on women's issues. It was emphasised that CEDAW is a very effective regulation. Although women's representation in decision making level is less, their participation is very high at grassroots. In addition to the national and international policies, many Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs) workings on disaster management in Sri Lanka have their own policies related to gender. An executive director of a company, who is working within the field of disaster reconstruction, said that their company has three-fold gender based policies. They are policies related to gender balance within members of staff, policies related to projects and activities carried out by the company and the statutory requirements such as international frameworks and national regulations. The director emphasised that compliance with these policies adds value to the company's reputation. This indicates the worth of introducing gender based policies to both participants and beneficiaries of the built environment in disaster reconstruction.

4.2. Perspectives on planning and implementation

Many NGOs and government organisations conduct workshops and seminars to identify women's issues and needs. However, it was found that women tend to be silent in general community based meetings. One of the experts from this study highlighted an incident where women were sitting in the back row benches in a community based meeting while men were sitting in the front row chairs. In addition, it was noted that women did not express their views within the meeting. However, when the organiser spoke to those women about their silence, women mentioned that they have already conveyed their issues and requirements to the most senior people, who were mostly men, before the meeting. It was noted that women are not given equal opportunities in developmental activities. In addition, the expert herself has experienced situations where men tend to ignore or not accept her ideas when she makes her presentation. She emphasised that even some women also tend to support this old school of thoughts. A research participant who has wider experience in these areas stated that, *'I, as a person who has worked in these areas still feel that women are not treated equally although women do office work, house work and many other responsibilities.'*

During the planning phase, policy developers consider the issues from the community from studies by developmental organisations and consultations with those organisations. Many studies are done by NGOs and community based organisations as it affects them more and the results are presented to policy developers. This study found that community based organisations indeed facilitate women and allow them to actively take part in developmental activities. However, in certain communities it was not successful due to lack of consideration of cultural values, beliefs and customs. Further, mainly due to stereotyping, their experience of socialisation, and especially the way mothers have brought up their children, contributed to these attitudes and promoted gender insensitivity.

A retired government officer who worked in a ministry stated that though significant amount of money came into the village for development purposes, on many occasions, both women and men did not know the availability of those funds. The remaining unutilised funds were ultimately returned to the main pool of

funds. Hence, it is important to ensure full recognition to these funds empower people to properly utilise and develop their community. The experts felt that if women are empowered, then they could get together and find a coping mechanism for their local conditions especially in certain communities where women are afraid of men or refrain from participating in developmental activities due to cultural beliefs.

Within the implementation stage, women can be beneficiaries, participants in the development activities or managers. In terms of developmental activities on women's development, women are the beneficiaries. It was brought to the attention of NGOs that women take the role of a participant commensurate with their power in respect of land or properties or any other assets, especially within rural communities. For example, women who had paddy fields took the responsibilities of their land and participated in development of their properties. Within this study, it was highlighted that in certain communities women do not speak their mind in front of men and this indicated that women tend to be less forward in certain communities due to cultural conditioning. The experts emphasised the need for further modifications in the regulations to support these societal differences.

When the interviewees were asked about the success of the implementation of these policies, it was noted that although many initiatives were pursued these policies did not commonly develop practice. Although a community may be supportive, the insensitive nature of institutions and the attitudes of some representatives towards these concepts were the reasons behind the failure. However, due to the importance given by the NGOs and other private organisations, the implementation of gender related policies and activities tend to more successful. It was also noted within the study that some people who are active in politics believed that these feminist concepts would

not work in Sri Lanka. Experts in the field of women's development believe that the success of the implementation of any legislation or policy on women's affairs is comparatively slow in Sri Lanka. However, it was stated within the study that International policies are implemented quickly, and although the policies on education and health are also implemented quickly as they are common policies, policies on employment and decision making require a longer period of time and to attain approval to balance the gender inequalities.

The study found that some people believed that, "*compared to those days women have got enough and what else do they want*". This illustrates the existence of traditional approach. Since during early days females did not contribute or participate in activities outside their house, a relatively small participation in activities outside their house is considered as an achievement and further improvements are not welcome by those people who do not believe in women's empowerment. Further, it was noted that females have entered universities and many are employed in organisations, especially within financial institutions. In reference to this statement the expert, who has actively worked in women's empowerment at policy level feels, '*Women's work is taken for granted. No matter how much the work has been done, if the sensitivity is not there among the policy makers then it will not make any difference.*

5. DISCUSSION

Although Sri Lanka is further developed than other south Asian countries in terms of education, maternal mortality, health, it has not achieved sufficient women's participation at the political level. The study found that even though polices are gender neutral, they are not gender sensitive. While investigating on whether post disaster reconstruction provides opportunities for women it was noted

that it can be a good opportunity for livelihood activities. Although women were not generally involved in the reconstruction activities within the built environment, there were instances where women were not consulted and the outcome has been the constructing services and facilities in an inappropriate or unsatisfied manner. This has resulted in some cases in the abandonment of the place and the less than full utilisation of the given properties and facilities. Although, overall, there was an issue of lack of women's participation within the built environment during reconstruction, many NGOS and other organisations had taken the initiatives to include women's involvement in post disaster reconstruction including adoption of gender sensitive approaches.

Although many women who go aboard for employment especially as house workers bring in high income generation to the country their level of skills is limited. Although these opportunities facilitate for an economic empowerment for their families, reported cases on ill treatment of women who go aboard indicates the disempowered state of women in their working places. Women are unable to enter middle level of management with ordinary level qualifications which leads to a greater degree of disadvantage to women. Further, it was highlighted within the study that the way their children were brought up to accept the occurrences of gender inequalities which reflected the need to consider training and development within the educational system, and changes to the educational system, to enable gender sensitive approaches to be adopted.

Within the study, many tended to disagree with the principle of quotas for increasing women's representation as some regard it as baseless. However, at the political level, some participants tend to agree on having a quota basis for women's representation as it is expected to be useful to bring women into power amongst those who still believe in the traditional approach. In reference to women's

representation in politics one expert said, *'Unless you have quotas it is hard to bring in women, because they don't nominate women'.* The success of a quota approach in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh was cited as examples of some of the countries which have been successful in this attempt.

Although international policies have not made much difference to women's representation in decision making, the study found that at very local level women have gained more participation through developmental organisations. The study noted that in order to enhance female empowerment women need to become better acquainted with their human rights; have the required skills that need to develop; and be provided to access to mentoring services. This may help to lessen the gender imbalance within the post disaster contexts.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The increasing importance of gender sensitive approaches to post disaster reconstruction emphasises the need for establishing the policies and frameworks for women's development. In Sri Lanka, although there is no specific national legislation on women's empowerment, it does have a Ministry on women's empowerment. In addition, Sri Lanka has certain legal provisions within other legislation, polices and committees which can contribute to women's empowerment such as,

– Domestic violence act;
– Human rights constitutions;
– Women's charter;
– National committee women;
– Women's bureau;
– Tsunami act, etc.

However, the study found that even though polices are gender neutral, they are not gender sensitive. In addition, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) serves as an

important guiding document for gender sensitive approaches.

While examining the way of empowerment in post disaster situations it was emphasised that women should be empowered to talk about their rights, properties, livelihood, access to resources, etc. If they are not expressing their needs and views, then NGOs and government organisations will not succeed in developing them. Therefore, the first thing that they should develop is the voices of affected women, especially those who are from the rural community, should be encouraged to be heard. This can provide greater exposure and opportunities for capacity building. While formulating the frameworks to support women's empowerment, project developers should consider the local realities like cultural values, beliefs and customs and work closely at the grassroots level. It is important to note that having a single policy or framework for the whole country is unlikely to be a success, therefore, any frameworks should have room to be adopted to the local situation.

The next phase of this research will gather information related to the difficulties that the communities face, their awareness and perceptions on existing frameworks, their needs for improved livelihood and necessities to cope with future disasters from affected communities as they are the beneficiaries to whom the framework and polices are made. This phase will cover both women and men, as the men's support is an important part of the empowering process.

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SANTRAUKA

DIDESNIŲ TEISIŲ SUTEIKIMAS MOTERIMS PO NELAIMIŲ ATSTATANT VIETOVES: POŽIŪRIAI Į POLITIKOS KRYPTIS IR GAIRES

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Stichinių nelaimių padaugėjo, taigi dėl jų poveikio daug interesų grupių susidomėjo, kaip nelaimėms valdyti pasitelkti įvairias strategijas. Nors nelaimės atima daug galimybių ir gyvybių, išlikusieji tebegyvena nelaimės nuniokotose teritorijose. Dėl stichinių nelaimių poveikio ir po jų vykstant daliniams atstatymo darbams, ypač daug sunkumų kyla moterims. Atsižvelgiant į tai, pagrindiniame tyrime nagrinėjamas didesnių teisių suteikimas moterims vykstant atstatymo po nelaimių darbams, ypač Šri Lankoje. Be kitų veiksnių, kurie daro įtaką suteikiant didesnes teises moterims, svarbi yra politika ir gairės, o jų reikšmė Šri Lankoje atstatant nelaimės nuniokotas vietoves gali būti didžiulė. Taigi siekiant suprasti esamas didesnių teisių suteikimo moterims gaires, šiame tyrime nagrinėjama nacionalinė ir tarptautinė politika bei gairės, Šri Lankoje taikomos darbų po nelaimių kontekste. Tyrime nustatyta, kad net jei politika pirmenybės neteikia nė vienai lyčiai, į lytims svarbius klausimus ji neatsižvelgia. Be to, nustatyta, kad visoje šalyje taikant vieną politiką arba gaires vargu ar galima tikėtis sėkmės. Taigi visose gairėse reikia numatyti galimybių jas priderinti prie vietinės situacijos.