

# Integrating Grassroots Women's Groups into the Planning Process:

Post-disaster experiences from India + Turkey



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*“Gender planning is ... a means by which women through the process of empowerment can emancipate themselves.”*

*“Since it comes out of the social and political movements that women themselves generate, rather than because of state intervention, its success ultimately must depend on their participation in the planning process.”*

*Caroline Moser. Gender planning and development: Theory, practice and training. London: Routledge. 1993. P. 10*

An understanding of how to translate gender policy into practice requires examination of

*“the mixed experiences of (women’s) organizations in raising consciousness to confront women’s subordination, creating alliances and linkages to ensure the success of planning processes ... (and) the entry points identified by women’s NGOs for negotiation and debate around women’s needs at four different levels: household, civil society, the state and global system.”*

Moser 1993, p. 10

**SSP** (Swayam Shikshan Prayog) and  
**KEDV** (Foundation for the Support of Women's Work)

- **Two NGOs with > 15 years of experience:**
  - KEDV works w/ 20 women's groups in Istanbul, the earthquake region, and Southeastern Turkey
  - SSP works w/ women's groups in 889 villages in Maharashtra + Gujarat
- **Share a participatory approach** -- not program or service-delivery driven; work with grassroots women as facilitators and resource partners.

- SSP and KEDV **use peer exchanges** to help women's groups grow and spread.
- They are **committed to sharing experiences with + learning from peer groups elsewhere** (locally and internationally).
- As members of GROOTS and Huairou Commission, **involved in policy advocacy** with major policy-makers and funding agencies **also at the international level.** (\*)

(\*) Huairou Commission (HC) is an international partnership network of grassroots women's organizations. GROOTS is a network of grassroots women's organizations and a member of the HC. (See: [www.huairou.org](http://www.huairou.org) and [www.groots.org](http://www.groots.org) )

## Background:

- India and Turkey located in hazard prone areas.

In recent earthquakes:

Turkey: Marmara, 1999

>18,000 dead

48,000 injured

200,000 homes lost

India: Latur, 1993

7,000 dead

16,000 injured

200,000 homes lost

India: Gujarat, 2001

20,000 dead

167,000 injured

700,000 homes lost

- Disaster mitigation (*should be*) integral part of planning
- Disasters create openings for long term development planning and for engendering reconstruction processes: (resources flow to the region, it is a time for partnerships, traditionally excluded groups may be involved)

## Different institutional frameworks:

- In India:
  - existing government programs for women's participation in governance and , and
  - community participation was a requirement of recovery/reconstruction programs
- In Turkey:
  - no such programs or requirement

→ difference in the scale achieved...

## How did the two NGOs get involved?

SSP, India:

In Latur, the reconstruction program was in crisis, SSP called in to design + implement a community participation strategy involving g women's groups.

In Gujarat, it facilitated community exchanges urged by women's groups in Latur.

KEDV, Turkey:

Started right after the earthquake on a volunteer basis, then raised resources through international sources and local partnerships.

## Strategies Used by SSP, India:

1. Formal roles (social/political space) for women in reconstruction processes: negotiated with government to hire women's groups as communication intermediaries
2. Capacity building: First, women's groups were trained for this role to:
  - Motivate house owners
  - Build technical capacity
  - Demonstrate collective arrangements
  - Provide feedback
  - Monitor reconstruction



Over time, women acquired confidence + skills to become community development intermediaries:

- Monitor basic services
- Voice women's priorities in their communities
- Initiate local development projects
- Facilitate dialogues between their communities and government officials

3. Training public agency staff on community & women's participation



## Outcomes:

- > 250,000 households involved in earthquake-safe construction in Gujarat and Latur
- Livelihoods and assets are stabilized:  
(4,000 women and families took loans; 1,200 women started businesses)
- Communities organized for long-term development:  
800 women's groups work on health, education, water, and sanitation issues in their communities



# Strategies Used by KEDV, Turkey:

1. Public spaces for women and their children – Women and Children Centers in tent cities, prefab housing settlements, and now, in permanent housing
2. Capacity Building to support grassroots livelihood initiatives and for empowerment



3. Dialogue and negotiation processes to build strategic partnerships for resources + recognition  
(Multi sector workshops; links with officials; community information meetings; municipal and ministry contracts, etc.)



## Outcomes:



- Outreach to over 10,000 women (+ children)
- Sustainable, independent grassroots women's organizations created:
  - 9 Women's and Children's Centers as independent coops
  - Collective + individual women's businesses
  - >100 women organized around tenant housing cooperatives
- Women's leadership recognized:
  - Women community leaders emerged + recognized
  - Women's groups secured public resource allocation
  - They participate in formal partnership bodies

## **Tools used by SSP and KEDV:**

- Peer exchanges; local to local dialogues
- Pilot villages, information fairs (India)
- Savings and credit groups
- Community surveys and mapping
- Monitoring of government aid & entitlements
- Skills training to expand livelihood options
- Provision of community services (early child care and education -Turkey)
- Advocacy for priority concerns (at the local, national and international level)

## Obstacles to women's participation in post-disaster situations:

- Top-down planning tradition + reliance on outside experts → local and esp. women's knowledge, capacity, and resources are undervalued
- Focus on individual program clients rather than on communities → leads to competition + conflict in communities; women work better in groups
- Tendency for quick fixes → participation requires time
- Information and capacity gap and
- Reluctance to institutionalize innovative approaches + women's participation → need for advocacy at local and global level for policy change and resources

## Appendix: Definition of terms

- Planning for women must be based on their *strategic* and *practical gender needs and interests*.
- *Gender needs and interests* refer to those that women (or men) may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes. (Maxine Molyneux 1985)
- *Strategic gender needs* refer to the gender divisions of labor, power and control (issues like legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies). Meeting such needs helps women achieve greater equality, changes existing roles and therefore challenges women's subordinate position. (C. Moser 1993, p.39)
- *Practical gender needs* are often refer to immediate perceived needs in living conditions (water provision, health care, employment etc) but do not challenge the gender divisions of labor or women's subordinate position in a society. (C. Moser 1993, p.40)

- There are different policy approaches to working with women. (See Moser 's categorization as 'welfare', 'equity', 'anti-poverty', 'efficiency' and 'empowerment' approaches.)
- Empowerment approach:
  - Articulated by feminists and popular with women's civil society organizations from the 'South'
  - Purpose is to empower women through greater self-reliance and strength, and through the redistribution of power within, as well as between societies
  - Seeks to meet strategic gender needs indirectly through bottom-up organizing around practical gender needs. (Moser 1993, p.74)

