

Resilience in the face of food crises

Bringing the experience of women's organizations to the table

Lauren Ravon
Senior Policy Advisor
Oxfam Canada

January 22, 2014



OXFAM
Canada

Why resilience?

- Recurring crises (e.g. Sahel food crisis)
- Perception of increased intensity of risk

Oxfam's definition of resilience:

*“Women and men should not only be able to cope with crises, but to realize their rights so that they have hope for the future (...). The ambition must not just be to help people survive one shock after another, but to help them **thrive** despite shocks, stresses and uncertainty.”*

- Opportunity to better link humanitarian & development work
- Focus on well-being of individuals (and groups) within a system
- Address underlying structures that create poverty and inequality

Why focus on women's organizations?

- Some literature on gender dimensions of vulnerability, but perspectives of women's orgs absent from resilience debate
- Women's orgs rarely included in DRR & emergency response
- Do men and women face different risks? What allows them to thrive amidst adversity?
- Assumption: lessons to be learned

Oxfam's research (with IDRC funding)

Resilience in the face of food insecurity and food crises:
Bringing the experience of women's organizations to the table

Interviewed 19 women's orgs in 10 countries

Risks and threats to food security identified by women's orgs

Main trends from interviews:

- Some commonalities with resilience literature
 - Climate change, extreme weather events, erratic weather patterns
 - Challenges to agricultural production
- Very broad understanding of risk
- Risks that don't appear on the resilience radar

Emphasis on risks that:

- Are rooted in gender inequality and sexual stereotypes
- Originate at the household level

Gender-specific risks and threats

- Women's access to land
- Lifecycle issues (from childbirth to widowhood)
- Women's health
- Male migration
- Violence against women

- Women's lack of decision making power
- Sexual stereotypes related to work & roles
- Gender barriers to resilience-building opportunities

Women's lack of decision making power

“Women’s opinion is not valued by men and that exacerbates risk. If the man decides to only leave two quintales of corn for family consumption and sell the rest, it may not last the family the whole year. Depending on the decisions made by men really increases food insecurity for women”.

- *Asociación de mujeres Madre Tierra, Guatemala*

Sexual stereotypes

“Women are more vulnerable to risks due to existing traditional practices that does not see women as equal... Traditional thinking that women should not plow land prevents them from using their land and encourages dependence on the men.”

- *Women's Association of Tigray, Ethiopia*

Defining resilience

- Capacity to make decisions and take action
Both technical capacity and agency
- Women's awareness of their own rights
Access to information

“No other choice” approach to resilience

- Making do, sacrificing for others
- Acceptance and sense of powerlessness to bring about change
- Coping strategies VS transformative resilience

Learning from ways of working of women's organizations

Main trends from interviews:

- Women's organization rarely consulted on the design of resilience building strategies, DRR and emergency response
- Need to address gender inequality as a **structural barrier** to resilience, not just as a **compounding factor** of vulnerability
- Need for a two-pronged approach:
 - Technical capacity to withstand shocks and secure livelihoods
 - Increased agency and shift in power relations

Ways of working

- Holistic approach
- Responsiveness
- Harnessing women's informal solidarity & strengthening collective organizing
- Many orgs interviewed are membership-based

Strategies for building resilience

- Strengthening women's agency through awareness raising
- Building women's leadership
- Changing attitudes and beliefs & challenging sexual stereotypes

Solidarity and collective organizing

“When women are organized in networks, they have a greater capacity to withstand shocks”

- Casa da Mulher do Nordeste, Brazil

“Women are starting to realize their strength in unity and are using the network more and more to support each other during hard times. The association structure at village level can independently act to mobilize resources from their own and help each other in time of crisis.”

- Women’s Association of Tigray, Ethiopia

What next?

Responding to the specific risks women face

- How can the risks identified by women get factored into adaptation programs?
- How can we avoid building on women's willingness to take on increasing responsibilities to cope with hardship?
- How to foster more equal risk sharing among men and women?

Learning from women's orgs' holistic, multidisciplinary approach

- Should adaptation programs work with a different range of partners?
- How can we foster meaningful collaborations between women's orgs and other development actors in the context of resilience programs?
- How can adaptation programs incorporate strategies to change attitudes and beliefs about gender?