

Role of Women's Organisations in Revitalising Communities: Some Reflections from the Gujarat Earthquake, India

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Abstract

This paper is based on the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 in which there was extensive devastation in Kachchh district in which more than 20,000 lives were lost. It has been almost 2 decades since the disaster and the analysis presented in the paper is a reflection on the role of women's organization in revitalizing the communities. Invariably, women are the most adversely affected, vulnerable to any disaster and they struggle to revitalise their lives and livelihoods typically in a patriarchal setup against a declining resource base. In case of Kachchh, several grassroot organisations have been consistently working with the community women in the villages and have been able to solicit their participation successfully for all the major and specific measures of rehabilitation. Continuation of the livelihood development has been the key to involve women in revitalizing communities. The paper also provides some key lessons learnt from the mutual interaction of women's organisations, with women at the community level during times of disaster.

Key words: Disaster, Women, Kachchh, Revitalising Communities, Women's Organisations, Gender Sensitivity.

Introduction

More than almost 2 decades have passed since the devastating earthquake struck Gujarat (western State of India) on the 26th January 2001 measuring 7.7 on the Richter scale. Kachchh district, the focus of the paper, was worst affected has now a new look today and has been completely rebuilt with the support of the government and 1,800 million dollars, aid received from different parts of the world. The government of Gujarat has been pro-active to rebuild the district by taking it to a new level in terms of infrastructure planning, industries and development. Bhuj town today boasts of a state-of-the art hospital. Today, rebuilding of Kachchh in Gujarat is cited as an exemplary case in major disaster management forums at the national and international levels. The paper at hand is based on reflections from the 2001 earthquake, particularly the role of women's organisations in revitalizing livelihoods through interventions with the local women and their communities. Lesson learnt can be pointers to revitalizing communities in future disasters in the country and elsewhere.

If one has to go back to 2001, the earthquake in Gujarat had caused extensive damage to life and property. More than 1 million houses were either damaged or destroyed. There were more than 20,000 deaths confirmed by the government. There was massive damage to water supply, electricity and telecommunications, two district hospitals, hundreds of smaller health facilities, thousands of classrooms, office buildings, roads, bridges, dams and reservoirs. Kachchh district is the most affected with maximum number of deaths, injured and loss of property (70% buildings destroyed), infrastructure and other services. The nature of damage

caused by the quake was not the same in rural and urban areas. Large number of buildings were completely destroyed in the urban areas, where the number of deaths is higher as compared with the rural areas. In rural areas however, people suffered loss both to housing as well as livelihood (loss of livestock, trees, work sheds, looms, grains etc.). Table 1 provides an overview of the damage in Gujarat and Kachchh in particular.

Table 1: Devastation due to Earthquake at a Glance

Devastation	Number
No. of districts affected in Gujarat*	21
No. of talukas affected	182
No. of villages	7,904
Total number of human deaths	18,253
Number of deaths in Kachchh	16,681
Total number of persons injured	1,66,836
Total number of persons injured in Kachchh	1,36,048
Number of 'Pucca' houses destroyed	1,59,960
Number of 'Pucca' houses damaged	3,99,346
Number of mud houses destroyed	1,48,339
Number of mud houses damaged	2,95,061
Number of huts destroyed	13,889
Number of huts damaged	31,395

Source: Government of Gujarat, February, 2001

* Gujarat State has 25 districts

After the relief period which lasted for three months, rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes were underway in Kachchh for about two years, although the intensity of activities declined. Infrastructure development and new buildings were the order of the day thereafter. Kachchh is the largest district in Gujarat with 938 odd villages and a population of 2,092,371 (Census 2011). Much of the area is arid, that has undergone severe environmental degradation. Kachchh is an area prone to multiple disasters such as droughts, cyclones, floods and earthquakes. Availability of drinking water is a perennial problem in Kachchh villages due to continuous droughts. The population of rural Kachchh comprises 15 different communities (7 Hindu and 8 Muslim groups). There are both mixed and single caste villages

found in Kachchh. Each community has a distinct identity in terms of lifestyle (women's clothing, handicrafts and housing). The maps of Gujarat and Kachchh are given in the Figures 1 and 2 respectively.



Figure 1: Geographical map representing Gujarat

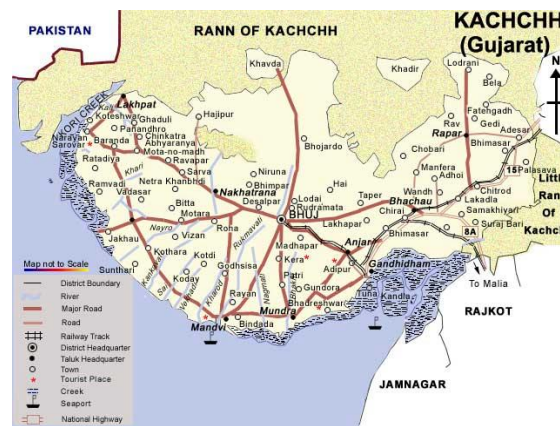


Figure 2: Geographical map representing Kachchh of Gujarat

In urban Kachchh, the four major towns namely Bhuj, Anjar, Bhachau and Rapar were badly hit by the earthquake. In rural Kachchh, 884 villages were affected by the earthquake, of which there was 100% damage in 178 villages and more than 70% damage in 165 villages (Abhiyan/ GSDMA/UNDP, August 2002).

The paper is divided into five sections. Observations and analysis pertain to relief, resettlement and rehabilitation programmes in rural areas of the district. After the introduction, the second section deals with the impact of earthquake on the rural communities

in general and women in particular. The third section discusses the various organizations engaged in rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes with a critical assessment of gender sensitivity of the same. The fourth section deals with two women's organizations specifically and their role in the process of rehabilitation in rural Kachchh. The last section provides some concluding remarks and lessons learnt. The analysis presented in the paper is based on primary observations during visits to the villages in different parts of Kachchh during the year 2001-2002 and thereafter, detailed discussions with professionals working at the grassroots level with NGOs and other organizations including the government. Primary data pertaining to five villages have been used in looking at the impacts of earthquake on women.

2. Impact of Earthquake

Apart from loss of life, people in the villages suffered injuries mostly relating to bone fractures, loss of shelter, work sheds (looms), livestock, sources of water and income. It is estimated that among the injured 65% were women (Abhiyan/UNDP, 2001). The reason could be attributed to the fact that when the tremor occurred in the morning, most women were inside their homes. Moreover, when the disaster struck, the *Darbar* (Rajput) and *Syed* (Muslim) women could not rush out of their houses, due to social restrictions. Therefore, in some villages proportionately more women were injured and lost their lives as compared with men. Besides, women belonging to the scheduled and backward castes such as the *Koli*, *Bharvad* and *Dalits* were particularly hard hit due to their poor economic status (landless and little access to means of income). A survey conducted in 5 villages (N=100) ranked the problems faced by women immediately after the quake during the rehabilitation phase, in the following order: housing (shelter), access to work, health services and schooling for children, access to water resources, livestock, natural resources and other social facilities. Shelter was the first priority for all women for obvious reasons. Lack of access to work was a pre-existing problem that got exacerbated after the quake. The study villages are: Jam Kunaria in Bhuj taluka, Jodhpur Wand and Gagodar in Rapar taluka, Rajansar and Khankoi in Bhachau taluka of Kachchh district.

Women-specific Impacts

The impact of earthquake on women has to be seen in conjunction with drought, which as already mentioned is a perennial feature in Kachchh. Availability of water has implications for women's work. The livelihood strategies practiced by rural households in Kachchh is typical of a drought economy and impose multiple burdens on women. On an average, rural women in Kachchh have a 19 hour work schedule, out of which 3-4 hours is devoted to only fetching water for domestic use. During drought, which happens every other year, embroidery work (traditional craft of women) and government-initiated drought relief work are the main sources of income for women. Upper caste women (*Darbar* and *Syed* Muslim) face social restrictions and are dependent on men for livelihood maintenance, which is not the case with lower caste women, although they too have some mobility restrictions. However, economic necessity creates space that allow for negotiation on these norms and other aspects of gender relations (KMVS, 2000). Along with this space, comes the responsibility and burden of household survival. Communities in rural Kachchh are by and large patriarchal in

nature, where gender relations are far from egalitarian. Within the framework of gender-based division of labour, women are responsible for provision of household resources (food, fodder and water), care and maintenance of the livestock and agriculture lands. In the wake of the devastating earthquake, women therefore were adversely affected. With regard to the specific impacts, it was observed that wherever women had to support the household single handedly, had been worst affected. Table 2 notes the specific impacts of earthquake on women.

Table 2: Specific Impacts of Earthquake on Women (N=100)

Impacts	Yes (%)	No (%)	Not sure (%)
Income earning through sale of handicrafts	85	5	10
Disruption of existing medical services	70	7	23
Inadequate nutrition	65	15	20
Post-quake trauma	60	26	14
Insecurity	64	14	22

Source: Primary survey in 5 villages of Kachchh, 2001

Note: The questions relating to the responses in the above table were asked to women alone, without the involvement of men. It was observed that the response 'not sure' may also imply that they were unable to comprehend the question or they may not have been affected directly.

The disaster affected women's income-earning opportunities, particularly sale of handicrafts (embroidery, etc.) with a decline in procurement, as there was disruption in major marketing channels. This was mentioned by 85% of the women surveyed in the 5 earthquake-affected villages. Furthermore, as construction of houses was a priority, women were not in a position to seek wage employment outside. Construction of houses with the support of NGO/government interventions (participatory owner-driven approach) was time-consuming for both women and men, and for which they did not receive any remuneration. Contribution of labour by the owner and his/her family was accepted as part of most housing packages, offered to the people by external agencies. Furthermore, the medical services (free check-ups and distribution of medicines like iron and folic acid tablets, immunization, etc.) that were previously available to women, especially through government and non-governmental channels, were disrupted for a few months during the relief period and partly during the rehabilitation phase and this had a detrimental effect on women's health. About 70% of the women surveyed expressed this fact very clearly, although they included their children's health along with theirs. Shelter construction during the rehabilitation phase was the priority for many NGOs and the government. Other areas such as health and education were neglected. Similarly, schools and *Anganwadis* (childcare centres) in the villages were closed for a long time. Consequently, women's work burden increased considerably as they had to take care of children along with their regular domestic responsibilities, also engage in house construction, and look for alternative wage earning opportunities. Women were also primary

responsible for bringing back the normal routine of the household. Similarly, another related aspect of women's health during disasters was availability of adequate nutrition. In Kachchh it was observed that women normally suffered from malnutrition and this had got exacerbated, especially during post-relief phase. During the relief period there was a steady supply of food by different agencies, which lasted a little longer beyond the two months stipulated for relief. Thereafter, people had to fend for themselves. During the transition from relief to rehabilitation phase, there is normally a gap of a few months when both income and food availability declines. The decline and unavailability of adequate nutrition for women was mentioned by all the women surveyed. As their priority was to reconstruct the damaged houses, women in Kachchh villages were more vulnerable in the transition phase as they were the last ones to get priority in terms of resource allocation at the household level and there was no respite from work (household and community levels).

Post-traumatic stress was a health problem faced by women. Women had a common problem of having to take on the entire responsibility for the household in the event of death of the spouse. They had anxiety during disaster situations and 60% of women expressed that they were suffering from depression and fear. Some of them were not sure about the symptoms and therefore, could not say for certain whether they were affected by stress. In order to make ends meet, women often had to go out in search of employment even in those communities where the mobility of women was restricted. Consequently, there was also the fear and apprehension of losing the goodwill of the community for not abiding by societal norms. The symptoms of trauma were manifested in the form of insomnia, frustration, startle reaction, irritability, anger, guilt, and depression. Kachchh is known to have a high suicide rate among women and this may have increased after the earthquake (although there has been no systematic documentation on this issue). Several NGO personnel working at the grass roots level have corroborated this fact. In the 5 villages surveyed, it was observed that women lived in constant fear of being struck again by an earthquake, as they tend to run out of their houses at the instance of slight tremor.

Despite the wider consequences of a drought-prone economy in rural Kachchh, the impact of disasters such as earthquakes was experienced in the first instance at the household level, where labour is profoundly shaped by gender (E. Enarson, unpublished data). Women's labour which is considered as secondary income for the household played a vital role in sustaining the livelihoods of the households during disaster situations. Worldwide, it was observed that women's daily lives are structured around a complex web of work and responsibilities for family members and the community, for the household economy, to employers, and for the poorest women, to the natural environment which supports them (Enarson, 2001). A study conducted in 141 countries during 1981-2002 in natural disasters and its impact revealed that more women are killed than men especially those belonging to the lower socio-economic strata (Neumayer and Plumper, 2007). The ability of poor women to earn an income every day is crucial for their survival before, during and after disasters (Agarwal, 1990, Jiggins, 1986), and the Kachchh case is no different. Low status and invisibility add to their problems (Doyal, 1995, cited in Daykin & Doyal, 1999). Yet, women manage to contribute to the survival of their families and dependants. What was observed,

was that women are actively exploring and using different work strategies in managing livelihoods of their households. Although women's contribution to household survival is indispensable, planners do not pay attention to them while providing institutional support. The next section discusses gender insensitivity in the rehabilitation programmes in Kachchh after the earthquake.

3. Gender Sensitivity in Rehabilitation Programmes

During 2001, there were 185 agencies working towards rehabilitation programmes in the rural areas of Kachchh. They comprised a mix of state governments, national as well as international NGOs, religious organizations, private/corporate organizations, various partnership organizations and NGO networks. The organizations were engaged in activities related to shelter, health, water/dams, handicraft/livelihood and legal sectors. Most organizations were not gender sensitive, when it came to planning and implementation of various rehabilitation programmes. This was because they assumed that earthquake affects the entire population regardless of gender. Furthermore, the household or the family is the smallest unit of convergent interests wherein all its members share benefits and burdens of existing plans and policies, which of course includes women. The latter is a stereotypical attitude of organizations working in Kachchh as well. It was however observed in the villages of Kachchh that women and children are the most vulnerable due to intra-household inequalities that already existed in the levels of literacy skills, health, nutrition etc. Such disparities tend to get aggravated during times of stress like earthquakes, particularly between the end of relief and beginning of the rehabilitation phase.

There was a distinct lack of gender sensitivity in all the policies and plans that govern rehabilitation and resettlement, as they go by ownership of land or property for compensation and benefits. Since women seldom have ownership rights and further in the absence of any affirmative or progressive clauses to include them, they were automatically left out. This was the situation in general in Kachchh villages during that time. Except for a few organizations, none of them worked with women. Some organizations targeted women for certain activities only in order to attract donor funding. However, such piecemeal efforts failed to make any significant impact on women in rural Kachchh. Two organizations (NGOs) were identified for detailed investigation to understand their contribution towards rehabilitation of rural Kachchh. They were Kachchh Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA). Both organizations were Kachchh based and had established their credibility of working with women among the local communities for several years.

4. Role of Women's Organisations in Rehabilitation Programmes

KMVS and SEWA were the only two Kachchh based organizations working with women in the villages. Kachchh Mahila Vikas Sangathan was a women's organization working in Kachchh for over 30 years. The major objective of the NGO was to enhance the socio-economic and political status of women in Kachchh both at the household and societal level. KMVS believes that in the process women should be empowered and become confident decision making partners in development initiatives at the village, community and regional

level. Apart from organizing the collective strength of rural women at the village, block and district level, KMVS aims at building women's capabilities and skills to manage, control, conserve and increase their physical, natural and financial resources. It has been successful in developing local "sangathan" groups into self-governed organizations with development initiatives led by women. These self-governed bodies are expected to control processes aimed at improving the quality of life, especially in the areas of their traditional livelihood (agriculture, craft and livestock rearing), health, access to credit, education and basic facilities (drinking water, fuel, housing etc) and security. KMVS works in Kachchh district alone and is member of NGO network called the 'Kachchh Nav Nirman Abhiyan' or 'Abhiyan', which was very active in the rehabilitation, works in both rural and urban areas of Kachchh. Similarly, Self Employed Women's Association was a member based organization and had established itself as a well-known trade union over a period of about 4 decades. It has over 13, 39, 621 members in the whole country, out of which over 6,99,194 are in Gujarat (SEWA, 2016). Membership of rural women has increased over the years and now they constitute two thirds of the members. Although SEWA started work in Kachchh in 1995, it has been working with women's groups of artisans and savings and credit groups, who constitute the Kachchh Craft Association. In 2018, SEWA started its International Design and Development programme to promote crafts (textile and embroidery) in Kachchh. The attempt by the NGO was to preserve, promote and help market their traditional crafts. SEWA adopts an integrated approach to help women come out of poverty and deprivation. The approach includes organizing for collective strength, bargaining power and representation in committees in the public domain; capital formation through savings and credit, insurance and create assets for women; capacity building for women to compete with the market by providing them access to market infrastructure, information on technology, education, knowledge and relevant skills; social security in terms of health care, child care, shelter and insurance. Both the NGOs have been engaged in the relief and rehabilitation activities in rural Kachchh. Their attempt is not to duplicate their interventions and work in separate villages in the district. Both NGOs work through their respective women's groups at the village level. The rehabilitation programme strategy of both organizations aimed at community based livelihood and shelter reconstruction. The major programmes covered under rehabilitation were:

- i) Shelter Reconstruction
- ii) Livelihood Security
- iii) Social Protection Services

The specific rehabilitation measures included:

- i) Housing upgradation and reconstruction of seismic proof houses
- ii) Craft as a livelihood security programme
- iii) Reviving and regenerating water resources

iv) Health care and nutrition services

Shelter and handicraft related livelihood programmes have been the strength of both the organizations. Strategies adopted by KMVS and SEWA to involve women in rehabilitation works are: involved women in relief distribution at the village level which gave them visibility; ensured that women's participation in the rehabilitation committee meetings at the village level is 50% or more; provided masonry training to women for house construction and building materials (seismic resistant); and ensuring that compensation amount is received jointly by both the women and men at the household level.

For the purpose of detailed discussion, the shelter and livelihood programmes of KMVS and SEWA respectively have been selected.

Shelter

KMVS has adopted a highly gender sensitive and participatory approach in providing housing to the affected households in the village. In all the 13 villages where KMVS is working, there were strong women's groups linked to the NGO activities. They completed 90% of the targeted work, which included 1939 permanent houses in 13 villages. Most of the permanent structures had been designed in a manner which was in tune with the traditional structures (locally called 'bhoonga'). These structures had a round look and had undergone less damage during the earthquake as compared to other houses. KMVS has incorporated certain seismic resistant features to the 'bhoonga' type housing and implemented them in their villages. Both women and men were consulted for adoption of the new structures. KMVS made sure that women's needs were specifically represented. The housing package was such that each household gets two 'bhoongas' (essentially two houses adjacent to each other), which was extremely functional for women as they can cook and store food grains in one and live in the other (smoke-free environment). The idea was to use local materials with slight improvisation for the construction of the 'bhoongas'. KMVS staff informed the author that women were keen to adopt traditional housing interventions, whereas men would generally prefer the typical rectangular houses made of concrete slabs.

In the context of provision of 'bhoonga' type of housing to the beneficiaries, it may be mentioned here that most newly reconstructed houses in Kachchh by a number of organizations have not considered the local designs and have implemented the typical reinforced concrete structures. The reconstructed villages resemble urban colonies completely alienated from the rural surroundings of Kachchh. In the process, the villages have lost their identity. The identity of the NGOs has been strengthened instead. The author has provided a detailed critique of such interventions elsewhere. Therefore, the efforts of KMVS in reconstruction of housing using the local 'bhoonga' designs were laudable.

The most significant feature in providing housing to the beneficiaries at the village level was that the house is registered jointly in the names of both spouses, which is against tradition as women have no property ownership. Initially it was difficult for KMVS to get the women for house registration. However, after much persuasion by a few women leaders (locally referred

to as 'ageywan'), both women and men came forward for registration. The other feature was related to building women's capacity in masonry for encouraged them for construction of new housing after the disaster. However, conducting trainings on new technologies and skills was a challenge as women do not want to come out of the villages. KMVS provided training on seismic resistant and other housing techniques to women in different centres locally, where they could have easy access. This was possible with the help of donors and external agencies who were willing to send technicians for the purpose of imparting training to village women. KMVS included harvesting roof rainwater as one of the design features in new housing. The water is collected from the roof and stored in an underground tank. Such an additional feature reduces the drudgery of women having to walk long distances for collecting water. In some of the areas, schools had closed down during and much after the quake. It was observed that the main reason for the closure was not due to damaged school buildings, but lack of proper housing for school teachers which was a problem even before the disaster. As women of the villages were most concerned about education of their children, KMVS took up the responsibility of constructing teachers' housing quarters as a special project in the vicinity of the villages in one of the most backward areas of the district. It was the government's responsibility to provide housing to the schoolteachers, but KMVS wanted to expedite the construction so as make the local government responsible for the regular functioning of the school and to ensure that teachers live in the same area and are accountable to both the government and the people. KMVS constructed 60 residential quarters in some villages, which would facilitate 42 villages of the area for 60 schools (Abhiyan/GSDMA/UNDP, 2002). Such efforts had the potential to improve the attitudes of people towards education, particularly for the girl child.

Livelihood Restoration through Handicrafts

Kachchh is an area famous for its handicrafts especially embroidery work by women. There are 8 different communities living in the district and each one has a distinct embroidery style. NGOs such as KMVS, SEWA, Kalarakhsha and Shrujan were engaged in promoting handicrafts made by village women. Marketing the products is a challenge for the organizations post-quake.

SEWA worked with 12,000 women artisans in 135 quake affected villages during 2001. Each artisan had been provided with a craft kit/bag with raw materials for a week's work. Every week, the spearhead team from SEWA collected the finished goods and made the payment of RS 40 per day (2001 minimum wages) at their homes. Women were paid in both cash and kind (food grains or clothes). SEWA had also planned worksheds for the artisans in some villages. In order to promote handicrafts, SEWA organized several exhibitions for sale of products in different parts of Gujarat and outside. Both SEWA and KMVS mobilised self-help groups (SHGs) of women for the purpose of savings and credit. These SHGs had the potential to act as collectives for different economic activities. KMVS and SEWA had organized 8603 and 4496 women through 209 and 277 SHGs in 147 and 87 villages of Kachchh respectively (Abhiyan/GSDMA/UNDP 2002).

Here is what some women artisans had to say with respect to SEWA's interventions:

Jamunaben an artisan from Dhokawada village says – *“Craft work not only gives us work and employment. It gives us dignity. It helps us live a dignified and decent life amidst such a disaster”*.

Others join her saying – *“Yes, we do not have to borrow for our daily necessities. This gives us and our families tremendous sense of security and self- respect. Otherwise we would be vulnerable and at the mercy of moneylenders”*.

Manchabaa says – *“By giving us immediate work, you have not only provided relief to us but also dignity and recognition. Our skill has now been recognized. How long can we survive on relief supplies? It is work that helps us survive and rebuild our lives”*.

Organisations such as SEWA restored the confidence of women who had been under tremendous mental and physical pressure after the quake. It is women’s income through handicraft work that contributes to the survival of households, where all assets were damaged or completely destroyed. Invariably, households were waiting for the ‘compensation money’ to be given by the government and alternative means of income for the male members.

Some of the other programmes implemented by KMVS and SEWA played a significant role in revitalizing the quake-affected communities in Kachchh. They are discussed in the ensuing sections.

Fodder Security System

SEWA was engaged in provision of fodder to 350 families to support 2204 cattle heads. The process involved placing order and procurement of fodder, planning the delivery mechanism, organization of the distribution process, deal with and negotiate with aggressive men, quality checking, assess the needs and keep records for the government. Active women members of the collectives efficiently performed all the above activities.

Restoration and Construction of Water Sources

Water scarcity as mentioned in Kachchh is a perennial problem. The destruction of irrigation structures, small dams and drinking water tanks and pipes had further exacerbated the problem especially for women. Both the organizations were working on promoting, revival and construction of water harvesting structures. Small dams and other water harvesting structures had been repaired before the onset of monsoon. KMVS was particularly interested in reviving the traditional water sources such as ponds and ‘virdas’ (shallow ponds). As already mentioned under the shelter programme, design features related to rainwater harvesting in housing had been introduced and proved to be a success among women. They had received training by NGOs to maintain the water infrastructure.

Drought proofing programme initiated by Abhiyan (network of 29 NGOs) with the support of the Prime Minister’s Relief fund, was the major activity that aimed at strengthening the existing water resource structures, enable dry land farmers to grow at least one crop, increase

productivity of grasslands, arrest migration from villages and bring greater community control (strong women focus) in drought relief work. KMVS was one of the member organizations pro-actively engaged in the drought proofing programme. The major activities in the drought proofing programme were: upgradation of traditional water structures, construction of new ponds, construction of percolation dams, well recharging, farmland bunding and grassland restoration and development.

Support Services (Childcare, Education, Insurance, Savings and Credit)

SEWA and KMVS emphasized on starting the childcare centers and primary schools in the villages. It required lobbying with the government to shift priority to social services and not focus only on housing. Government and UNICEF responded to the demands of the women's organizations positively - insurance and credit services were extended to women to take care of their income needs. Similarly, health services were also being revived gradually for women.

Dialogue and Interaction with the Communities

Through their respective mediums (newsletter, radio and satellite programmes) both SEWA and KMVS had conducted regular interactive sessions on the rehabilitation plan, government's different shelter packages, policy, the significance of seismic proof construction etc. Such interactions help women to understand the significance of organizing and to overcome stress and trauma, the relevance of micro-finance and SHGs, insurance and childcare services in protecting and securing their lives and their livelihoods during times of disaster. Discussions with personnel (professionals as well as village level workers) of both organizations brought out clearly that during the relief phase, women's groups were less driven by caste and religious sentiments. Women were sincere and concerned about the welfare of the entire community. Although the approach of both KMVS and SEWA were to work through women's groups in the villages, but it had implications for the entire community. KMVS staff mentioned that they had been successful in mobilizing women to come forward and participate in implementation of programmes and various trainings related to rehabilitation. But their experience had been that wherever women participated, they put in their best, attended meetings on time, maintained transparency in accounts and other records. Women's consistent participation in the rehabilitation programmes had strongly facilitated both the organizations in implementation at the village level efficiently.

5. Concluding Remarks and Lessons Learnt

This paper is based on observations and data gathered during the years 2001-2002. The lessons learnt from role of women's organizations in revitalizing the communities have its relevance today as disasters are a regular feature in India. There is a differential and adverse impact of earthquake on women in terms of casualty, injury, trauma, insecurity, income earning and household responsibility. Women's indisposition affects the functioning of the households and therefore their well-being is of prime concern especially during times of

stress. Women's participation in relief and rehabilitation can better address not only, women's needs but also, the needs of the community in terms of prioritizing needs, implementing programmes and monitoring progress. It was observed from the foregoing sections that women's organizations such as KMVS and SEWA are in a better position to address the communities' needs compared with other organizations in terms of addressing equity and other concerns which are invariably neglected. Consistency in women's participation has facilitated the smooth implementation of the rehabilitation programmes. In general, there is a need to factor in gender sensitivity in the post disaster relief and rehabilitation programmes especially looking at the needs of women. It is necessary to include women's and men's voices, needs and expertise equally in disaster risk reduction (DRR), and recovery policy and programming (UNDP, 2010). Attention needs to be paid to women's capacity to manage risks, with a view to minimize their vulnerability and enhancing their opportunities for development. What is generally observed is that women's vulnerability in disaster situations is highlighted, but their potential roles in DRR have often been overlooked (IUCN, 2009).

Lessons learnt

1. Women's groups should be involved in the relief programmes at the village level as they have proved to be sincere and transparent in the task.
2. Women's sense of functional space in the house is important to consider and therefore their participation in reconstruction should be solicited, especially when traditional features of housing are retained.
3. Additional housing features for disaster resilience and water harvesting will not only, help women, but also their families in the long run.
4. The transition between relief and rehabilitation is most critical for women as they would need special attention in terms of food, medicine and child care.
5. Training women in masonry and building water infrastructure like roof rain water harvesting will not only, ensure that they are empowered but also, break gender barriers and change gender relations.
6. Promoting women SHGs (self-help groups) in capacity building for livelihood development and insurance is important in disaster situations.

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