

Gender and Land Tenure in the Context of Disaster in Asia Review DOI 10.1108/DPM-02-2018-300

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Gender inequality shapes unequal access to livelihood resources between men and women. Such double inequalities often perfectly amplify vulnerabilities of women and girls to disasters. On the other hand, disasters exacerbate existing inequalities and social relations. Understanding how amplification of vulnerabilities takes place after disasters is crucial in rebuilding people's lives and livelihoods. Using case studies from natural hazards and man-made disaster in Asia (India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka), this edited volume (*Gender and Land Tenure in the Context of Disaster in Asia*, edited by Kyoko Kusakabe, Rajendra Shrestha and Veena N., doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-16616-2, Springer, Cham Heidelberg; New York, NY; Dordrecht; London) argues that an understanding of gender and women's land tenure security is a key factor in mitigating the impact of disasters on women.

The book starts with an introductory chapter by the Editors Veena N. and Kyoko Kusakabe unpacking the intersections between gender, land tenure and disasters. Informing by recent cases around the globe as well as the chapters, Veena and Kusakabe's introduction chapter highlighted the fact that natural and man-made hazards not only can erase land records and dispossessing landowners but also erase land markers on the ground. For humanitarian and emergency managers as well as disaster practitioners who have been working on the ground such as in the context of Indian Ocean tsunamis (IOTs) would just knew it from experience that the pace to quickly rebuild and recover from disasters one need to ensure land ownership. And without understanding gender relations, humanitarian workers could end up re-create and re-strengthen existing vulnerabilities that have been imprinted in established norms and traditions.

The volume contributors highlight the impact of landslides on women's land tenure rights in Sri Lanka (Subhangi M.K. Herath, pp. 33-35); flash floods impacts on a matrilineal society in West Sumatra, Indonesia (Yonariza and Mahdi, pp. 49-59) and land tenure issues after disasters in the Mentawai Islands, Indonesia (Yong, Siahaan and Burghofer, pp. 61-72) examined how natural hazards impact on the lives of men and women and the environment more generally. Gender relations and land tenure security have been exacerbated also in the context of unsustainable development practice and human-made hazard: first, large-scale deforestation and oil palm plantations among indigenous groups in Sarawak, Malaysia (Yong and Wee, pp. 15-31); second, the loss of women's property in the context of an urbanised mountainous region in Leh, Ladakh, India (Bhuvaneswari Raman, pp. 61-74). All the contributors present a wealth of data and views of natural and development-induced disasters and its impact on women and girls, who often experience disasters impact more severely than men and boys.

I worked in Aceh during post-IOT recovery 2005-2007 and had witnessed how disasters exacerbated the dynamics of land rights. The IOT 2004 erased more than a hundred thousand physical markers of land plots. One of the issues that slowed down disaster recovery was gender issues related to land rights claims. This had been exacerbated by the fact that land administration offices were destroyed together with land records. Mortality rates of the staff of land administration officers have been significant. At least 15,000 private land parcels were submerged leading to widespread disappearing of land boundary markers (Fitzpatrick, 2012). Post-disaster land ownership claims, inheritance mechanism and gender issues further complicated the whole reconstruction processes.



Different but still complicated stories from Minangkabau (Chapter 4) and Mentawai Island (Chapter 7) (West Sumatra, Indonesia) highlight complex gender relation, land tenure and disaster recovery in which further reproduced women's vulnerability to disaster risk and poverty. Even in the context of matrilineal society (Chapter 4), women's vulnerability has been no means less. The distribution of recovery supports after a big flood had been skewed towards men as formal system failed to be sensitive to women's need. At worst, Yonariza and Mahdi argue that "participation does not ensure that the matrilineal property ownership is correctly recorded, reported and compensated" (p. 56).

Sri Lanka does not experience near-field earthquakes and tsunamis. Unfortunately, Sri Lanka must confront with the force of nature when far-distance tsunamis hit its shores. At least 35,000 people died and half a million people displaced due to the long-distance tsunamis from the Indian Ocean, causing damages throughout 70 per cent of its coastline. Based on a grounded work in Galle, one of the districts in southern Sri Lanka that were severely affected by the tsunami, Chapter 6 highlighted the female survivors struggling to return to livelihoods normalcy after the IOTs 2014. The Tsunami allowed some degree of social change where exploitative relationships from the context of coir-fibre procurement before the tsunami could be reduced by establishing women's institutional supports (e.g. associations) to have their own coir-processing centre as conditioned by the aid industry during the recovery. However, women's lack of access to land ownership creates challenges to ensure long-term success of livelihood recovery. Furthermore, "powerful patriarchal practices limiting women's mobility and acquisition of skills continue to limit women's agency, making them dependent on a male worker to collect and transport coconut husks to the centre" (p. 87).

The book argues that gendered approach to land rights is critical to disaster preparedness and recovery. In other words "Build Back Better" must be totally mindful of gender and land access after disasters. While disasters invited some humanitarian actors to help, it often becomes opportunities for new powerful actors to enter a particular place where the chaotic situation can facilitate some form of land grabbing by powerful actors. This could leave some groups to be more vulnerable and disadvantaged after disasters. Disaster studies communities understand that gender discrimination is a manifestation of vulnerability and access to land is often mediated by cultural factors as well as gender.

Those who have been studying and observing disasters and emergency management literature in the last 50 years would know that linking gender and land tenure and disasters (hereinafter GLD) is a rare academic endeavour. One of the reasons could be the fact interdisciplinarity is about commitment to disciplinary boundaries crossing. And it is not an easy exercise. GLD combines the core of gender studies, disaster studies, development studies as well as natural resource management including land studies.

I recommend this book for students, academics and motivated readers from disaster studies, development studies, gender studies as well as natural resource management. Professionals who are interested in Asian disaster studies and practices, despite written in the academic format, this book is still recommended to those who are interested in GLD issues in Asia.

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Reference

- Fitzpatrick, D.J. (2012), "Between custom and law: protecting the property rights of women after the tsunami disaster in Aceh", in Daly, P., Feener, M. and Reid, A. (Eds), *From the Ground Up: Perspective on Post-Tsunami and Post-Conflict Aceh*, Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore, pp. 114-131.