



Learning Forum on Women's Rights and Resilience

Ottawa, September 24-25, 2013

In early 2013, Oxfam Canada launched a research initiative¹ to explore how women's organizations define and contribute to building resilience in the face of shocks and stresses in the food system.

While there has been some research on the gender dimensions of vulnerability to shocks and crises, the perspectives of women's organisations are virtually absent from the development sector's current thinking and debates on resilience. Oxfam Canada's research initiative, co-funded by the International Development Research Center, seeks to address this gap and contribute to the body of knowledge on resilience from a gender and women's rights perspective. It aims to identify what women's organizations consider to be the key threats to resilience and to draw lessons from their ways of working. The ultimate aim is to inform the work of emergency and development actors to ensure that efforts to build resilience better respond to the needs and priorities of women.

As part of this research, Oxfam Canada held a Learning Forum on Women's Rights and Resilience² in Ottawa on September 24-25, 2013. The Forum brought together women's organizations, development and humanitarian practitioners, resilience experts and academics from Central America, Africa, North America and Europe to:

- Discuss current approaches to resilience and analyze them from a women's rights perspective
- Identify ways in which international agencies, NGOs and donors can support better resilience programming from a gender perspective
- Develop recommendations and identify influencing strategies to integrate a gender perspective into resilience building policy and practice

In total, 27 people attended the Forum, including representatives from four women's organizations and staff from Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Québec, Oxfam Great Britain and Oxfam America³. The Forum was intended as a space where participants could both think critically about current knowledge and practice as well as develop practical recommendations they could then integrate into their organizations' existing work. The Forum was also designed as an opportunity for Oxfam Canada to receive feedback on its preliminary research findings, which could then inform the final research report.

¹ *Resilience in the face of food insecurity and food crises: Bringing women's experience to the humanitarian and development table.* The research and Learning Forum were carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Center (Ottawa, Canada) and with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency.

² The complete agenda can be found in Annex A.

³ The complete list of participants can be found in Annex B.

Learning Forum: Day 1

Setting the stage

The Forum kicked off with a panel to help define concepts and give a sense of the range of current organizational approaches to building resilience, with presentations by Oxfam, World Vision and ORMUSA, a Salvadorian women's organization.

Gina Castillo began by presenting **Oxfam's** rights based approach to resilience, which seeks to ensure that individuals and communities are able to thrive despite a wide array of shocks and stressors, and which understands risk as deeply rooted in inequality. Gloria Ceron from **ORMUSA** spoke of the need to ensure that the concept of resilience not merely focus on vulnerability but recognize and encompass women's capacity to respond to crises. She described ORMUSA's resilience building work in terms of empowering women to challenge structural inequalities that put them at risk. Speaking to **World Vision's** current research, Josh Folkema emphasized that resilience work should recognize the complexity of systems that exacerbate risk, focus on opportunities rather than problems, prioritize flexibility and learning over compliance, and use multisectoral approaches.

Following the panel, participants split up into breakout groups to discuss the gender dimensions of resilience definitions and frameworks. Below are some of the main points raised:

- Resilience needs to be understood holistically, including emotional well-being and freedom from violence. We need to better understand women's goals, hopes and aspirations which inform the choices they make and the risks they are willing to take.
- The diversity of women's lived experiences must be acknowledged and understood (e.g. we cannot simply address women's vulnerabilities as farmers or as survivors of violence, but must recognize the range of risks they face in their lives). 'One size fits all' resilience strategies will not work.
- Women's lack of access to information, and in particular information about their rights, is one of the greatest determinants of women's vulnerability.
- Resilience building programs must recognize all the unpaid, invisible work that women do at the household level that enable families to carry on despite shocks. To be effective, resilience building strategies must address the burden of women's unpaid care work and resulting time poverty by providing more robust social services and protection.

Participants debated whether the concept of resilience is actually new, and whether using a resilience framework can help improve our ways of working. Representatives of women's organizations explained that while the concept was relatively new to them, in many ways it corresponds quite well to their longstanding ways of working. Participants agreed that the international community's focus on resilience provides an opportunity to ask questions we weren't asking before and draw greater attention to the specific risks women face.

Presenting the experiences of women's organizations

Following this initial brainstorming, the afternoon session explored in greater depth the practical experiences that women's organizations have had in building resilience at the community level.

Colette Solomon began by presenting the experience of the **Women on Farms Project**, a South African feminist organization that strives to strengthen the capacity of women who live and work on farms to claim their rights and fulfill their needs. Colette spoke of women's self-confidence, leadership, solidarity and active citizenship as key pillars of resilience, and of the need to build on women's indigenous knowledge rather than rely on imported solutions. Echoing the morning discussions, she stressed the importance of supporting women's organizations to articulate their own needs and intervene at multiple levels – from the farm, to parliament, to international forums.

Dalila de Jesus Vasquez then presented the work of the **Asociación de Mujeres Madre Tierra**, a membership-based association of rural women in Guatemala. She spoke of the fact that women's organizations such as AMT aren't valued as legitimate actors in the sphere of resilience and emergency response because of their perceived lack of technical capacity and reach. In response, AMT has focused on identifying skills and strengths that exist at the community level, and building the capacity of women to collectively respond to the threats and vulnerabilities they themselves have identified. She also highlighted the lack of information at the community level, particularly among women, as a major barrier to building resilience in the face of recurring natural disasters.

Olivia Some Hema concluded the panel by speaking about the strategies that the **Association Munyu des femmes de la Comoé** has developed over the past two decades to build community resilience in Burkina Faso. MUNYU's main strategy has been to support and strengthen solidarity among women, helping set up over 180 women's group as a rampart against the effects of shocks at the community level. A practical example of this approach is the collective health insurance schemes that MUNYU has been able to establish thanks to the strength of its membership. Olivia concluded by speaking to the key role literacy and access to information play in ensuring that women have the self-confidence and capacity to make decisions within their communities, access services, and raise their voice to make their needs heard.

Exploring Oxfam Canada's research questions and preliminary findings

Following the panel, Lauren Ravon presented the preliminary findings of Oxfam Canada's research based on interviews conducted with two dozen women's organizations in ten countries⁴. She also highlighted some critical questions for participants to reflect on.

Risks and threats to food security: While Oxfam Canada's research found some commonalities with the literature on resilience, most women's organizations identified risks that are absent from mainstream resilience frameworks (e.g. women's limited access to land, effects of widowhood, health, violence against women, male migration...). They emphasized risks that originate at the household level, that are rooted in gender inequality, and that are exacerbated by cultural stereotypes about women's roles and ability to engage in decision making. They also spoke of barriers to building resilience that are linked to sexual stereotypes, care responsibilities and time poverty.

⁴ Brazil, Burkina Faso, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Niger, Peru, South Africa and Sri Lanka.

- ✓ How can we ensure that the risks and vulnerabilities identified by women's organizations (in particular risks that originate at the household level and that are rooted in gender inequality) get factored into resilience frameworks? Who is best placed to address these risks?
- ✓ From a women's rights perspective, does good resilience programming simply imply better gender mainstreaming, or another approach entirely?

Definitions of resilience: The organizations that Oxfam Canada interviewed systematically spoke of resilience in terms of the capacity to make decisions and to take action in the face of risks and threats. Their definitions of resilience included technical capacity, but also awareness of one's own rights, self-confidence and agency. Many women's organizations also spoke of women having no other choice but to be resilient and to sacrifice for the wellbeing of others in the face of adversity. They spoke of women's resilience with awe, but also explained that women's coping strategies often go hand in hand with a sense of powerlessness to bring about change.

- ✓ Does the development sector sufficiently take into account women's disproportionate responsibility for coping with the effects of stresses and shocks at the household level?
- ✓ Do our programs and emergency responses unintentionally build on women's willingness to take on increasing responsibilities to cope with hardship? Do they reinforce sexual stereotypes and a gendered division of labor?
- ✓ How can programs shift gendered coping mechanisms and contribute to more equal risk sharing? What would a transformative approach to resilience look like?

Ways of working and resilience building strategies: Organizations that were interviewed spoke of the need to address gender inequality as a *structural barrier* to resilience, not simply as a *compounding factor* of vulnerability. They defined their resilience building strategies as being rooted in a holistic, responsive approach to programming that addresses the wide range of risks women face. They suggested a two-pronged approach, focused on both technical capacity to withstand shocks and secure livelihoods, and shifts in gender power relations. They spoke of their capacity to harness the informal solidarity that already exists among women at the community level, and to foster collective organizing as a rampart against shocks. They also identified their efforts to challenge sexist attitudes and beliefs as a means of strengthening overall community resilience in the long term.

- ✓ Does building resilience imply addressing women's practical and strategic needs in tandem?
- ✓ How can we foster meaningful collaborations between women's organizations and other development actors in the context of resilience programs?

Following Lauren's presentation, participants discussed some of the critical questions raised, first in breakout groups and then in plenary. Below are some of the key points that emerged:

- Women's organizations need to be recognized as legitimate actors within the field of resilience because of their capacity to design solutions, not simply as a target group to be consulted.
- Resilience is about more than technical fixes – ultimately it's about larger social transformation. Inequality, power and rights should be central to resilience frameworks. A feminist approach to resilience provides a political underpinning to the work, and makes clear that the vulnerabilities people experience are linked to broader structures of oppression and discrimination.

Investments in resilience will not ‘trickle down’ to women if they do not address deep rooted gender inequality and the disproportionate burden placed on women’s shoulders.

- The current focus on resilience is pushing development and humanitarian actors to reflect on how to better integrate their work. There is much to learn from women’s organizations’ holistic, cross-thematic approach to addressing women’s priorities and needs.
- Women and their organizations are often undervalued and marginalized from resilience planning, disaster preparedness and emergency response work. And yet, supporting women to organize collectively is an effective means to build on women’s existing strengths (rather than vulnerabilities) and forge a path to empowerment and active citizenship, while reducing the impact of shocks and/or improving recovery from them. A focus on resilience provides the impetus to think about how to build collective capacities.
- Existing social protection systems and emergency responses are often predicated on overburdening female household members in ways that exacerbate existing inequalities, i.e. by adding to existing time poverty, resource deprivation, or denial of access to opportunities or decision making. Resilience frameworks should explicitly aim to shift these gender roles.

Learning Forum: Day 2

The second day of the Forum was designed to discuss practical recommendations for getting gender and women’s rights into resilience frameworks, in terms of both policy and practice.

To get the discussion started, the day began with three presentations on resilience campaigns and programs that have incorporated a strong gender lens. Maureen Fordham spoke about the **Gender and Disaster Network’s** efforts to get the humanitarian community to better take into account gender relations in disaster contexts. She explained that misleading conceptions of women as passive and helpless victims have limited the effectiveness of humanitarian responses. She also spoke of the need for resilience frameworks to take into account the secondary impacts of disasters on women, such as impacts on women’s land and property rights, access to reproductive health services and psychological well-being. Haydee Rodriguez then spoke about the **Huairou Commission’s Global Campaign on Community Resilience**. She explained the campaign’s focus on increasing women’s access to land, training women on how to conduct risk mapping within their communities, and forging stronger collaboration between communities and local authorities on the gender dimensions of disaster risk reduction. Margaret Capelazo concluded the session by explaining how **CARE Canada** is shifting its organizational ways of working to integrate more attention to gender into its resilience work, speaking frankly about both successes and challenges. She gave specific examples of programs to build women’s resilience through microcredit and entrepreneurship training.

Identifying program strategies and innovative ways of working

Following the morning presentations, participants worked in breakout groups to come up with initial recommendations for how to strengthen resilience programs from a gender perspective. Below are some of the main recommendations that emerged from the discussion:

- Resilience programs should have multi-disciplinary teams, with a mix of technical expertise, knowledge of local culture and power dynamics, and policy and advocacy capacity. Working holistically does not imply working on every issue, but it does mean working with a broader range of actors and conducting cross-sectoral assessments at the program design stage.
- The international community should recognize women's organizations as legitimate actors who can bring unique value to resilience building work. International organizations and NGOs should partner with women's organizations and invest in building their capacity to work on the technical dimensions of resilience (risk mapping, DRR, emergency response) instead of merely confining them to more traditional roles (such as the identification of vulnerable households in emergency response). Strengthened technical capacity will enable women's organizations to engage in national humanitarian spaces from which they are currently excluded.
- Donor agencies and NGOs should consider setting targets for increasing their number of partnerships and percentage of funding going to women's organizations. They should also rethink their criteria for selecting emergency response partners and aim to bring more development actors (and in particular women's organizations) into humanitarian coordination, to help bridge the emergency-development divide.
- Resilience programs should systematically include a power analysis, in addition traditional risk assessments, to understand how power dynamics affect vulnerability and how structural inequalities affect men and women's different needs, capacities, opportunities and risks.
- Programs to strengthen women's resilience need to look beyond women and explicitly aim to challenge cultural stereotypes that reinforce women's inferior social status and exacerbate their vulnerability in the face of shocks and stresses. Technical projects should go hand-in-hand with efforts to shift attitudes and beliefs about gender roles.
- Programs should address women's land rights and access to information, both of which have been identified by women's organizations as some of the most critical resilience issues for women and their communities. Violence against women also needs to be integrated into resilience frameworks, going beyond a protection approach.

Exploring policy recommendations and influencing strategies

The final session was dedicated to exploring the policy implications of the many issues discussed during the two days of the Learning Forum. Given the many policy processes underway and the large spectrum of actors involved (NGOs, national governments, donors, humanitarian organizations, multilateral agencies...), it was not possible for participants to come up with a narrow set of recommendations. Nonetheless, there was clearly a consensus that the *definition* of resilience needs to be broadened and that the terms of the debate need to shift in order to ensure that resilience frameworks do not remain gender blind. Participants suggested that resilience building must be understood as a long term process

of social transformation, designed to address immediate risks, bring about changes in attitudes and beliefs, shift power dynamics that exacerbate vulnerabilities, and ultimately strengthen people's fundamental rights.

In terms of policy recommendations, participants focused on a couple of key issues:

- The need for greater investments in national social protection systems, including more budget allocations to respond to women's priorities and a much stronger focus on reducing women's burden of care.
- The need to strengthen women's access to land and security of tenure as a critical resilience building measure.
- The urgent need to recognize the risks and shocks that women experience at the household level as fundamental threats to resilience.
- The importance of facilitating the participation of women's organization in national humanitarian coordination and DRR planning, in addition to allocating specific budgets to gender and resilience.

Participants also discussed resilience *measurement* as a critical policy issue. There are many initiatives underway to define indicators of resilience, most of which are not informed by a robust gender analysis. Participants highlighted the need to influence the design of these indicators to ensure they adequately capture the complex notion of well-being and safety, and are able to measure the enabling environment for women's resilience. Based on the two days of discussion, participants concluded that resilience indicators need to capture a wide range of factors – from the freedom from violence, to emotional health, to perceptions of safety. These indicators should also track relational changes between men and women, looking in particular at the capacity to participate in decision making and the power to influence.

Oxfam Canada concluded the Learning Forum by thanking participants for their very thoughtful contributions to the discussion, and by committing to following up with participants and their organizations to share the final research findings and to explore opportunities for further collaboration.

Annex A: Learning Forum Agenda

Day 1: September 24, 2013		
Time	Session	Speaker/Facilitator
8:30 – 10:00	Welcome and Introductions Outline of the Learning Forum	All participants
10:00 – 11:30	Setting the Stage: Understanding and defining resilience	Gina Castillo, Oxfam (USA) Josh Folkema, World Vision (Canada) Gloria Elizabeth Ceron, ORMUSA (El Salvador)
11:30 – 11:45	Coffee Break	
11:45 – 12:30	Identifying key elements of resilience from a gender perspective	Small group discussions
12:30 – 1:15	Lunch	
1:15 – 2:30	Resilience in practice: Presenting the experiences of women's organizations	Olivia Regina Hema, MUNYU (Burkina Faso) Colette Solomon, Women on Farms Project (South Africa) Dalila de Jesus Vasquez, Mother Earth Women's association (Guatemala)
2:30 – 3:30	Women's organizations' approaches to resilience in the face of food insecurity: Presentation of Oxfam's preliminary research findings	Lauren Ravon, Oxfam (Canada)
3:30 – 5:15	Digging deeper: continuing to explore elements of resilience from a gender perspective	Small group discussions and Plenary session
5:15 – 5:30	Wrap Up	All participants

Day 2: September 25, 2013		
Time	Topic	Speaker/Facilitator
8:30 – 9:30	Arrival and Recap of Day 1	All participants
9:30 – 10:30	Lessons learned: Sharing practical experiences of campaigns and programs on women’s rights and resilience	Margaret Capelazo, CARE (Canada) Haydee Rodriguez, Huairou Commission (Nicaragua) Maureen Fordham, Gender and Disaster Network (UK)
10:30 – 10:45	Coffee Break	
10:45 – 12:45	Identifying program strategies and ways of working	Small group discussions and Plenary
12:45 – 1:30	Lunch	
1:30 – 3:30	Developing policy recommendations and influencing strategies	Small group discussions and Plenary
3:30 – 4:00	Workshop Conclusion	All participants

Annex B: List of participants

Robyn Baron (Canada)

Learning Forum Facilitator

Isabelle Bremaud (Mexico)

Regional Adaptation and Risk Reduction Advisor, Latin America and the Caribbean
Oxfam Great Britain

Margaret Capelazo (Canada)

Gender Advisor
CARE Canada

Gina Castillo (USA)

Agriculture Program Strategist
Oxfam America

Gloria Elizabeth Ceron (El Salvador)

Coordinator, Local Development Program
ORMUSA

Chih Chen (Canada)

Intern
Centre for Gender Justice, Oxfam Canada

Josh Folkema (Canada)

Buisness Development Manager
World Vision Canada

Maureen Fordham (UK)

Principal Lecturer in Disaster Management at the University of Northumbria
Founding Member of the Gender and Disaster Network

Beatriz Gonzalez (Canada)

Women's Rights Specialist, Transformative Change
Centre for Gender Justice, Oxfam Canada

Melisa N Handl (Canada)

Intern
Centre for Gender Justice, Oxfam Canada

Lina Holguin (Canada)

Director of Policy
Oxfam Québec

Dalila de Jesus Vasquez (Guatemala)

General Coordinator of the Mother Earth Women's Association
Member of the Rural Women's Alliance of Guatemala

Loredana Marchetti (Canada)

Senior Program Specialist, Canadian Partnerships Program
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Elena Modolo (Italy)

Consultant, women's rights in emergencies

Nicolas Montibert (Canada)

Program Officer, Water, Environment and Climate Change
Oxfam Québec

Daniel Morchain (UK)

Global Advisor, Resilience, Climate Change Adaptation and Agriculture
Oxfam Great Britain

Roxanne Murell (Nicaragua)

Associate Country Director, Central America
Oxfam Canada

Lois Mushonga (Ethiopia)

Associate Country Director, Ethiopia
Oxfam Canada

Lauren Ravon (Canada)

Women's Rights Policy Advisor
Centre for Gender Justice, Oxfam Canada

Fraser Reilly-King (Canada)

Policy Analyst on Aid and International Cooperation
Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC)

Haydee Rodriguez (Nicaragua)

President, Union of Women's Cooperatives in Nicaragua
Member of the GROOTS International Global Campaign on Community Resilience

Colette Solomon (South Africa)

Executive Director
Women on Farms Project

Olivia Regina Some Hema (Burkina Faso)

Coordinator, Projects and Programs
Association Munyu des femmes de la Comoé

Dana Stefov (Canada)

Program Manager, Latin America
USC Canada

Beth Timmers (Canada)

Research Award Recipient, Agriculture and Food Security
International Development Research Centre (IDRC)

Ann Witteveen (Canada)

Manager, Humanitarian Department
Oxfam Canada

Kerri Wright (Canada)

Program Officer, Africa
Canadian Hunger Foundation (CHF)