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Integrating rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response: Insights from six countries

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Contents

Key messages

- The extent of integration of human rights and gender equality in disaster preparedness and response varies in the six countries in Asia compared here: Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

- Analysis within the Framework for Integrating Rights and Equality (FIRE) shows changes that can be made to various systems across scales that can reinforce the rights and equality measures to "leave no one behind" before, during and after disasters.

- Important dimensions are fulfilling fundamental rights, ensuring non-discrimination, enabling meaningful participation and access to information, creating transparent and accountable governance systems, supporting the agency and empowerment of marginalized groups, and accounting for social norms.

- This analysis also shows the barriers to full and meaningful integration of rights and equality in a disaster context in the six countries. The 10 recommendations in this report include ratification of human rights agreements and establishing legal measures that can remove barriers to response in each country. Participation must be fostered in transparent and easy ways, especially for disenfranchised stakeholders.

1 Introduction

As countries in Asia face growing disaster and climate risks, governments are coming under increased pressure to strengthen disaster preparedness and response capacity. One important and often overlooked aspect of this is the need to consider and respond to gender inequality and human-rights based issues in the context of disasters and climate change. A necessary first step in this process is to overcome the perception that effectively integrating human rights–based approaches and gender and social equality actions into disaster preparedness and response policy is burdensome, unnecessary and a distraction from other priorities.

The research presented here takes stock of the status of the integration of gender and social equality and human rights–based approaches in disaster preparedness and response, in six countries in Asia: Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka. Through policy review and stakeholder interviews, we aim to demonstrate to government and non-government actors that integrating rights and equality in preparedness and response is important, worthwhile and beneficial for all.

Governments and communities alike must be fully prepared for and ready to respond to future disaster events in an effective, timely and coherent manner. Regional, national and local governments in Asia have made progress on key targets under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: 2015-2030 (Sendai Framework). Nevertheless, growing exposure and vulnerability to disasters and climate risks remains a significant challenge for state and non-state actors in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) policy and action in the region (UNDRR, 2022).

While disasters stem from natural hazards, their outcomes are not natural: they are rooted in socio-political power structures and development processes. People's experiences of disasters depend not only on the strength of a storm or the height of flood waters, but on their exposure, vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities tied to their socio-economic status, age, gender, ability and migrant status, among other characteristics (Bradshaw, 2015).

According to the Sendai Framework, disaster preparedness and response policies and actions should account for people's realities and actively seek to address social and gender inequality, political marginalization and underlying causes of vulnerability (UNDRR, 2015). Respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights and gender and social equality at all stages of DRR governance, planning and implementation must be central to these efforts to avoid ineffective interventions that can widen inequalities, deepen marginalization and exacerbate disaster impacts (Lewis & Maguire, 2015).

Throughout this report, we use "rights" and "equality" as shorthand for human rights–based approaches and gender and social equality, respectively. The effective integration of rights and equality is critical to ensuring appropriate and effective disaster preparedness and response (Bradshaw, 2015; Enarson & Pease, 2016; Lewis & Maguire, 2015). A holistic and sustained effort to acknowledge, consider and embed rights and equality into disaster preparedness and response can contribute towards more inclusive and effective actions, particularly for the benefit of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations. This requires a collective and coherent approach from governments, civil society and the private sector to ensure that "no one is left behind", in line with the Sendai Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This report presents findings from research conducted in the six focus countries in Asia – Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka – to understand how rights and equality are integrated into national disaster preparedness and response policies and actions. Across the six countries, we conducted a total of 65 interviews and six focus group discussions, in 2019–2020, with representatives from more than 60 institutions, including government

agencies and commissions, non-government organizations (NGOs), UN agencies and the private sector (see Annex 1 for a list of participating institutions). The majority of participants were representatives of members of the Asian Preparedness Partnership (APP), a multi-stakeholder regional network of organizations working across public and private sectors to better prepare for and respond to disasters in Asia. Primary data collection was supported by a review of relevant policies, plans and strategies in each of the six countries, and peer-reviewed academic literature pertaining to the main themes of this report.

In our assessment of the extent of integration of rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response policies and implementation in these six countries, we highlight the enabling conditions and barriers to integration of rights and equality in each. We then make recommendations intended to support effective, timely and coherent rights- and equality-based approaches in preparedness and response across the region, as part of a wider effort to enable transformative change towards more inclusive, resilient and equitable societies. In our findings and recommendations, we recognize and consider the diverse contexts of the six countries, given the varied disaster risks faced, development status, norms and perceptions relating to rights and equality, and preparedness and response capacities.

2 An integrated rights-based and gender and social equality approach

Rights-based approaches complement and overlap with gender and social equality methods, yet policies and interventions are typically pursued separately for these two arenas. In practice, both rights- and equality-based actions have common goals and approaches that would lead to enhanced outcomes if pursued in tandem.

The Framework for Integrating Rights and Equality (FIRE) is a single common approach to examine policies, good practices, challenges and opportunities, with equal attention to rights and equality to enhance disaster preparedness and response planning and action (ADPC et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022). FIRE consists of six dimensions, summarized in Table 1: fundamental rights and equality; non-discrimination; participation and access to information; governance systems and structures; agency and empowerment; and social norms and context (ADPC et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022).

The analysis here is organized according to FIRE. In the following sections, we discuss the current extent of integration of rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response in Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka, structured by the six dimensions of FIRE.

Table 1. Summary of the Framework for Integrating Rights and Equality (FIRE) (ADPC et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022)

Fundamental rights and equality	• Fulfil rights reflected in international standards, treaties and guidelines, including equality as a right under law • Assess the influence of socio-political structures on rights, entitlements and resource access
Non-discrimination	• Address root causes of inequality and discrimination based on socio-economic characteristics • Recognize intersectionality of these causes and characteristics
Participation and access to information	• Promote effective, meaningful and equal participation in governance, planning and implementation processes • Ensure equitable access to information, consent to participate and promotion of marginalized voices
Governance systems and structures	• Ensure legal and policy systems, decision-making institutions and civil society platforms are based on international standards and guidelines • Prevent marginalization and exclusion from governance, planning and implementation processes on the basis of social and economic status
Agency and empowerment	• Enhance the ability of rights-holders to exercise their rights and entitlements in decision-making processes • Recognize agency and capacity, and promote collective action and learning
Social norms and context	• Assess power dynamics within family, community and social groups and between power-holding institutions, across scales • Transform social and gender norms that drive inequality, marginalization and discrimination and thus, risk and vulnerability

2.1 Fundamental rights and equality

Fundamental rights are basic human rights, including the right to life, food, health and safety. Government actors from the local to national level are considered duty-bearers with obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights of persons within their jurisdiction (ENNHRI, n.d.). States protect substantive rights with direct and intentional policy instruments, including through the ratification of human rights treaties, the inclusion of human rights in national constitutions, and equality measures in DRR policies. Figure 1 summarizes substantive rights with examples from the six countries in focus in this report.

International human rights treaties
(e.g. the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities)

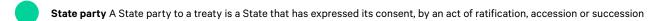|		
National constitutions (All six countries)	**National rights and equality legislation** (e.g. Philippines Magna Carta of Women)	**National disaster risk reduction & management legislation** (e.g. Nepal Disaster Risk and Management Act 2017)
Socio-economic development plans (e.g. Sri Lanka National Development Plan; Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan)	**Rights and equality plans** (e.g. Myanmar National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women; Pakistan Action Plan for Human Rights)	**Disaster preparedness and response plans** (e.g. Cambodia National Action Plan for DRR; Philippines National Disaster Response Plan)

Figure 1. Substantive rights and equality legal and policy foundation for integration in disaster preparedness and response
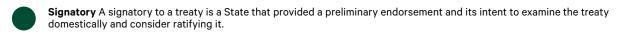
Five of the six countries have ratified all or nearly all of the major international human rights treaties (see Table 2) and have highlighted the protection of human rights in their constitutions, designating the State as the primary duty-bearer and establishing a legal foundation for integrating human rights into disaster preparedness and response legislation and strategies.

Some countries have passed specific legislation or initiated specific action plans to protect the rights of certain groups. In the Philippines, the Magna Carta of Women states, "Women have the right to protection and security in times of disasters, calamities, and other crisis situations especially in all phases of relief, recovery, rehabilitation and construction efforts" (Philippines, 2012). The Pakistan Action Plan for Human Rights sets priority areas for the protection of the rights of women, children, minorities and persons with disabilities (MOHR Pakistan, 2016), while the Myanmar National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women focuses on gender equality and women's rights (MNWCA, 2013). These plans are an important starting point for tackling rights and equality issues at the national policy level, but the translation to sub-national planning and ground-level implementation remains a significant challenge in most countries.

Table 2. The status of international human rights treaty ratification in Nepal, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan

International human rights treaty*	Nepal	Philippines	Cambodia	Myanmar	Sri Lanka	Pakistan
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	State party	State party	State party	No action	State party	State party
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	State party	State party	State party	No action	State party	State party
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)	State party	State party	State party	No action	State party	State party
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW)	No action	State party	Signatory	No action	State party	No action
International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED)	No action	No action	State party	No action	State party	No action
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party	State party

State party A State party to a treaty is a State that has expressed its consent, by an act of ratification, accession or succession

Signatory A signatory to a treaty is a State that provided a preliminary endorsement and its intent to examine the treaty domestically and consider ratifying it.

No action No action means that a State did not express its consent.

*Optional protocols are not included.

Most governments call for protection of rights and social inclusion in preparedness and response plans and specify minimum standards for relief and response. For example, Nepal's DRR National Strategic Plan of Action (2018-2030) is guided by principles of protecting people, their health and livelihood, and promoting all human rights (Government of Nepal, 2018). Sri Lanka's National Policy on Disaster Management explicitly recognizes links to human rights such as "equal rights to receive assistance and information regardless of ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, ability or other personal attributes" (NCDM Sri Lanka, 2010).

The Philippines has integrated and localized the Sphere standards for humanitarian response in the Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act (RA 10821), with training for emergency responders included in the act, along with rules and regulations (Sphere, 2017). The Sphere standards are a set of principles and minimum humanitarian standards to promote quality and accountability. Similar capacity building initiatives for Sphere standards are being undertaken in Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

While capacity building enables more effective implementation of legislation and plans, other measures are also required, including more inclusive governance systems, participatory decision-making processes, and adequate allocation of financial resources for integrating rights and equality in preparedness and response. We discuss these aspects in the following sections.

2.2 Non-discrimination

In the context of disaster preparedness and response, ensuring non-discrimination requires an intersectional approach that considers how social characteristics interact to produce levels of risk, vulnerability and resilience. For instance, intersecting social characteristics might restrict individuals' access to services and opportunities. "Intersectionality" acknowledges the existence of systemic discrimination due to aspects of one's identity such as age, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, ethnicity and ability (Raza, 2017). Such an approach is aligned with the notion of "leaving no one behind", a central pledge of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development that is also highly applicable in disaster and climate risk contexts.

Intersectionality has been used as a framework to merge disaster vulnerability with environmental justice (Ryder, 2017). An intersectional approach to disaster preparedness and response ensures that all groups are meaningfully included or considered in planning and decision-making processes; however, in many countries around the world, this is not yet realized. For example, people who claim non-normative gender and sexual identities, such as the Bakla in the Philippines, are unheard or insufficiently heard when it comes to designing DRR policies and actions (Gaillard et al., 2017). Such groups often face discrimination and violations of human rights in both everyday life and in disaster settings, and tend to lack access to resources, opportunities and information that are available to other groups in society. Despite the recognition of non-discrimination in most of the six national constitutions, discrimination against at-risk groups might lead to the prioritization of some groups over others in relief efforts.

In preparedness and response, a number of opportunities could facilitate inclusion and eradicate discrimination. For example, the Nepali government holds responsibility for general awareness of the needs and locations of vulnerable groups to accurately distribute aid. Knowing the needs and abilities of vulnerable groups can also be vital when making evacuation strategies. One of Cambodia's outcome indicators of its DRR plan is the number of people with disabilities receiving early warning information, demonstrating an attempt to promote more inclusive preparedness and improve the response capacity of people with disabilities.

2.3 Participation and access to information

Participation is widely recognized as essential to DRR initiatives. In its description of the role of stakeholders, the Sendai Framework states that "women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes" (UNDRR, 2015, p. 23). However, the equal participation of women and men is an integral but as-yet unrealized feature of gender equality, and the ability to participate does not necessarily translate into decision-making power and authority.

The poor representation of women and marginalized groups at decision-making levels of preparedness and response can result in the incapacity of the national agencies to address their needs. Many countries are actively working to increase women's participation in government. Pakistan, for example, increased the number of seats reserved for women in national and provincial legislatures following its ratification of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The laws and policies of all six countries reviewed here highlight the importance of women's participation in one way or another, either generally or specifically in the context of DRR. Some also specify the need to include children, senior citizens and other economically disadvantaged or socially marginalized groups. In the Philippines, for example, the Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act (RA 10821) specifically mandates the participation of children in community-level programmes, to provide them with an appropriate space to express their needs and priorities in disaster preparedness and response. In addition to calling for the meaningful participation of vulnerable groups, Nepal's 2018 national DRR policy mandates participation at the local level. Cambodia's Law on Disaster Management (2015) discusses participation not only as a right, but as an obligation.

Calls for participation in DRR can come in different forms. In addition to seeking representation from different social groups, governments might work to ensure long-term engagement and stronger participation from civil society actors involved in disaster preparedness and response. In this arena, government efforts are required but may fall short; NGOs also play an important role in providing participation opportunities for women and other marginalized groups and driving the gender equality agenda. In Nepal, for example, local meetings are an opportunity for community members to express their concerns and raise questions. However, marginalized groups, such as single women, can find it difficult to fully participate in these settings due to social and cultural norms.

There are many examples of civil society actors and NGOs working to increase and improve the participation of marginal groups within DRR policy and programme decision-making. In Sri Lanka, the Centre for Equality and Justice helps to bring local communities and local officials together to encourage participation of youth and women in planning activities. In Nepal, networks of local organizations hold regular meetings with disabled people's organizations, including from rural areas, to discuss issues. In Sri Lanka, NGOs work to engage women in search and rescue activities to ensure that women's needs are met in response and relief organizations.

Fair and equitable access to information is essential to a rights-based approach to disaster preparedness and response, and it is also vital for informed participation in decision-making. The six countries reviewed here address issues of access and control in a variety of ways, but all recognize the importance of access to credible and timely information in disaster preparedness and response – as articulated in policies and plans, or conveyed during interviews and focus group discussions. Limited access to appropriate warning information is an issue particularly for women, children and people with disabilities.

For some countries, addressing these gaps starts with better understanding the problem. The Myanmar National Framework for Community Disaster Resilience (2017), for example, recognizes that disaster risk in Myanmar is a product of inappropriate development practices and existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, such as women's lack of access to information, but also to land tenure and credit, which constrain the sustainability of their livelihoods. The framework also encourages the involvement of women in DRR and in the development of early warning systems and identifies access to finance and employment as a solution to increase women's resilience. At the time of publication, the current political situation in Myanmar has created uncertainty around the governance and implementation of disaster and climate policies enacted under previous administrations.

In Sri Lanka, public institutions have the responsibility to provide affected populations with disaster risk information prior to and during a disaster. The 2010 national DRR policy also acknowledges that "disaster-prone communities have the right to participate in and contribute to planning, decision making, implementation and monitoring processes related to disaster management" (NCDM Sri Lanka, 2010).

2.4 Governance structures and systems

The integration of rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response is shaped not only by a country's legislation, policies and plans but also by the governance structures and systems which enact and implement them, at national, sub-national and local levels. Here we discuss the roles of DRR, human rights and gender equality governance structures, and how they interact.

All six countries have a dedicated women's ministry, department, commission or committee for promoting women's status and roles in society, ensuring the welfare of women, and working to eliminate discrimination and violence against women. Cambodia has both the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the National Council for Women; Myanmar, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement; Nepal, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, together with the National Dalit Commission; Pakistan, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Special Education and the National Commission on the Status of Women; Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Commission on Women; and Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Security and a National Committee. The engagement of these agencies and institutions in DRR governance varies depending on policies, mandates and governance arrangements.

Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka have accredited national human rights institutions (NHRIs). The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) has accredited the NHRIs of Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka with A status and has given B status to Myanmar's institution (accreditation status as of 29 November 2022, although this has not been reviewed since November 2015). Cambodia has a Human Rights Committee rather than a formal NHRI. The formal engagement of these institutions in DRR varies, including preparedness and response, varies.

Integration of rights and equality may come in the form of, for example, representation of NHRIs and gender equality institutions in DRR governance mechanisms, conducting post-disaster needs assessments and rights monitoring, and institutional collaboration on capacity building for rights and equality. For example, the Philippine Commission on Women is a member agency of the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council; meanwhile, the Commission on Human Rights Philippines (CHRP) is not, but it still has an oversight role for human rights monitoring in disaster and conflict situations.

Dedicated ministries and departments play important roles for social protection and response, particularly for typically vulnerable and marginalized groups, in all six countries. For example, in

Pakistan, the Gender and Child Cell was established under the National Disaster Management Agency to integrate the needs of women and children into DRR, guided by protection tools such as the Minimum Standards for Protective Spaces for Children (2013) and the National Policy Guidelines on Vulnerable Groups in Disasters (2014).

An important aspect of rights and equality governance is effective accountability and transparency mechanisms. Disaster-related complaints are often handled by the response agencies themselves. A stronger accountability and transparency system would involve an independent third party; in other words, the NHRIs should be handling and assessing complaints, which is not currently universally done in post-disaster contexts across the six countries discussed here.

The NHRIs have played active roles in protecting and promoting rights in disaster response and recovery efforts. For instance, the National Human Rights Commission of Nepal conducted human rights monitoring during the response to the Gorkha Earthquake in 2015 (NHRC, 2017; NHRC Nepal, 2015). The CHRP conducted multi-year internal displacement monitoring following Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, and Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights investigated how severe drought impacted fundamental rights during the Tharparkar Crisis in 2016 (NCHR Pakistan, 2016).

Overall, the integration of equality in national governance across the six nations considered here tends to be stronger than the integration of rights. This can lead to weak integration at sub-national and local levels, too, due to a lack of prioritization and constraints around technical capacity, resources and limited coordination. However, as local preparedness and response is often supported by bottom-up, grassroots actions, there are several positive examples of localities and programmes integrating rights and equality into disaster governance, as discussed in subsequent sections.

We observe that an effective governance system for rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response requires collaboration and coherence between agencies and institutions in different sectors. Governance structures and systems may establish formal and informal mechanisms to enhance institutional engagement and mutual support for technical, strategic and operational aspects for integration of rights and equality at all levels. Opportunities exist for enhancing integration when agencies seek to build response capacity and improve preparedness planning by embedding principles of rights and equality from the outset.

2.5 Agency and empowerment

The six countries have examples of inclusive, grassroots actions and collective learnings from disaster preparedness and response experiences. For example, the Feminist Dalit Organization in Nepal works to eliminate gender- and caste-based violence, which has been shown to increase in times of disaster. The Cambodian Women's Development Agency is an NGO promoting the development of disadvantaged communities and the advancement of women's and children's rights.

Understanding and accounting for local context are key factors in the success of actions undertaken before and after disasters. They are of particular importance when external actors are involved, such as NGOs and other agencies that support state actions or address capacity and resource gaps during disaster preparedness and response phases, such as the aftermath of the 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka, when local capacity was overwhelmed. Providing direct aid or relief is less likely to facilitate agency and empowerment building than providing cash transfers, livelihood resources or skills training – interventions that are designed to enable and empower, as shown in post-disaster processes after Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines (Ensor et al., 2021).

Both state and non-state actors recognize pre-existing strengths and capacities within affected communities, and both work with beneficiaries to build on those strengths and capacities rather than seeking to implement what suits a partner or donor. Post-disaster needs assessments can play an important role in response and recovery actions; however, those conducting the assessments must also be cognizant of the agency and capabilities of disadvantaged and marginalized groups and be sure not to perpetuate social inequalities or power dynamics through assessment tools and methodologies. Disaster preparedness can also empower and build capacity through educational interventions that teach people how to respond to early warning signals and evacuate safely (Allen 2006).

2.6 Social norms and context

Social norms play an important role in shaping how rights and equality are perceived and how socio-economic development differs depending on age, gender, ethnicity, (dis)ability and wealth, among other characteristics. Studies have also shown the influence of social norms in disaster preparedness planning and shaping people's resilience (Le Masson et al., 2016; MacGillivray, 2018).

Gender gaps in all six countries in this report – influenced by a social norm that women's primary roles are reproductive and caregiving, while men's are to provide an income – affect women's and men's vulnerability and capacity in disaster contexts. In Pakistan, for example, interviews revealed a divide in women's development split across rural–urban lines. One trend showed professionalization of women's work in cities. In rural areas, gender-based violence and discrimination rooted in patriarchal values is still pervasive.

In the Philippines, women make up around half of the total labour force and there is only a narrow gender gap in terms of health, while women's political empowerment is declining (WEF, 2020). Analysis of data at the provincial level in the Philippines has shown sub-national differences in women's development and gender equality tied to rates of poverty, access to healthcare, and ownership of land (Abarquez & Parreño, 2014).

Across all six countries in focus here, respondents spoke of a lack of disaggregated data at national and sub-national levels – an indicator of gender inequality itself – preventing a full understanding of gender and social issues.

3 Conclusions and recommendations

This report presents a snapshot of the status of integration of rights-based approaches and gender and social equality in disaster preparedness and response in six countries in Asia, applying FIRE (ADPC et al., 2021; Scott et al., 2022) in diverse and varied contexts. In conclusion, rights and equality integration is partial, uneven and at times lacking altogether. In some contexts, gender considerations are mainstreamed well at national policy level, but applied weakly at the local level. The strength of rights-based approaches in disaster contexts does not evenly reflect how countries consider international human rights law and national legislation.

Based on our findings, this final section outlines a set of 10 recommendations for enhancing rights and equality in preparedness and response, at all levels. These recommendations build on previously published work (ADPC et al., 2021), expanding on specific actions while reflecting the varied status of integration across the six countries. They are for duty-bearers and other actors to consider when working together to strengthen rights- and equality-based approaches in disaster preparedness and response. Each recommendation is supported by an explanation of the enabling factors and existing barriers upon which the recommendation is based.

We acknowledge that each country context is different, and actors will therefore connect with these recommendations in different ways. However, based on our research, we consider these points a set of actions relevant to all contexts, which can support the enhanced integration of rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response.

1. **Make visible how social norms and power dynamics shape rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response governance, planning and implementation.**

The social norms in a given context are foundational to how well rights and equality are integrated into societies, policies and practices. If they are widely held core values, that increases the likelihood that they will be considered in preparedness and response action.
However, in some countries "human rights" is a politicized and controversial term. Such politicization prevents rights-based approaches from being implemented effectively and evenly.

When "gender equality" is conceptualized as the pursuit of social, political and economic equality of all genders and sexes, including non-normative gender and sexualities, rather than being about "women's issues", it facilitates a deeper understanding of the root causes of inequality and power imbalances.

2. **Ensure that rights reflected in international standards, including the right to equality, are core principles of disaster preparedness and response action, by meaningfully engaging with NHRIs and gender equality agencies.**

International law and national policy are the legal, or substantive, basis for rights and equality in preparedness and response governance, planning and implementation. The ratification of international human rights treaties, relevant clauses in national constitutions, standalone rights or equality laws, and broader development policies, all inform how DRR laws are framed and implemented. They are also called upon for accountability and transparency requirements of duty-bearers.

All countries' preparedness and response planning flows directly from DRR laws, but not all

countries have DRR laws that integrate rights and equality standards. A weak legal framework for DRR in this regard limits the extent to which rights and equality can be effectively integrated in disaster preparedness and response at all levels. Engaging with NHRIs and gender equality agencies could increase the effective integration of rights and equality.

3. **Develop and strengthen partnerships between human rights institutions, gender equality agencies, and disaster preparedness and response actors – both government and non-government.**

The structure and mandate of governance institutions plays an important role in rights and equality integration. Where there are standalone, independent institutions with mandates to promote and ensure rights and equality, such as human rights commissions and women's ministries, their presence increases the likelihood that sectors will prioritize these issues. In some countries, these institutions bring additional resources, capacities and accountability mechanisms to support integration, but in others they are relatively weak and lack clout to enforce international and national law within governments.

This context informs how effective integration is in DRR institutions, and therefore in disaster preparedness and response action. However, the willingness of DRR institutions themselves to proactively integrate rights and equality is just as important for enabling, or restricting, efforts.

4. **Build coherence between sectors and stakeholders at all levels of governance for more effective and inclusive disaster preparedness and response governance, planning and implementation.**

Coherence between sectors, stakeholders and levels of governance is needed to enable effective integration. When rights and equality actors are directly engaged in DRR decision-making processes, it promotes an integration agenda. In many cases, DRR councils or committees consisting of representatives from ministries and other institutions are designed to make mainstream the risk in socio-economic development sectors; such councils or committees are generally better represented by gender equality–related institutions than human rights–based institutions.

Coherence between government and civil society actors, including NGOs, academia and the private sector, is also an important enabler of integration, as effective preparedness and response actions rely on multi-stakeholder partnerships. Finally, coherence is essential between the national level, where policies and plans are set, and all levels of sub-national governance, where preparedness and response are implemented – incomplete decentralization of DRR inhibits effective integration of rights and equality.

5. **Prioritize the effective, meaningful and equal participation of all stakeholders, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups, in disaster preparedness and response governance, planning and implementation.**

Meaningful participation requires that individuals are entitled to participate in decisions directly affecting them and are included in the design, implementation and monitoring of relevant interventions. Meaningful participation of all stakeholders, including at-risk people, is a key enabler of rights and equality integration. Participation in disaster preparedness and response planning and action, including evacuation drills, early warning systems and camp management, reflects general levels of participation in decision-making.

In the six countries studied in this report, a common disconnect occurs between DRR policies

set at the national level, which tend to state the necessity of broad participation, and practice at local levels, which can be exclusionary or even burdensome to certain groups. Furthermore, participation of all genders and social groups can sometimes be taken for granted, or seen as a head-counting exercise, rather than an important governance process. However, there is a trade-off between broad participation and decision-making, as resources may not allow for extensive consultation. When participation is restricted, unequal or not transparent, it is rendered meaningless and becomes a barrier to rights and equality integration.

6. **Build the capacity of key disaster, gender equality and human rights institutions at all levels to coherently integrate rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response.**

The capacity of all sub-national and local levels of government – in all aspects – influences the extent rights and equality will be considered and prioritized. In many cases, preparedness and response capacity itself needs to be enhanced, which is a prerequisite for integration. Support from national level actors is uneven; trainings may be provided as well as guidelines and handbooks, but this is a large, ongoing effort that is generally under-resourced. NGOs and other civil society actors also provide capacity-building support for preparedness activities, such as community disaster information and education campaigns, and when there is a need to respond, this support tends to increase significantly – further reflecting weak local government capacity and the limits to integration.

7. **Strengthen the implementation and operationalization of rights and equality dimensions of disaster preparedness and response policies, plans, guidelines and procedures at all levels.**

Policy implementation determines how effectively rights and equality may be integrated in preparedness and response. Implementation is supported through dedicated preparedness and response plans, guidelines and standard operating procedures, which not all countries currently have in place. As preparedness and response are typically multi-actor, multi-level phases of DRR, it is important that guidance and support is tailored to different actor and governance level needs. Generally speaking, the more local the level, the lower the capacity and therefore the greater need for higher-level support. In some cases, preparedness action is limited and responding to disasters is done on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis without consistent procedures – these are significant limitations to the integration of rights and equality.

8. **Allocate sufficient human, financial, physical and intellectual resources over the long-term to strengthen the integration of rights and equality in disaster preparedness and response at all levels.**

In order to enhance the capacity of relevant stakeholders, resources – referring to human, financial, physical and intellectual resources – must be made available to integrate rights and equality at all levels. Most, if not all, relevant institutions on all sides feel they are under-resourced to effectively integrate rights and equality into DRR planning and implementation. Rights- and equality-focused institutions are working across all sectors of government and must prioritize core functions, e.g. related to human rights monitoring, which lie outside of DRR. Similarly, DRR institutions have a set of functions throughout the DRR cycle that have to be resourced in ways that allow for sufficient response capacity in the event of a major disaster.

Some but not all countries have mechanisms that require government agencies to allocate a fixed

percentage of annual budgets for gender equality-related activities – which is an effective way to enable integration to improve over time. Overall, however, resources for integration are limited on all sides and are not effectively combined across agencies and institutions to maximize value.

9. **Strengthen monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms to ensure the accountability and transparency of disaster preparedness and response governance, planning and implementation at all levels.**

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policy implementation are an important accountability and transparency mechanism for the integration of rights and equality. When conducted regularly and effectively, the M&E mechanism serves as an important pillar of good governance and is also key for effective preparedness and response initiatives. Given that monitoring is a core function of NHRIs, examples have shown the importance of independent inquiries into disaster response practices. Furthermore, M&E is required for the accountability and transparency of disaster funds use, as well as how funds reserved for gender equality activities have been utilized, at all levels of government. Across the countries, M&E of disaster preparedness and response action is an area of weakness that currently acts as a barrier to more effective integration of rights and equality.

10. **Design and implement disaster preparedness and response action based on data disaggregated by social group, and ensure that "nobody is left behind", in line with the Sendai Framework and SDGs.**

A general lack of reliable data is limiting the extent of rights and equality integration in preparedness and response across all countries. Effective action requires the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by social group or socio-economic characteristic, including gender, age, (dis)ability, ethnicity and poverty status, to account for all realities and ensure that "nobody is left behind". Incomplete and unreliable socio-economic and disaster data prevent the establishment of good baselines for policy interventions in many cases. Evidence-informed action for preparedness and response is essential to enable the integration of rights and equality.

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Annex 1

The status of international human rights treaty ratification in Nepal, Philippines, Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan '

Country	Institutions
Cambodia (11)	• Ministry of Planning • UN Women • Cambodian Red Cross • Kratie Women's Welfare Association • DanChurchAid • Cambodian Disabled People's Organisation • Partnership for Development of Kampuchea • Cambodian Women's Development Association • Cambodian Center for Human Rights • Federation of Associations for Small and Medium Enterprises of Cambodia • Cambodian Humanitarian Forum
Myanmar (10)	• Department of Social Welfare, Yangon Region • Department of Disaster Management, Yangon Region • Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies • Myanmar Red Cross Society • Gender Equality Network • UN Population Fund • Myanmar National Human Rights Commission • UNICEF • Save the Children • Myanmar Preparedness Partnership
Nepal (15)	• Women's Rehabilitation Centre • The Disaster Management Department, Kathmandu Metropolitan Office • Human Rights Alliance Nepal • Human Rights Commission • International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development • Feminist Dalit Organization • National Dalit Commission • National Women's Department • Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce & Industries • BRAC Nepal • Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research, and Development • Nepal Development Research Institute • Christian Aid • Disaster Preparedness Network – Nepal • National Society for Earthquake Technology – Nepal

Country	Institutions
Pakistan (6)	• Human Rights Commission of Pakistan • Care International Pakistan • Oxfam Pakistan • Islamic Relief Pakistan • Shirkat Gah Women's Resource Centre • International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Philippines (8)	• Office of Civil Defense – Department of Policy Development and Planning Services • Office of Civil Defense – Department of Capacity Building and Training • Center for Disaster Preparedness • Philippines Disaster Resilience Foundation • National Economic and Development Authority • Commission on Human Rights Philippines • Local Government Academy • Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines
Sri Lanka (12)	• Hapan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) – Sri Lanka • Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement • Oxfam Sri Lanka • UNFPA Sri Lanka • Centre for Equality and Justice • Disaster Management Centre • Janathakshan GTE Ltd • Ceylon Chamber of Commerce • National Disaster Relief Services Centre • Sri Lanka Red Cross Society • Ministry of Women & Child Affairs and Dry Zone Development • The Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka

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