



UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES OF WOMEN MEMBERS IN UNION DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN BANGLADESH

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Women are no longer meant to sit at home and do the chores. If they do not go out and participate in things such as the UDMC and other such things, they will never be able to come out of the shackles they have been put in. I feel I have learned so much from my time in the UDMC, and I could not have gained this knowledge by sitting at home.

Meherunnisa, Member, UDMC, Chaugram in Natore



Introduction

- ▶ Bangladesh is highly vulnerable for various reasons
- ▶ Climate Change has intensified this vulnerability
- ▶ Women are disproportionately affected compared to men by the impacts of climatic disasters due to
 - socio-economic differences,
 - discriminatory actions and
 - gender inequality,
 - besides some specific impacts of disasters on female population

Introduction

- ▶ Bangladesh Government recognizes this issue and thus, established Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD) that includes women memberships in Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC).
- ▶ This study explores perceptions of women members in UDMC, and the roles they play – considering various challenges that act as barriers to women empowerment.
- ▶ Study conducted in coastal, drought and flood prone eco-zones – 20 Union Parishads of 10 Upazillas in 10 districts.

Research Questions

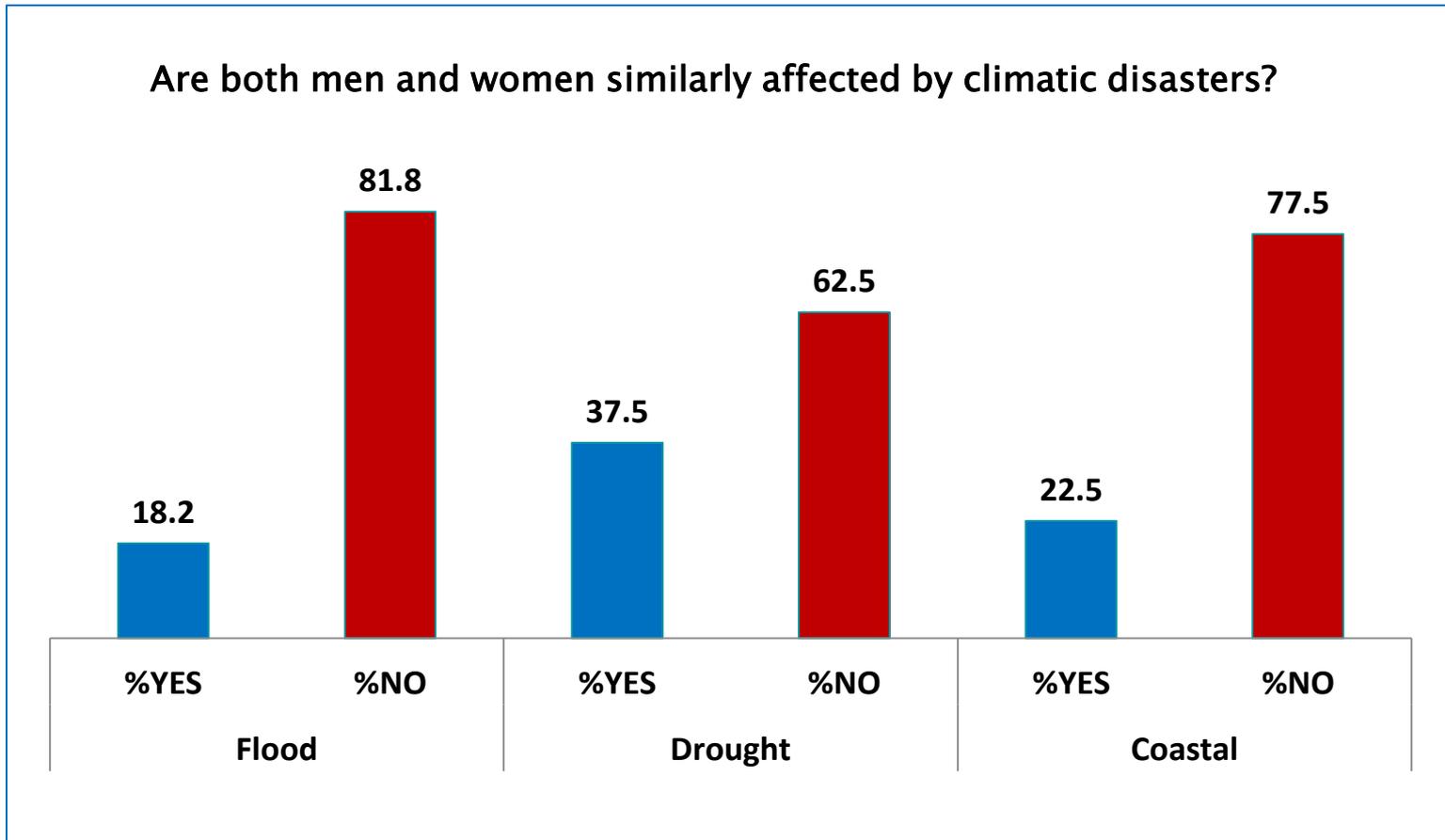
- ▶ What is the current level of participation of women members' within UDMCs?
 - ▶ What level of knowledge do UDMC women members have on the differentiated impacts of disaster risk reduction on women and men in the community?
 - ▶ How do women use their local knowledge to engage with UDMC activities?
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Key Findings and Analysis

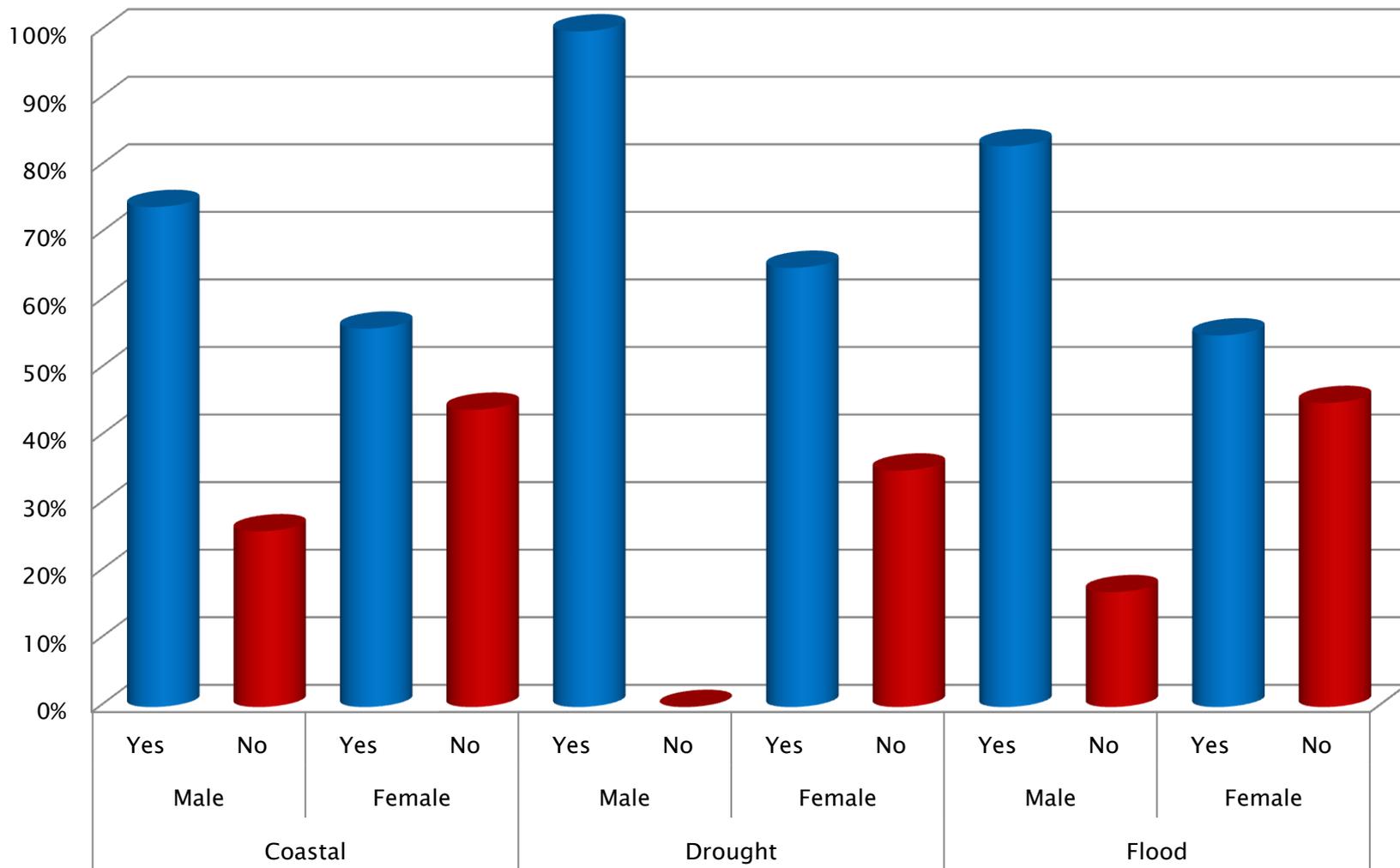
- ▶ Knowledge and perception of women UDMC members

Women's socio-economic position, perception of their capability, gender biases, and cultural and religious influences limit opportunities for women to contribute to field-based activities, hardship duties, financial management and decision making processes in DRR.

Key Findings and Analysis



Are men and women equally benefitted from UDMC activities?



Roles, Responsibilities and Leadership of Female UDMC Members

- ▶ Bangladesh is historically a patriarchal society where certain roles and responsibilities are pre-assigned to men and women.
- ▶ This is also prevalent in addressing the impacts of Climate Change and disasters in Bangladesh, particularly in rural setting and vulnerable communities.
- ▶ Though a number of initiatives were taken by both government and non-government organizations to design and implement gender inclusive disaster risk reduction process, establishing gender unbiased roles, responsibilities and leadership has not been possible yet in the vulnerable locations.

Roles, Responsibilities and Leadership of Female UDMC Members

- ▶ Women are expected to be the primary caregiver of children and elderly members of the family, manage drinking water and cook meals. This practice continues in disaster risk reduction process as well as the study finds that women are also expected to play similar role in disaster time.
- ▶ Many women, for example, also have limited or no access to financial resources and rely on men in their families; this situation also persists in disaster risk reduction thought-process in the UDMCs where a number of women pointed out that financial loss and employment are associated with men primarily.



Roles, Responsibilities and Leadership of Female UDMC Members

- ▶ When talking about the responsibilities of women members during disasters, majority respondents said they thought it was the responsibility of the women to be on the field and guiding women, children and the disabled to safety.
- ▶ Only a quarter of the respondents said that they thought it was not the responsibility of women to be out on the field during a disaster, since sometimes situations can get very dangerous.



Are female members involved in different roles and responsibilities of UDMC?

Roles and responsibilities	Female UDMC member	Chairman	NGO	Govt.
	Percentage "Yes"			
Rescue measures	64	65	65	84
Relief collection	44	55	60	58
Relief distribution	61	80	75	89
Rehabilitation	47	75	60	79
Disaster risk reduction plan	59	75	75	63
Improve awareness of people, volunteers and relevant stakeholders on coping measures to reduce risks	69	75	70	79
Ensuring security for women, children and disabled during disaster period	48	65	65	58
Damage assessment during post disaster period	47	60	55	58

Male member perceptions on the Roles, Responsibilities and Leadership of Women in UDMCs

Gabura Union Chairman- “We also need women to be a part of the UDMC since they are the ones who need to take care of pregnant women, children and old people during disasters. These women need to be made aware of their responsibilities and their roles in society.” This perception is associated with earlier observations on gender biasness.

An NGO representative in UDMC expressed women voices are not given priority, he believes that there need to be more female members in the UDMC, and only then will their opinions be heard.

Another Chairman representing Kalam Union UDMC said that women were given priority in his UDMC, with their suggestions being put into action if they were plausible. Nachole Union Chairman also said the same thing, and added that women were not always present at the meetings due to various domestic responsibilities, but when they attended they were given full priority.

Specific and Issue-based Recommendations

- ▶ Structure of the UDMCs
 - ▶ Leadership of Women in the UDMCs
 - ▶ Functionality of UDMCs
 - ▶ Establishing gender sensitive early warning system
 - ▶ Training and Capacity Building
 - ▶ Facilities for the UDMC female members
 - ▶ Improved awareness of Male UDMC members
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Thank you for your kind attention