

# LEADING RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT

GRASSROOTS WOMEN'S PRIORITIES, PRACTICES AND INNOVATIONS



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This publication is a joint effort of GROOTS International, Northumbria University School of the Built and Natural Environment and the United Nations Development Programme.

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# FOREWORD



Women living in poor communities are consistently identified as one of the groups most vulnerable to natural hazards and climate change. Their meagre asset base, social marginalization, lack of mobility and exclusion from decision-making processes compound the vulnerabilities they experience. It is important to recognize that women's vulnerabilities are embedded in social, economic and political processes—and the development gaps that reproduce them. However, development processes can empower grassroots women to transform the living conditions of their families and communities and to reverse these vulnerabilities.

In the policy world, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and poverty reduction are each advancing within their own area. This publication shows how for grassroots women, building resilience to disaster and climate change is inextricably linked to advancing development priorities. It explores the links between disasters, development, poverty and gender-based inequality. This analysis is supported by a set of case studies in which grassroots women's organizations working in disaster-struck communities have demonstrated their leadership in securing resource sets in order to address their communities' most pressing development concerns. In doing so, grassroots women are simultaneously improving their everyday living conditions and empowering themselves to be leaders and drivers of development processes that will help overcome the factors that contribute to women's vulnerabilities.

This booklet distinguishes itself from others in the field by incorporating these development initiatives into disaster risk reduction discussions—a connection rarely made in development literature. Furthermore, it offers an atypical perspective on grassroots women as leaders and active agents of strategies that advance disaster risk reduction and long-term resilience.

Practitioners, policy makers and academics can use this publication to support their efforts to invest in grassroots women's active engagement in building resilience—resilience that both empowers grassroots women and benefits communities that are vulnerable to natural hazards and climate change.

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# ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

**The women whose works are presented in this publication are teachers, trainers, resource-persons and leaders—disaster recovery and development efforts should not reduce them to mere victims. Disaster and development professionals, researchers, scholars and organizations partnering with grassroots women can use these case studies as examples, for ideas or for advocacy efforts.**



This publication—firmly grounded in the research and practices of its contributors—is a practical source document of ideas for readers studying and working on resilience issues. In presenting a set of grassroots women’s development innovations that build community resilience (and a framework in which to view these innovations), it celebrates women’s inventiveness as they struggle to support and feed their families, find and maintain livelihoods, and make their voices heard as they survive and cope with disasters.

The women’s groups and collectives described in this publication are grassroots women’s groups. ‘Grassroots women’ are women who live and work in poor and low-income communities, who are economically, socially and politically marginalized and whose survival and everyday lives are directly affected by natural hazards and climate change.

Part I presents a framework through which to view grassroots women’s resilience-building activities, illustrating the multiple entry points through which grassroots women approach resilience-building.

Part II presents select case studies that demonstrate the breadth and reach of resilience-building strategies led by grassroots women’s organizations. These examples, viewed through a sustainable livelihoods lens, represent a diverse range of themes and groups at different stages of their evolution. Some organizations are mature, with widespread robust networks of women’s groups that span multiple cities or provinces; other groups are smaller, nascent and fragile. A commonality among all the groups is that they are organized to collectively secure a range of resources and relationships that cushion their communities from the shocks and stresses of disaster.

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# PART I

GENDER, DISASTER AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE







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