International Disaster Reduction Conference, Davos, Switzerland

Risks, resilience, gender and disasters in Mexico

Úrsula Oswald Spring

MRF Chair UNU-EHS

CRIM-National University of Mexico

El Colegio de Tlaxcala

August 31, 2006

Focus of the Talk and Main Questions

1. Why are women living with higher social vulnerability and are more exposed to natural risks and hazards?

2. Why are women's resilience capacities ignored or taken for granted?

3. What are the possible policies and measures to improve resilience for these social groups and to reduce their risks?

1. Social Vulnerability: Gender Identity and Social Representation

Main attributes of social identity

- Thousand of years of social practices have created a society within a **specific socio-historic environment**, where symbolic elements have developed and changed.

- The main attributes –**gender, sex and race-** and socioeconomic conditions –**rich, poor-** are maintained stable (Habermas, 2000).

- Each process of classification implies processes of identity, inclusion or rejection and exclusion, which constitutes the base of any **power exercise**.

Characteristics of Social Identity

Social identity is:

- *processual* resulting from and leading to permanent change (Taijfel, 1985; Adams, 2005);

- *relational* due to its transformation linked to interaction (Moscovici, 1976, 2000);

- *multidimensional* operating inside and between individuals, groups and ideologies (Doise, 1986);

- *systemic* open, dissipative & self-organizing system (Prigogine, 1992; Oswald, 2005)

- *contextual* forging relationships in specific contexts;

- *essential* due to the diversity and complexity of social interactions that are sustained and transformed by identity processes (Serrano, 2004, 2005).

Gender as mode of social situation

- **Identities:** "All the ways one might understand oneself to be a man or a women...with any subset of gender norms, roles and traits ascribed" (Anderson: 2006:4) and understood, while repudiating others (stereotypes, racism).
- **Symbolism:** gendered representation through conventional association, imaginative projection and metaphoric thinking; symbolic spaces: male (garage); women (kitchen).
- **Roles:** man and women get different social roles (military, childrearing)
- **Norms:** Men are assertive, logic, strong; women are humble, modest, weak; a society expects to conform to those roles.
- **Performance and behaviors:** not fixed trails, but increasingly more flexible, variable and gender resilient.

Origin of Social Vulnerability: Patriarchy

- In gender studies *patriarchy* refers to a **social organization** marked by the **supremacy and systematic domination** of women by men and those whose genders and bodies defy traditional man/woman categorization.

- **Religious patriarchy** is the systematic exclusion of women from roles of religious authority, often based on the presupposition that **God is male**. Patriarchal mindset is shared by most religions (Judaism, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam). Religious patriarchy takes shape in the structure of religious institutions, and current practices. However, religious structures are not expressions of divine law; they are results of **historical events** driven by human decisions (Wikipedia, 2005).

Results of Patriarchy: Disadvantage of Women in Science & Daily Life

- Exclusion from inquiry
- Denial of epistemic authority
- Denigration of feminine cognitive style and mode of knowledge
- Production of theories representing women as inferior, serving male interests
- Generation of theories rendering gendered power invisible
- Creation of knowledge reinforcing gender and other social hierarchies
- Hierarchical barriers for achieving leadership positions (glass roof)

2. Resilience-Building and Gender Differences

| Gender Equity Indicator	Lowest Country	Worldwide Average	Highest Country	Countries Reporting	Year Reported
Ratio of girls to boys in primary education	0.63	0.95	1.03	163	2001
Ratio of girls to boys in secondary education	0.46	0.69	1.39	144	2001
Ratio of girls to boys in tertiary education	0.15	1.13	3.36	116	2001
Ratio of literate women to literate men	0.42	0.93	1.09	123	2004
Women's share in salaried office employment (%)	6.1	40.26	55.9	136	2003
National parliament seats held by women (%)	0	14.43	49	182	2005
U.N. Gender Equity Index (combined male-female parity in economic, political, and resource decisions)	0.123	0.551	0.908	78	2003

Inequality for Women

Women in the World

50.3%
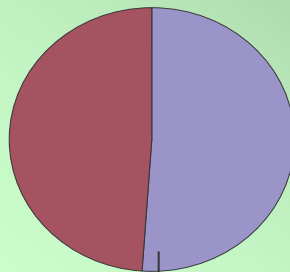
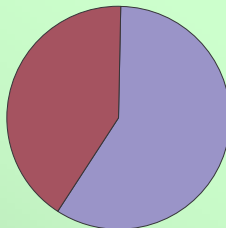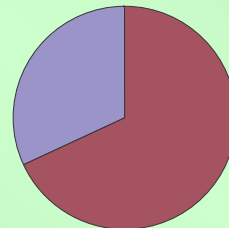| 67%	68%	36%	41%	70%	12%	113%
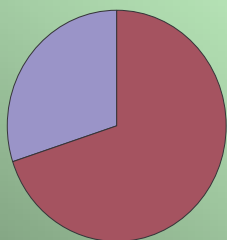
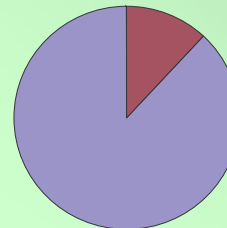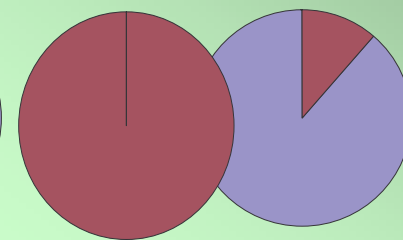**Illiterate Adults 1 billion** | **Without Access to Basic School 300 million** | **With Access to Secundary School** | **% of Women infected by HVI/AIDS of all Infected** | **Extreme Poverty** | **Representation in Parlament** | **Charge of Daily Work for Women in Developing Countries (% of Work of Men)**
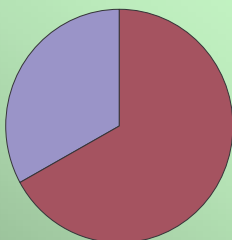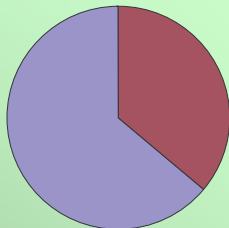
3. Possible Policies to Improve Women's Reslience: Human, Gender and Environmental Security: HUGE

Gender Security & Identity

- Refers to the process of socialization to "**become**" **a gendered** human being; a men or a women, depending on the position of the social structure.

- Gender security is **socially constructed** and systemic within the present patriarchal society, and it is normally taken for granted. The relations are linked to gender status– ethnicity/race, class, age and minority status- in relation to the model of reference. **Equity and identity** are values at risk. The source of threat comes in first instance from the patriarchal hierarchical and violent order, characterized by exclusive, dominant and authoritarian institutions such as non-democratic governments, churches and élites.

- The symbolic distribution of space and time assigns the male the **public sphere**: production, *res publica*, *homo sapiens;* and the **women the private**: reproduction, home, *homo domesticus.*

- The **distribution of power** acquires also generic forms. Men exercise a hierarchical and vertical power of domination and superiority.

2.2. Human, Gender and Environmental Security (HUGE)

Level of expansion	Determination **Which security?**	Mode of expansion Reference object **Security of whom?**	Value at risk **Security of what?**	Source(s) of threat **Security from whom or what?**
Without expansion	National security (political, military dimension)	The State	Sovereignty, territorial integrity	Other States, terrorism, sub-state actors, guerrilla
Increased	Societal security	Nations, social groups	National Unity, national identity	(States), Nations, Migrants, Alien cultures
Radical	**Human security**	**Individuals (Humankind)**	**Survival, quality of life, cultural integrity**	**The State, globalization, nature, GEC, poverty, fundamentalism**
Ultra-radical	**Environmental Security**	**Ecosystem, urban and agricultural system**	**Sustainability**	**Nature Humankind**
Trans-radical	**Gender security**	**Gender relations, indigenous, minorities**	**Equity, identity, social relations**	**Patriarchy, totalitarian institutions (élites, governments, religions, culture), intolerance**

Source: Bjørn Møller, 2003:279 and Úrsula Oswald, 2001, 2004

HUGE

- Oswald (2001, 2006) **widened gender concept** of HUGE including vulnerable (children, elders, indigenous and other groups)

- Human-centered focus on *environmental security* and *peace challenges*.

- HUGE analyzes patriarchal, violent & **exclusive structures** within family & society **questioning** gendered social representation-building & traditional role assignation by overcoming women discrimination & narrow feminist male-female opposition.

- '***Human security***' focuses on equity & development through social organization, governmental policies, private investments & legal reinforcements by stimulating sociopolitical participation of women, young and elders.

- At the international level HUGE examines the free & equal access to world & regional **markets** without trade distortions, stimulating world **solidarity** for poor countries with financial aid, technological support and debt relief.

- As a holistic concept it includes '**environmental security**': healthy environment, integral management of natural resources, prevention and remediation practices reducing vulnerability to hazard impacts.
- Hazard-prone countries are enabled to develop technical, economic and human **support to reduce** social vulnerability through bottom-up internal organization & resilience-building, top-down policies and institutions guaranteeing early warning, evacuation, disaster support & reconstruction.
- **Nonviolent conflict resolution** with diverse systems of values, ideas and practices overcoming contradictory messages and behaviours.
- HUGE examines participatory democracy and governance, promoting conflict prevention, nonviolent conflict resolution and peace-building; in summary a '**huge**' **solidarity** process of **sustainable and equal** development.

Women and Disasters Management

Water and food production in hand of women:

- Under normal conditions women produce **half of world food**; in developing countries even up to 60% to 80%;

- Women in México **own** 17% of their land & in Africa only 2%

- Women practice **survival strategies** in coping with **short & long-term disasters** such as economic crises and **famine**.

- They contribute in Africa to:
  - 33% of the paid labor force
  - 70% of agricultural labor days
  - 60-80% of subsistence production
  - 100% of food transformation
  - 80% of food storing
  - 90% of spinning and weaving
  - 60% of harvesting and market activities
  - 2% own land or have land rights (FAO, 2002)

4. Conclusion

- Complex **social networks** sustain humans in normal times. Human vulnerabilities during disaster bring **disruption or failure** of these networks.
- **Gender analysis** will lend a more nuanced understanding of **women as social** beings aligning in networks of family and community.
- More accurate understanding and training will facilitate network support that underlies a **resilient society**: women educate, care, reproduce historical memory, cultural background, & material family sustenance.
- Active female participation reduces social vulnerability, improves resilience to hazard, increases survival of communities, & reduces gender violence and insecurity before, during and after disasters.
- Central challenge for policy: existing data banks do **not distinguish between gender** and other demographic questions, **overlooking social vulnerability,** and ignoring **gender identity** in crises.
- Future research & policy on resilience-building should improve **theories, data and concrete trainings** about impacts of disasters, and other disruptions.

We women and men, the indigenous Mam, Mocho and Kachiquel, the poorest peasants and excluded from Mexico

The Sierra Madre of Chiapas

Octobre 2005 « STAN »

« STAN » destroyed the few we had…

40% of land and forest were destroyed

Nothing survived

Thanks for your attention

uoswald@gmail.com

http://www.afes-press.de/html/download_oswald.html