

Depletion Through Social Reproduction: A Major Barrier for Women's Participation in Post Disaster Recovery Process in Bangladesh

Mir Tamanna Siddika¹

Received: 14 April 2025

Accepted: 13 May 2025

Published : 01 June 2025

Abstract

Women do most of the social reproductive work. Performing this work becomes more difficult in post disaster conditions. In this situation, along with the household responsibilities, women also have to involve in paid activities. This increased burden of labor can occur depletion of women. Though Bangladesh has adopted some gender-inclusive disaster management policies, these policies do not recognize the issue of depletion, which can reduce women's capacity to attend in the community recovery and rebuilding process. Therefore, the aim of this article is to draw attention to the issue of depletion of women during the post disaster period for taking necessary initiatives.

¹Associate Professor, Department of Gender and Development Studies,
Begum Rokeya University Rangpur, Bangladesh,
Email : tamanna.gds@brur.ac.bd

Introduction

Natural disasters affect women and men differently due to the socially constructed gender inequalities of a society which repeatedly put women at a disadvantage (Ariyabandu, 2009)). Being the primary victim of disaster events, women can play an important role in adaptation to disaster exposure. Women can also play a role of agents of change in the disaster recovery process by employing their particular experience and skills because of their primary roles as caregivers within the family and their local knowledge of natural resources and surroundings (Valdes, 2009). Therefore, women's full and representative participation become essential when it comes to making decisions and implementations towards post disaster building resilient communities.

By realizing the necessity of incorporating women's different needs, vulnerabilities as well as adaptation and recovery capacities in different disaster phases, Bangladesh, which is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, has been endeavoring to develop gender-inclusive disaster management by constructing and establishing gender-inclusive disaster management national plans, policies and programs (Hasan, et al., 2019). Therefore, after reviewing the National Plan for Disaster Management (2021-2025), Standing orders on Disaster (2019), Bangladesh Climate Change and Gender Action Plan, it has been observed that women's participation and leadership in the decision making processes of disaster management have been given highest priority, especially in women's active and equal participation in community based recovery and reconstruction and in building resilience in different post disaster phases. Therefore, to ensure women's participation different strategies such as twin track strategy have been adopted through the policies. However, none of these plans and policies recognize women's increased burden of labor during the post disaster period occurred as a result of the double burden of regular unpaid household work and their increasing mobilization into the paid work because of the necessity to ensure family survival which can occur depletion of women. This depletion can lessen their capacity to attend in the community recovery and rebuilding process after disaster by limiting their focus on only surviving and maintaining their households.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to draw attention to the authority who are responsible for designing, formulating and implementing disaster management related policies, plans and interventions for addressing the issue of depletion of women and taking necessary initiatives for recognizing and reducing the burden of unpaid care work on women during the post disaster period so that better outcomes of the policies and plans designed to ensure women's meaningful participation in the community emergency management and recovery can be achieved.

Key Definitions

Social Reproduction (SR)

In this article Social Reproduction refers to the labor that goes into reproducing social life. This includes biological reproduction including reproducing labor, the provision of sexual, emotional, and affective services in the household that are required to maintain family and intimate relationships, unpaid production in the household of both goods and services including different forms of care, social provisioning and voluntary work directed at meeting community needs and the reproduction of culture and ideology (Rai et al., 2014; Rai, et al.,2019).

Household

This article defines the household ‘simply as a site where social reproduction takes place. This would include some sites which are not normally defined as households, for example, orphanages and old people’s homes, where some of the care provided is on a voluntary basis and not paid for’ (Rai et al., 2014:90).

Community

In this article the term community refers to ‘a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings’ (MacQueen, et al., 2001:1929).

Depletion through Social Reproduction (DSR)

Social reproduction is vital to human welfare. From domestic work to caring for loved ones, everyday across the world people jointly spend 16 billion hours on social reproduction (UN Women, 2020). Though real conditions of social reproduction vary, most of the work is done by women (Peterson, 2010). Women accomplish 75 per cent of such work, dedicating, on average, four hours and 25 minutes daily to it – more than three times men’s average of one hour and 23 minutes (Dhar 2020). Traditional capitalist economics has tended to benefit market-oriented production of goods and services, while taking reproductive labor for granted (Razavi, 2007). The economic contribution of social reproduction is approximately estimated at \$10 trillion per year, about 13 per cent of world GD, yet it is not acknowledged as “work” that is a crucial input into economic growth (Dhar, 2020). Therefore, it needs to be seen in much larger terms, not only as a sociological but also as a social policy phenomenon, ‘as it is part of the structure of society and essential to social development’ (Razavi, 2007:379).

Since the late 1960s, feminist economists have been struggling to focus on the uncounted, therefore, invisible contribution of social reproductive labor to national economies (Rai, et al., 2014). They have been striving to conceptualize the connection between unpaid work in the households and productive work at the macro level (MacDonald, et al., 2005) and to exhibit that analysis of the domestic has applicability to issues which are not characterized in terms of the domestic (Elson, 1998). These unpaid works generate societal members who are capable to perform appropriately: as family and community members, workers, and citizens. Therefore, these unpaid works are indispensable not only for families but also for the economy of a society as they contribute to produce and maintain labour force required for the market (Peterson, 2010).

In addition to focusing on the uncounted contribution of social reproduction, recent interventions of feminist political economy have started to emphasize on the consequences of neglecting this unpaid labor for individuals, households and communities engaged in it. The negative effect of social reproduction on women's health and wellbeing is termed as Depletion through Social Reproduction (DSR) by Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas (2014). They argue that people who engage in social reproduction experience depletion, although at different rates and levels in different social contexts, when there is a serious gap between the outflows – domestic, affective and social reproductive labor – and the inflows-income earned, medical care and leisure time- that sustain their health and well-being. Women are engaged in largely poorly paid work as they need to deal with the burden of work for wages as well as social reproductive labor in their own households, face serious challenges of being depleted. DSR of a woman can be physical, led to consequences such as a low or too high Body Mass Index (BMI), tiredness, exhaustion or sleeplessness. DSR consequences can also be mental – the weakening of the self, feelings of guilt and uneasiness or insufficient time for oneself, the family and community life. Therefore, if the inflows which buttress carrying out social reproduction fall below the level of normal damage, health and well-being can deteriorate, and the ability of a woman to carry out reproductive labor in the long run can be diminished and even in circumstances it can lead to increased mortality (Rai, et al., 2014).

Depletion also affects the households and communities where social reproduction takes place. The DSR of household would include a lack of leisure time spent together among household members, failure to manage the outcomes of a rise in the number of household members engaged in paid work and decreased support structures. Though the household can be benefitted to different degrees from the wage labor of the individuals that constitute it, but can also deteriorate a woman's DSR specially through the gendered division of labor. The DSR of communities can be becoming smaller of spaces for community mobilization because of a lack

of time commitments from those engaged into paid work, and the depletion of community resources that occurs with the neglect as well as the extensive or irresponsible use of community networks. This could lead to an individualization of community spaces and the termination of community ties, which can in diverse contexts empower or disempower those women engaged in SR(Rai, et al., 2014).

Women's Depletion through Social Reproduction in Post Disaster Period

Crises can be different types, from economic downturn to massive technological failures, to natural disasters. Different scholars have delved into the range of crises that human societies can experience and have recorded the ways in which such societies try to respond and recover from such crises. (Horwitz, 2018). More or less in every crisis's situation, whether related with financial crash or humanitarian disasters, unpaid care economics is expected to cushion "crisis shocks" (Folbre, 2013). When other sets of institutions such as state and market do not perform adequately during a crisis, this can work as an effective shock absorber. Therefore, the scope of household social reproduction can expand to undertake new responsibilities in times of crisis (Horwitz, 2018) which increase the pressures on those who carry out social reproductive roles.

In a post disaster crisis moment when physical and social infrastructures are damaged, economic resources such as lands and livestock are lost, regular public services and other support systems needed for taking care and survival for sick and injured family members are unavailable, produce an increases necessity to secure more income to fulfill household needs. As a result of this, women are still anticipated to "fill the gap" by whatever means necessary to make certain family survival (Peterson, 2010). Therefore, a greater demand on women's labor for acquiring basic needs such as food, water, clothing, shelter, health and education for their families arises (Rai et al., 2019). Empirical evidences from the previously occurred crises show that as well as increasing social reproductive care work, women endeavor to safeguard their families by increasing their participation in informal paid work in the private sector (Elson, 2012). Therefore, 'households and whole communities are increasingly dependent on women for their survival'(Sassen, 2000:506).

Moreover, in post disaster situations, traditional social reproduction becomes more difficult and is performed under complex conditions. Women's labor is stretched and women spend more time in household activities than previous time. In this situation, along with the household responsibilities, women also have to perform income earning activities. They even also seek to increase their paid work activities to make up the economic deficiencies that can also

boost pressure on them. They are often overburdened and their intensified labor is also possibly at the expense of their own health and well-being which can cause depletion of them. Naturally, this depletion of women in times of crises, may lead to a reduction in women's capacity to continue their participation beyond the household in political and social life (Dijkhorst and Vonhof, 2005).

This supply of social reproduction by women during and in the proximate aftermath of a crisis is apparently assumed by policymakers as an 'endlessly elastic and self-renewing resource' (Elson, 2000). Consequently, a lack of attention is perceived in addressing the consequences of women's increased care burden to the disaster crisis related policies. However, the costs of neglecting women's DSR may result in an unsuccessful policy outcome even if after making a disaster management policy which aims to be gender inclusive as it fails to have a positive impact on by ensuring women's substantive participation in the post disaster recovery processes.

Women in Post Disaster Crisis Situation in Bangladesh

Different studies on gendered impact of disasters on women in Bangladesh also reflect the reality of women's intensified burden of labor due to social reproduction and their increasing participation in informal wage work as an endeavor to uphold their families during the post disaster crisis moments. A study by Azad, et al. (2013) on flood-induced vulnerabilities among women in northern Bangladesh show that severe disaster impacts make women from the poor and disadvantaged households are more vulnerable to disaster than men. Lack of proper shelter, fetching safe water and collecting fuel for cooking becomes much more difficult which increases their domestic burden and hardship. They also involve themselves in 'food processing such as making *khurma* (a type of sweetmeat dry food made of flour and sugar) and *chanachur* (dry food made of flour) and selling in local markets, doing small business including weaving *pati* (a type of mat) and *noxikatha* (embroidered quilt)' (p.192) to mitigate their household risks induced by disasters and saving for children's education and other emergency needs. Another study by Parvin and Ahsan (2013) on the impact of frequent natural disasters due to climate change on the south-western coastal area of Bangladesh explore how natural disaster increase the vulnerability and affect the socio economic patterns of the women in coastal and rural areas. The study reveals that as cyclone Aila destroyed crops, trees and plants and hampered agricultural lands as well, made it difficult for women to collect firewood from their surroundings. Therefore, women are compelled to purchase firewood from those (mainly men) who gather fuel from Sundarbans and sell them at local market. This creates an extra need of money for buying fuel, which requires an extra income. Therefore, in order to provide the extra

income, most of the women in that area are now working as day laborers with a payment of 70-80 Bangladeshi taka per hour.

The impact of this stretched labor on women's wellbeing who do not have necessarily any opportunity to share the responsibility is revealed by a recent study on the prevalence of depression among rural Bangladeshi women aftermath of cyclone Mora conducted by Mamun et al, (2019). The study finds that women who have access to financial and other support from their partners and the rest of the family member have the lowest depressive symptoms and more capacity of coping with disaster related unexpected situations which make them more resilient to the aftershock of disasters. On the other hand, earning women who do not have access to these kinds of support are more likely to suffer from stress related and adjustment disorders, anxiety, insomnia and depression. Therefore, it can be easily assumed that it is the long hours spent at both income generating and unpaid social reproduction that is the main reason of mental stress and subsequently of poor health of women.

Therefore, in the absence of any state provided support due to the nonrecognition and undervaluing of unpaid care labor could increase depletion of women's wellbeing and make women more vulnerable in a post disaster situation. Therefore, any policy intervention which are taken to ensure women's active participation in emergency management and recovery processes without adopting any initiative to reduce women's work will have little impact in mainstreaming gender in disaster management processes.

Recommendations

Social reproduction is a crucial resource for the survival of households in disaster affected communities. But the nonrecognition or devaluation of especially the unpaid care labor included it leads to the depletion of the health and other wellbeing of individual women, household and communities. Therefore, this article recommends a short term (replenishment) and a long term (transformative) strategies to reverse depletion in a post disaster crisis period.

Replenishment involves strategies that mitigate harm results from depletion and do not challenge women's role as primary caregivers, hence, the structural gender inequalities. As a part of the replenishment strategy, the government of Bangladesh should introduce through national disaster management policy a monthly social wage or allowance from the state funds for the people involved in social reproduction until they recover from the post disaster crisis period. This provision should be introduced for a temporary basis unless the transformative strategies are fully ensured.

Transformation accompanies strategies that avoid harm entirely by bringing structural change (Goldblatt and Rai, 2020). For reversing depletion of women and ensuring their participation in the disaster recovery process, the government should take initiatives to recognize and value as well as redistribute social reproductive labor between men and women in the disaster management policies and plans. Societal recognition and valuation of social reproduction are important not only for reversing depletion but also ensuring women's access in resources and decision making in the recovery process of their communities. The invisibility of women as producer, makes them invisible in resource distribution (Ariyabandu, 2009). Therefore, 'they are treated more as recipients of welfare and burden on the state or as service providers. This means that any investment in social infrastructure that might replenish women's lives takes second place' (Rai, et al., 2019:573). For making visible the social reproductive labor of women of disaster affected areas, time use survey and other evaluative measures can be employed. Time spent on unpaid reproductive labor can be measured 'through its replacement value, calculating how much it would cost to replace unpaid workers with paid workers, or its opportunity value, based on the amount the unpaid worker would be earning if they were in the paid labor market instead of doing unpaid work' (Rai, et al., 2019a:374).

For ensuring an equitable burden sharing of social reproduction between men and women within the household, the government of Bangladesh should adopt some policies and programme interventions which are emphasized on facilitating equitable sharing of household responsibilities. Such intervention can include some awareness raising and advocacy programs which will facilitate to transform men's attitude for greater redistribution of social reproduction. As media has occupied a very important place in people's lives in Bangladesh, therefore, campaigns through all kinds of media such as print, electronic and social, can be effective ways in disseminating such information to the mass people. Moreover, motivational meetings targeting men can be arranged in the disaster-prone areas to transform their negative gendered norms and make people aware about the necessity of redistribution of unpaid care work for getting over the disaster crisis moment and reducing household poverty.

It is expected that in future, the implication of recognizing and redistributing care work in disaster management policy measures and interventions will have a long term economic development impact. By reducing the burden of social reproductive labor shouldered by women, it will increase women's labor force participation in Bangladesh, hence, accelerate the country's economic growth which is the principal development goal of Bangladesh.

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