



GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Summary

Early warning systems (EWS) build community resilience to disasters, with the potential to save lives and livelihoods. Women and marginalized gender groups face unique barriers in disasters, which must be considered in early warning. EWS that do not explicitly consider gender are likely to increase the marginalization of vulnerable gender groups. Our research in Nepal and Peru explores the interaction between gender and flood EWS. This policy brief extracts key findings and recommendations to ensure no one is left behind.

Recommendations

- To reach the most vulnerable, early warning systems need to proactively consider gender.
- Proactive effort is needed to reach out to, partner with, and listen to the voices of vulnerable and marginalized gender groups with an inclusive and intersectional perspective.
- A gender transformative system is one in which people of all genders can equitably access, understand and respond to effective early warnings.
- It is important to explicitly consider gendered impacts on vulnerability, participation, dissemination, response, power, and decision making. The specific considerations or adaptations required for a gender-transformative EWS vary depending on context and are shaped by existing gender norms, gendered systems, and gendered power dynamics.



Key Findings



Vulnerability

- Gender inequality, gender norms, and social marginalization increase vulnerability to disasters.
- The less economic, political and cultural power women and gender minorities have before an event, the greater their suffering during and in the aftermath.
- Efforts to consider gender need to be intersectional – lack of political rights, low social capital, ethnicity, age, health, disability, gender, gender identity, and sexuality, influence individual and group experiences of vulnerability and capacity to respond to early warnings.



Participation

- Marginalized gender groups participate less in EWS initiatives due to the demands of domestic roles, lack of autonomy, social isolation and persecution, gendered assumptions, and perceptions that their contributions are not relevant or welcome.
- Proactive efforts are needed to include the needs, priorities and capabilities of marginalized gender groups, and magnify their voices at every stage of the EWS.
- Inclusion may require transforming the systems, processes, and ways of working that have led to exclusion.



Dissemination

- Gender inequality in education, literacy, economic and social capital, and access to technology impacts on capacity to receive and act upon early warnings.
- People of different genders may have different levels of access to formal and informal dissemination channels, have different communication preferences (shaped by gender norms), and face different challenges in accessing and being able to act upon early warnings.



Response

- Groups with higher vulnerability have different preferences in preparedness and response, including a preference for earlier evacuation.
- Women and men traditionally have distinct roles in response, though changing mobility and migration patterns mean women increasingly need to cover a wider range of roles.
- Gendered cultural norms, marginalization, and gender based violence reduce the security of vulnerable groups, exacerbate existing discrimination, and increase the risk of sexual harassment and assault during and after a disaster.



Power and Decision Making

- Marginalized groups (often including women and gender minorities) lack control over decision making in disaster situations, with social norms prioritising male leadership.
- Participation in EWS initiatives does not equate to influence or power over decision making, so the gendered needs, priorities, and capabilities of marginalized gender groups are rarely identified or prioritized.
- When marginalized gender groups are included, they can and do play an important role in fostering a culture of resilience and championing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and EWS.
- Representation matters: there is a need for transformational change and empowerment of marginalized gender groups in all elements of EWS.



Policy recommendations

Early warning systems need proactive consideration of gender in order to effectively reach the last mile.

A key first step is **acknowledgement** that gender is a critical consideration, including consideration of the likely impacts of gender norms, gender stereotypes, cisnormative assumptions, and the repercussions of these that marginalize women and gender minorities, and result in the greater vulnerability of these groups to the impacts of disasters. Gender **analysis** is a way of understanding gender inequality and the ways in which gender norms, gender roles, and gendered power structures shape families, communities, and institutions in a given location. At this point it is also important to **examine** and question gendered assumptions informing the analysis.

Proactive effort is needed to reach out to, partner with, and **listen** to the voices of marginalized gender groups, with careful consideration of which voices are missing. In this research project we heard from marginalized women including elderly women, women with disabilities, single mothers, transgender women, pregnant women or those with young babies, women with young children, and women with visual impairments. Consideration is also needed of other marginalized gender groups including other gender minorities (including but not limited to transgender men, non-binary people) and sexual minorities (e.g. lesbian and bisexual women).

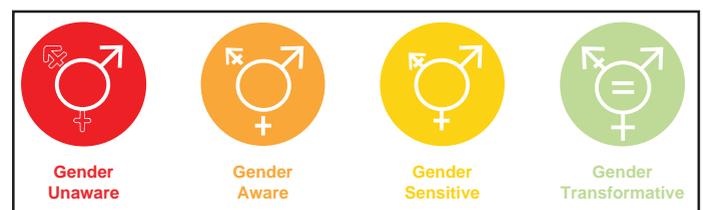
Women and gender minorities are not all equally and uniformly vulnerable. Therefore an inclusive and **intersectional** perspective is critical, understanding and considering how multiple intersecting marginalized identities or vulnerabilities can increase vulnerability.

For example, a widow, living with a disability, from a minority ethnic group may have higher vulnerability than an individual facing only one aspect of marginalization. It is important in an intersectional approach to acknowledge the interaction of gender with other socially excluding factors including disability, socio-economic status, gender identity, marital status, and sexual orientation.

A **gender-aware** EWS has explicit consideration and understanding of the specific ways in which gender affects a particular EWS (in a particular context), and any differential impacts of the EWS on different gender groups. A next step can be moving to a **gender sensitive** EWS, with some adaptations to activities to improve the impact on marginalized gender groups.

A more ambitious EWS is **gender transformative**, aiming for an improved status quo where people of all genders benefit from effective early warnings. Gender transformative approaches to early warning must respond effectively to the nuances of different gendered experiences, vulnerabilities, and capacities, recognizing that marginalized groups are heterogeneous and consist of diverse populations with varying degrees of power.

In the context of an EWS, it is important to explicitly consider gendered impacts on **vulnerability, participation, dissemination, response, power and decision making**. The exact considerations required under each of these themes are context specific, depending on existing gender norms, gendered systems, and gendered power dynamics.



Checklist for gender transformative early warning systems

	Gender aware: Explicitly acknowledge, assess, and document the ways in which disasters and EWS impact different gender groups in different ways.
	Acknowledge: Explicitly acknowledge gendered impacts
	Assess: Undertake gender analysis
	Examine: Examine gendered assumptions (including stereotypes and cisnormativity)
	Listen: Make proactive efforts to hear from marginalized gender groups
	Intersectionality: Understand how intersectional vulnerabilities exacerbate gendered vulnerabilities
	Vulnerability: Understand how gender impacts on vulnerability
	Participation: Understand how gender impacts on participation
	Dissemination: Understand how gender impacts on dissemination
	Response: Understand how gender impacts on response
	Power and Decision-making: Understand how gender impacts on decision making

 **Gender sensitive:** Adapt project actions (across all areas of the EWS, with proactive consideration of participation, power and decision-making) to improve the effectiveness of EWS for marginalized and vulnerable gender groups.

 **Gender transformative:** Design policies, approaches and actions to ensure the EWS works effectively for people of all genders. Consider how all aspects of the EWS (including participation, power and decision making) can support the reduction of gender-based inequalities.

References

Practical Action (2016) *Flood Early Warning System in Practice: Experiences of Nepal*, Rugby: Practical Action.

Practical Action/Flood Resilience Alliance (2019a) *Gender Transformative Early Warning Systems: Lessons from Nepal and Peru*, Rugby: Practical Action.

Practical Action/Flood Resilience Alliance (2019b) *Missing Voices: Experience of Marginalized Gender Groups in Disaster in Nepal and Peru*, Rugby: Practical Action.

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About Practical Action

Practical Action uses technology to challenge poverty by building the capabilities of poor people, improving their access to technical options and knowledge.

Practical Action is a member of the Zurich Flood Resilience Programme, a multi-sectoral alliance focusing on helping communities in developed and developing countries strengthen their resilience to flood risk.

Find out more: <https://zurich.com/en/corporate-responsibility/flood-resilience>

