

# **THE ROLE OF WOMEN VOLUNTEER AS AGENT OF CHANGE IN COMMUNITY AS A DISASTER RISK REDUCTION EFFORT**

**(A Case Study of Women Volunteer in Disaster Risk Reduction Organization)  
by: Ayu Krishna Y, S.Sos. MM, Maya Sari, SE, MM, Rofi Rofaida, SP. M.Si**

## **ABSTRACT**

*During 1990-2000, Indonesia ranks fourth place as a country that frequently endure disaster amongst Asian countries, there were 257 disaster amongst 2866 natural disaster that occurred in Asia. The active participation of Indonesian women in disaster risk reduction is in the form of their involvement in many organizations that have an interest in disaster mitigation. Their activity is based on the Hyogo Framework 2005-2015 (ISDR) that have the objective of decreasing the loss of live and social-economic asset due to disaster in a community and country. Basically this research have the objective to capture the portraits of women and their struggle in communities amongst public opinion about women role, patriarch culture and other obstacles that must be dealt with during their activity in disaster risk reduction(DRR) in Indonesia, Specifically the objective of this research is to: (1) describe the women volunteer profile as agent of change in community as an effort of disaster risk reduction in Indonesia, (2) describe the women's role as an agent of change in community; (3) find out the challenges facing women in performing their duties.*

*The method used is descriptive and qualitative using the gender analysis approach. The type of research method used is descriptive through data collection in the field, there are two survey methods used, which are descriptive survey and explanatory survey. Observation used the time horizon with one shot cross sectional method, which means information or data collected was in a certain time in the year 2008.*

*The result of this research indicates that women role as an agent of change in community through DRR activities in Indonesia is quite large. They become the initiator/motor in their community to conduct DRR. Some play the role of advisor to public policy, some as facilitator/educator for public education (non formal education for community) to increase DRR awareness, some plays the role of seeking funding for activities, medical professional for emergency and other important roles. But their role faced several challenges/obstacles that came from internally such as controlling their emotions and dependency on other people. External obstacles are form their organization where they did not obtain chances to increase their capacity to become a high human capital and they usually receive low safety guarantee in working as a volunteer.*

**Keywords: Gender, Women Role, Disaster Risk Reduction**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The geographic and geodynamic position of Indonesia have put this country in an region where volcanic and seismic activity is quite high. This position is due to the variance in Indonesia's topography that consisted of mountainous regions with steep hills to a plateau area in the coast line are prone to landslide, flood, and tsunami. This condition has caused numerous disasters occurring in the region over a period of time such as earthquake, tsunami, volcanic eruption, landslide, tornado, and etc. During 1990-2000, Indonesia ranks fourth place as a country that frequently endure disaster amongst Asian countries, there were 257 disasters amongst 2866 natural disaster that occurred in Asia. The

active participation of Indonesian women in disaster risk reduction is in the form of their involvement in many organizations that have an interest in disaster mitigation.

Women are more vulnerable toward disaster because of their constructed social role. Gender develop the social world where natural occurrences flourish. Several reasons why women are more vulnerable towards disaster are:

- Women have limited access towards resources –social network and influence, transportation, information, skill, land ownership and other resources.
- Women become victims from division of labor/task, they are present in agriculture industry, informal workers and other low paying jobs without job security, safety or health benefit.
- Because women are responsible to their main task on domestic chores, such as child nurturing, caring for the elderly, they do not have the freedom to seek out work after disaster occur.
- Women who does not have economic resources have low bargaining positioning in their household.
- Many research in the past stated that women became victims of domestic violence after disaster occurrences.

From one side it can be viewed that women are more vulnerable towards disaster compared to other groups in the community, but on the other side natural disaster can open opportunity for women challenging their gender role in the community. Basically the research's main purpose is to capture portraits of women and their struggle in the community amidst concern of public opinion women role, patriarchy culture and other challenges they must face in their disaster risk reduction activity at Indonesia. Specifically the research objectives are: (1) to describe the profile of women volunteer as agent of change in community; (2) describe the role women volunteer play in Indonesia's disaster risk reduction activity; (3) describe the challenges faced women volunteer in conducting their activity.

## **THEORITICAL BACKGROUND**

Gender equality is a global issue where nations in the world including Indonesia are committed to implement it. Effort in Indonesia to implement gender equality have been inscribed into the national policy as stated in the National Policy Plan (GBHN) 1999, in the Statuary/Decree number 25 in the year 2000 about National Development Program PROPENAS 2000-2004, and in the President decree number 9 year 2000 about gender mainstreaming in national development, as one of the strategy to implement gender equality and justice. The implementation is the program planning, conducting and controlling of development must consider the needs and aspiration of women.

The definition of gender itself is the differences and social role function constructed by the community, also responsibility of men and women. Julia T.Wood in her book *Gender Lives : Communication, Gender, and Culture* said that gender as a social construction that grew from system, value and faith developed in a community. Therefore gender will be different in places and can change from time to time.

The personal characteristic of women volunteer displayed by the women volunteer will determine her success in conducting her duties. The characteristic can be divided into three, which are: (1) Physical characteristics, (2) Psychological

characteristics, (3) Social organization characteristics. (Sources: Robin, 2005:42 and IDNDR Inform, No.8, 1995)

According to Nunuk Murniati (pages 117-118) there are several weakness and obstacles faced by women to increase their status and role, amongst them are:

**a. Obstacles from within the women (Weakness)**

- Low perception of oneself, that a women has the same rights as other human beings.
- Difficulty in tearing down shyness and afraid of making mistakes.
- Low ability to think clearly and logically, thus resulting in difficulty to conduct decision making (not tough enough)
- Not willing accept power given to them, none the less take over power, like to give into.
- Low in controlling emotions, so their minds are not stable and easily influenced.
- Low in unity, easily dispersed and difficulty in uniting views
- Low interest in thinking deeply
- High dependency on others, not independent

**b. Obstacles from the environment (Challenges)**

- The patriarchy structure that make women bound
- Male dominance attitude
- Stereotype views flourished in community
- Division of labor according to sex that the community instill

Disaster reduction is a basic need of a man from birth, with the belief that human life is precious and has dignity. Every human must have their basic rights also the same access on sources of livelihood. Life and living as a basic right for every human being imply that all steps must be taken to prevent or reduce human suffering due to conflict or disaster. This is where women role can be played in disaster risk reduction efforts. Even though women role socially, economically and politically in community made them more vulnerable toward natural disaster. They are not helpless victim. Women are important agents of change and therefore must be further strengthened as such. Legitimizing and mobilizing women's skill and capacity as a social power and distribution it to increase their safety/protection is a huge work to do in disaster risk reduction strategy. One example is the women in Aceh who is the backbone in economy, due to their productive work to feed their families and thus the community can fill their livelihood.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

The research used gender analysis concept. From the research purpose, this research used the descriptive method, divided into two, they are: qualitative in the form of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and second through survey to women active in DRR.

Considering the type of research consisted of descriptive implemented through data collection in the field, there are two survey method implemented which are descriptive survey and explanatory survey. The observation used time horizon with a cross section/one shoot nature, which means the information or data obtained from research outcome is analyzed in a certain time period, in this case, in the year 2008.

Unit analysis of this research are individual, they are women active in DRR organization located in Bandung and Jakarta. The women participation in disaster

management in this research unit analysis, is in the disaster prevention/mitigation. The limited time and cost of research made the survey to be conducted in a purposive sample, including preparation stage and research implementation stage. The research stages are:

### **1. Field Observation**

Field observation was conducted as the first step in defining the subject that will be analyzed. Observation was implemented in relevance with the research interest and the places are DRR organizations located in Bandung and Jakarta. Based on the observation, data about women volunteer were acquired as they are the research subject.

### **2. Developing Questionnaires**

During this stage developing questionnaires is based on research operational variables so the questionnaires must answer the research questions. Before the questionnaires are given to the respondents, it was assessed to measure the validity and reliability.

### **3. Implementation of FGD and Survey**

The implementation of FGD and survey is needed to collect data answering the research objectives. FGD was conducted in Bandung, with FGD participants divided into groups consisted of women active in DRR organization.

### **4. Data Handling and Analysis**

The FGD and Survey outcome consisted of data collected then handled and analyzed.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The volunteer profile is pictured through identification of the women volunteer personal characteristics. The physical characteristic is between the productive ages of 25-29 year, also the respondent that have strong physical condition. They usually exercise routinely to maintain health and stamina. The psychological characteristic of women volunteer have high intellectual capacity seen from their education background most of them have a bachelor degree and work experience between 1-3 years.

Most respondents have a high belief in finishing their work assigned to them according to the standard given. The external factor have a positive influence to increase respondent's motivation which came from one factor on respondent's pride on their work as a volunteer.

To maintain the volunteer motivation in high level, it cannot be laid only through internal motivation only, because individual have material and non material need. If the two needs are not met, they may resign from their work. As for leadership performance, half of the respondents have not conducted certain steps in decision making. Decision making is made based on judgment or feeling without considering actual fact. The social characteristic consisted of communication ability and ability to work together with women volunteer.

The majority of women volunteer find characteristic can communicate well. This is very important because it support volunteer work in DRR, one of the activity

conducted is conveying information connected to disaster in a simple language so it will be understood by the common people. Disaster awareness can be increased if women volunteer have the ability to communicate well. All critics are received well by volunteer openly without complaining. In cooperation point, women volunteer have strong social network in organization so they receive many opportunity for increasing their capacity. Women volunteer does not like to boast themselves, respondents state they prefer working with others than working alone.

The result of this research indicates that women role as an agent of change in community through DRR activities in Indonesia is quite large. They become the initiator/motor in their community to conduct DRR. Some play the role of advisor to public policy, some as facilitator/educator for public education (non formal education for community) to increase DRR awareness, some plays the role of seeking funding for activities, medical professional for emergency and other *important roles*.

## **SUMMARY**

Women is an important agent of change and needs to be strengthened, so legitimizing and mobilizing their skill and capacity as a social power and distributing them to increase the community's safety is a huge work in DRR strategy.

## **RECCOMENDATION**

The women relevant work in disaster risk reduction is often seen as an extension of their domestic responsibility compared to social-economic activity as a separate activity. By differing/categorizing the women's work from the domestic work is in the form of women as participation in DRR activity, so it will be easier to target them for training and education program to increase their capacity and get them more involved in DRR. They also need receive more safety and security guarantee from DRR organizations.

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