

A Retrospective-Perspective:
**Re-evaluating the Meaning of Gender in Disaster Risk Governance in
Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka**

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While disasters inflict widespread destruction to lives, livelihoods, and properties of everyone in their trail, disasters tend to have differing, if not more severe, impacts on particular demographics both during and following the disasters. Studies have pointed out that women, girls are particularly exposed to disaster risk given gendered differences and vulnerabilities in the capacity to cope with such events (see United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2013). Having said that, it has been argued that women bring unique, pointedly gendered, experiences, skills, and strategies to disaster risk reduction, and form part of the solution to poor disaster risk governance experienced in pre-, during, and post-disaster stages (see Shah, 2012; UNDP, 2013; Alexander, 2017).

In this context, this paper is aimed at exploring the meaning of gender in disaster risk governance based on Sri Lanka's fateful experience of the Indian Ocean tsunami on 26th December 2004, the most devastating natural disaster ever to strike Sri Lanka. Using a retrospective-perspective of this deadliest natural disaster in Sri Lanka's recorded history, this paper will examine and understand the experiences and implications of gender-sensitization in disaster risk governance in post-tsunami Sri Lanka. The paper used qualitative, multiple case study method, which allowed an in-depth, multifaceted, and *in situ* exploration and evaluation of the experience of Indian Ocean tsunami from the perspective of gender and gendered meaning-making. The qualitative fieldwork was carried out in Galle District on the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka, which suffered extensive effects of the tsunami. It was found that gender-sensitization disaster risk governance, situated in and reflected from the experience and recollection of the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, was not a priority or major concern, but a matter of ambivalence, ambiguity, and speculation, which was informed and influenced by the broader ideological workings of the society. This was especially the case among administrative actors, while local village women in tsunami-affected communities were more informed by the discourse of gender-sensitization in disaster risk governance, which was experiential and contextual.

Keywords: Disaster Risk Governance, Gender, Retrospective-Perspective, Sri Lanka, Tsunami