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Mitglied des Europäischen Parlaments a.D.

## Gender and Reconstruction

Workshop of Agromart Foundation  
and Friedrich Ebert Foundation

-short version-

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“Gender and Reconstruction”  
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## Gender and disasters

### **A. Women are more vulnerable to disasters than men.**

Women are disproportionately affected by natural disasters because of their gendered status in society. It is wrong to look at women in disasters only as victims despite the fact that the majority of victims in disasters are women and children. The central role of women in answering the aftermath of disasters is neglected. Women play the central role in the family to organize survival, to define the needs, claiming for help and manage temporary delocalization.

1. Women are not always the bread winners, but those who care for shelter, food and security for their families. Disasters deprive them from this function. They become more dependent on the male members of the household.

2. Violence after disasters is increasing against women because of the depression and frustration of men having no jobs and perspectives and drinking alcohol day and night, also in Sri Lanka. Women after disasters and in case of displacement are often victims of violence, also sexual violence and human trafficking.

3. Women being more than half of the effected population have an impact on how to deal with crisis situations. Nevertheless the participation of women in the planning, designing, implementing and monitoring emergency programs and rehabilitation projects is still underdeveloped on the national but also on the international level.

4. The women's situation worsens in addition because after disasters the services for reproductive and sexual health questions are relegated to second place.

5. Women have more difficulties than men regaining identification papers which are needed to require food, health care, subsidies, grants, education or other social services.

6. Relief supplies have regularly been provided by men and been given to men. So women had no or limited access to supplies despite the fact that they were care-takers.

7. After disasters like in after-war-situations resources matter. Reconstruction provides a rare opportunity for women to help shape emerging economic, social and political structures.

8. There is a lot of engagement and readiness of women to reconstruct after disasters. But rarely officials ask the women for their needs or their advice.

9. Women will no longer accept that their perspectives, experiences, skills and contributions to sustainable reconstruction are rendered trivial. And they are right. Women are the key to recovery and reconstruction. Therefore aid programs need to involve women in planning and implementation.

10. Gender issues have to be incorporated into disaster management:

- Gender-based vulnerabilities have to be identified,
- women have to be identified who are especially at risk,
- women have to be engaged as full and equal partners in community-based disaster mitigation and planning . They have to participate in decision-making at the highest level.

Conclusion:

My travel now and my travel in spring this year taught me the lesson that women are not only key to development but also to recovery after natural disasters. My respect is with the women having suffered from tsunami, but especially with the women of agromart who immediately identified the needs of women in the affected areas and helped in an immediate and concrete way. The Marie Schlei Association is proud to have such an engaged partner for 16 years always being down to the grassroot levels. The message is clear: women should not be left alone. Women should be empowered to restart their economic activities. This is in the interest of Sri Lanka. Therefore, women should insist on having voices in the After-Tsunami-Networks and Commissions on

the NGO and government level, also in the president-nominated-  
Commission.