

## **WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE OF 2005 IN PAKISTAN**

**Tabassum Rehmani<sup>1</sup>**  
**Anwaar Mohyuddin<sup>2</sup>**  
**Jamil Sheikh<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*In this research paper entitled “Women Participation in Relief and Reconstruction after the Earthquake of 2005 in Balakot, Pakistan” the main focus would remain on the after effects of the 2005 earthquake in Balakot as the disasters have a considerable impact on women’s lives all over the world. Generally they are considered most vulnerable and victim of the disaster. Conversely women played an active role in the reconstruction activities of the earthquake 2005 in Balakot. In the post disaster scenario many national and international organizational appeared to be a pull factor for women to participate in the reconstruction phase. The local women of Balakot were mobilized to participate in relief and reconstruction plans. This paper deliberates the case studies of women who actively participated in the reconstruction process, role in the welfare of the community. The women were evaluated as an agent of social change for being a part of field work of NGO’s during and post disaster scenario. The Women reconstructed their social roles by providing moral and social therapy to families and hence communities. At the empirical level, the paper does not analyze women's roles during and post disaster phase, but consequences the*

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Anthropology, Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup> Department of Anthropology, Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

<sup>3</sup> Department of Anthropology, Quaid i Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

*transformation of gender roles. This study, based on theoretical and empirical knowledge obtained through secondary and primary data. The qualitative anthropological techniques were used to collect empirical data.*

**Keywords:** *Disaster, Earthquake, Empowerment, Relief, Reconstruction, Women*

### **Introduction**

The occurrence of natural and human-caused disasters has increased over the recent decades in many countries around the world. Disasters are generally large, intractable problems that test the ability of communities and nations to effectively protect their population and infrastructure and, its capacity to recover rapidly (Delaney, P.L. and Shrader, E. 2000). During disaster management, post disaster reconstruction stage is confronted with many barriers in making the disaster an opportunity for development due to its ineffectiveness and inefficiency. Reconstruction is a rebuilding measure which involves not only constructing physical structures but also building the confidence, self-respect, self-esteem, self-dependency, mutual support and mutual trust and, the rebuilding of communities. This long-term process focuses on human and material resource development, coordinated effort towards independence, sustainability and empowerment. The United Nations (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction 2003) defines disaster as a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society causing widespread human, material, economic or environmental loss that exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources. The disasters can be in the form of a battery of floods, droughts, cyclones, landslides, earthquakes, communal riots, armed conflicts, fires, volcanic eruptions, epidemics and industrial disasters. These disasters are naturally occurring phenomenon, the intense impact of a disaster is exacerbated by human actions including incomplete development practices. Although there have been improvements in the emergency response to natural disasters, permanent reconstruction is often inefficiently managed, improperly coordinated and slow to get off the ground (Jones, T.L. 2006). However post disaster reconstruction (PDR) is an important stage in disaster management where it becomes a window of opportunity for the community's development.

Present literature on disaster management emphasizes the importance of gender sensitivity in PDR (Bradshaw, S. 2002). It argues that gender consideration will help for better targeting of resources to reach people in greatest need; for more

accurate service provision to meet actual needs; to decrease vulnerability to future disasters and to prevent or mitigate negative impacts to second generation (ibid, 2002). In addition, earlier studies found that the gender composition of the population tends to change following a disaster where the percentage of female-headed households typically increases (ibid, 2000). Furthermore, it states that, during the post disaster phase the roles and responsibilities of women can change dramatically. In addition, the level of risk experienced by women in disaster is more than men and women are also more vulnerable in post disaster stages (Ariyabandu et al, 2003). Therefore, it is important to study women's experiences in PDR in order to improve their development. Although the roles of women have changed noticeably in the past decades still they find it difficult to improve their status within the community. This research aims to present a review of literature related to women's experiences and empirical findings in PDR in order to analyze the effects of post disaster reconstruction towards their development. The study identifies their experiences with regard to their participation and confronts the challenges related to women's development during PDR in the disaster cycle. In addition, this study discusses whether PDR fosters or hinders women's development. This research has been based on theoretical and empirical knowledge obtained through literature and field study.

### **UNIVERSE AND METHODOLOGY**

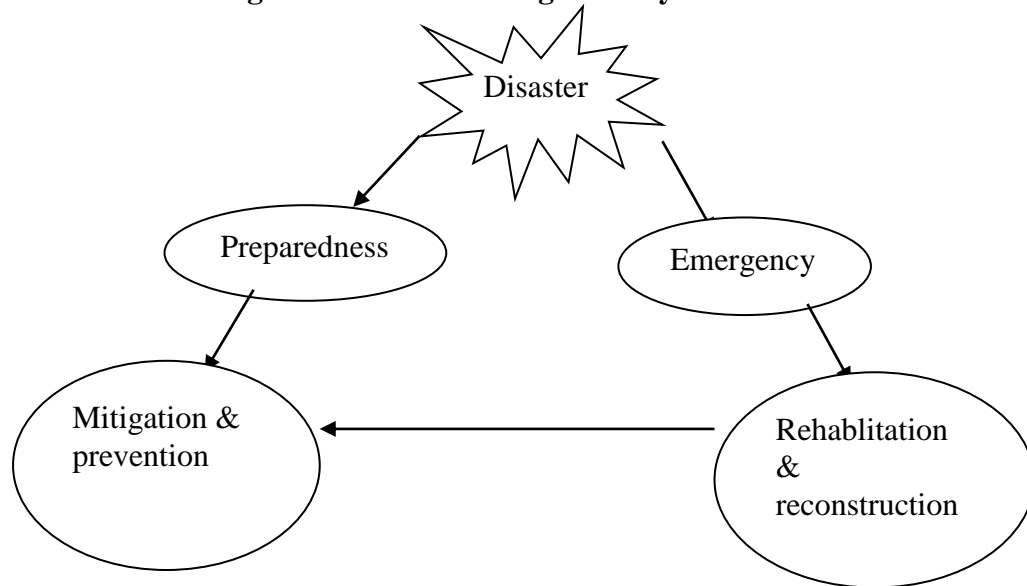
The village is situated near epicenter of the earthquake, falling in the territory of KPK, district Mansehra Tehsil Balakot. An Anthropological study piloted in Tehsil Balakot, Village Gharibabad, from February to July 2010. Baseline data were accumulated through the socioeconomic census of the area. For this purpose 35 households were selected through judgmental sampling. Females from these Households were further probed through in-depth interviews and fifteen case studies collected regarding women's participation, experiences in the reconstruction process and transforming roles. Before starting research in the field first step was established rapport as a researcher. For this concern, I selected key informants from the community. This was the famous person due to his profession and behavior. He became a source of researcher identity in the community.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Natural disasters can occur as slow-onset natural disasters such as droughts or as rapid-onset disasters. The magnitude of disasters is documented by reference to the degree of vulnerability of the affected population (Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe, 2003). A population's level of risk of disaster is determined by

the type of hazard and the calculation of the level of vulnerability, which is determined by social, physical and attitudinal variables (bid 2003). Although in disasters, it is difficult to differentiate between the different stages, for management purposes, there is a standard disaster cycle and each phase merits special considerations. The cycle includes disaster mitigation and prevention, preparedness, emergency, rehabilitation and reconstruction (Delaney and Shrader, 2000). Each phase in the cycle requires particular types of interventions and programming. According to Ariyabandu and Wickramasinghe (2003), disaster management is a collective term encompassing all aspects of planning for and responding to disasters which includes both pre and post disaster activities. Further, they state that the disaster management cycle includes the shaping of public policies and plans that either modify the causes of disasters or mitigate their effects on people, property and infrastructure. Disaster management should not be seen in isolation, but it should be considered at various phases of management in addressing the issue.

**Figure1. Disaster management cycle**



Source: Delaney, P.L. and Shrader, E. (2000)

### **Disaster Mitigation and Prevention**

In the natural disaster cycle, the pre-disaster phase includes mitigation and prevention and, preparedness. During mitigation stage activities are related to the reduction of the probability of the occurrence or decreasing of the effects of unavoidable disasters. The mitigation process includes building codes;

vulnerability analysis; zoning and land use management; building safety codes; preventive health care and public education. The success of mitigation measures depends on the integration of appropriate measures in national and regional development planning. Its effectiveness will also depend on the availability of information on hazards, emergency risks and the countermeasures to be taken.

**Disaster Preparedness**

During the disaster preparedness phase, measures are undertaken to control the impact of the event through ensuring a structured response and establishing mechanisms for effecting a quick and orderly reaction to it (International Labour Organization 2006). These are not aimed at preventing the occurrence of a disaster. Further, this stage includes the development of awareness among people on the general aspects disaster preparedness, mitigation & prevention, rehabilitation & reconstruction, emergency of disaster and how they will need to behave in the future by educating them about the disaster signs, methods of successful evacuation and first aid measures. In addition formation and training of local committees, building of communication systems, meteorological observation systems, facilitation of basic utility systems such as water supply system and sanitation are some of the activities undertaken during this phase.

**Emergency phase**

The emergency response aims to provide immediate assistance to maintain life, improve health and support the morale of the affected population. The emergency phase involves immediate post recovery, which can last for days, weeks or months, depending on the nature of the disaster and local conditions (Jones, 2006). During the emergency phase, relief agencies or groups focus on preventing additional loss of life through actions such as search and rescue, emergency food and water, temporary shelter, and temporary transport. The focus of this phase is on meeting the basic needs of people until more permanent and sustainable solutions can be provided. Humanitarian organizations are often strongly present during this phase in the disaster management cycle.

**Rehabilitation**

The recovery activities, which include both short and long term, continue until all systems return to normal or improved status. The rehabilitation phase includes medium term interventions such as construction of transitional housing, provision of basic food to the affected population, the provision of social services, road clearing, and income generation, water system rehabilitation (Delaney and Shrader, 2000). As the emergency is brought under control the affected community is capable of undertaking a growing number of activities aimed at

restoring their lives and the infrastructure that supports them. There is no distinct point at which immediate relief changes into rehabilitation and then into long-term reconstruction development.

The reconstruction period includes the long-term and often substantial investment in rebuilding the physical and social infrastructure of affected regions. PDR is a process that is the interaction of complex social, technological and economic factors and actions (Baradhan, B 2006). There will be many opportunities during the reconstruction period to enhance prevention and increase preparedness, thus reducing vulnerability. However, though many organizations are involved in relief and rehabilitation most often they focus on the emergency and reconstruction remains neglected (Jayaraj, A 2006). Therefore, it is necessary for organizations which are concerned about disasters to utilize the opportunities and develop the community's capabilities.

### **Women's Participation in Reconstruction**

Participation of women in post disaster phase has significant impacts in women empowerment with a variety of experiences in many areas. Almost all the family members, including women, were the victim of the earthquake 2005. The earthquake day did not only bring the destruction to the community, but also brought some opportunities for the community to re-emerge and develop with new zeal. The women of the community mustered up their courage in order to face the reality of the disaster. Initially, everyone was shocked and was feeling like a nightmare. They realized soon that it was not a nightmare, but an open reality. Before the earthquake, a female's mobility without a family member was considered a taboo. However, after the disaster, they had to help, assist and look after the family members who were either in the rubble or were injured or dead. Like men, the women were also trying to help the wounded, rescue the people from the rubble and to bury their dead near and dear ones. After the emergency tasks, they had to reconstruct their houses and the community at large. The women involved had diverse experiences.

The earthquake disaster 2005 had worse impacts on the lives of people in case of casualties and infrastructure collapse at large scale. A massive destruction, although worsen off the life, but a pull factor for marginalized community, especially women, paved out some new horizons of development through social sector. Women participation was merely a verbal calculation before this disaster. So the women took charge to participate in the reintegration of their people and community by coming out of the stereotypical society where the woman working

relationship is considered as a taboo. The women by and large contributed in the development process.

***Treematka Bahir Niklna (women go outside):*** It is the norm of Hindko Culture that females are not allowed to go outside their homes for a job or any money earning activity. But they can go outside to do agriculture work in the fields, for shopping purpose. It was feeling of shamefulness if any female desire to do the job. After the earthquake, many females went outside their home to earn money. As case studies illustrate, Rabia Bibi, a 23 year old young girl belonging to Gujjar caste, told that in the earthquake, she had lost her father, and elder brother and their house turned into rubble. She further told that they were helpless and left with nothing. She expressed: A norm in Hindko culture where women are suppressed to take part in economic activities and especially the working relationship with the men are greatly discouraged.

“On the third day of the earthquake, we were sitting on a rock near the debris of our house; one NGO female worker came to us and asked about our losses to share grievances. A female worker from an NGO inquired about my education and asked me to sort out job somewhere. I told her that my family would never allow me to go out for a job and did not have any job experience either. Hence, no one would consider me. Even I did not have confidence to talk or to face male members. She said as she would provide me an opportunity to work with her. She offered me an attractive salary package. I was astonished to know about the amount of money, which she was offering me. I could not even think of having or earning such an amount. I was tense because my relatives would not allow me to do that job. She started convincing my mother and told her that many foreigners had come to help the victims of our area. She asked my mother why they did not want to support themselves. My mother realized it and finally permitted. Nevertheless, I started working with the NGO. At the Initial stage, I faced many difficulties from my relatives and in the field as well, but she (NGO worker) always supported me. By doing the job with an NGO, I did not only support my family, but also helped other people in the village. I was the first in the village who reconstructed her house. My professional life gave me confidence, courage and the strength to face the challenges. The evidence shows that female job experience became the symbol of prestige after my successful entry. This exposure did not only empower them, but also appear to be an agent of change for the female section of the community.

***Treematki Madad (Female Support):*** Females are considered as a vulnerable group of society. When come across a crisis situation, bear multiple psychological

and social sways. As Bradshah mentioned in his study “They are the most vulnerable segment and cannot manage the crisis situation”. In the study area, findings indicate that females are not vulnerable. They are very strong and fully participated in rescue, reconstruction and rehabilitation activities. Kalsoom, a female from the area, said that in disaster her family suffered a lot. She lost her 11 family members. She further told that when disaster struck, everyone was struck off. She was almost in a trauma state, but recovered soon. When she saw that everything had been destroyed and no one was left alive in her family, she rushed nervously. Suddenly one of her brothers cried, “*bachao bachao*” (rescue me). She took him on her shoulders to the hospital in two hours. If she did not take courage and waited for any male to come and support, her brother would certainly have passed away due to severe injuries. Another case of female strength and courage is Lubna. She shared that her husband was a shopkeeper. His shop was near their home. When disaster happened, she rushed to his shop. She saw there was only the debris of the shop. She was shocked and started calling for help. No one heard her; she summed up her courage and started searching for her husband without any tool or help. Soon she found her husband and rescued him out from the debris. He was severely injured but survived. She thought if she did not sum up the courage, her husband would have died there. The demonstration of courage and bravery from the females of Balakot ascertained that they are not a vulnerable section rather a dynamic human resource of their country and can face a crisis competently.

**Working Women as a Social Stigma:** Females are considered as a repository of honor, protected and treated in a very dignified way in *Hindko* culture (Balakot), in Pakistani culture. If Females thought of doing a *nokri* (job), before the earthquake, it was deliberate as a sin or taboo. Female respondents told that whenever they discussed with their men about women’s employment, They responded in these words, “*Hamri izzat khakmein melanachahti ho, ap hamein society mein zalil krna chahti ho. Wo koi mar dhej jiski aurat ghar se bahr nikly.*” (Do you want to make us a laughing stone in the society and society disregards us? He is a man whose female goes out of home for the job.)

There are many examples of working women who participated as nurses, mobilisers and teachers after disaster. Tanzeela, a 21 year old girl, told that they lived in the Upper Mountain before the earthquake. Her family migrated to the current village after the 2005 earthquake. In the disaster their agricultural land turned to land sliding and their house collapsed completely. Three months after the disaster, their family was accommodated by their relatives. She further told, her father was very old and they did not have any source of income and does not



know how to earn in the changing environment. There were many opportunities for her to earn money. She started a job as a trainer and then she switched over to different NGOs in order to pursue careers. She struggled to adjust her sister in any kind of job because she was a sole bread earner of the family. After a consistent struggle she found a job for her sister as a teacher in a private school. Now, they, both sisters worked to support their family. She further said that now they have had been earning a reasonable and managing their home expenses easily. Tanzeela purchased a small piece of land in Abbottabad city. She migrated there. Her family's socio-economic level rose. Consequently, she got her brother admitted in a good school. She was satisfied and happy to support her family in the time of crisis. Her parents were pleased and felt proud of her. Now they tell their relatives very proudly about their daughter's performance. . They set the example of respect for their family. They are taken as an example of successful women of the area.

**Women Coping the Critical Situation:** Earthquake 2005 was the biggest disaster in the history of Pakistan known as *Qamayeet-e-Sughra* (Day of Judgment) in Hindko language. People of Balakot told that everything turned topsy-turvy. All segments of the society, i.e. male, female, children were out of senses. According to male respondents, females took more courage to support other family members as well as community members. One of my female respondents said that all of her family members were faint. They had lost their memory. When earthquake's severe shocks stopped, her mother rushed to school *Jundkhan di Khabriko* (know about children). Except her mother all of them were sitting on the ground dumbfounded and were just looking at each other. She went to school and brought three children back home with her. She further told that the other school was totally collapsed where the other children of their family were studying. They thought they should go there to search the other children also. Another evidence of female courage and coping strategy is Kousar of Gujjar family. She told that after the earthquake she rushed to her in-laws home to know about their situation. When she reached there, their house was totally collapsed. There were three females inside. She said that they started calling "*Zinda ho Zinda ho, O TreematKidr Ho.*" (Are you alive, where are you).

One of them replied she was Shaheen and alive, and she pleaded to rescue her out. Kausar started finding her in the debris. After a consistent struggle, she was successful to bring her out. Then, she informed male family members about the situation. Finally, they were successful to save the female. It describes women's efforts in rescuing the victim to survive in a critical situation.

**Relatives' Disapproval for working with Male:** In the initial stages when women started working with NGOs, they faced many challenges from their relatives. Irum told that her brother did not allow her to work with any organization where the female had interaction with males. After the disaster when her father was badly injured, her elder brother looked after him in the hospital. Everything was destroyed. They were suffering socio-economically. She was offered a job of a mobiliser in UNDP. Her mother did not allow her initially to work; she tried to convince her that it was their need to work for family support. She got angry with her and said, "*Rishtedar baaten kryengy. Koi bhi hm se talaq nae rekhyga. Mein ghurbaat mein reh sakti hn lakin rishtadaron ki nafrat nae dekh skti*" (Relatives will criticize us; they will not interact with us. I can spend my life poorly, but cannot face hatred of relatives).

She tried to convince her mother to allow for job. Eventually she gave her a chance and she started her job as a social mobiliser. After six months her salary increased and she earned double. With this earning she was able to establish her home. Her father recovered soon due to her care and the financial support which she was contributing. Another example is of Tayyaba, who also faced challenges before starting the job. She shared her experience that her husband hated the girls who did the jobs. After the disaster, there were many opportunities for females to do jobs. Her husband's income was not sufficient to face a critical situation. One day she asked him how much financial crisis, they were facing. She asked her husband if he could allow me to start teaching so that they could manage their life in a better way. He replied angrily and said it was enough. He would never allow her to do the job even if they starved to death. Then she discussed the problem with her cousin. Her cousin came and shared success stories of women's employment with her husband. Tayyaba's husband got convinced and asked her to search a job only in the teaching profession. She got a job of Teaching Assistant in a school where male and female teachers worked together. Now in changing circumstances there is no issue of females and males working together. She said that her profession gave her courage and strength her husband and other family member were very happy. They loved her for being such a responsible woman. These evidences showed that now to interact with males was not a deviant behavior, rather it provided women the strength and confidence, how to survive in the crisis.

**Economic Independence:** In the times of crisis when bread earners died or suffered from an injury, family members suffered an economic crisis, particularly when an earthquake destroyed the whole infrastructure of the community. Twenty eight male members died in this particular community so it became the *Zaroart*

(need) for women to find a job to support their families. The earthquake destroyed the whole infrastructure where the male bread earner either died or suffered from severe injuries. This situation became worse when twenty eight male members died and situation challenged the women to take part in economic activity for their survival. Mariya told that, if she did not start job her family could not have recovered quickly. Her younger brother and sister sensed frustrated by the prevailing situation and now they were satisfied and confident by having all the basic facilities of life. Another case study is that of Haleema. Her family faced many troubles with the destruction of economic earning resources. They came across a miserable life. So Haleema decided to find a job. She tackled many challenges and finally she was able to change her family's poor condition.

**Vocational Center:** In the post disaster phase many International Organizations (International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nation Development Projects (UNDP) focused on gender related issues and women empowerment through the implementation of different projects in the disaster prone area to combat the inequity. These organizations established vocational training centers like *Silahi Karahi* (Embroidery & Stitching) to develop the skills of rural women so that women could contribute their economy. Sadia, one of my respondents, described that how she started working as a trainer in vocational training center to become economically independent. She said that to open a vocational center in a Swaati family was a big challenge. She accounted that her brother was discussing about an NGO which established home-based female training centers. He also told that they gave attractive salary packages to the trainers. She requested and convinced her husband to allow her to join the home based vocational center. If he allowed her, she might be able to do something for her children. She asked him that how long they will take help from others? Her husband was convinced eventually. Then she took help from the secretary of union council (UC) to open *Silahi* (vocational) center, he sent a representative of NGO to assess and finally the NGO provided her the entire basic facilities to open vocational training center. She only got economic independence rather than becoming an agent of empowerment for other female of the region.

**Apna Ghar an Agent of Change:** Female respondent articulated that *Apna Ghar* (own independent home) was their utmost desire before disaster. We could merely idealize independent home. In Balakot joint family system was practiced. If someone desired to live independently, it was considered a deviant. The joint family system was considered as a symbol of integrity, cohesiveness, respect and honor. Fakhra, Tazeem and Naheed shared their experience of joint family system. We did not have right to serve guests with our own choice of meal. They

further told that our husband could not show intimacy with their children in front of the elders. A husband and wife could not communicate in front of other family members. They said that we were socio-economically dependent on others. All the income was generated at one end and the facilities were shared equally among the family members. If one brother was earning more and the other was unemployed hence the facilities were shared equally among family members. Indeed, it was the joint family system from all perspective. After the disaster when the whole fabric of society destroyed and reconstruction process started it paved an opportunity for families to get independent home. There were many projects of development organization which provided opportunity to construct homes. Specifically, women got more independence with reference on all aspects of their life and empowerment in *Apna Ghar* (independent home).

## CONCLUSION

Findings of the study show that this disaster becomes the window of opportunity for change. Disaster accentuate gender inequalities, they also have the potential to alter the sexual division of labour, mainly through changes in household composition, economic empowerment thus presenting opportunities for change. Women are the dominant beneficiary group in this situation. Disaster response goes beyond their immediate needs and vulnerabilities and addresses issues surrounding their subordinate position by working with women's capacities and taking a long term development perspective.

## References

- Ariyabandu, M.M. & Wickramasinghe, M. (2003). *Gender dimensions in disaster management*. Colombo: ITDG South Asia Publication
- Bradshaw, S. (2001). Reconstructing Roles and Relations: Women's participation in reconstruction in post-Mitch Nicaragua. *Gender and Development*, Vol. 9, No 3), pp. 79–87.
- Bradshaw, S. (2002). Exploring the gender dimensions of reconstruction process post Hurricane Mitch. *Journal of International Development*, Vol 14, pp. 871–879.
- Baradhan, B. (2006). Analysis of the Post-Disaster Reconstruction Process following TurkishEarthquakes, 1999. In: IF Research Group (Ed.), International Conference on post-disasterreconstruction Meeting stakeholder interests, 17-19 May 2006, Florence. University deMontreal.

- Delaney, P.L. & Shrader, E. (2000). Gender and Post-Disaster Reconstruction: The case of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras and Nicaragua. Report prepared for the World Bank.
- International Labour Organization (2000). Crisis response and reconstruction (available online <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/crisis/download/afghanwomen.pdf> [accessed on 23/11/2015])
- International Strategies for Disaster Reduction (available online <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/291061823> [accessed on 22/11/2015])
- Jones, T.L. (2006). Mind the Gap! *Post-disaster reconstruction and the transition from humanitarian relief*. London: RICS.
- Jayaraj, A. (2006). Post disaster reconstruction experiences in Andhra Pradesh, in India. In: IF Research Group (Ed.), International Conference on post-disaster reconstruction Meeting stakeholder interests, 17-19 May 2006, Florence. University de Montreal