

"Invisible victims: unveiling the gendered impacts of displacement in coastal disasters in india "

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ABSTRACT:

Coastal disasters, caused by climate change and environmental degradation, disproportionately affect marginalized populations, particularly women. Displacement due to cyclones, floods, and coastal erosion pushes women into conditions of stripping of security and human rights. This article highlights the diverse human rights violations faced by the displaced women in coastal disasters.

The congested temporary shelters and insufficient infrastructure create fertile ground for gender-based violence in displacement. In temporary camps where privacy and safety are not addressed, women are exposed to sexual exploitation, harassment, and abuse. Moreover, the traditional social structure in the coastal area has collapsed. The displaced women are left with no support in the response and recovery mechanism, aggravating their vulnerability.

This paper reveals the impact of existing systemic inequity in society on gender during disaster-related displacement in the coastal region. It also delves into the nexus of socio-economic vulnerability of women and the discrimination they face. It exposes the ground reality of discriminatory treatment in access to the justice system, healthcare system, and other critical resources in disaster governance.

The paper argues for the protection of human rights in disaster management. It upholds the policies and strategies that are more inclusive and gender-sensitive. Key recommendations are to increase the safety of temporary shelters, ensure legal safeguards to combat violence, and create community-based support networks for the survivors of violence. This paper advocates that the disaster resilience framework should be framed in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals to reduce systemic inequalities. It also stresses the need for gender-responsive disaster response and recovery frameworks to support women's rights and dignity.

Keywords: Coastal Disasters, Displacement, Human Rights, Gender-Sensitive Approaches, Disaster Resilience, Marginalized Communities

1. INTRODUCTION

India's coastlines are at the nexus of increasing environmental challenges and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Climate change and ecological degradation have escalated the frequency and severity of coastal disasters, like cyclones, storm surges, and progressive coastal erosion in coastal regions, making them more vulnerable than inland. The most troubling factor of these phenomena is that the marginalized are at the frontline among those affected most in the disasters. The coastline, home to nearly 170 million people, provides occupation and food to the fishing community but also witnesses a threat to their life and security from cyclones and the persistent, inexorable process of coastal erosion. The fisher folk are among the most vulnerable due to pre-existing socio-economic, political, and physical vulnerabilities along with their deep-rooted coastal habitats. Frequent coastal disasters have disrupted traditional livelihoods, leading to unemployment and income shortages. It also caused damage to house properties and resulted in the displacement of family members. Moreover, loss of fishing days due to early warnings compels them to change their employment patterns.. All these factors aggravate unemployment and poverty, as the coastal communities mainly depend on the sea for their day-to-day earnings. This leads to the impoverishment of the community, which in turn further increases their marginalization.(Ramesh and Bhatt)

Among fisherfolk, women bear the brunt of massive displacement disproportionately. The displacement is the worst condition they have ever faced, as the fisher communities are forced to move into perilous living conditions in relief camps or other places. The impacts of coastal disasters are not uniform; women from marginalized communities suffer the most. The fisher folk women face unique and compounded challenges that strip them of safety, dignity, and means of survival. Existing structural inequalities and discrimination, inadequate access to resources, exclusion from decision-making processes, poor safety and privacy in relief settings exacerbate their vulnerabilities(Roy and Mukherjee 14). In Kerala, 39% of its coastline eroded over the past five decades. Disaster-stricken areas also demonstrate the same risks due to sea-level rise, intensified monsoons, and recurring cyclones, which triggered the loss of land and livelihoods, particularly for women in fisher communities.(Sachin, Menon, and Sankaranarayanan)

In India, the disaster management process focuses on displacement caused by rapid-onset disasters like cyclones, it does not have adequate policies on slow-onset disasters such as coastal erosion, leaving affected communities to confront the challenges of displacement without sufficient support or resources. Moreover, it lacks strategies for safeguarding them from socioeconomic instability, health crises, and gender-based violence due to displacement. The consequence of displacement on women highlights the urgent need for disaster management frameworks addressing systemic inequalities and upholding women's rights.

This paper examines the intersection of displacement and human rights violations in the event of a hazard in India. It also discusses the multidimensional human rights violations experienced by women displaced by coastal disasters. It also exposes how existing social inequities and inapt disaster management policies fuel the marginalization of women. By analyzing the bitter experiences of women in displacement, the paper underlines the necessity for gender-sensitive and rights-based strategies amid growing climate uncertainty.

2. COASTAL DISASTERS IN INDIA AND THEIR IMPACT

India's coastal zone constitutes an ecologically sensitive interface where land, sea, and atmospheric systems interact dynamically. It spans approximately 7,500 kilometers, including 5,500 kilometers along the mainland and an additional 1,382 offshore islands. This vast shoreline region is densely populated and environmentally fragile. The coasts are treasured with abundant resources for the country's economic and overall development. It is a hub of biodiversity, vibrant culture, and commercial activities, featuring an extensive human presence in the zones. Coastal zones are highly susceptible to coastal and ocean-induced hazards like sea level rise and cyclones due to climate change. The loss of diverse sensitive ecosystems and geomorphological systems due to over-exploitation of natural resources, unscientific constructions, sand mining, etc., worsens the situation. It poses an intricate challenge for disaster risk governance, resource management, and resilience. (Ramesh et al.)

The coastal belt of India is also home to a distinct socio-economic demographic, having approximately 3,288 marine fishing villages. It accommodates over 4.25 million people, of whom 90% belong to traditional fishing communities. (International Collective in Support of Fishworkers) These populations are scattered mainly in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Kerala. They are inextricably linked to the coastal ecosystem and vulnerable to

environmental hazards due to the physical exposure and socio-economic disparities they suffer.(Periasamy 25)

India faces significant and escalating coastal hazards. A 'Coastal Disaster' refers to catastrophic events such as tsunamis, hurricanes, and sea level rise that lead to loss of life and cause significant damage to property and livelihood of fisher folk in coastal areas due to a combination of factors like climate change, unregulated coastal development, unscientific mining, disruption of natural sediment dynamics, and the conversion of low-lying, flood-prone areas for infrastructure and habitation(Ranjan and Karmakar 15)India witnessed around 10% of the world's tropical cyclones annually, with a marked increase in intensity. (India Meteorological Department 23)In 2023 alone, six cyclones were recorded, doubling the statistics of the previous year. Rising sea levels threaten coastal zones through (i) the perpetual submerging of land; (ii) extreme coastal flooding; (iii) increased coastal erosion; (iv) variation in coastal ecosystems; (v) soils, and water salinization, etc. Among these, Coastal erosion has emerged as a synchronous hazard, affecting 33.6% of the national coastline between 1990 and 2018. Between 1996 and 2016, an estimated 236 square kilometres of land were lost to erosion, and 45.5% of the coastline is also experiencing degradation of varying intensity.Kerala's picture exemplifies this growing threat,showing that about 39.12% of its 590-kilometer coast was eroded over the past five decades. These hazards significantly undermine the well-being of fisherfolk, causing loss of livelihood, sharp unemployment, and poverty.They also bear the disproportionate socio-economic and cultural consequences of displacement, which further deepen the marginalization as they endure.

3. COASTAL DISPLACEMENT IN INDIA: VULNERABILITY OF FISHERFOLK

Disasters cause millions of people to abandon their homes each year worldwide. Among these climate-related weather events are more intense which lead to internal displacement. According to IDMC, by the end of 2023, 7.7 million people will be displaced due to disasters.(Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre)Disaster displacement is defined as: "Situations where people are forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of a disaster or to avoid the impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard. Such displacement results from the fact that affected persons are exposed to a natural hazard in a situation where they are too vulnerable and lack the resilience to withstand the impacts of that hazard." ("Key Definitions")So the factors contributing toDisaster

displacement are: the vigor of the hazardous event, the exposure of people and assets to it, and their vulnerability. So, displacement arises at the intersection of hazard exposure, socio-economic vulnerability, and inadequate adaptive capacity. Displaced people are uprooted from their lives, which worsens their vulnerabilities and exposes them to new risks and obstacles in unfamiliar social and economic backgrounds. They are not prepared to meet the contingency, and the loss of support from the family and community worsens their hardships. (Neumayer and Plümper 560) Slow-onset disasters are under-recognized drivers of displacement, though they contribute significantly. In India, an average of 3.6 million disaster-related displacements occurred annually between 2008 and 2018. This has recorded the highest in the world, with a substantial proportion of events occurring in coastal regions. (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre) This trend reveals deep-rooted structural vulnerabilities of traditional marine fishing communities that are located in erosion-prone coastal areas. Displacement severely disrupts these communities by undermining access to fishing grounds, threatening livelihood continuity, and eroding socio-cultural identities. (Bavinck et al. 150) State-led resettlement initiatives lead to a disconnect from the coastal environment as they often relocate affected populations to inland or peri-urban areas. It also heightened economic insecurity and social dislocation. (Bavinck et al. 150) Moreover, the absence of formal land tenure for many displaced households renders them ineligible for government compensation and rehabilitation assistance. This illustrates the limitations of current legal and institutional frameworks in addressing the complex realities of climate-induced displacement. (Ramanathan and Achuthan 12)

4. GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF COASTAL DISPLACEMENT IN INDIA

Unlike men, Women's access to resources is restricted, leading to gender disparity. In a society, they have to perform a supportive role in the home and local community, and not expect their presence in the public sphere. In rural areas, women from poor families are burdened with the responsibility for their families' chores. They are frequently excluded from decisions in family affairs because they are not an earning member. Moreover, the societal concept is that they are born to do household responsibilities of caring for their youngsters, which excludes them from educational opportunities. Even if they are working, the wages they earn are usually less than men. Though they engaged in agricultural production and allied fisheries activity which are crucial to sustainable livelihoods and national economies, their contributions are less visible and recognised. All these aspects leave them more

vulnerable to changes in their working environment caused by disasters. Due to these pre-existing inequalities and structural disparities, they become the most susceptible to coastal disasters. The Impact of disasters deepened their degree of marginalisation.(Sugirtharajah 134)

The gendered dimensions of disaster-induced displacement in India's coastal regions are profound and structurally embedded. Women in traditional fishing communities engaged in post-harvest processing, marketing for sustaining livelihoods, and played a central role in household management. In coastal communities, women are often confined to informal, low-mobility roles compared to men, who are mostly prone to disruption during disasters. This gendered division of labour further intensifies this vulnerability. Disasters interact with ingrained gender norms, roles, and responsibilities shaped by patriarchal socio-economic structures. This places women at a systematic disadvantage in all courses of preparedness, recovery, resettlement, and rehabilitation; they are excluded or ignored in important decision-making processes regarding disaster management.(UN Women)As a result, displacement severely cut their ties to the land where they were born, disrupted their livelihoods, and disturbed cultural practices. It also hindered their access to economic resources, public services, and social networks by thereby reinforcing pre-existing gender inequalities.(Inter-Agency Standing Committee)The irreversible land loss due to coastal disasters results in the relocation of the community to other areas, leading to permanent displacement. When these areas were disconnected from the coastline, they desperately lost marine-based livelihoods. Temporary displacement, leading to relocation to relief camps, poses additional risks, including overcrowding, lack of privacy, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence.(Kantamaneni et al. 3472)Moreover, in coastal communities, women neither possess property rights nor have a document proving their property rights. This leads to their exclusion from the compensation scheme when property is destroyed in coastal disasters. This renders their losses invisible within legal and policy frameworks. The vulnerabilities of women in displacement stress the dire need for gender-responsive and rights-based policies in disaster management. Disaster governance should recognize the specific challenges of women and secure equitable access to resources by guaranteeing women's representation in policy matters.

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

IN COASTAL DISPLACEMENT CONTEXTS

The connection between gender vulnerability and displacement necessitates vigorous legal frameworks that explicitly safeguard women's rights in the context of disaster. Various efforts have been taken at the international and national levels to address the concerns related to disaster management, human rights protection, especially of women in disasters.

A. International Framework

Efforts for disaster management started in the year 1989 by announcing the "International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction," and an "International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction" was declared. The World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction developed the "Yokohama Strategy 12" for risk reduction. This sets forth procedures for "natural disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation." In 1999, "the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)" was set up to streamline the implementation of the strategy for reducing the risk. "Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations" formulated the "Disaster Risk Reduction framework" for reducing human loss and destruction to property in disasters. The "World Conference on Disaster Reduction" adopted the Framework for Action 2005-2015, the "Hyogo Framework", for structuring the resilience of Communities. "Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction" is the ongoing directive of UNDRR in this spectrum.

"Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030" reiterates the necessity of gender-responsive disaster governance. It has seven clear targets and four priorities to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks: "(i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to "Build Back Better" in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction." (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction) Its goal is to reduce disaster risk, losses, and environmental deterioration in countries over the next 15 years. The inclusion of women in policy-making bodies is vital for safeguarding specific needs in risk mitigation, preparedness, and recovery strategies. However, implementation of these mandates remains ineffective. Disaster management institutions at the regional levels lack the capacity or directive to ensure gender parity.

Several international instruments are globally recognized for protecting women against human rights violations. However, none have specific provisions for the protection of women during displacement.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights that guarantees the right to life, dignity, equality, and security from inhuman treatment and discrimination to all human beings. (United Nations, "Universal Declaration") But all these rights are jeopardized when a disaster occurs. Especially, the human rights of women are violated in all disaster management stages. Moreover, the women, particularly in displacement, confronted gender-based violence, discrimination based on caste, gender, and social isolation, in emergency shelters. The resettlement colonies, where they are relocated due to disaster, lack adequate infrastructure and necessities. The system was also unsuccessful in safeguarding adequate legal protection when their right were violated.

The United Nations endorsed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979, generally named "Women's Convention." It aspires to protect women by eliminating all forms of inequalities and discrimination. Its target is to secure equal rights and opportunities to women in every aspect of life and safeguard their rights by establishing legal mechanisms. The Convention sets out specific obligations for countries to enact laws and schemes to protect the rights by promoting gender equality. The provisions under CEDAW emphasize the need for special treatment for vulnerable, rural, and marginalized women. India ratified it in 1993 and has to take measures to eliminate gender-based discrimination in all domains, including disaster response and rehabilitation. (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) During displacement, India's coastal fisherwomen are excluded from compensation, livelihood protection, land rights, credit access, and resettlement planning. These led to their growing socio-economic precarity after a disaster. Though the convention mandated the state to enact legal provisions to reduce women's socio-economic susceptibility in displacement, the state failed to ensure it. (UN Women)

At the global development level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the significance of gender-sensitive disaster resilience by recognizing the uneven influence of disasters on women and girls. Goal 5 (Gender Equality) advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) stresses reducing the vulnerability of women and girls to disasters and promoting gender-sensitive

planning, preparedness, and response in disasters. Goal 13 necessitates imperative action to fight climate change, and accentuates the need to protect vulnerable populations, including women from climate-induced hazards.(United Nations General Assembly)It ensures equal accessibility and timely support for women to recover from disasters. So the integration of these goals into national policy and the district disaster management plan is crucial. The existing schemes indicate a lack of commitment or persistence to achieve a comprehensive approach to disaster management.

The United Nations adopted the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement in 1998,” to address the concerns of internally displaced people. These principles emphasize the need for IDPs to receive protection and assistance, regardless of the circumstances of their displacement, and establish that they are entitled to equal rights and equal protection.(United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)Key provisions relevant to women include: Principles 10–11: Protection from sexual violence and inhuman treatment; Principle 18: Right to health and housing; Principles 28–30: Voluntary and dignified return, resettlement, the right to access essential services, and reintegration. They provide a framework for the security and well-being of their displaced populations. It also promotes a humanitarian approach by giving adequate support to IDPs.

B.National Framework

In India, there are numerous legal frameworks for disaster risk reduction in compliance with global laws and conventions. The Disaster Management Act, 2005, serves as India’s principal legislative framework to mitigate the effects of all catastrophes on the nation's population and infrastructure. It authorizes the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to coordinate response efforts in the country during a mishap. The Act also mandates the states to set up their disaster management authorities (SDMA) and authorities at the district level (DDMA). (Disaster Management Act) India also formulates policies and plans to implement necessary procedures to prepare and reduce the impact of disaster. Under the National Disaster Management Policy, 2007 (NDMP), the District Disaster Management Authority has to set up temporary camps and temporary shelters if necessary for disaster-displaced persons. These temporary camps should have provisions for privacy, clean water, and sanitation for everyday life. The rehabilitation should be organised with the effective involvement of all stakeholders. Within 2 to 3 years.(National Disaster Management Policy) On the issue of displacement, the National Disaster Management Plan directs the relocation of the displaced

population. Rehabilitation is defined as “An overall dynamic and intermediate strategy of institutional reforms and reinforcement, reconstruction and improvement of infrastructure and services; aimed towards support to true initiatives and actions of the affected populations in the political, economic, and social domains, as well as reiteration of sustainable development.” (National Disaster management Plan)It identifies ‘Relocation’ as a part of Physical rehabilitation. It defines relocation as “Relocation is a very sensitive part of the physical rehabilitation process, and it must be ensured that need-based considerations and not extraneous factors should drive the relocation policy.”(National Disaster management Plan) Though the Act, policy, and plan mandate inclusive disaster planning across national, state, and district levels, it fails to incorporate explicit gender-responsive provisions for displacement. It lacks provisions to deal with the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities in disaster management. Moreover, it is unsuccessful in ensuring gender equality and participatory strategies for displaced women.

Similarly, the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notifications 2011 aim to balance ecological protection of coastal livelihoods. The objectives of the Notification are: • to safeguard traditional livelihood; • guard distinct atmosphere in coastal area; and • uphold sustainable development by assessing the dangers caused coastal hazards due to global warming (Ministry of Environment & Forests) Though the CRZ framework acknowledges the importance of fishing communities, it lacks gender-specific language or provisions that address the unique roles women play in coastal economies and resilience in disaster displacement

India has relied on hard engineering solutions, including the construction of seawalls, groins, and revetments, to address coastal erosion. In Kerala alone, more than ₹310 crore has been allocated to erect seawalls along approximately 386 kilometres of its 560-kilometer coastline. Though these interventions are intended to provide immediate shoreline protection, they frequently result in unintended geomorphological consequences, such as the exacerbation of erosion in adjacent, unprotected coastal stretches. (Shaji et al. 1751) These site-specific constructions can trigger an environmental blow by interrupting natural sediment transport dynamics. Soft engineering strategies as dune restoration, artificial reef installation, and vegetative beach replantation, offer more ecologically sustainable and adaptive responses to coastal erosion. Despite its proven effectiveness, such nature-based solutions remain significantly underutilized in India’s coastal management frameworks.

6.HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH ON DISPLACEMENT

During a disaster, victims undergo the acute form of human rights violations, like inequitable distribution of assistance, exploitation, violence, and discrimination in compensation, during the rehabilitation process. In addition, several people were also displaced due to natural disasters. They experienced human rights abuses like discrimination and violations of economic, social, and cultural rights. The Operational Guidelines on Human Rights and Natural Disasters were adopted by the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to guide how to uphold and safeguard the rights of survivors of calamities. It underscores the inherent obligation of the country to guarantee the safety and protection of its citizens, particularly those affected by disaster-induced displacement. It categorizes rights into four practical domains, requiring the state to ensure in all disaster management steps. The inherent obligation of the state to ensure the safety and protection of its citizens, particularly those affected by displacement due to disasters. They are

A.Rights to Physical Security and Integrity: These include safeguarding protection from all exploitation and other forms of discriminatory acts, upholding the right to have a dignified life

B.Rights to Necessities: These consist of the right to equitable access to essential resources such as food, clean water, housing, health, and hygiene facilities.

C.Rights to Economic, Social, and Cultural Protection: This category includes access to education, compensation for lost property, and opportunities for alternative employment.

D.Rights to Civil and Political Protection: These include freedom of speech, right to religion, participation in policy decisions, legal aid, and protection against discrimination.(Inter-Agency Standing Committee)

International human rights principles guide preparedness measures, emergency relief and rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts in disaster risk management. However, state disaster mechanisms have failed to meet this holistic expectation for the protection of marginalized groups. By disproportionate impact on women, coastal disasters pose a major risk to the full spectrum of human rights. It does not consider the specific concerns of the affected people, especially in a displacement context. The human rights mechanism in the state stands still in the acute violation of human rights in hazard-related displacement. Hence, the state has the responsibility to ensure rights-based disaster strategies.

7. PROBLEMS FACED BY DISPLACED WOMEN DURING COASTAL DISASTERS IN INDIA

Neglecting the human rights of displaced people means ignoring the fact that such people do live in countries with laws, rules, and institutions that protect their rights. They provided protection and assistance at the time of risk. They should also be supported either to return to their original lands and property safely, or be assisted to integrate locally in the area to which they fled, or to settle elsewhere in the country. While international and national frameworks recognize the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), the realization of these rights remains asymmetrical and frequently inadequate for women from traditional fishing communities. They encountered the following problems:

A. Discriminatory Relief and Documentation Practices

The patriarchal practices prevail in rural coastal areas, considering women as property of men and never giving them property rights. Household ownership records are always in the name of a male household member. So, displaced women, particularly widows and single women, face systematic exclusion from relief documentation and entitlement registers following coastal disasters. (Ramanathan and Achuthan) They also have restricted access to entitlements under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and Aadhaar-linked social security schemes. These lead to discriminatory treatment of displaced women throughout the relief, recovery, and rehabilitation stages. ("Effects of Coastal Erosion" 25) In Odisha's resettlement colonies, relocated families received agricultural plots, but patriarchal norms often exclude women from ownership.

B. Gender-Based Violence and Insecurity

The emergency shelters in coastal disaster zones are overcrowded, which creates an unsafe environment for women. Failing to ensure privacy and security, it exposes women to harassment, abuse including rape, sexual assault, gender-based violence (GBV) including intimate partner violence (IPV), and human trafficking. (Kapur 114) For instance, IPV increased dramatically after the 2004 tsunami and floods in states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Bihar. The post-2018 Kerala floods also witnessed a 25% spike in GBV incidents. (Chowdhury and Agarwal)

C. Disruption of Livelihood and Economic Disempowerment

Displacement disrupts livelihoods such as fish processing, coastal agriculture, and informal trade. They do not receive adequate compensation in proportion to the loss of livelihood, which deepens their impoverishment. Women face greater challenges in securing alternative employment due to social norms restricting their mobility and work outside the home. Women's responsibilities increase post-disaster, including caring for family members and managing scarce resources, which often worsen their economic status. The state strategies are insufficient to give recovery support to the displaced women.(Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute)Displacement weakens women's social status and negotiating power within families and communities. Widows and orphaned girls become particularly vulnerable to neglect, forced marriages, and exploitation.After Cyclone Aila (2009), women in the Sundarbans faced livelihood collapse, with a 20–25% increase in migration to Kolkata's red-light districts as sex workers. The state rehabilitation programs after the 2018 Kerala floods prioritized predominantly male-dominated sectors, marginalizing women entrepreneurs.(Centre for Development Studies)

D. Inadequate Health and Sanitation Infrastructure

In disaster-induced displacement scenarios, women disproportionately face neglect in sanitation, menstrual hygiene management, maternal healthcare, and psychological support. The collapse of the local economy and scarcity of food further aggravate women's health vulnerabilities. The denial of access to reproductive health services to displaced women resulted in unplanned pregnancies and maternal mortality. In Sundarbans, displacement severely affects the menstrual hygiene of women, due to an inadequate supply of sanitary products in temporary shelters.(Shaji et al. 35)

E. Arbitrary Displacement and Lack of Consultation

Coastal infrastructural projects such as port expansions and seawall constructions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala frequently displace communities without adequate consultation. Women are displaced without free prior and informed consent, violating their right to have a dignified. Displacement disproportionately affects women who typically lack formal land ownership, as they receive inadequate or no compensation.(Forest Rights Act)

F. Lack of Legal and Institutional Support

Illiteracy and limited awareness of their rights obstruct women's access to legal aid and disaster relief programs in displacement. Even if they are being discriminated against in compensation or aid distribution, they are subjected to gender based violence, they do not get any legal protection. Police and disaster response systems are often insensitive or unresponsive to women's specific needs, with a lack of female officers intensifying the problem.

G. Psychological and Cultural Dislocation

Forced displacement disrupts their bond with a community where they have lived before the disaster and severed traditional societal roles. This severely affecting women's mental health, resulting in mental trauma. Though a 2020 study by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) revealed that 65% of women in flood-affected regions experienced significant mental distress, the disaster response system has no mental health provision. (Indian Council of Medical Research)

H. Structural Gaps in Governance and Participation

The traditional patriarchal system always upholds men's dominant role in decision-making in society, which makes women voiceless. During the disaster-related displacement, women's needs and voices in disaster planning and recovery are discarded as men dominate all. They do not have representation or participation in decision-making, as the gender mainstreaming in State Disaster Management Plans (SDMPs) remains minimal. (UN Women) The lack of sex-disaggregated data further obstructs effective, gender-sensitive disaster response planning.

I Judicial Recognition but Administrative Apathy

While the Supreme Court judgment in *Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*, reiterate women's equal right to inheritance with men administrative practices continue to favor male beneficiaries. The displaced women were denied compensation or other rehabilitation support notably under schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), due to persistent patriarchal norms in property registration. (*Vineeta Sharma v. Rakesh Sharma*)

These reveal that women in India facing coastal disaster-induced displacement encounter multiple rights violations rooted in socio-cultural, economic, and systemic factors. These

violations span physical safety, legal rights, economic opportunities, and health access, exacerbated by patriarchal norms and inadequate disaster response mechanisms. Addressing these gaps gender-sensitive and rights-based approach is crucial for planning, recovery and rehabilitation frameworks.

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARD A GENDER-RESPONSIVE COASTAL DISPLACEMENT FRAMEWORK IN INDIA

India necessitates a paradigm shift from reactive, gender-neutral disaster responses to inclusive and gender-sensitive frameworks. This will address the pervasive human rights violations endured by women in the context of coastal displacement. Factors like climatic conditions, unsustainable development, and unscientific intervention lead to displacement in coastal areas.. So, a multi-layered policy approach is essential to protect and empower women by dismantling their structural vulnerabilities.

A. Establishing a Rights-Based Policy Framework

- Align disaster management frameworks with international commitments, like CEDAW, the Sendai Framework, andSDG.
- Implement planned retreat or relocation to safeguard cultural and economic continuity.

B. Enhancing Data Infrastructure for Evidence-Based Policy

- Establish vigorous systems for collecting gender-disaggregated data to identify and address women's vulnerabilities.
- Prioritize intersectional research focusing on marginalized groups, including widows, single women, fisherwomen, Dalit, and Adivasi women.
- Conduct studies to track the impacts of coastal displacement on women's economic security, mental health, and social mobility.

C. Economic Empowerment Initiatives

- Provide context-specific vocational training and skill development programs to enhance women's financial empowerment.
- Facilitate women's access to financial support such as microfinance, low-interest loans, and unconditional cash transfers.

- Prioritize recovery assistance for sectors traditionally dominated by women, including fish processing, coastal agriculture, and handicrafts.

D. Reforming Relief and Resettlement Infrastructure

- Design gender-sensitive relief camps with secure spaces, adequate sanitation, maternal care, and privacy facilities.
- Ensure effective representation of women in disaster management committees, resettlement planning, and grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Adopt culturally sensitive and community-driven relocation strategies to protect women's social and cultural identities.

E. Legal and Institutional Reforms

- Start mobile legal aid services and paralegal networks to simplify women's access to land titles, compensation, and rehabilitation entitlements.
- Strengthen mechanisms to address gender-based violence through robust reporting, psychosocial support, and legal assistance to the victims
- Enforce joint land titling and promote equal property rights for women under rehabilitation schemes.

F. Integrated Healthcare and Psychosocial Support

- Include comprehensive reproductive health care, menstrual hygiene management, and trauma-informed services in disaster health responses.
- Develop community-based psychosocial networks, peer support groups, and mobile mental health services for displaced women.
- Provide essential Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) facilities in the camp.

G. Climate Resilience and Environmental Security

- Build eco-resilient, cyclone-proof, and flood-resistant infrastructure according to NDMA guidelines.
- Provide gender-sensitive disaster education and preparedness training, emphasizing women's roles in early warning systems and ecological stewardship.

- Encourage nature-based solutions, such as mangrove afforestation and coral reef protection, to mitigate coastal hazards and support women's livelihoods.

H. Institutionalizing Inclusive Disaster Governance

- Enforce mandatory gender representation quotas in disaster governance structures and technical working groups.
- Foster collaborative partnerships among government, NGOs, and community organizations to co-create inclusive disaster governance models.
- Mandate comprehensive gender-sensitivity training for all disaster response personnel, guided by Sphere Standards and Sendai Framework guidelines.

9. CONCLUSION

The impacts of coastal displacement on women represent a profound constitutional and human rights crisis in India. The persistent exclusion of women from equitable disaster relief, rehabilitation, and planning shows systemic institutional failures. Women displaced by coastal disasters encounter severe injustices such as economic disempowerment, landlessness, gender-based violence, insufficient healthcare, legal marginalization, and exclusion from governance. These issues reflect entrenched structural inequalities rather than isolated policy failures.

Disaster response mechanisms in India are inadequate for addressing the complex, intersecting dimensions of coastal displacement. While the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and institutions such as the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) indicate incremental progress, they fall short of fully integrating gender-responsive, rights-based, and ecologically supported strategies. Additionally, the lack of harmonization between domestic policies and international obligations, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Sendai Framework, and the Sustainable Development Goals, intensifies the vulnerability of marginalized women.

To overcome these shortcomings, India must fundamentally restructure its displacement governance frameworks. Since displacement has a high impact on livelihoods, identity, culture, and dignity of the disaster victims in the coastal area, the formulation of policy on displacement due to coastal erosion is crucial. A transformative policy approach should centre women's experiences and uphold social justice, environmental stewardship, and participatory democracy.

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