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Organization/Institution

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Occupation

Founder & Programme Director

Please choose the theme

2 Women's Empowerment

Please briefly describe your organisation

EMIC Culture Union is a charity organization, registered in Hong Kong, which advocates the concept of cultural diversity. We place culture at the heart of development, promoting the role of cultural heritage as a source of poverty alleviation. We work mainly in regions of different ethnic groups where women are culturally submissive. Women and children are the main beneficiaries whom we are working with.

Statement Title

Gender & Cultural sensitivity in humanitarian & development work

Statement (600 words limit)

It has been great honor to be here to share our front line experience in humanitarian work regarding women as beneficiaries as well as actor of humanitarian action. I hope my sharing will motivate deeper discussion on gender awareness and equality issues in humanitarian action.

Women are always directly affected and displaced when facing natural disaster or internal displacement. Natural disasters happen quite coincidentally in regions of ethnic minorities. Such regions have therefore been regarded also as priority migration regions by the Chinese government. Over 70% of various ethnic minorities are living in the most remote and poor regions in China. According to Chinese Seismic Information, in 2013 nearly 70% of earthquakes over 5 magnitude in the Richter Scale were situated in the western provinces like Yunnan and Sichuan, where ethnic minorities are located.¹ In these poor ethnic minority regions, women are culturally doomed to be submissive. Most women were left behind with the poultry and old people in their home village, when the men are forced to rush to eastern coastal cities to hunt for more cash. Therefore, it is not difficult to imagine that women are the main actors facing everyday difficulties. The situation would become imminent when natural disasters strike.

Under such culture context, years of humanitarian action experience points to areas of three importance. We see humanitarian work as a holistic framework which includes the three components---preparedness, the immediate response and resilience empowerment. Therefore, women as beneficiaries and actors of humanitarian action can be realistically subjected to administrative and operational principles as well as advocates gender awareness and equality. Thus, women and girls can take part in preparation for and response to crises. They are not passive recipients of humanitarian assistance and protection; rather they are engaged as agents of change in all preparedness, response and recovery efforts and empowered. Secondly, our action is culturally sensitive humanitarian action. Humanitarian action processes are changing perceptions of women's and men's life cycles and social participation as well as pattern of gender relations. On equity grounds women can no longer be discriminated against and at the same time efficiency criteria call for much better use women's productive capacities as a means of improving the quality of life for all.

Gender sensitive activities can be more flexible when humanitarian action framework covers the whole period of preparedness, immediate response and resilience empowerment. It is sometimes difficult and operationally unrealistic to pinpoint gender sensitive issues during

emergency response, as donors usually are more inclined to ensure their support for humanitarian action would respond to the needs of the most affected population, rather than the social agenda of gender equity.² However, humanitarian actors are able to diverge partly the resources for training preparedness and resilience empowerment. We invest most of our input in training for preparedness. However, gender sensitivity is regarded as a very importance and fundamental theme in preparedness training, especially in capacity building and organizational development. Women get involved in routine organizational participation have created a cultural habit of engagement which would enhance the agents of change, namely, the women themselves, during emergency response and resilience development.

Culturally sensitive humanitarian action is a process of changing perceptions of women's and men's life cycles and social participation as well. Women's role and social contribution as a mother has been undermined by economic/income indicator. However, humanitarian action allows a good start of gender sensitive project designed according to our field experience. Our field assessment would facilitate discussion to focus on the need of the family from a mother's perspective, resulting in a very different needs outcome. During such process, the father is more inclined to see the family need as basic, rather than seeing himself as a figure possessing the ability to getting resources ready for reallocation to his wife. Gender equity is built upon a healthy pattern of gender relations.

The positive role of women as beneficiaries and actors of humanitarian action has rather resulted in restructuring and redefining work according to women's vision, in order to fashion a new society for women and men based on women's experience and skills as care-givers and child-bearer.