WHO Conference on Health Aspects of Tsunami Disaster in Asia

Phuket, Thailand
4–6 May 2005
Mortality and the Gender Bias in Aceh

Dr Ines Smyth
Oxfam Great Britain
The Silencing of Women

• Women are often ‘silenced’
• Discrimination and abuses of rights lead to a female deficit in many Asian countries
• Gender bias of disasters may contribute to the deficit and to the ultimate silencing of women
The Biases of the Tsunami

• Earthquakes cause more injuries, floods (including those associated with tsunami) more deaths

• The effects are worst for those living in the poorest countries

• The poor are disproportionately affected by severe impacts, including loss of life
I Love You
Mama Room
And Gender?

- In Aceh 126,602 people were killed and 93,638 are missing
- Lack of systematic sex disaggregated data raises questions about connectedness of responses
- What about appropriateness, adequacy, and efficiency?
Some Examples

- In four villages in Aceh Besar, of 676 survivors only 189 were women, in 4 villages in north Aceh of 366 people dead, 77% were women.

- For Tamil Nadu: in Nagapattinam 2,406 women, compared to 1,883 men died; In Cuddalore 391 women versus 146 men.
The Consequences of the Gender Bias in Mortality in Aceh

*Immediate consequences*

- Women’s reduced numbers contribute to their poor participation in relief, at all levels
- Reported physical and sexual violence against women
- Men have lost wives, daughters and sisters
The Consequences of the Gender Bias in Mortality in Aceh

Disaster preparedness

• Only accurate information allow for disaster preparedness of adequate scale and sophistication (beyond ‘teaching women to swim’).
The Consequences of the Gender Bias in Mortality in Aceh

*Long term consequences*

- Early marriage and frequent pregnancies endanger reproductive health and have a deleterious effect on girls’ education
- Land rights of survivors and of descendants of deceased women may be neglected
- Where women are a minority they will be more vulnerable to gender based violence
Recommendations

• **Always** disaggregate disaster statistics by gender.
• Long-term comparative research on demographic trends, gender aspects of livelihood, property rights, violence etc.
• Women’s participation must mean: addressing the dominance of men in leadership, a mind shift from perceiving women as ‘vulnerable victims’ to one recognising their skills and rights.