Women Rebuilding their Communities: 2019-2020 Evaluation & Learnings

Advocating for Resilient Communities

FONDO SEMILLAS
30 AÑOS JUNTAS SEMBRANDO IGUALDAD

Contenido

Foreword I

Executive summary 2

I. INTRODUCTION 6

a) The 2017 earthquakes in Mexico 6

b) The WRC 6

c) The research: objectives, methodology and limitations 10

d) Why focus on women? 12

e) Key concepts: community / resilience / risk culture / feminisms 16

II. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 17

Part one - Grantee-partners 21

a) Repositioning women's roles: from informal and invisible, to participation in the open 22

b) Developing new capacities and solidarities together 25

c) The challenges of strengthening the social fabric of communities 27

d) Beyond housing: recovery of livelihood and economic autonomy 28

e) Prevention and preparedness for future disasters: towards a shift in risk awareness 30

Part two - WRC 33

a) WRC contribution to the field of reconstruction: perspectives from allies 34

b) The accompaniment model (strengths, challenges and learnings): perspectives from the WRC team 36

III. RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: MAKING THE CASE FOR A LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR FONDO SEMILLAS 38

1.Our disaster framework 39

a) Disasters are human-made: calling for preventive and proactive strategies 40

b) Disasters are cyclical: calling for a continuous and sustained strategy focused on building up communities' resilience 42

c) Disasters are collective: calling for community-led and participatory strategies 43

2. Key implications: Resilient Communities 45

a) Our model: community leadership 45

b) Our strength: people-focused 46

c) Our perimeter: key guardrails 47

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM WRC TO RESILIENT COMMUNITIES 49

a) Organizational structure for Resilient Communities as a program area 50

b) Profiles of grantee-partners under Resilient Communities 50

c) Implications for the different operational areas within Fondo Semillas 53

d) Introducing Resilient Communities to external audiences 56

V. CONCLUSION 57

APPENDIX 59

REFERENCES 60

Foreword

In September 2017, Mexico was struck by two earthquakes and their aftershocks, creating a humanitarian emergency that the country had not seen since 1985. Even though this is a seismic country, nobody was prepared for such a strong shake, nor for its consequences.

Fondo Semillas, a feminist fund that supports women's groups to advance women's rights, had never responded to an emergency before. Yet, the magnitude of the disaster moved us to formulate a program that would not only respond to our mission but also to the needs of the affected communities. Thus, Women Rebuilding their Communities was born.

Throughout this process, we got to know some incredible women in different Mexican communities and, as our first program responding to an emergency, we learned so much. Mainly, that disasters take a very long time to overcome and that, as a fund, we need to continue improving the way we provide support to groups rebuilding their communities. We asked Eva Didier, an external evaluator who already knew Fondo Semillas' methodology, to evaluate our program with two objectives. The first was to analyze whether we had accomplished our initial goals and identify the areas of improvement. The second was to map out, seeing that disasters take a long time to overcome, whether Fondo Semillas should continue supporting recovery efforts and, if so, in which areas.

We want to thank all our generous donors that trusted us in implementing a recovery program even though we did not have the experience, and all our allies for strengthening our grantee-partners and Fondo Semillas. We are extremely satisfied with how the communities we supported have advanced in their reconstruction and are eager to keep on improving our program.

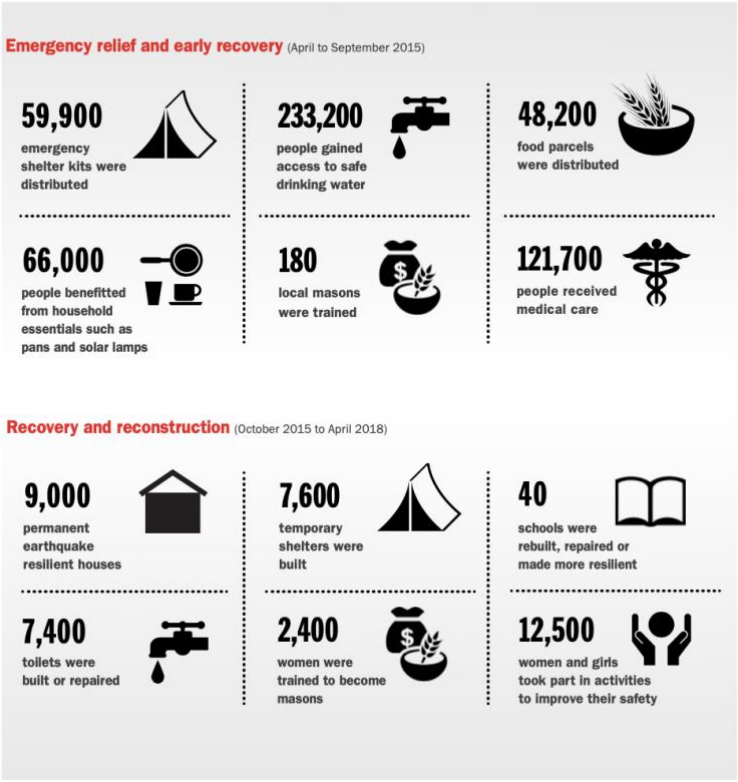
We hope that, by reading this report, you will learn more about our experience and the incredible work that so many women carried out in the last year and a half. We also hope that this evaluation and its findings can help all of us in the philanthropic sector when responding to a new emergency.

Sincerely,

Florencia Bluthgen
Head of Programs - Fondo Semillas

Executive summary

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



This study set out to evaluate the WRC fund (Women Rebuilding their Communities) by interviewing its stakeholders (grantee-partners, Fondo Semillas team, donors and allies). It also examined the achievements and challenges encountered within the program in light of the latest literature available on similar projects carried out around the world, in order to keep enriching the state of knowledge around women and reconstruction, for women's movements and the philanthropic community. In so doing, this research identified eight key findings:

1. The importance of contextualizing the meaning and practice of community rebuilding

A common pitfall highlighted by literature concerning post-disaster reconstruction is to address all women as one homogenous group (in the rare cases where they are singled out as a separate 'group of interest'!). In other words, there is a tendency to promote a universal narrative of reconstruction that tends to collapse and homogenize all women's reconstruction experiences. However, as we found in this research, universalization is problematic at several levels. Not only does it erase the specificity and diversity of women's lived experiences, but it also ignores the way that gender intersects with other key variables such as race, class, age, ethnicity, and education. These factors can be crucial for programming strategies and subsequent capacity building. Fundamentally, narrative universalization fails to recognize the key dimension of context and its impact on the different practices that shape community building. Typically, some of our women's groups operate in contexts that have a long-standing tradition of 'making community together' (such as *tequio* in the isthmus of Oaxaca, which consists of unpaid, collaborative work between neighbors); whereas other women's groups operate in more urban environments, and their sense of community is more dependent upon length of residence and sharing a sense of belonging to the same neighborhood. Variations in

contexts influence the type of activities women's groups favor with the women constituents in their communities, or what progress may look like in said communities.

2. While challenging, cultivating bridging networks is crucial to recovery

The latest research in reconstruction and resilience dynamics stresses the importance of bonding networks (family, close relatives) and bridging networks (neighbors, distant relatives) in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, but it highlights how bridging networks tend to endure less well than bonding ones over time. The gap is further increased by the competition between individuals to access aid and/or governmental compensation. While this rise of individualism was witnessed by many of the WRC women's groups and proved to be a challenge for some of the groups initially, it appeared to recede over time, with women across different families and even across different neighborhoods, villages or towns starting to organize and collaborate. This was the case across the different types of projects: economic reactivation projects with the perspective of shared economic gain and stability allowed to transcend neighbors' rivalries; community development projects with shared activities enabled women to share their knowledge and learnings (e.g., sharing tips with other women in their communities on how to rebuild ovens); mental health recovery projects allowed women to relate to one another in collective empathy to overcome their traumas.

3. Beyond housing projects, funding economic reactivation is essential to ensure healing and long-term stability of communities

Securing a livelihood has been a basis for a sense of solidarity between women and building social stability over time. While recovery should not be conflated with economic rebuilding alone, the importance of economic reactivation allowing people to pursue a livelihood should not be underestimated. This is especially important in communities where women are the main or sole breadwinners due to extensive male migration, as well as in vulnerable rural environments where the community usually relies upon a single activity and is often uninsured in the event of a disaster. Given how better income support has been found in other disaster contexts to minimize the risks of relief dependence, supporting programs that are dedicated to income-generating activities and the strengthening of communities' economic resilience has been a significant contribution from the WRC fund.

4. Risk preparedness: gaps between perception and reality

While all grantee-partners received capacity-building related to risk preparedness, their perceptions of how prepared they felt varied significantly from one group to the next. Similarly, there was a gap between practical knowledge of immediate safety steps to take in the event of another disaster, and the perception of the grantee-partners' ability to cope. Several factors at play were identified here: 1/ minimizing or denial strategies as a psychological coping mechanism to deal with uncertainty and helplessness in anticipating future disasters; 2/ a distrust of authorities rooted in citizens' perceptions that the civil protection system was not working effectively, which has been linked to cultural fatalistic attitudes that can hamper disaster preparedness; 3/ the reliance on informal networks of communication and word-of-mouth versus official channels of communication or mainstream mass media during a critical

situation, which can act as an enabler or a barrier to perceived risk preparedness, depending on how solid bonding (family) and bridging (neighbors) networks are in a given community.

5. Community support does not automatically equate to an increase in women's leadership

This finding is correlated to a core insight from this research, which found that women's groups that carried out reconstruction activities aligned with traditional gender roles faced less opposition from within the community. Organizations which involved women in activities that traditionally fell in line with supposedly 'dedicated' women's areas of activity within the socio-cultural norms in a community (e.g., projects around recovering the means for women to bake *totopos* - traditional corn-baked tortillas) tended to meet least resistance within the communities of these women. A likely reason is that these activities neither questioned nor disrupted the status quo around women's assigned roles in the community. Additionally, these reconstruction activities were broadly similar to the ones women were carrying out pre-disaster. Conversely, groups that involved women in activities traditionally reserved for men (e.g., masonry) or had them lead the decision-making process (e.g., designing a kitchen and the distribution of elements inside it) were met with more opposition. This did not deter the women who had decided to get involved in these activities from the start, although it likely dissuaded further women from enrolling or voicing interest. Crucially, it could be that some women's groups contribute to increasing women's leadership while generating high opposition from within the community, or that a women's group gets ample in-community support, but still not enough to reconfigure women's access to leadership in their communities. This reveals the need to continue exploring whether community support truly brings about broader changes to gender dynamics and under which conditions.

6. Do not underestimate the importance of creating formal spaces dedicated to women during reconstruction

This research found that spaces dedicated to women were necessary to ensure recovery. Groups of women coming together, having the confidence to self-organize and achieve objectives they have set for themselves is a constitutive and essential step towards movement building; and while collective and participatory decision-making processes usually take more time, external partners and stakeholders must support them, as this is essential of activist organizing.

7. Women's groups operating under the themes of Community Development and Mental Health Recovery tend to align with key identifiable feminist issues that traverse women's movements more broadly

Women's groups whose reconstruction projects dealt with the stimulation of the social fabric within their communities (e.g., cultivating shared gardens together or developing community centers) or with mental health recovery projects (e.g., constitution of women's circles or spaces) often led women in these groups to discuss women's rights and to confront women's situations pre- and post-earthquake through a feminist perspective—assumed as such or not.

Community development projects tended to emphasize the role of women leading collective processes and the importance of women's participation outside the domestic sphere—a core component of feminist organizing. They also highlighted the conversion from participants to women's rights defenders. Mental health recovery projects focused on fighting post-traumatic stress disorder by breaking women's isolation, reinforcing self-esteem and sharing essential self-care practices—a topic that feminist movements have embraced to embed care practices within organizations in order to reinforce the security of defenders and ensure the sustainability of movement building.

8. Fondo Semillas' disaster framework

This research allowed us to build and refine our conceptual understanding of disaster, with implications in terms of strategies and programming for Fondo Semillas. 1/Disasters are human-made. In the context of disaster, there is a major pressure on long-standing vulnerabilities in infrastructure, amplified by migration and overpopulation in some areas, calling for a preventive and proactive approach. 2/Disasters are cyclical. In a context of increased global climate urgency, resilience is defined at the intersection of social and environmental justice. 3/Disasters are collective. They affect the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of communities in deep ways, not all visible or tangible in the immediate aftermath. Research shows that when intervention strategies are led from the grassroots communities that are primarily affected, rebuilding initiatives are more likely to have a long-lasting impact on communities.

I. INTRODUCTION

a) The 2017 earthquakes in Mexico

On September 7 and 19, 2017, Mexico was hit by **two earthquakes with magnitudes of 8.2 and 7.1**, respectively, that affected the states of **Chiapas**, **Mexico City**, **the State of Mexico**, **Guerrero**, **Morelos**, **Puebla and Oaxaca**[1]**.** Reports estimated that nearly 400 people were killed (with a high concentration of these deaths in Mexico City), almost 1% of houses in the country were destroyed and at least 73,000 buildings were damaged in Mexico City alone. The economic impact was estimated at a loss equivalent to between 0.1% and 0.3% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP)[2].

While there were severe damages in the capital, it is crucial to consider that other regions (Oaxaca and Puebla, for example) had less access to capital for recovery. This, paired with a heavily centralized government response, amplified the precarious position of these states to deal with the damages caused by the earthquakes.

'With the earthquakes, the response and mechanisms remain centralized and led by the discourse of the central government… and as we're slowly moving away from the 2017 events, the anniversaries are key moments to remind people that we still need to work on this.'
WRC ally, disaster expert

b) The WRC

After the earthquakes, Fondo Semillas got involved in the reconstruction effort. This decision was influenced by five key factors:

1. Several donors reached out with the intention to provide financial support for Fondo Semillas' grantee-partner organizations that had been affected. Progressively, a bigger grant pool emerged compared to initial assumptions.
2. From the early stages, it looked like the national government would not be able to tackle the emergency alone and that the response mechanisms in place lacked transparency, leaving government accountability not guaranteed;
3. In the initial post-earthquake stage, many people got together to help, and some started to join forces within women's groups—which Fondo Semillas wanted to encourage in order to keep strengthening civil society engagement.

---

1 For more information on the earthquakes and the damages caused, visit https://www.sismosmexico.org/mapas and https://public.tableau.com/profile/aga.kreglewska#!/vizhome/MX_Affected_Population-Lite/Dashboard

2 Mexico City government with 100 Resilient cities (2018): Aprender del Sismo para ser más resilientes, https://www.resiliencia.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/media/Publicaciones/aprender-del-sismo-para-ser-mas-resilientes.pdf

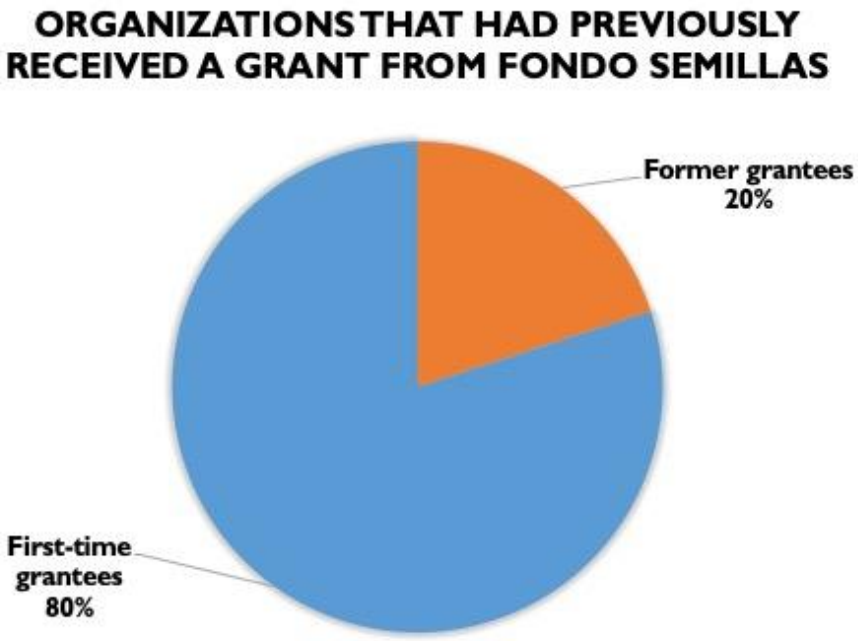
4. The geographical spread of damages involving the country's capital meant that the entirety of the not-for-profit sector was spurred into action (not just disaster specialist organizations), trying to find their own way to support recovery.
5. A mapping exercise conducted by the Fund shortly after the earthquakes showed that community groups, especially those led by women, were not being funded because priority was given to short-term housing reconstruction projects, leaving aside other key recovery needs such as economic revival, strengthening of social fabric within communities, and mental health.

Therefore, Fondo Semillas launched a formal call for donations under the initiative **Women Rebuilding their Communities (WRC, 'Mujeres reconstruyendo sus comunidades')**. In 2018, the WRC project was created to spearhead Fondo Semillas' response: provide long-lasting, sustainable accompaniment to the affected communities by supporting **women-led reconstruction projects**.

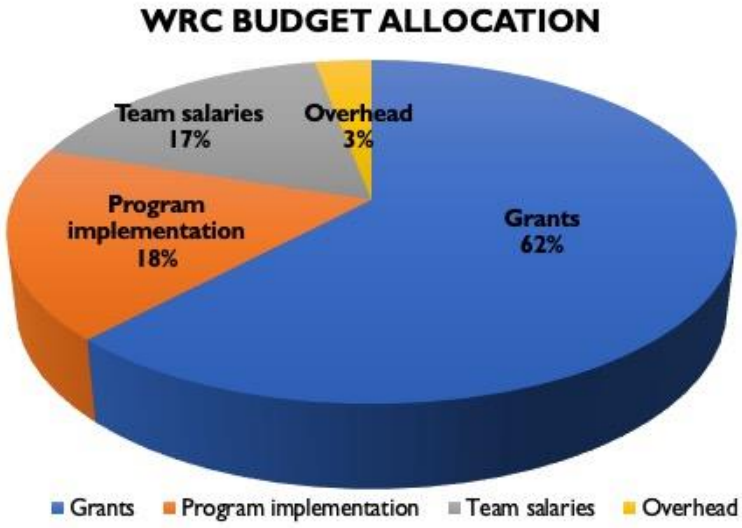
In line with Fondo Semillas' core mission, the WRC operated through a **feminist lens** and aimed at providing accompaniment and support to women's organizations that were involved in reconstruction processes. The WRC was a first-time initiative of this style for Fondo Semillas. While there was a strong interest and financial support from donors, this type of support focused on reconstruction after an event of this scale was not something the Fund had done before (although they had supported women's groups after hurricanes Ingrid and Manuel). Importantly, the objective of the WRC was not only to **strengthen women's organizations' capacities**—in terms of women's rights, strategic skills and knowledge around reconstruction, recovery and organizational capacity—but also to **reduce vulnerability to potential future disasters** by **fostering alliances** among organizations and other key actors in the field.

After a consultative phase mapping out key disaster actors nationally and conducting a diagnostic to assess needs from women on the ground in November and December 2017, the Fund began by consolidating its own alliances with various key actors, in particular with the organization Ambulante (which created the fund 'Levantemos Mexico' following the 2017 earthquakes to respond to the crisis), Oxfam México and the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Mexico This was followed by a call for proposals in 2018. Eighty-five applications from different organizations were received. Out of these, 51 organizations met the Fund's selection criteria. There was also a consultative selection process involving members from grassroots organizations allied to Fondo Semillas, some of the key disaster actors, and allies of the feminist movement in Mexico, all of which voted to determine which 25 organizations would receive a grant. One organization dropped out, bringing **the number of WRC-sponsored grantee-partners to 24**. The localization of the final set of women's groups reflected the areas that had been hit worst by the earthquakes, whilst also taking into account which regions were particularly exposed post-disaster due to underlying pre-existing vulnerabilities:

A notable difference in the application process of the WRC compared to that of Fondo Semillas was a greater flexibility in terms of the profile of organizations selected, as **groups without prior experience as an organization and that had existed for less than a year** were encouraged to apply. This was a deliberate decision to reflect that many women's groups had formed as a result of the earthquakes, and Fondo Semillas sought to strengthen civil society with this project. The flexibility in the application process allowed Fondo Semillas to successfully reach and support women's organizations with whom they had never worked before:



The WCR support started in July 2018 and lasted for all 24 women's groups until December 2019, with a one-year extension for 15 organizations. This extension was enabled by continuous fundraising while the WRC was being implemented. As of March 31, 2019, WRC's



total budget was of 17,382,444 MXN (approximately 880-900,000 USD) and allocated as follows

- Grants for the 24 women's groups.
- Program implementation: Costs dedicated to the implementation of the WRC accompaniment model. These included but were not limited to the compensation of allies imparting capacity-building workshops, Fondo Semillas' workshops, travel expenses for grantee-partners to attend meetings organized by Fondo Semillas and—in some cases—by other grantee-partners (in line with the alliance-building strategy), professional training, site visits conducted by the WRC to monitor progress or allow them to better curate capacity-building accompaniment, communication materials for the WRC, and the external evaluation of the program.
- Team salaries: These covered three positions within the WRC (Coordinator, Program Officer, and Administrator).

c) The research: objectives, methodology and limitations

Two objectives lead up to this research:

1. **Evaluate the Reconstruction project (WRC)** in order to learn whether the implemented strategies and accompaniment met the WRC objectives effectively.
2. **Explore the potential for replication of the WRC initiative within Fondo Semillas in the longer term** to establish whether a 'reconstruction' initiative should and could be retained by the Fund in the longer term. Analyze whether it strategically aligned with Fondo Semillas' vision, which capacities would be needed and how to implement lessons learnt from the WRC evaluation.

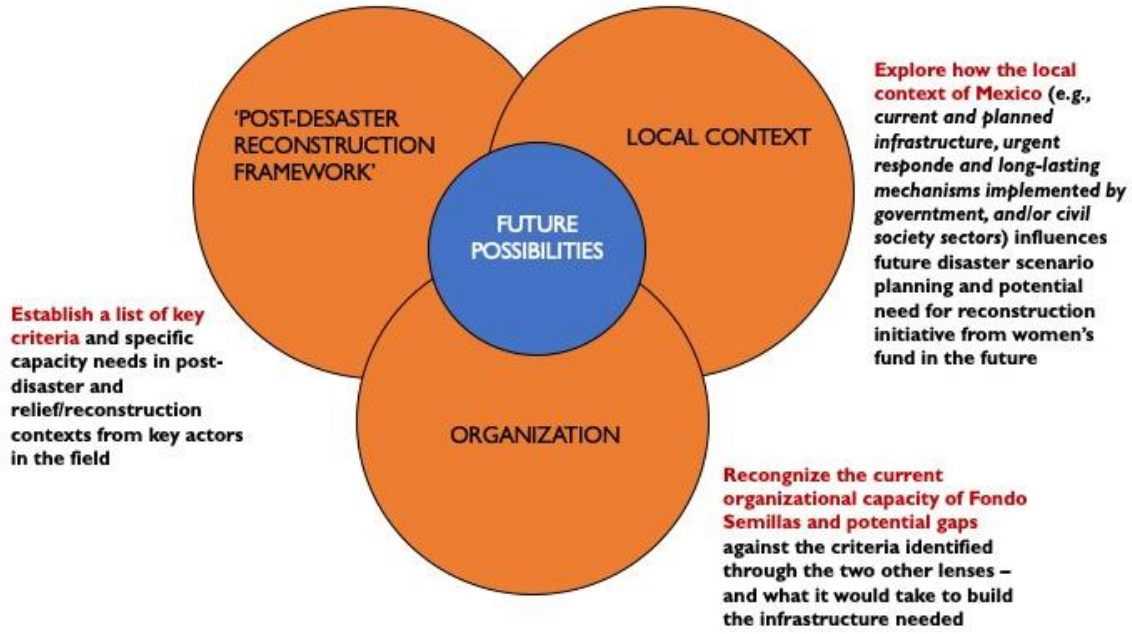
Under objective 1, we followed a four-stage methodology:
1. Define: an initial participatory kick-off session with Fondo Semillas and WRC team members and an internal review of key WRC documents.
2. Learn: in-depth interviews with the WRC and Fondo Semillas teams, diagnostic interviews with a sample of WRC grantee-partners, and interviews with the WRC disaster-reconstruction allied organizations.
3. Confirm: immersion ethnographies in the communities of two grantee-partners. The ethnographies included focus groups with the grantee-partner groups, community discussions with members of the community (men and women either directly or indirectly involved in activities of the women's groups), meetings with local authorities to explore their perceptions of the women's groups, and visits to grantee-partner projects and activities.
4. Enrich: follow-up closing interviews with grantee-partners and a final documentation review from the WRC (including end of grant final reports).

We adopted a small-scale longitudinal approach for this research. Longitudinal studies are particularly useful for understanding the evolution in time of certain processes by contrasting results with the same group or population at regular time intervals[3]. This approach allowed

[3] Moreno J and Shaw D (2018) Women's empowerment following disaster: a longitudinal study of social change. *Natural Hazards* 32: 205–224

us to provide a more 'real-time' picture in order to contextualize and better understand what had happened throughout the project.

Under objective 2, we designed a framework model focused on **learning** and **predicting**:



- For the post-disaster reconstruction framework component, we conducted interviews with post-disaster reconstruction experts across the world, as well a review of the latest research and evidence in disaster and gender literature.
- To map out the disaster context in Mexico, we used a scenario planning approach. Scenario planning is linked to future trend casting and foresight analysis. It is a process that raises questions about the future instead of looking back, searches for ways to map out where we are headed, and considers what possible futures await—both desirable and undesirable future scenarios. At its heart, scenario planning is asking two questions: **What insights would this future provide regarding where to invest resources and actions, now and over the coming years? What can these insights tell us about priorities to consider if we want this future to be a just one for women?** Scenario planning was pioneered by AWDF (African Women's Development Fund) to develop their strategic planning process[4].
- To establish the organizational capacity of the Fund, we used interviews conducted with Fondo Semillas and WRC teams under objective 1 to review which capacities were already in place within the organization and explored together what would be needed to fill in gaps in terms of capacities, infrastructures, team skills, and others.

To analyze our findings, **abductive reasoning**, as defined in a paper developed by the Global Fund for Community Foundations, was prioritized: 'Abductive reasoning addresses weaknesses associated with deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive reasoning is

[4] AWDF (2016): Africa Futures https://awdf.org/futures/

criticized for the lack of clarity in terms of how to select theory to be tested via formulating hypotheses. Inductive reasoning, on the other hand, is criticized because no amount of empirical data will necessarily enable theory-building. Abductive reasoning, as a third option, overcomes these weaknesses via adopting a pragmatist perspective. **The abductive researcher seeks to choose the 'best' explanation based on the evidence. Conclusions are interpreted in the light of what is the best action to be taken to meet the underlying perceptions and values of people involved in the work**'[5]. Abductive reasoning takes on a more pragmatic perspective on findings. Hence, we were able to **contextualize the empirical data provided by the WRC evaluation** by contrasting them with similar experiences around the globe. This was key to help build knowledge and contribute to the field of women in post-disaster reconstruction, which is why this report references other work and literature in the field.

Finally, it is important to highlight the limitations of this research:

- **Adapted participatory research**: The selection of grantee-partners to interview was based on recommendations from the WRC team. This was decided in conjunction with the researcher and based on an informed judgment of who would be better suited to participate in this type of research. It was designed to mix organizations that had carried out their projects successfully, with others who had struggled, to make sure we learned from all. Additionally, while we conducted all interviews in Spanish[6], full language inclusivity was not achieved because many community members of women's groups and the constituents of their community have a different primary language.

- **Size of sample and statistical significance**: We did not speak to the 24 organizations supported by the WRC. We reviewed documents (auto-diagnostic, work plans, mid-term and final reports) for all of them and interviewed or visited 8 of them (about 33% of the total sample).

- **Cultural equivalence**: To our knowledge, much of the literature available on women's participation in post-disaster settings does not focus on Mexico, particularly regarding risk culture and its relationship to attitudes and beliefs in terms of disaster preparedness. While learnings can still be contrasted and compared, we have to be careful in deriving definitive learnings, as cultural contexts do not simply translate into the same diagnostics, nor the same solutions.

d) Why focus on women?

There are three key reasons:

- **Women's and girls' vulnerabilities in disasters are different from those of men** due to pre-existing structural inequalities.

---

[5] Knight B (2019) Systems to shift the power. *Global Fund for Community Foundations* (31). Available at: https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SystemsToShiftThePower.pdf

[6] English was used in interviews with donors and some allies

- **Women's and girls' specific needs in post-disaster settings and reconstruction go ignored,** leading to further violence.
- **Women's and girls' contributions in reconstruction are not recognized nor valued and therefore remain hidden**, perpetuating the vicious circle of patriarchy.

Women's and girls' vulnerabilities in disasters are different from those of men due to pre-existing structural inequalities

There is widespread evidence that when natural hazards occur, women and girls are particularly vulnerable—especially among the lower socio-economic classes in the Global South[7] (alongside other groups: the elderly, people with disabilities, children, migrant populations[8]). The statistics are grim: 'In the 1991 cyclone disasters that killed 140,000 people in Bangladesh, 90% of victims were women. In 2008, among the 130,000 people dead or missing in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, 61% were women'[9]. **This is linked to traditional gender roles women and girls occupy in society, which lead to a lack of 'assets' that they can rely on in an emergency**. For example:

- **Not all women and girls have the opportunity—or are allowed—to learn skills** (e.g., swimming or climbing) that may be crucial for survival during natural hazards.
- **Patriarchal norms police women's clothing**; thus, women's clothes impede their ability to move quickly and easily when fleeing from danger.
- **Women and girls are the main caregivers for relatives at home** (e.g., children and older adults), which means they tend to be responsible for the safety and care of others during an emergency.

Women´s and girls' specific needs in post-disaster settings and reconstruction go ignored, leading to further violence against them

- **Caregivers for all**: In the aftermath of a disaster, it generally falls upon women to look after the sick, injured, children, elderly, among others, in addition to carrying out their usual domestic chores. This responsibility creates a greater burden on their time and health.
- **Economic tensions**: If the main breadwinner (often the male head of household) is killed or forced to migrate, women need to seek paid employment in a context where opportunities scarce, creating fertile ground for labor exploitation. Moreover, women still have to take care of the household, and a domino effect is sometimes observed.

---

7 For more information: Center for Disaster Philanthropy 'Women and Girls in Disaster' https://disasterphilanthropy.org/issue-insight/women-and-girls-in-disasters/

8 World Disasters Report (2018) Leaving no one behind: The international humanitarian sector must do more to respond to the needs of the world's most vulnerable people. Available at https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2018-world-disasters-report-leaving-no-one-behind

9 World Health Organization (2014) Gender, Climate Change and Health. Available at https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/reports/gender_climate_change/en/

Girls are pulled out of school to take care of the household while their mother pursues paid work outside of the house: 'It is more difficult for them to re-establish their livelihoods because of their dependence on household-based economic activities (e.g., food processing, rearing the livestock, and poultry). There are limited work opportunities available for women outside the home in the rural areas. (…) Women are also disadvantaged in competition for community relief goods provided in public places, because cultural norms limit their ability to advocate for themselves in public places'[10].

- **Land ownership laws**: Due to tenure laws in many countries, it is common that women do not have the legal right to own property, and/or do not have land ownership documentation in their names. This means they are less likely to inherit land in case the male head of household dies. This point was particularly crucial in the aftermath of the 2017 earthquakes in Mexico, as support was provided to those who could demonstrate land ownership.
- **Barriers to access financial aid compensation**: Due to a lack of viable identity documentation, it is extremely difficult for women to access cash handouts that are sometimes distributed by government authorities as compensation. 'Women and girls are often discriminated against in registration procedures for the issuance of new, renewed or modified IDs. For example, a female head of household may find it difficult to renew IDs for her children without also showing the father's IDs—creating a sometimes-insurmountable barrier if the woman is divorced, widowed or otherwise separated from her husband'[11].
- **Sexual and gender-based violence**: It is increasingly recognized that little attention is paid to the risks and realities of gender-based violence in post-disaster settings (versus in refugees camps during armed conflicts, for example), and to the considerable delay in women reporting this violence (when they do) due to a lack of access to essential services and support structures. 'This lack of awareness means that basic measures to prevent further incidents of sexual and gender-based violence, and efforts to provide protection, assistance and services to survivors are not adequately prioritized and implemented in disaster settings'[12]. Some WRC grantee-partner organizations witnessed this form of violence when assisting women who felt unsafe or at risk in mixed-gender shelters. Additionally, when families who had lost housing after the earthquakes moved in with relatives, the proximity and overcrowded quarters often resulted in an increased risk of sexual violence.
- **Pregnancy and childbirth as aggravating factors of vulnerabilities**: In the context of post-disaster settings, women generally do not receive the health and obstetric care they need and may live in unsanitary conditions, putting them at greater risk during pregnancy and childbirth.

---

[10] Islam R and Walkerden G (2014) How bonding and bridging networks contribute to disaster resilience and recovery on the Bangladeshi coast. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 10(A): 281-291

[11] World Disasters Report (2018) Leaving no one behind: The international humanitarian sector must do more to respond to the needs of the world's most vulnerable people. Available at https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2018-world-disasters-report-leaving-no-one-behind: 35

[12] Ibid: 42

Women´s and girls' contributions in reconstruction are not recognized nor valued and therefore remain hidden, perpetuating the vicious circle of patriarchy

- **Exclusion from planning, designing and repair processes** (including in spaces considered as 'women's spheres'): Despite women's central role in the home, their opinions and needs are largely ignored when it comes to reconstruction. This is supported by literature[13] and empirical evidence from the WRC grantee-partners, as many reported how the authorities responsible for assessing damages sometimes ignored those caused to kitchens or, ovens. This is, unfortunately, a common occurrence: 'In post-tsunami Sri Lanka, women had no say in temporary housing design. As a result, dwellings were constructed without any kitchen facilities. The lack of safe cooking areas led to smoke and fire hazards'[14].
- **Lack of involvement prevents women from identifying disaster risk factors for themselves**: This perpetuates the absence of adequate preparedness in case of replicas or other natural hazards.
- **Invisible and hidden in official governmental datasets**: The lack of official statistics broken down by sex or gender in many countries essentially erases the specific, unique aspects of women's situations and makes it much harder to take sex or gender into consideration when conducting research, or to learn about how disasters affect women differently and which solutions can have more impact. 'A reading of community-based disaster preparedness plans in the visited communities showed that the plans were gender-neutral/blind—there was no specific mention of women's sex- or gender-specific vulnerabilities. Data in the majority of the plans did not capture the women-headed households, pregnant women/girls, number of midwives, displaced households and status of women within them, persons with disabilities with gender-disaggregation, number of extremely poor and asset-starved families, especially those without male support, and the critical needs of women and adolescent girls during disasters'[15].
- **Women's organizing is still not firmly established**: In some places, it is still often uncommon for women to have the autonomy to step out of their homes and gather, which impairs collective organizing—a critical skill in the context of reconstruction.

---

[13] 'Gender concerns also were missing from the reconstruction and community-participation strategies. Despite women's central role in the home and their related work, they were categorically ignored and socially excluded from planning, design, and repair processes associated with the recovery of their homes and local communities'; Yonder A, Akcar S and Gopalan P (2005) Women's Participation in Disaster Relief and Recovery. *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives* 15: 11

[14] Chew L and N. Ramdas K (2005) Caught in the storm: the impact of Natural disasters on women. *The Global Fund for women* Available at https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/11/disaster-report.pdf

[15] Pincha C (2019) Women's Voices & Agencies in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction: Facilitating Factors & Constraints from the Experiences of the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium. *AFGHANISTAN RESILIENCE CONSORTIUM (ARC) (ARC) and UK AID (UK AID)*

These factors lead to a cycle in which **natural hazards reveal and aggravate structural inequalities that affect women daily**. **Moreover**, reconstruction procedures and tools can also lead to **a perpetuation of patriarchal oppression**. This is why the WRC was created: to ensure that rebuilding would be conducted in a more equal way by empowering women, and that women's participation and leadership in reconstruction would be supported, recognized, and valued.

e) Key concepts: community / resilience / risk culture / feminisms

We use several terms throughout this report that can take on different meanings. Therefore, we provide some working definitions we relied on, which can be referred to when encountering the following terms in this report:

- **Community**: In the context of this study, community refers to **the social and geographical unit of the women** (also called 'beneficiaries') **who participated in the activities and workshops**. In other words, community refers to the women who live and work in the areas where the WRC project took place, and to the relatives (men, women, elderly, children) and neighbors of the women participants of the grantee-partner's groups.

- **Resilience**: We merged two definitions—one of which is specifically indicated in the context of heightened climate crisis (and therefore linked to the increasing occurrence of natural hazards) coined by the Rockefeller Foundation: '[Resilience is] the ability to survive and thrive in the face of increasingly unpredictable natural or manmade disasters, often spurred by climatic change or hiccups in the global economy'[16]. The other definition focuses on social bonds within a given community: 'The UK Department for International Development defines disaster resilience as the ability of communities and households to manage change, through maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses'[17]. We stress that **we do not use the term 'resilience' as the removal of all vulnerabilities, but as the capacity of communities to integrate these factors into their lives in the most positive way and to be better prepared in the face of 'shocks and stresses'** (in agreement with Astrid Vachette, 2016)[18].

- **Risk culture**: **The set of patterns and characteristics encompassing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of a given population in the context of risk**. In this study, our referent has been national culture, as we found limited literature specifically covering Mexico in this topic. This presents some limitations, as the literature does

[16] Ottenhoff R.G. (2020) How Philanthropy Is Transforming Resilience Theory Into Practical Applications at the Local Level. *Optimizing Community Infrastructure, Resilience in the Face of Shocks and Stresses* 15: 247-260
[17] Islam R and Walkerden G (2014) How bonding and bridging networks contribute to disaster resilience and recovery on the Bangladeshi coast. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 10(A): 281-291
[18] Vachette A (2016) Developing a culture of preparedness: embracing vulnerability to build resilience. *Conference Proceedings 6th International conference on building resilience*, Auckland, New Zealand

not take into account the specifics of the local contexts and populations supported by the WRC grantee-partners.

- **Feminisms**: To **denounce the collapse of 'all women's experiences' into a single universal narrative**, we used—when possible—specific and diverse examples from our grantee-partners' experiences, particularly **highlighting where and when variations occurred amongst our group of grantee-partners, reflecting the plurality and intersectionality of their identities as women**. While several grantee-partners of the WRC do not identify or recognize themselves as feminists, there is a clear plurality within the WRC women's groups. For instance, indigenous women or women in rural or urban contexts. Their respective situations bear influence over what type of intervention strategies these groups promote, how they work and who they work with within their communities, and how/whether they relate to feminism in general. Importantly, while some of the groups may not consider themselves feminists, they do challenge the status quo by giving women tools and empowering them to carry out reconstruction projects. These groups play a key role in reframing women's contributions and promoting women's rights, which is why Fondo Semillas decided to fund them in the first place.

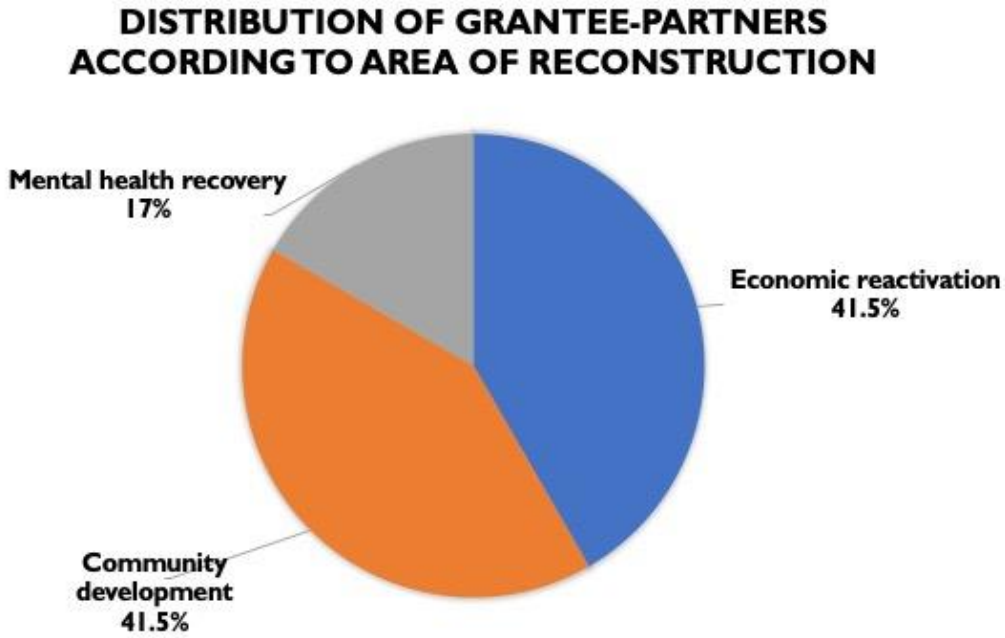
II. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

As we embark on this research journey, we will establish some of the major findings. A disclaimer: This case study research could benefit from in-depth follow-up research to enhance some of the broader findings and reach more definitive conclusions. However, this should not deter us from exploring and learning from the WRC's experience, which is what we intend to do.

As discussed in the introduction, certain concepts get easily over-used and thus become divorced from what they mean to describe, or they take on very different meanings. **Community** is such a word. Given that 'women rebuilding their communities' is at the core of the WRC mission, it is important to consider *what communities* we are talking about and how the differences or nuances between them affect the program's achievements.

- The first key variable that influenced progress amongst the WRC groups is **their disparity in terms of activism** (including feminist activism). Most of the groups supported by Fondo Semillas are constituted by feminist activists (e.g., sexual and reproductive health rights) or defenders whose activism overlaps with feminist causes (e.g., environmental rights feminism or '*feminismo comunitario territorial*'), whereas the WRC groups have different backgrounds and compositions. To some extent, this reflects the key decision Fondo Semillas took to open up the selection process to new groups, which were formed immediately after the earthquakes.

- But it also reflects how different WRC grantee-partners relate to women's rights: some groups feel less comfortable using the term 'feminist' to describe their project. While it is impossible to determine the exact reason for this (for a while we thought that regional contexts could be a factor, but empirical evidence across groups does not confirm this), we found some variations that seemed to be linked to the sphere of intervention within which the reconstruction was carried out:



Women's groups under **Economic Reactivation** (typically rebuilding ovens, masonry skills, learning how to build furniture, recuperating the art of making traditional '*huarache*' sandals to commercialize them…) were more centered on **the right of women to work, to generate an income for themselves and their families**. These groups were not necessarily committed to a broader vision of activist engagement and did not readily associate themselves with the feminist movement. However, they shared some similarities with another typology of groups supported by Fondo Semillas: economic cooperatives. A 2019 study conducted externally for Fondo Semillas showed that economic cooperatives, even when not aware or actively supportive of feminism, tend to play a key role in movement building: *'It was observed that for all cooperatives, feminism is related to a women's space, without the participation of men. While for some it only means this, for others it implies the fight for the recognition of women's rights and equality between women and men'*[19] and '*in addition to the achievements in income generation and economic autonomy that are expected to be generated with the support of cooperatives, they were found to have the potential to achieve changes that contribute to greater gender equality and respect for women's rights in their communities*'[20].

[19] Informe final Evaluación Cooperativas Semillas, 2019 (19)
[20] Informe final Evaluación Cooperativas Semillas, 2019 (46)

By contrast, women's groups operating **Community Development** projects (fixing the social tissue by inciting women from different villages to cooperate in growing and maintaining shared gardens; women learning how to cooperate within collective processes; developing a community center…) **strongly emphasized that women should lead collective processes**, which resulted in a **more direct understanding of the importance of women's participation outside the domestic sphere**.

Similarly, for women's groups that worked under **Mental Health Recovery** (teaching women promoters healing techniques to deal with trauma; forming women's circles or spaces…), there was naturally a strong focus on **breaking women's isolation and silence and fighting post-traumatic stress disorder through collective empathy**.

These key differences are crucial when women and their needs are taken into account in reconstruction processes, as all women tend to be lumped together as a single audience. **This tendency to universalize and homogenize can have negative implications especially in terms of recovery intervention strategies**, wherein ALL women are artificially assumed to have the same characteristics, share the same context, and have the same needs. This has been documented in the context of war-to-peace rebuilding: 'The most explicit result of seeing women as a homogeneous social category within the war-to-peace context is **the construction of a universalistic narrative of women's experience of war**. In attempting to highlight women's particular situation (as opposed to men's), it fails to document and explain the diversity of experiences and positions among women, and therefore **it may only vaguely resonate with any specific case (…) class, age, ethnicity, region and education which cross-cut and intermingle with gender identity**'[21]. The implication is that there must be ways for programs such as WRC to account for the specificity and diversity of the women it supports.

In line with this point, the research revealed **how community rebuilding takes on a different meaning depending on the context**.
Some groups already had a long-standing community-making practice embedded in their traditions. Take for example the 'tequio' practice, which predominantly exists within indigenous communities of the Isthmus region in Oaxaca, a geographic area that was particularly affected by the earthquakes (many groups supported by the WRC were located in this region). Tequio consists of unpaid, collaborative work between neighbors of the same village or group of villages. Although this tradition is in decline, **it was relatively easy to implement or reactivate the community-building angle of the WRC in that region**.

There was obviously a different background for groups located in Mexico City, for example. It is not uncommon to hear that relationships in major Mexican mega-cities such as Mexico City are highly individualistic and competitive and therefore that inhabitants experience a loss in terms of community living (e.g., the ability to develop interdependent relationships with

21 Sörensen B (1998) Women and post-conflict reconstruction: issues and sources'. *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies* (45)

neighbors that guarantee mutual help and support in times of need). However, we would argue that the WRC grantee-partners' experiences forced us to approach this distinction with more nuance. Indeed, many of the city-based women's groups carried out projects aimed at fostering a sense of interdependency with their neighbors. In doing so, **they relied on stimulating BRIDGING NETWORKS (e.g., neighbors, friends in the vicinity) as opposed to BONDING NETWORKS (e.g., family and close relatives)**. Previous research has found that over time, bonding networks tend to endure more than bridging ones with critical implications for long-term recovery: 'Neighbors and friends provide most of their support for each other in the early recovery phase. Their capacity to help with long-term recovery is limited by their poverty and their experience of the disaster. Mutual support is also reduced significantly by competition for access to relief and conflict that emerges from this. Solidarity in local communities suffers substantially from this (…) Due to the uneven distribution, there is competition and conflict over access to recovery support within bridging networks. Conflict amongst neighbors during the early recovery phase is rare, by contrast'[22]. However, it can be assumed that in the context of big cities where inhabitants do not necessarily live close to their families (or have come from other states, leaving their relatives behind), tapping into bridging networks through initiatives that can generate long-lasting solidarity between neighbors or closely located inhabitants, was strategically important.

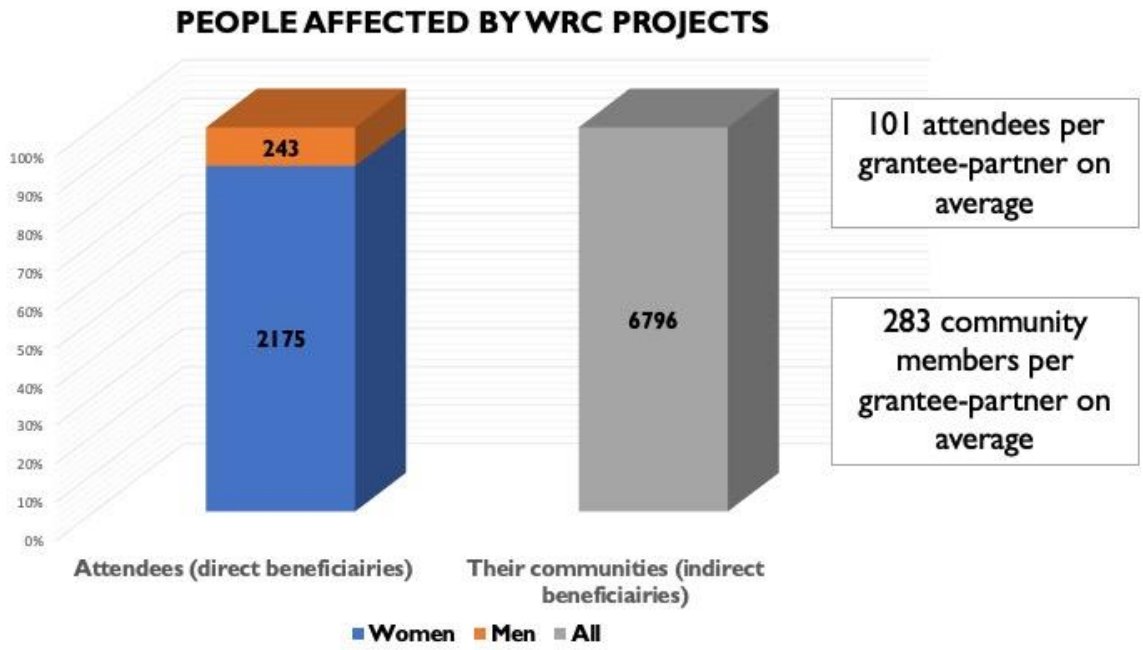
Findings in other geographical areas stress the significance of these bridging networks, such as those from Pr. Aldrich, who studies social capital and disaster recovery and explored the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan[23]. His findings indicate that the core aspects of survival and recovery come from social connections, and that the strength of social ties in the community trumps all the other possible explanations (wave height, politics, age, infrastructure) and drives outcomes. We have to account for key differences in cultural contexts between Mexico and Japan, but in general **the focus on making communities more resilient, and why this would be an insurance policy against future human-made disasters, is *already* supported by evidence in the field**.

[22] 'As the time after the disaster increases, the [bridging] networks perform less well, because of the limited physical and financial capital. After a period of time, bridging relationships become less active and sometimes break down due to poverty, disaster impact, and competition and conflict over access to external support. Bonding relationships, however, do not break down; rather, they continue contributing to the recovery process by reducing food intake, helping with alternative income, and livelihood options through temporary migration and so on' Islam R and Walkerden G (2014) How bonding and bridging networks contribute to disaster resilience and recovery on the Bangladeshi coast. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 10(A): 281-291

[23] Aldrich D (2019) Black Wave, how networks and governance shaped Japan's 3/11 Disasters. *Summary talk at Department of Asian Studies, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.* Available at https://asianstudies.unc.edu/summary-of-prof-aldrichs-black-wave-talk/

Part one - Grantee-partners

The 24 women's groups supported by the WRC reached approximately 9,214 people in total. Of these, 26% were people who participated in at least one activity or workshop run by the grantee-partner and the other 74% were community members who indirectly benefited from these activities:



The specific objectives of the WRC regarding grantee-partners' progress were as follows:
OBJECTIVE 1: Strengthen the participation and leadership of women in the reconstruction efforts of their communities.
OBJECTIVE 2: Increase the capacities of women's organizations and the communities with whom they work on strategic aspects for the response to earthquakes.
OBJECTIVE 3: Strengthen the social fabric, collaboration and solidarity in the affected communities.
OBJECTIVE 4: Promote the recovery of appropriate and equitable livelihoods.
OBJECTIVE 5: Incorporate measures of prevention and resilience to future disasters in community actions.

Overall, the majority of the women's groups supported by the WRC displayed strong progress over the 18-month WRC grant span, especially regarding the direct involvement and participation of women in the various recovery processes implemented:

Five areas of critical learning, which we will discuss, emerged from these objectives:

- the repositioning of women's roles within their own contexts;
- the joint development of new capacities and solidarities;
- the challenges of strengthening the social fabric of communities;
- the importance of economic recovery beyond housing;
- care (emotional, mental) at the center of the psychological recovery process, and the very early stage of an awareness shift in terms of risk culture.

a) Repositioning women's roles: from informal and invisible, to participation in the open

Across grantee-partners, there was a conviction that women who became involved in projects acquired a new voice and that their value as key players within reconstruction efforts was recognized by their parents and neighbors, but also by themselves.

However, several grantee-partners dispelled the notion that this was a total transformation. In some cases, women were already doing some of this work pre-earthquake; for example, some of the oven projects supported in Oaxaca, where *managing* the ovens was already considered 'a woman's task'. In this sense, some of the recovery projects propelled by the WRC could be framed as reclaiming what women knew how to do, but putting them officially in charge. Also, even in these contexts where women already managed or cared for a specific domain pre-earthquake, officially recognizing women as **the experts**, as the decision-makers, marked a critical shift. It had an impact in terms of boosting self-esteem, but it also inscribed

value on their work and expertise for the rest of their community, recognizing the importance of tasks and knowledge that was previously invisible. Additionally, in a few individual cases, the impact of formalizing such knowledge meant that women had access to formal training and new resources that were previously unavailable to them.

'The participation of women has been legitimized more because of how we managed some processes: a road was closed because of the earthquake, and we sought out a machine to re-open it. This was a very important road because it connected the farmlands together. This was a very interesting case, because some of the husbands and other landowners sought us out to ask us, through the organization, to find a solution.' *WRC Grantee-partner*
CASE STUDY: close-up on Mujeres Luchando por la Autonomía

CASE STUDY: close-up on **Mujeres Luchando por la Autonomía** "For example, [after the earthquake] schools were damaged, so there was a meeting of parents and a committee was going to be appointed [to supervise the schools rebuilding]. This committee was going to be composed only with men, but during the meeting one of the women who had participated in the reconstruction of totopos ovens was designated to become a member of the committee. It had been mentioned that she had reconstruction experience through our project, and that she had already participated in a reconstruction workshop, which was the first one we did, on risk prevention. There, the community recognized her role as a participant and therefore they integrated her into the school reconstruction committee. So this woman, after being invisible for so long, is now named by her community and recognized so that she can somehow use her voice for the benefit of her own community."

Examples such as this one challenge the narrative of 'women as victims', which can result from the layering of multiple misconceptions, such as the idea that local communities are helpless in the context of disasters and the idea that women cannot lead reconstruction processes. Challenging these narratives is essential: 'One of the risks of conceptualizing women as victims is that we reinforce existing incapacitating processes by introducing welfare-oriented projects that aim to reduce suffering here and now, but which do not support women's own long-term strategic interests. (…) This review has confirmed that women play an important role in a household's survival, but that their visions exceed mere survival. Their actions are often directed toward future goals for themselves, their family, their community or the whole society. In other words, their actions are in principle transforming'[24].

Interestingly, we found that **women's groups which carried out reconstruction activities that were more aligned with traditional gender roles were less likely to encounter opposition to women's participation in the community**. Organizations that involved women in activities traditionally reserved for women (e.g., projects around recovering the means for women to bake *totopos*) tended to meet least resistance within the communities of these women. A likely reason is that these activities did not question or disrupt the status quo around women's assigned roles in the community. Moreover, in some cases, women's reconstruction activities were broadly similar to the ones they were carrying out pre-disaster, which was perceived as less challenging by the rest of the community. This observation echoed findings in other contextual settings: 'When women's trading activities

[24] Sörensen B (1998) Women and post-conflict reconstruction: issues and sources'. *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies* (45)

were a continuation of pre-war practice, they were more likely to win respect and support than when women's involvement in extra-domestic activities was a recent phenomenon. In such situations, women's efforts to support their family implied a major break with existing social patterns and norms, and they risked social marginalization and exclusion which added to their vulnerability'[25].

Conversely, groups that involved women in activities traditionally reserved for men (e.g., masonry) or involved them in the decision-making process (e.g., designing a kitchen and the distribution of elements inside it) were initially met with more reserve or criticism, although this tended to shift to a more positive acceptance as women persisted:

'Generally it is said that construction is a man's thing, but no: many of the decisions fell to women, because men finally realized that those who make use of that space and those who know what that space is for are the women themselves. Even though many of the male workers who were doing the rebuilding work were saying 'I am going to speak with mister such and such', our men would turn and look around, while we [the women] would be the ones pointing out 'have you noticed this for the ceiling?', and they would have no choice [but to listen to us].' *WRC grantee-partner*

In most communities, the initial resistance progressively evolved to neutrality, and sometimes even interest, which brought about the participation of extra members. This is consistent with findings from Pincha (2019), who conducted gender-focused situation analysis research over a resilience program implemented by the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium (ARC). 'In almost all focus group discussions in communities across four provinces, it was gathered that the ARC efforts to engage women in most activities had brought about a readiness in the communities to accept women in roles which were previously unthought of. In most cases, new opportunities to engage in new skills offered a fluidity in terms of gender roles'[26].

CASE STUDY: close-up on **Unión de Pueblos de Morelos**

"One day, a man from the community joined at the end of one of our workshops: we were like 25 women and him. [Planning for an excursion to Guerrero to sell some of their products] we asked for volunteers—who was able to go—, and some women began to take an interest and raised their hands. But then the man said to the women, 'You are already signing up, yet you have not asked your husbands for permission.' And the women with whom we are working replied, 'Well, but why do I have to ask permission if I am not going to do anything wrong?" Another woman said, 'If in some way what I do is going to benefit my family and my community, why would my husband not let me go?' So this example made us witness this reconfiguration of the [gender] roles that I am talking about. They know that they now have a more active role and that this role already exists today and is recognized and respected, because they say, 'We are gathering resources because our husbands can no longer do so'; it all converges in a slow process. The interesting thing is that when they responded to that

[25] Ibid

[26] Pincha C (2019) Women's Voices & Agencies in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction: Facilitating Factors & Constraints from the Experiences of the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium. *AFGHANISTAN RESILIENCE CONSORTIUM (ARC) (ARC) and UK AID (UK AID)* (5)

man, we [women from the organization] were not the ones who had to give an explanation of why we were inviting them to Guerrero, they were the ones who replied to him directly."

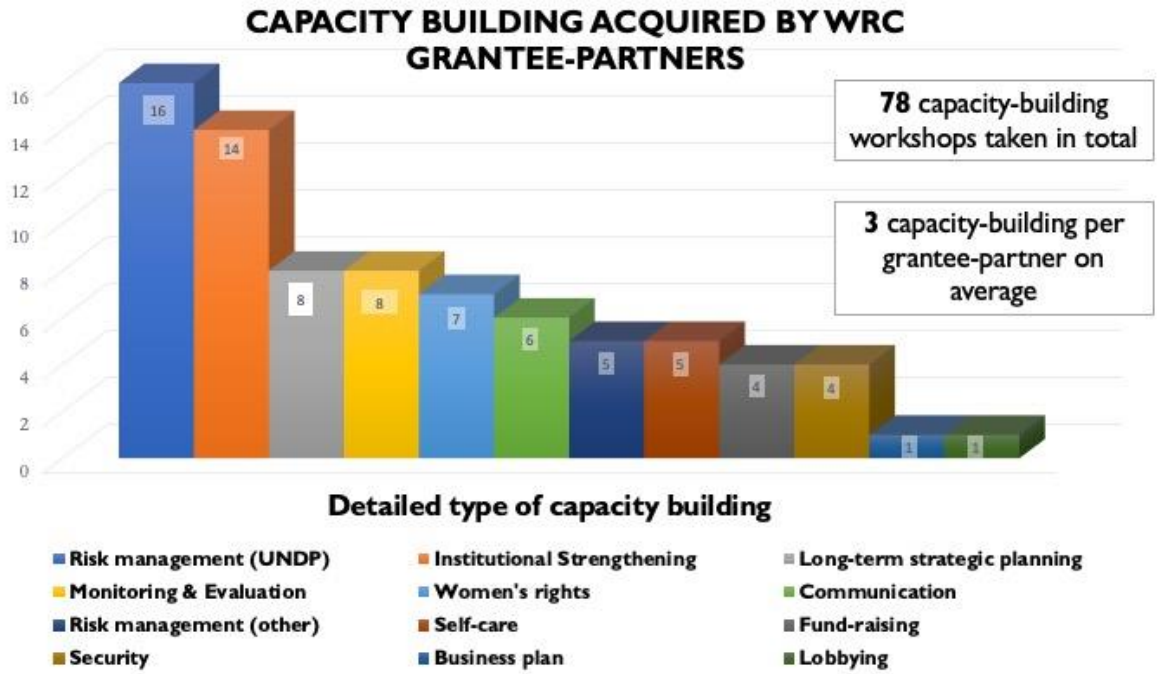
A key finding here (which would need to be further explored, and in comparison with other case studies) is that **community support does not automatically correlate, nor equate to an increase in women's leadership**. When assessing the contribution of this area of work (whether it is reconstruction or resilience) to the women's movement in Mexico and elsewhere, it is crucial to question what 'community support' really means and whether it brings about broader changes to gender dynamics, and under which conditions. It may well be that **a women's group contributes to increasing women's leadership while generating high opposition from within the community** (or that **a group gets ample in-community support, but without advancing women's leadership**). This also raises the question for a program focused on 'resilient communities', whether the focus should be on fostering community support projects led by women, and tackle women's political participation and leadership separately to ensure the provision of an appropriate strategy.

b) Developing new capacities and solidarities together

We can distinguish between two types of new capacities that were developed and acquired by women through the WRC-sponsored projects: **organizational capacities** (these concern both the women's organizations and their women 'constituents' in the focus communities) and **'thematic' capacities** relating to what can be described as 'hard' skills (e.g., masonry or bioconstruction techniques and learning new design or sewing patterns for traditional clothes or sandals) and 'soft' skills (e.g., emotional healing and techniques to cope with the psychological trauma of the earthquakes). In this section, we focus on organizational capacities (but cover thematic capacities in section d, 'beyond housing').

In terms of organizational capacities, women acquired new skills post-earthquakes. Previously, women would occasionally gather to plan for a specific event (a school fair, for example), but **they now demonstrated a greater ability to systematically manage, plan and organize as a group**—a key finding considering that the biggest difficulties reported by these groups concerned internal collaboration. This is particularly important, taking into consideration that **42% of the WRC's set of grantee-partners did not exist pre-earthquake**. Women gathered with a strong desire and motivation to help their communities to recover, but they had no prior experience working in a collective, and certainly not in activism.

Additionally, each women's group supported by the WRC got access to a wealth of training, from risk management training to monitoring and evaluation, from institutional strengthening to self-care or women's rights workshops. Grantee-partners reported how they have incorporated some of this newly acquired knowledge to strengthen their structures.



Providing access to different types of training was aligned with the Fondo Semillas accompaniment model. It aimed at providing not only financial resources in the form of grants but also equipping grantees with the critical skills they would need to thrive and self-sustain as a group. This strategy proved to be relevant for the WRC grantee-partners, as one of the main hurdles faced by many groups at the beginning of their project concerned internal decision-making, which affected their ability to reach their group objectives. As it turned out, ***how*** decisions are made at an organizational level mattered as much as the content of these decisions to ensure collective, horizontal and participatory processes.

A particularly significant example of capacity building was self-care and emotional healing. Almost all groups ended up using self-care techniques in their reconstruction projects, even those that had not initially planned on it. For women, the self-care workshops acted as a form of psychological counseling for post-traumatic stress: 'As we stated from the beginning, the most difficult thing was not only the physical or architectural reconstruction but the emotional one—the recovery of security and a mood of confidence. So women have begun to give more importance to activities or workshops related to the reduction of post-traumatic stress or the strengthening of community ties.' (*Grantee-partner interview*)

Finally, the importance of setting up, enabling and forming women-only spaces should not be underestimated, as research shows: 'The case studies suggest two cornerstones for good programming: creating formal spaces where women's groups can organize to participate in post-disaster efforts and formally allocating resources and roles to groups of affected women'[27].

[27] Yonder A, Akcar S and Gopalan P (2005) Women's Participation in Disaster Relief and Recovery. *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives* 15: 11

CASE STUDY: close-up on **Xasasti Yolistli**

"Before, these women were alone, abandoned. They were affected by the earthquakes, but they had been also damaged by violence and infidelity… Many issues that had affected them in extreme ways. So they refer to a 'before' and an 'after'. This seems very important: 'before I was alone, and now I feel accompanied'. Today they defend this space that they have created as women; this space where they meet, learn, have fun, chat, talk about their problems—so it is actually something that has nurtured us exponentially as an organization."

Groups of women coming together with the confidence to self-organize and achieve objectives they set for themselves is a constitutive and essential step towards movement building. We want to emphasize that this finding is crucial and cannot be underestimated. While collective and participatory decision-making processes are slower, external partners and stakeholders must understand that this is constitutive to activist organizing. Not only is this supported by empirical evidence from the field (research shows that broad-based social movements effectively create and sustain long-term social transformation), but it also has a strong theoretical underpinning in system theory, which argues that to solve complex social issues, the solution often has to encompass a superior degree of complexity and interdependence across actors.[28]

c) The challenges of strengthening the social fabric of communities

'*Asistencialismo*'—which could be defined as the passive attitude of expecting hand-outs—was a major obstacle that WRC women's groups had to reckon with in attempting to carry out their projects. It is in general attributed to decades of the state's paternalistic approach to aid, which fosters a culture of passivity and makes it much harder to bring people together to take matters into their own hands, without relying on external assistance to 'fix' problems.

This obstacle manifested for some women's groups in encountering resistance amongst the women or their families, within the communities of intervention, to embrace collective processes. Some of the groups witnessed **a rise of individualism**, with dissent rising when some women were thought to have benefitted more heavily from state assistance or even from the WRC project itself than others in the community. Another related challenge emerged around **sustaining women's participation over time:** the lack of time (due to household responsibilities and work) and the lack of ownership that women have over their own time—worsened in the aftermath of the earthquakes as women absorbed more of the extra workload—meant that often groups were not sure how many attendees would show

[28] '*This satisfies the central tenet of equifinality, which is that the solution to any problem must be more complex than the problem itself*' – Knight B (2019) Systems to shift the power. *Global Fund for Community Foundations* (35)

up for workshops or activities. 'Women's workload increased because they are always doing extra work to support the family. Some make *totopos*, others make handicrafts and others are dedicated to selling some products of the region at the market. There is little time for themselves and that is why when we call them to meetings, they can only dedicate a short period of time to the project.' *(Grantee-partner interview)*

Women's groups found that women got demotivated if they did not get immediate results, which meant that the constraints on their participation (domestic work, caregiving, family responsibilities, church attendance), or the criticism and mockery from their partners or from the wider community became increasingly hard to resist, until they gave up. With this, it became increasingly clear that **there was a need to question activities and strategies of engagement with women in communities**.

CASE STUDY: close-up on **Una Mano para Oaxaca**

"The cleaning of the river was key [to bring people together] because even though it goes across private farmlands, the river itself is a public space. During this cleaning, women were the lead actors, and it was an initiative that went beyond the cleaning of their private houses, as they were the protagonists of a care initiative for the sake of the whole community. This was visible not only to their family but to everyone."

Several of the women's groups were thereafter motivated to find alternative ways to engage their audience, adapting tools and modes of engagement to suit different populations. **Some of the groups found that workshops (*'talleres'*) as a default methodology may not be the most suited for women who do not have a history of activism or organized collective association**, and that other forms of collective meetings could have more success. For instance, some women's groups decided to carry out their activities during a 'cultural day' that coincided with local village celebrations, to ensure women would have free time to attend or that they'd be able to directly participate in the activities. Other groups used 'artivism' as a new strategy of engagement—based on training facilitated by Fondo Semillas ally Reinas Chulas (a group that uses cabaret and humor to generate conversations around women's rights).

d) Beyond housing: recovery of livelihood and economic autonomy

A key gain of the program was that in the majority of groups, **women developed radically new skills** and learned techniques that had not existed before, including amongst men; for

example, bioconstruction techniques for housing or the ovens, with a positive impact on women's health as the new ovens do not produce toxic gas when in use.

A side outcome of the projects is that women developed knowledge and practices they used for their own private benefit and/or for the benefit of their communities and as a potential asset in income-generating activities. In this sense, the WRC implemented some of the long-term recommendations established in prior literature on the topic, such as in a study by the Global Fund for Women (2005) that states, 'Help women become self-sufficient. Relief efforts must include long-term income-generating projects and/or jobs for women whose livelihoods and/or key providers have been lost, so they may provide for themselves and their families'[29].

'Making the stove allowed them to exchange knowledge; it allowed them to show solidarity throughout the construction, because none of them built it alone, but it was among themselves, they supported each other. They shared design ideas, how to improve techniques, where to place the stove so that the kitchen space would be more functional.' (*Grantee-partner interview)*

CASE STUDY: close-up on **El Sueño de Huejotengo**

Through this project we managed to achieve that women were directly involved in the reconstruction process: visualizing, getting their hands into the mix or directly designing their furniture. Right now we are in phase two. Since most of the affected people already have at least a house, some have managed to put down flooring with their own resources, or do some of the blacksmith work themselves. Obviously what we want to make sure of is that reconstruction does not depend upon what the government can give us through the Fonden, Infonavit and other programs they have. Instead, through formalizing this group and training women to develop products derived from avocado, which is a key resource in our community, we seek to guarantee that livelihoods for the community are being rebuilt too, and that the social, family fabric within our community is strengthened so that in the future we can have the necessary community development that we haven't had to date due to being in a marginalized area. So we have evolved our objectives throughout the project, but always keeping in sight this idea of reconstruction, to not depend upon governmental aid, and to be the main protagonists in pursuing the stability we need.'

Looking at how the women's groups, as well as their communities, took up capacity building, shows how the WRC aligns with Fondo Semillas' Theory of Change, from a programmatic lens. It enabled women to develop their autonomy **at a personal level** (learning and honing new skills, boosting self-esteem), **at a community level** (transmitting and sharing the knowledge with others in the community and using it to rebuild in order to strengthen the community), and **finally at a professional level** (acquiring new skills they could potentially use to generate income).

[29] Chew L and N. Ramdas K (2005) Caught in the storm: the impact of Natural disasters on women. *The Global Fund for women (4)*

Part of the success of the WRC was to take into account the importance of an economic activity for the social fabric of a community. Beyond the primary necessity of providing an income for women and ensuring they are able to cope and maintain dignity, **gaining collective** (collective is key here) **economic stability was a basis to build social stability and a sense of solidarity between women**. So while we should not conflate reconstruction with economic rebuilding nor undermine its importance. **This was especially important in the communities where women were the main or sole breadwinners due to intensive male migration,** as well as in vulnerable rural environments where the community usually depended on a single activity (e.g., agriculture) and was often uninsured for disaster and therefore particularly affected.

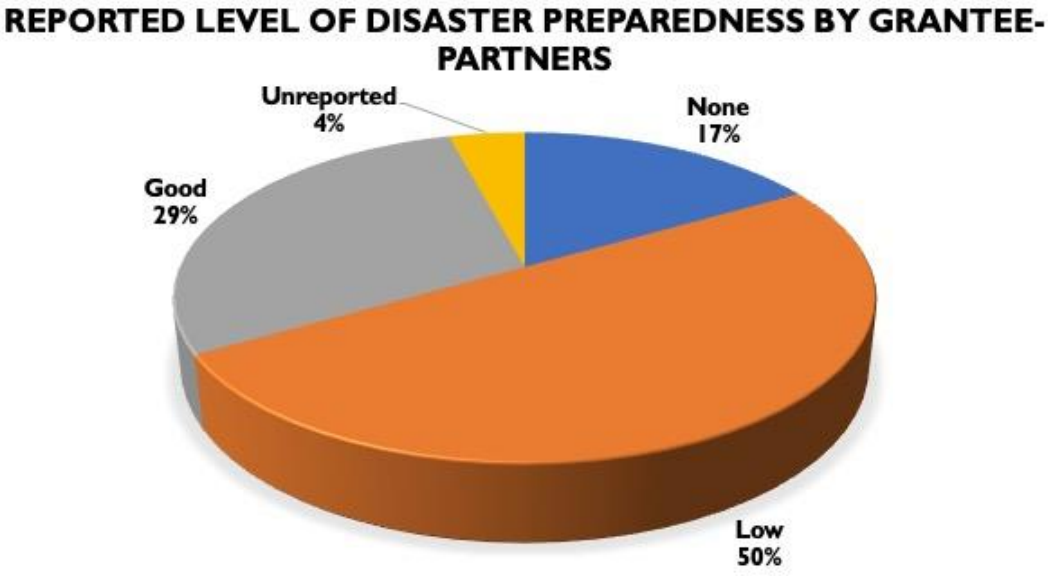
However, there is **an ongoing need to ensure the cultural uptake of innovation**. When the community loses an oven, it represents not only an economic loss but also a loss of inheritance of ways of baking, of culture. Some unexpected challenges with rebuilding were identified by groups; for example, how to ensure cultural acceptance of solar ovens when these are completely alien to the communities, or how to get buy-in for new techniques (such as bioconstruction) introduced in communities. Many of the women's groups improvised and found ways that worked in their context. One of the groups produced an illustrated manual to chart the step-by-step progress of kitchen construction and give reassurance to people involved that they were on the right track. This points to the dual implication of material reconstruction: the need to rebuild the oven 'enough as it was' (to restore tradition) but in a smart modified way (to make it 'disaster-proof').

More broadly, supporting recovery *beyond housing* has been a key achievement of the WRC and its grantee-partners. Nourishing the potential for autonomy was essential for the community. "**Both local and national key informants indicate that external support through NGOs and local government sometimes leads households to become relief dependent, a conclusion that is also reached by other researchers. If we take these findings together—households' substantial efforts to solve their own problems, their limited assets and income, and the risks of relief dependence—it is obvious that better income support (i.e., assistance with employment) would make a substantial contribution to recovery. This is a conclusion supported by local people, disaster practitioners, and policy makers**"[30].

e) Prevention and preparedness for future disasters: towards a shift in risk awareness

In risk preparedness, achievements seemed less apparent, as this research identified an ongoing lack of risk prevention measures implemented. Most groups reported they were able to identify potential vulnerabilities in their communities, but they also felt that there was a lack of concrete measures in place in the eventuality of a new disaster.

[30] Islam R and Walkerden G (2014) How bonding and bridging networks contribute to disaster resilience and recovery on the Bangladeshi coast. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 10(A): 281-291



Paradoxically, communities on the ground that were the most likely to be directly affected seemed to be the hardest to engage in disaster preparedness. A hypothesis here is that living in a disaster-prone area is not necessarily correlated to increased risk perception, and this could also be attributed to a psychological coping mechanism for populations in order to manage uncertainty. Several studies on the impact of culture on disaster preparedness, although not set in Mexico, can help shed light on what is going on with the limited uptake of risk preparedness (despite risk preparedness being the training that almost all grantees received in one form or the other).

For instance, studies that explore the link between risk perception and disaster preparedness found that 'disaster risk perception showed only weak links to preparedness intentions (…) both living in a disaster-prone area and previous experience of disasters have been found to affect disaster risk perception, but they do not directly translate into an increase of perceived future risks'[31]. A study focusing on attitudes and perceptions of risk in the low-hazard island of Malta showed that '**distrust of authorities – rooted in citizens' perceptions that the respective civil protection systems are not working effectively – has been linked to fatalistic attitudes which also hamper disaster preparedness**'[32], which we can relate to the Mexican context, where the distrust towards both local authorities and central state and its institutions such as the FONDEN (Mexico's natural disaster fund, established in the late 1990s as a mechanism to support the rapid rehabilitation of federal and

[31] Appleby-Arnold S, Brockdorff N, Jakovlej I and Zdravkovic S (2018) Applying cultural values to encourage disaster preparedness: Lessons from a low-hazard country. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 31: 37-44

[32] ibid

state infrastructure affected by adverse natural events) has been particularly high, with suspicion of corruption and mishandling of final aid compensation according to partisan politics.

The impact of culture on risk preparedness aversion in different populations is documented in the literature and offers potential clues for what Mexico could do at the intervention level. Indeed, current literature focuses on three key variables to understand risk culture in a given community: **disaster framing, trust in authorities and blaming**[33]**.** One paper examines risk culture across several European countries and establishes different risk typologies. One of them, 'the fatalists', share some commonalities with the Mexican national landscape, as the 'presence of fatalistic attitudes is often associated with mistrust in authorities.' This has some **implications in terms of risk perception**: 'The survivors do not blame anyone because disasters are considered to be caused by the intervention of a supernatural entity. Considering disasters as beyond human control has important implications in terms of risk perception. (…) [citizens] often ignore risks and, even when they recognize that a disaster could affect their area, they tend to believe that they will not be personally concerned by the disaster's consequences.' These findings could be one explanation for why most grantee-partners somehow still felt underprepared in the event of disaster despite receiving training. Another potential explanation lies in the perception of what 'being ready' in the face of a disaster means. Many grantee-partners knew, to some degree, what practical immediate steps to take in the event of another earthquake. **This knowledge is not equated with readiness because the earthquake occurrence itself cannot be controlled or anticipated**.

Of course we also can't exclude that the preparation training itself can be optimized so that women feel more at ease or take ownership of it. Additionally, another finding from the same paper highlights how, for fatalistic risk cultures, 'when information about a critical situation is needed, members of this culture tend to rely more on people they personally know and on informal networks of communication, e.g. neighbors, rather than on the mainstream mass media or on official channels of communication,' which would validate **our hypothesis around the critical importance of bridging networks in disaster reduction planning**.

In this sense, **taking into account the full extent of activities and strategies implemented by the women's groups is central to understanding the degree to which these groups are building resilience for their community overall, not just through disaster preparedness training.** One intervention strategy used by the women's groups that appeared to be successful was **the formation of women-only spaces**. Discussion in these spaces encompassed a wide range of issues that women and children face. Moreover, the spaces offered an opportunity for women to look beyond themselves, allowing them to encounter other women like them, with similar needs, and to overcome self-centeredness or envy between neighbors. They fostered empathy and solidarity across women, and covered both 'informal' spaces (for instance, a group of women occupying the streets or other public spaces, getting them out of the privacy of their homes) and formal spaces (having women opening up to one another during a healing workshop, or learning something together). The importance of women's spaces is supported by other research in the field: 'The case studies suggest two cornerstones for good programming: creating formal

[33] Cornia A, Dressel K and Pfeil P (2016) Risk cultures and dominant approaches towards disasters in seven European countries, *Journal of Risk Research* 19(3): 288-304

spaces where women's groups can organize to participate in post-disaster efforts and formally allocating resources and roles to groups of affected women'[34].

Women's groups reported how in these spaces, participants rediscovered their identity as women in terms of the perception of their capacities ('we can do this') and those of their communities ('they are doing it'). But interestingly for many, taking charge of reconstruction processes unveiled **a new perspective on their identity: workers, fighters, survivors**. 'After the earthquake, it allowed us to be the same as before, recovering our autonomy, our livelihoods. The kitchen is a fundamental element because it allows us to feed our children, our families, and it gives us the possibility of generating income.' (*Grantee-partner interview*)

PRIORITIZING WOMEN'S SPACES is a practical step that cannot be skipped in reconstruction and resilience. Their lack of availability constitutes a real barrier to women's organizing. These spaces are the medium through which revising, reinventing and creating new ways for women to collaborate, work and heal together takes place.

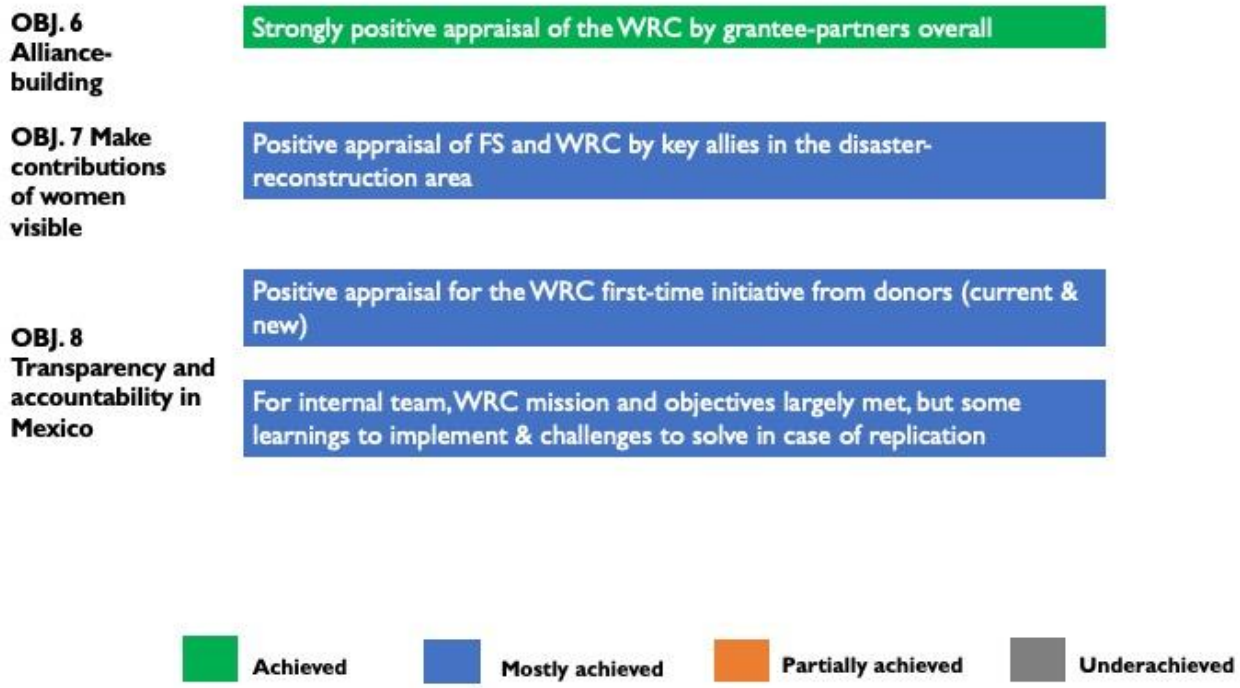
Part two - WRC

The specific objectives that WRC set for itself are as follows:

OBJECTIVE 6: Promote alliance-building and collaboration of women's organizations with other actors working on reconstruction.
OBJECTIVE 7: Make the contribution of women in reconstruction efforts visible.
OBJECTIVE 8: Contribute to transparency and accountability in the post-earthquake context in Mexico.

Overall, the WRC strongly delivered against all of them:

[34] Yonder A, Akcar S and Gopalan P (2005) Women's Participation in Disaster Relief and Recovery. *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives* 15: 11



a) WRC contribution to the field of reconstruction: perspectives from allies

In this section, we summarize key learnings and opportunities for the WRC, as perceived by our allies: partner organizations in the field (UNDP Mexico, Oxfam México, Reinas Chulas), donors (GlobalGiving, MacArthur Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, Global Fund for Community Foundations), and feminist and community allies (TEWA, Urgent Action Fund Latin America, ICOM Brazil, Puerto Rico Community Foundation).

ALLIES & DISASTER EXPERTS

The contribution of the WRC to the reconstruction field in Mexico was seen as highly valuable across the board of allies and disaster specialist organizations. Indeed, all recognized that, traditionally, there had not been a reflection or strategy focused specifically on women and their needs in disaster contexts (both during and in the aftermath), which often ended up preventing women from contributing to recovery or from receiving recognition for their contributions. From the point of view of allies, the WRC brought **women's voices, abilities and needs to the forefront**.

Three specific dimensions of the WRC and its approach were praised by allies:

- **Taking a longer-term view of recovery**: For allies, the WRC did well to wait several months post-earthquakes before starting to give grants. It enabled the Fund to support projects on a midterm scale, while also leaving room for women's groups on the ground to refine their vision and strategies, especially in terms of how their projects were going to benefit the wider community.
- **Shifting power to grassroots organizations**: Consistent with Fondo Semillas' general approach, in particular, **the focus on marginalized, underserved**

communities and the **accompaniment model that seeks to build up alliances across women's groups and promote capacity building**. For many allies, working together with Fondo Semillas stimulated a desire to find ways to emulate some of these dimensions within their own working model.

- **Expanding the geographical scope to support new organizations**: Working in partnership with allies, the WRC had greater coverage in the country and reached new organizations that Fondo Semillas had not worked with previously.

"It's about providing other types of accompaniment and support. Fondo Semillas is uniquely equipped to connect to the organizations, whereas maybe an international funder doesn't have that. [We] lack the ability to run a similar program, where we provide very specific accompaniment and support to a coordinated group of grantees. Fondo Semillas has the ability to coordinate and cohesively support a group of 24-25 organizations, which is another kind of key strength of Fondo Semillas."

Ally of the WRC

There were also a couple of opportunities that emerged to continue enriching these partnerships moving forward:

- **FEEDBACK AND COLLABORATION FOLLOW-UP**: Especially for allies that provided capacity-building or strengthening workshops on the ground, maintaining feedback loops was identified as a need moving forward to help curate the training provided to the individual needs of grantee-partners. Additionally, systematizing debriefs of these consultants would also provide additional insight into how grantee-partners were feeling, allowing for a closer follow-up.
- **ALLIES AS THINKING PARTNERS**: Oftentimes allies contributed beyond delivering practical training and could be an additional source of knowledge and learnings, in complement to grantee-partners themselves. Getting ally input into some of the learnings could help refine the strategy of the WRC.

DONORS

Similarly, donors strongly relied in Fondo Semillas due to their 30 years of experience working in Mexico, which was perceived as allowing to gather funds both at the international and national levels (through an initiative like the music festival Amplifica organized for fundraising by the WRC, for instance). Several positive elements in the WRC were highlighted, in particular:

- **Opening up a dialogue with key 'disaster actors' in Mexico early on:** As a newcomer in the area, this enabled the WRC to set up a collaborative process from the start and avoid the pitfall of redundant efforts between actors further down the line.

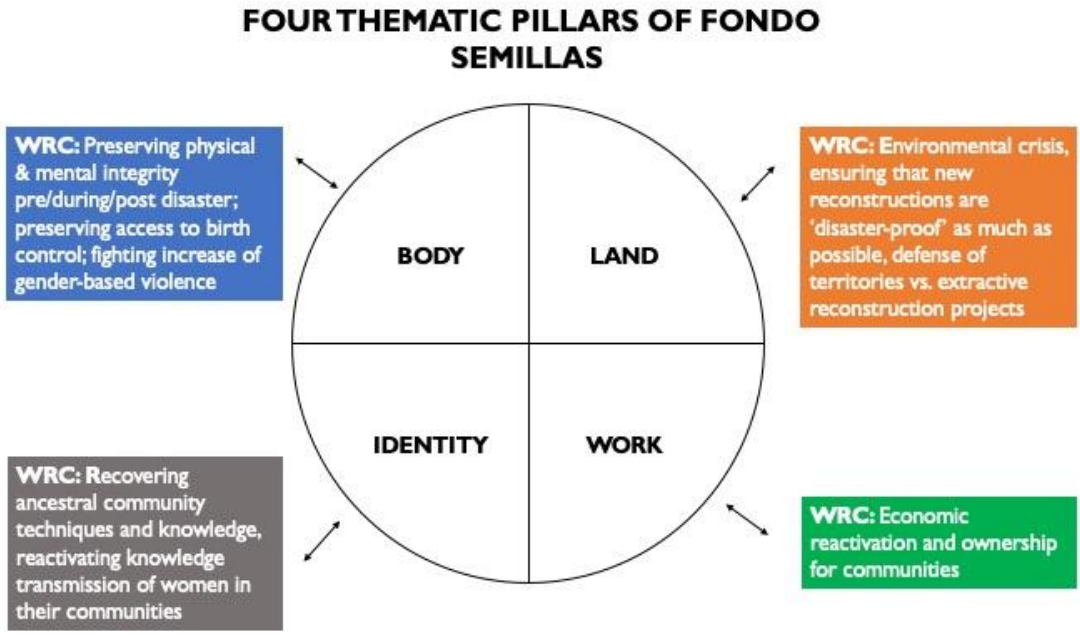
"We were very happy to know that they were thinking of trying to coordinate the help, because what we were most worried about was that everyone wanted to help and began to give, but without a strategy, without a clear understanding of what the needs were. We really liked that Fondo Semillas first started trying to get the different actors involved to get in touch (...) So, that was what convinced us to contribute to Fondo Semillas, because we knew that

the resource was going to be used better, where it was really needed and where it could fill in the gaps."

Donor of the WRC

- **Transparency around the selection process:** communicating how each grantee-partner was to be selected and the mechanics of the participatory selection process (informed by committees involving a mix of former grantee-partners and advisors as well as by other disaster expert actors).

Donors—especially those rooted within 'disaster philanthropy'—saw a core alignment between reconstruction as an area and the four pillars of Fondo Semillas' architecture:



Two opportunity areas were identified:

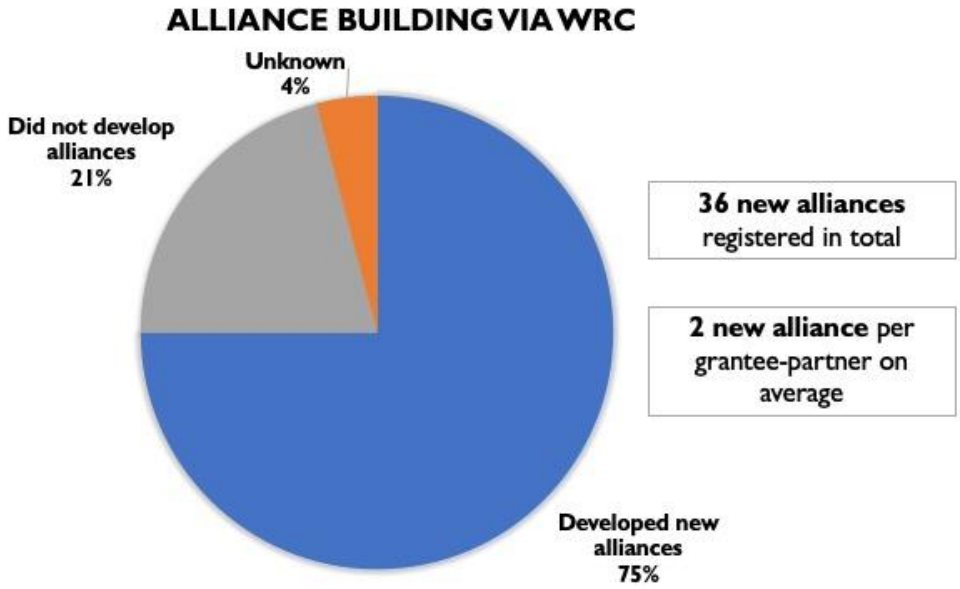
- Leverage the learnings gathered by the WRC project into an advocacy strategy at both local and global levels to start building more bridges between disaster and feminist philanthropy.
- Communicate the accompaniment model of the WRC more specifically in order to highlight how it supported grantee-partners to go further with their work.

b) The accompaniment model (strengths, challenges and learnings): perspectives from the WRC team

We will start this section with an overview of Fondo Semillas and the WRC accompaniment model.

The accompaniment model of the WRC entails **1/ financial support through a grant**; **2/ capacity-building training** (facilitated by Fondo Semillas directly or by allied specialist organizations); **3/ alliance-building strategy** (facilitated by Fondo Semillas through the organization of meetings, but also with separate financial help to support grantee-partners who wish to organize mini-regional meetings or travel to meet their partners). Additionally, both capacity-building training and alliance-building strategy needs are determined by the grantee-partner, with some 'core' components established by the Fund.

While we summarized capacity-building achievements earlier on, it is important to stress that new alliances also emerged across the grantee-partners of the WRC:



We found that women's groups with the most successful track-record were those for which the mission and objectives were clearly established from the start but adapted their strategies as they went along. Here, it is worth noting that we consider a successful track-record in this context the group's own sense of achievement of their objectives as well as a stable internal organization. There was a strong sense that strategies and activities to get there evolved throughout the project, often because the organizations realized as they carried out the work that there may be more efficient ways to work and engage their beneficiaries in order to reach the initial goals: 'For the mural route, we had decided to involve different women artisans, to draw collectively. However, as the project unfolded, we recognized that each one of them had diverse needs and desires for their portion of the mural, often depending on a generational and/or a social trait; therefore, we chose to carry out mostly individual rather than group follow-ups [to better involve them].' (*Grantee-partner community immersion*)

This highlights **the importance of flexibility from the funder's perspective**. A key advantage of Fondo Semillas' accompaniment model is that it allows **for a high degree of personalization**, as it follows what grantee-partners deem best for their group and

objectives. It is also a **highly flexible model**, as it accommodates for grantee-partners to revise and modify their strategy or activities as they go along. This was invaluable in the context of the WRC, from the perspective of grantee-partners but also from the WRC perspective, as it was the first experience of Fondo Semillas in regards to reconstruction.

III. RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: MAKING THE CASE FOR A LONG-TERM STRATEGY FOR FONDO SEMILLAS

The second objective of this research was to determine whether there was an opportunity to transform the WRC fund into a permanent, fully integrated program area within Fondo Semillas. Interviews with the internal WRC and Fondo Semillas teams revealed excitement and a clear sense of opportunity, but also a need to revise some of the internal processes to turn it into a permanent area. Interviews with donors (from the WRC and Fondo Semillas) also confirmed the potential for long-term replication. An audit with allies of the Fund—including other women's funds that had either gone through a similar experiment (e.g., stretched into reconstruction and/or recovery from their core women's work) or had programmatic intervention strategies that overlapped with recovery (e.g., emergency action in case of political crisis, focus on community care)—also unveiled some practical guardrails and opportunities, which we will explore in the section.

Fundamentally, it is important to highlight that the understanding of what reconstruction *is* and *how it works* differs according to Fondo Semillas' donors:

- Non-disaster donors (e.g., donors who operate outside of a disaster/humanitarian aid remit) see reconstruction as **primarily *material* rebuilding**. They also tend to see it as **fixed in time**, limited to a short-term recovery time frame post disaster. These donors **are not familiar with the rationale of having a gender or feminist lens to reconstruction**, although there is some openness to it (especially among current Fondo Semillas donors). For this group of donors, **it is essential for Fondo Semillas to make the case of why reconstruction led by women and for women is essential**.
- Disaster specialist donors, on the contrary, consider **reconstruction as both material and social**. They understand that the response time frame is long and complex, and that it operates on **both the short term and the longer term**. Within this group of donors, there is an increasing **focus on community-led, participatory and localized recovery processes**. While the need for a gendered approach to reconstruction is a key area of discussion within this group, literature and conversation highlight a **current lack of dedicated focus on women and their needs**. For this group of donors, it is important to highlight **Fondo Semillas' relationship to grassroots organizations in the field, and how its working**

processes operate following participatory and community-led principles, as well as to make the case for women-led reconstruction.

In summary, there are three core 'myths' that Fondo Semillas needs to address to make the case for why a longer-term reconstruction programmatic area would make sense, which will also help to define the role of the Fund in the disaster reconstruction landscape:

1. Reconstruction is short-term/limited in time: To debunk this myth, we need to establish Fondo Semillas' conceptual understanding of disasters, and what solutions are called for.

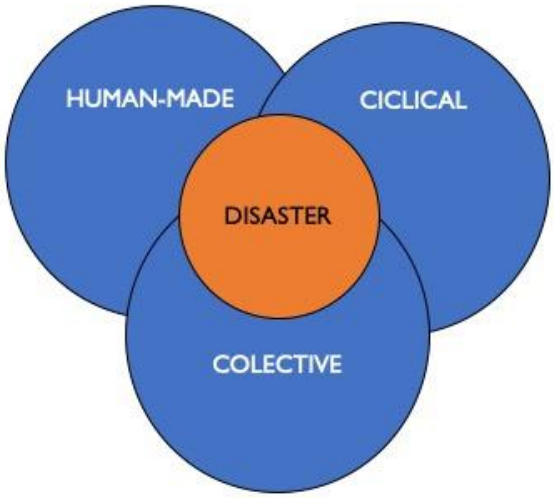
2. Reconstruction is a specialist humanitarian aid area requiring specific technical capacities: While this is true to some extent, especially in the immediate aftermath response to disasters, it is essential to situate what Fondo Semillas' sphere of intervention would be in the disaster reconstruction landscape (and at *which stage* of reconstruction the Fund would intervene) and what its contribution would be – e.g. longer term recovery focused on revitalizing communities and social links.

3. A gender lens is irrelevant in reconstruction: This requires Fondo Semillas to show how women are specifically exposed or vulnerable in the context of disasters and how their needs should be recognized and their contributions made visible.

1.Our disaster framework

There is a three-pronged rationale in making the WRC a permanent program area within Fondo Semillas:

- DISASTERS ARE HUMAN-MADE: In the context of disaster, major pressure is placed on long-standing vulnerabilities in infrastructures, amplified by migrations and overpopulation in some areas. In this sense, a **preventive and proactive approach** is required.
- DISASTERS ARE CYCLICAL: In a context of increased global climate urgency, and given Mexico's specific exposure in this respect (earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, etc.), donors are particularly interested in **resilience conceptually defined at the intersection of social and environmental justice**.
- DISASTERS ARE COLLECTIVE: Disasters affect the social, political, economic, and cultural fabric of communities in deep ways, not all visible or tangible in the immediate aftermath. Research shows that when **intervention strategies are led from the grassroots communities that are primarily affected**, initiatives implemented are more likely to have long-lasting impact.



In the following sections, we explore in detail each pillar of Fondo Semillas' disaster framework.

a) Disasters are human-made: calling for preventive and proactive strategies

Disasters are not 'natural'—earthquakes, floods, and hurricanes are natural phenomena, but **disasters are human-made situations created by the lack of adequate prevention measures** (for example poor infrastructures). This is why researchers and practitioners in the field talk about a **'living with risk'** approach, especially in geographical areas highly susceptible to natural hazards (such as Mexico). They emphasize how 'the contrasting potential and style of management identified with 'living with risk' – as the context of longer-term safety measures and safe development – as against emergency and relief measures, or reconstruction after disaster. The 'living with risk' approach is important for understanding how natural hazards often reinforce already existing vulnerabilities'[35]. In this sense, a shift of mindset is required to consider disasters not as external fatalistic events that 'happen to people' but as hazards that bring exhausted or over-stressed infrastructures, networks and systems to the brink.

This has drastic implications in terms of how we deal with disasters and reconstruction from a programmatic perspective, as this 'living with risk' approach calls for **preventive and proactive strategies** over reactive ones (when disaster hits). This is aligned with what civil society groups, such as Ciudadania19S in Mexico City, advocate: 'Facing risk implies that we honestly recognize that we cannot control the threats (they are the "forces of the Earth") but we do have direct influence on the factors that can decrease or increase the risk:

[35] Hewitt K (2009) Culture and risk: understanding the sociocultural settings that influence risk from natural hazards, *Synthesis Report from a Global E-Conference organised by ICIMOD and facilitated by the Mountain Forum*

vulnerabilities and capacities. Both depend directly on us. So, although the risk is uncertain, we can trace a route to feel safer'[36].

In parallel there is an increasing realization in the philanthropic sector that more proactive funding is needed, especially in terms of tackling the climate emergency: 'I think we're seeing that funders who haven't been in the disaster space before are moving more and more into the disaster space, just by virtue of the reality of climate change, and increasing frequency of disasters.'

'(…) We're going to be taking a slightly different approach moving forward. We're going to be stepping away from doing grants in the aftermath of natural disasters. And what we will do instead is have a proactive fund where we can examine the intersection of climate change and social justice. So really we're looking at environmental justice and climate resilience as an area for us to expand our grant making opportunities.' (WRC donor interviews)

Another key aspect of disasters is a particular risk identified by women's groups and women defenders: Natural hazards like earthquakes open a breach through which certain exploitative projects tend to get pushed. 'The situation here is on high alert because the wind companies have returned and they are lurking to put up an energy park. The electoral issue also puts a tense atmosphere in place.' (*Grantee-partner interview*). This is one cross-over among many between climate crisis-induced hazards and the defense of territories against extractive corporate-industrial greed, as vulnerabilities are accentuated in disaster settings. This is partially due to a shift of priorities during the rebuilding phase, as some groups or community members can no longer afford to play their usual role of watchdogs and because some companies may take advantage of the greater need for cash of individuals to force their projects through.

While there is a growing awareness in the philanthropic sector, directing funds towards supporting proactive and preventive intervention strategies in lieu of or not uniquely towards immediate relief is an important conceptual shift that most funders have yet to make. As shown in a 2019 report from the Center for Disaster Philanthropy, **nearly two thirds (64%) of the global funding for disaster relief assistance strategy in 2017 was dedicated to short-term response and relief**, whereas 17% was dedicated to reconstruction and relief and **only 2% was allocated to resilience, risk reduction and mitigation**.[37] Of course, these categories do not neatly overlap with Fondo Semillas' approach to reconstruction, as intervention strategies from the WRC women's groups intersect between resilience, and reconstruction and recovery. But overall, this is still a small part of the pie, and a more general philanthropic shift towards resilience is needed, which case studies like this one can help inform.

[36] Ciudadanía19S (2018): Manual para la Reconstrucción con dignidad CDMX
[37] Center for Disaster Philanthropy (2019): Measuring the state of disaster philanthropy: data to drive decisions. Available at https://disasterphilanthropy.org/event/measuring-the-state-of-disaster-philanthropy-2019/

b) Disasters are cyclical: calling for a continuous and sustained strategy focused on building up communities' resilience

Disaster risk is a constant in the current era of climate crisis. Even though the WRC was created in the context of a specific series of events (2017 earthquakes), **people on the ground had to deal with an accumulation of vulnerabilities and damages rather than with the aftermath of a single isolated event**. Many grantee-partners noticed through their work how they often were dealing not only with the consequences of the 2017 earthquakes but also with decades of unaddressed damage caused by previous disasters (e.g., floods, hurricanes), which had fragilized infrastructure and worsened the impact of the 2017 earthquakes: 'Impoverished communities facing disaster and climate risks often bundle themes and issues that address the interlinked elements of disaster risks, vulnerability, poverty and development failures that they experience. (…) [These] communities continually deal with multiple, inter-connected risks and associated vulnerabilities, they tend to prioritize risk reduction strategies that have multiple benefits'[38].

'There was a flood there, three years ago. There is a river which borders the area and they were doing what they call 'the ravine', and it rained so hard and because that is where they were going and throwing the garbage, without taking care of that space, the flood covered it up, overflowed and flooded the part of the village that was later on the most affected one in the earthquake. That is to say, there was first a flood two years before the earthquake and in those areas that had been flooded, where they already had lost property, with the earthquake it completely went under, their homes fell.' *(Grantee-partner interviews)*

This points to a dramatic lack of resilience in remote locations, but other studies show this is not limited to hardest-to-reach areas. Indeed, several urban studies in the past decades mapped the risk profile of Mexico City and recommended **framing disasters as the direct result of poor urban planning**: 'Mexico City is highly vulnerable as a result of their huge population and economic activities concentration. There is no doubt of the importance of institutional and academic planning for the reduction of its vulnerability and risk exposure. For this reason, it is necessary to understand that **risk and disaster occurrence are not extraordinary events in the city's functioning. It is the result of a historical process which made certain groups of people less capable to face risks and disasters. In this sense, risk and vulnerability in any city are socially built, and, therefore, they are not external factors to the urban process**'.[39]

The same study also emphasized how the capital was becoming a hotbed for disasters, listing (not exclusively) risks associated with flooding due to poor drainage systems, water scarcity due to overexploitation of aquifers, ecological risk due to the high concentration of polluting industries: 'Mexico City's vulnerability has been increasing for the last years due to the expansion of the urban settlements in risky areas, the environmental devastation, the

[38] GFDRR (2015) Community-led partnerships for resilience. *The World Bank Group* Available at https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/Community_led_partnership_JUNE24.pdf

[39] Mexico City, Mexico Disaster Risk Management Profile (last update 2006), *3CD City Profiles Series*, Available at https://www.eird.org/wikien/images/Mexico_Disaster_Profile.pdf

deterioration of life levels, the economic activities concentration that requires dangerous substances, and growing complexity of transportation process'[40].

This is why many protagonists (both governmental and from civil society) advocate for resilience measures as one of the key lessons of the 2017 earthquakes in Mexico. In September 2018, a year after the earthquakes, a report was published by the local council of Mexico City in partnership with 100 Resilient Cities (a Rockefeller Foundation program that concluded its cycle in 2019[41]). This report highlighted ongoing vulnerabilities in Mexico City, as and suggested a definition for resilience which is useful to frame the longer-term aim of the WRC as it transitions towards a permanent program area of Fondo Semillas: 'Resilience is not equivalent to comprehensive risk or disaster management. **Resilience observes the city as a system of systems and operates in a transversal and pre-emptive way to make the city stronger before, during and after the impact**. Resilience goes beyond civil protection and anticipates the negative effects of chronic tensions, sometimes silent or invisible, that make a city more vulnerable and jeopardize its survival in cases of acute crisis.'[42]

While this definition constitutes a solid foundation for how Fondo Semillas could approach resilience, it is important to highlight a couple of key additions the WRC implemented which should be retained: First, remote rural areas and some of the left-behind urban areas within cities (e.g., migrants' urban settlements) should be taken into account. Second, women and their communities should be the core nexus of intervention for a longer-term program from Fondo Semillas in this area (rather than urban planning or infrastructure, for example), with the experience of the WRC and others attesting to the importance of developing women's self-sufficiency in advance43.

c) Disasters are collective: calling for community-led and participatory strategies

Disasters have far-reaching implications for communities: **they destroy their living and working spaces, as well as the resources necessary to generate income, triggering displacement (often of men) and producing a deep change in the collective fabric of communities, both socially and culturally**.

'In these two communities, men's migration to the cities, caused by the loss of the factories [*which were the source of income for many in the community*], has led women to be in charge in

40 Ibid.
41 https://www.100resilientcities.org/
42 Report https://www.resiliencia.cdmx.gob.mx/storage/app/media/Publicaciones/aprender-del-sismo-para-ser-mas-resilientes.pdf
43 'In Togo and other African countries, women gather in a "Mother's Club". This is a group of 20 women who live close together. They are trained "in the field of maternal and child health, hygiene and environmental sanitation, nutrition and the creation of income-generating activities' Center for Disaster Philanthropy 'Women and Girls in Disaster' https://disasterphilanthropy.org/issue-insight/women-and-girls-in-disasters/

many families, or alternatively men only concentrate on farming activities, which means that all their resources depend on what the field gives, and so many women have had to look for new strategies to get resources.' *(Grantee-partner interview)*

But as the impact of disaster is collective, so is the path to recovery. The latest research in the field shows that one of the stronger predictors of recovery is community and social capital. This is exactly the approach privileged by the WRC, with the focus on rebuilding the social fabric of communities.

A case study in India explored the role of social capital in rebuilding. Findings indicated that **the ability of a given community to successfully rebuild is strongly related to how the community worked before the disaster**. 'Our research found that when the community members followed the rules of the community before the tsunami, many villagers followed state/national recovery policies more closely and welcomed NGOs to redevelop their communities. Our research concluded that social capital is vital for disaster recovery. However, whether a community successfully develops social capital or not is strongly related to how the community worked before the disaster. The strength of social networks, the commitment of residents to the community, the leader's popularity, and various social factors influence the progress of recovery'[44]. This would support **a proactive approach to build resilient communities ahead of disasters**.

Another strong argument in favor of making the WRC a permanent area within Fondo Semillas, and which validates its general approach within this current project, is that the participatory selection process and focus on grassroots communities allowed the inclusion of women's groups located in harder-to-reach areas and **underserved communities**. This is critical because these communities are often the last ones to get a slice of the pie (if they get one at all), and as such they face an accumulation of obstacles on the road to recovery. Furthermore, literature on this topic highlights how **people's relationship to risk is fundamentally linked to power, especially for lower income groups**: 'It is important to look at the role of political culture, where the socio-cultural aspects are really determined by the power structures that make people more superstitious and fatalist **because they are not only ignored but totally disregarded** (…) Communities' notions of risk are often linked to power issues which are often (almost always) overlooked by either academics, or governments or aid organizations. Power is perceived as not being their/our business, even though power relations are at the root of differential vulnerability'[45].

To counterbalance this power dynamic and involve all communities, including the most underserved ones, embracing participatory and community-led interventions is essential. 'Community-based activities are a form of participant empowerment and a mechanism that transfers ideas from the community to the authorities who make decisions at the top level of

---

[44] Abhay Joshi & Misa Aoki (2013): The role of social capital and public policy in disaster recovery: A case study of Tamil Nadu State, India, International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction

[45] Hewitt K (2009) Culture and risk: understanding the sociocultural settings that influence risk from natural hazards, *Synthesis Report from a Global E-Conference organised by ICIMOD and facilitated by the Mountain Forum*

the governance system'[46]. This applies at a risk reduction level to ensure the full participation and ownership of people most at risk; but also for practitioners such as Fondo Semillas to co-develop intervention strategies led by women that reinforce communities' resilience. Other published results support this argument; for instance, research led in the Vanuatu island in the Pacific (an area prone to volcanic activity): 'Networks like the Traditional Knowledge Working Group directly aim to capture traditional knowledge to make it more sustainable and transferable, addressing the challenge of potential loss inherent in oral culture. However, the oral nature of the Vanuatu culture should also be seen as a real asset for networking and cooperation, since relations are easily built during informal and formal group meetings, community gatherings and ceremonies'[47]. Enabling communities to capture their 'memory' of disasters, as well as retain the traditional knowledge used and enriched during previous recovery interventions, is key to building resilient communities in the future.

2. Key implications: Resilient Communities

a) Our model: community leadership

The WRC filled a gap in the disaster reconstruction landscape: Whereas the FONDEN and several INGOs, private donors and local organizations focused on rebuilding homes, schools, and other essential infrastructure that had been damaged, a common diagnostic echoed across women's groups highlighted how the audits conducted to determine loss often ignored the fundamental needs of women. Unfortunately, this is a frequent diagnostic in many disaster reconstruction settings: 'When the members of the [WRC grantee-partner] asked the authorities about the damages in terms of bread ovens and stoves, they realized that there was no census for such damages, and that this type of damages had not been taken into account.' *(Grantee-partner interview)*.

Typically, ovens and kitchens lost in communities were not taken into account, yet they affect the domestic lives of households (and primarily women's spheres) and completely disrupt the community's functioning, as suddenly there is a shortage or incapacity to produce the food necessary for the survival of the community. By way of example, the Center for Disaster Philanthropy[48] received $300,000 USD in donations to its Mexico Earthquake Recovery Fund. Out of the total, 50% was allocated to supporting economic recovery and growth of small businesses affected by the earthquake, while the rest was split between local economic and neighborhood recovery support, home rebuilding projects in Puebla and the creation of a cultural center. While this is highly valuable, the WRC intervened at a totally different level, focusing on women's needs.

---

[46] Kulatunga U (2010) Impact of Culture towards Disaster Risk Reduction. *International Journal of Strategic Property Management* 14(4): 304-313

[47] Vachette A (2016) Developing a culture of preparedness: embracing vulnerability to build resilience. *Conference Proceedings 6th International conference on building resilience*, Auckland, New Zealand

[48] http://disasterphilanthropy.org/issue-insight/earthquakes/

Another common issue mentioned by grantee-partners is **corruption of the official authorities** and the promise of financial aid that never came, leaving entire groups or villages stranded: 'There were many irregularities in the censuses, so many families did not receive the compensation for the full amount of their losses, or the money did not reach them because the government pushed for 'free' demolition, which caused 409 traditional houses to be demolished, because people were told, 'If you do not get rid of your house ruins, you will not receive the refund card for the total loss—demolition is free now, take advantage of it'; then they did not receive the refunds anyway (…) Sometimes, it's the neighbors that give bad information; if they don't get along, they'd say, 'They no longer live here, they moved there,' so many censuses were wrong because of this, and potential aid was also lost. **I think this reflects the rupture of the social fabric that already existed in our town**'. *(Grantee-partner community meetings)*

There is also a sense from women's groups that some of the 'solutions' promoted by government authorities follow a one-size-fits-all logic, without taking the context into account, amounting to little more than what they refer to as '**token reconstruction**'. This has a negative impact for long-term recovery: 'Many organizations and institutions outside the affected communities tried to impose generic aid plans that do not adapt to the needs, customs or traditions of the residents' (*Grantee-partner auto-diagnostic*).

A particular example of this logic is the replacement of some traditional homes with constructions relying on materials foreign to the area (a missed opportunity in terms of sourcing local material, which would have contributed to the economic reactivation of the area and generated new jobs). Moreover, the housing designs favored individual living and had fewer open communal spaces, deeply affecting community life. Indeed, many WRC women's groups reported how this type of reconstruction endangered their sense of belonging and identity by removing the 'unique character' of their town, causing further distress rather than alleviating it.

Therefore, we advocate for community leadership (not just participation)—based on both the WRC project evaluation results and contextualizing these with literature in the field. This is in line with the approach that Fondo Semillas has developed and supported since its inception, by supporting 'organized women themselves to identify the problems they face and propose solutions'[49]. This is why **the WRC-supported projects made a major difference, filling the gaps left by government and other institutional actors, and redirecting some of the philanthropic effort where it was needed, while focusing specifically on women**, which was not a key area of focus for many of the other rebuilding initiatives.

b) Our strength: people-focused

Looking across the board of 'disaster specialist' organizations operating in Mexico (e.g., those operating more broadly under a humanitarian aid framework[50]), it is obvious that none of them is solely working along the lines of relief: **there is an understanding among these organizations that disaster mitigation strategy has to do with prevention**. This

[49] Fondo Semillas website https://www.semillas.org.mx/en/what-is-fondo-semillas/
[50] E.g. Oxfam, UNDP; Mercy Corps; GlobalGiving, etc.

means that 'resilience' strategies already exist in the field, so it is crucial to define what role Fondo Semillas can play in this ecosystem by identifying the core assets the Fund can offer.

Broadly speaking, exploring both the taxonomy in use and the core intervention strategies deployed by different actors in the reconstruction field, we identified four clusters:

- **Value-focused**: These disaster-reconstruction actors frame reconstruction through abstract values (such as resilience, adaptability, preparedness) and focus on a higher-order commitment within which they can incorporate more technical details regarding their specific intervention strategies. While this would have the advantage of creating space for the WRC to lead with a familiar and recognizable take on reconstruction, a potential pitfall is that it would create an obligation for the WRC to educate donors and public opinion on what it means exactly by 'resilience' on its own, and it could be accused of lacking specificity.
- **Technical-focused**: This group leads with expertise—which is potentially reassuring for external audiences. Terms such as 'strengthening', 'risk management', 'integral reconstruction', and 'holistic strengthening' hint at the complexity of the issues faced and the inherent interrelatedness of disaster response. However, it is unclear how technical expertise would relate to the core mission of a women's fund such as Fondo Semillas, and crucially it would not capitalize on the core strengths that the Fund can bring into this field (e.g., women-led / participatory model / grassroots and community-focused).
- **Aid-focused**: This group focuses on emergency ('relief', 'crisis response', 'emergency settings'), and it clearly connects with the most recognized language around 'disaster relief', with the added advantage of creating an acute need to spur donors into action. While this would cast Fondo Semillas into a familiar role within reconstruction, thus minimizing the need to explain their activities to donors, it would not necessarily convey the particularity of the Fund's perspective, nor would it do justice to the 'participatory' nature of the WRC approach to reconstruction. It also suggests a specific and narrow timeline of intervention (directly after a disaster has taken place).
- **People-focused:** The people-focused lens on reconstruction puts the human factor at the center of reconstruction and/or highlights the benefits for people ('capable communities', 'sustainable, inclusive and resilient development', 'sustainable care'). It would provide a remit for talking about reconstruction beyond the material, and a logical bridge between reconstruction work and the work of Fondo Semillas more generally.

Taking into account Fondo Semillas' conceptual framework of disasters, as well as the strategies implemented via the WRC, we recommend that the long-term reconstruction area of Fondo Semillas should be positioned under the people-focused cluster, and that its name should reflect the WRC mission: **RESILIENT COMMUNITIES**.

c) Our perimeter: key guardrails

As WRC becomes a permanent program within Fondo Semillas, there will be a need to define its scope to ensure there is no overlap with other Fondo Semillas programs.

An initial draft developed by Fondo Semillas in conjunction with allies Oxfam, UNDP and the Cantaro Azul Foundation identified five major risk scenarios for Mexico:

1. Natural strong magnitude hazards: Primary events include floods and tropical hurricanes, while secondary events (a subsequent effect) include localized flooding, building collapses, and epidemics.
2. Droughts: Secondary events include food insecurity, water shortages and mass displacements of population.
3. Earthquakes: Secondary events include localized flooding, fires, landslides, and lack of access to essential services.
4. Volcano eruptions: more localized to specific regions in Mexico.
5. Epidemics (*at the time of finalizing this report, Fondo Semillas started to bring support to women's groups affected by the COVID crisis in 2020*).

Other risk scenarios span violent social conflicts, under which femicides, migrations, and aggression against human rights defenders were grouped. While the violent social conflicts are taking place, we argue that these issues (femicides, migrations, human right aggressions) are already prioritized within other Fondo Semillas programs. This does not mean these issues do not present intersections with disasters (as seen in the five risk scenarios); there is plenty of room for grantee-partners' alliances.

For programmatic clarity, we recommend that intervention for the Resilient Communities program and its selection process concentrate on **women's groups operating at the intersection of climate change and the defense of territory**—specifically in **historically underserved, more marginalized communities**— to **support them in recovering or building up their livelihoods and strengthening their resilience tools**.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS: FROM WRC TO RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

In this section, we lay out and explore in detail four areas of recommendation to foster the transition from the WRC to Resilient Communities:

- Organizational structure for the new program area: how we would recommend formally setting up Resilient Communities.
- Revising the profiles of grantee-partners under Resilient Communities: with implications in terms of recommended capacity-building training and selection criteria.
- Implications for the different operational areas within Fondo Semillas: concrete implications for the teams in making the transition from WRC to Resilient Communities.
- How to introduce Resilient Communities to external audiences: useful in terms of writing proposals to donors and introducing the work at conferences with allies, sister organizations, philanthropists, among others.

In so doing, we aim to address three main concerns voiced by our allies in setting up the WRC for the longer term:

1. Over-stretching Fondo Semillas' strengths: This requires a need to keep on building strategic partnerships with reconstruction specialist allies (OXFAM and UNDP in Mexico, and others).

2. Coping with unequal flows of donation: We already pointed out that there are currently fewer funds dedicated to long-term resilience initiatives than to the immediate emergencies of the disaster aftermath.

- A key implication is that Fondo Semillas has to build a **fund-raising strategy** that relies on the intersectionality it brings to the table, therefore targeting not only traditional disaster philanthropy but also feminist philanthropy, especially at the intersection with eco-feminism and defense of the territory.
- Another recommendation here would be to try to pool funding from multiple donors into a **common fund dedicated to Resilient Communities** led by a consortium of sister organizations involving Fondo Semillas and other funds[51].

3. Sustaining grantee-partners' participation (in the absence of immediate disasters): The experience of allies on the ground in the country attests to the difficulty in keeping grantee-partners motivated in the absence of perceived urgency and disaster. However, given that Resilient Communities would focus on supporting women-led projects and strengthening communities—with risk preparedness, economic reactivity and community development as sub-components—we believe that community leaders will feel free to create innovative approaches to keep participants engaged in these projects.

[51] Akin to the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA: https://gaggaalliance.org/about-gagga/) 'a multi-actor network that is active from local to international levels, supporting local movements fighting for women's rights and environmental justice and further amplifying local women´s struggles and solutions' and made up by a consortium of women's funds and women's organizations across the globe

a) Organizational structure for Resilient Communities as a program area

There are two key implications for Fondo Semillas emerging from this evaluation:

1/ Turn the WRC into a permanent area— 'Resilient Communities'—within the Programs portfolio. [*Note*: **at the date this report is finalized, this is already under implementation by Fondo Semillas**]. This area would retain its focus on (re)building the social fabric of communities and strengthening them to become more resilient. **Resilient Communities would be incorporated under Programs with a dedicated official**. This area would be proactive and target the most vulnerable communities, which are 'hidden' and traditionally overlooked by government agendas and are the last to receive attention. It would thereafter join the regular cycle of Fondo Semillas, and the call for grantee-partner applications would happen on a two-year rolling basis and be part of the participatory selection process already implemented by the Fund.

2/ **Strengthening the parallel Emergency Fund:** To date, this emergency fund has been used to relocate women defenders whose security is at risk, or to respond at a smaller scale to natural catastrophes. But moving forward, we would recommend building up the emergency fund and using it more broadly **as a 'safety net' to respond to short-term emergencies in case of new natural hazards**, as well as for attacks on women's right defenders. While short-term aid is not the primary vocation of Fondo Semillas, and this is not where the majority of our efforts in terms of programming or granting would occur, we have an obligation to assist our grantee-partners in the field when such events happen. This emergency fund would have implications primarily at both an administrative and a fund-raising level, as they would need to provision a percentage of the general fundraising effort to the emergency fund.

In complement to this emergency fund, an emergency protocol ('*protocolo de emergencia*') should be designed and implemented, with a specific role for each member of the Fondo Semillas team (relevant to their role within the organization). The emergency protocol would be activated in case of another major disaster and would ensure appropriate and efficient first response in the immediate aftermath, with responsibilities clearly identified for each person.

b) Profiles of grantee-partners under Resilient Communities

Through the research, we were also able to build a typology of grantee-partners within the WRC. **Two key profiles of grantee-partners emerged**, each presenting a different set of priorities in terms of accompaniment and capacity-building needs:

- **Newcomers**: groups that consolidated themselves because of the earthquakes in 2017, without prior experience of working together as a collective.
- **Established:** groups that operated since before the earthquake (as opposed to having been previously involved in disaster recovery)

CORE CURRICULUM (for all)

- Disaster risk preparedness 2.0* (with UNDP and other organizations as support and grantee-partners leading training at a local level)
- Emotional/mental healing (self-care)
- Generating spaces dedicated for women (formal and informal)
- [Optional] Sales and business training ('plan de negocios'; for groups engaged in economic reactivation projects) **
- [Optional] Artivism (with the support of Reinas Chulas and other allies)

**A note on risk preparedness training*: If this kind of training/preparation is going to be rolled out more widely to all of Fondo Semillas grantee-partners, it will be essential to understand the mechanics of risk culture locally, and how it affects engagement in disaster preparedness—What best practices and strategies can be implemented considering potential blocks? Literature in the field seems to indicate two key components (also appropriate in fatalistic risk culture contexts):

1/ **Hyper-localized in-situ training in communities** is more likely to foster engagement and ownership of women and communities over disaster preparedness, such as transect walks led by and with women in the community 'to understand the risks and resources including safe and unsafe sites in the context of disasters.'[52]

2/ **Memory work** aimed at preserving and communicating the stories of survivors and, more broadly, indigenous community resilience initiatives[53].

***A note on sales and business training:* One of the key difficulties that women's groups involved in these activities encountered was how to manage an unstable supply of reconstruction materials and fluctuating costs (due to high demand across the country). Specific skill sets and knowledge are required in this area, and it is worth leveraging part of the training resources currently implemented under the economic cooperatives program to this end.

[52] Pincha C (2019) Women's Voices & Agencies in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction: Facilitating Factors & Constraints from the Experiences of the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium. AFGHANISTAN RESILIENCE CONSORTIUM (ARC) (ARC) and UK AID (UK AID)

[53] Danladi A, Siong H.C. and Teck G.L.H (2018) Importance of Indigenous Knowledge in Flood Risk Reduction: A Review. *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology* 11 (1): 7-16

TAILORED | Newcomers

- Institutional strengthening fundamentals to operate as a collective (e.g., assertive communication, division of responsibilities, defining a mission, vision and goals)
- Basics of administrative management (budget and resource management; accounting)
- Long-term strategic planning (the ability to set objectives for one's group)
- M&E training (the ability to measure progress against one's objectives)
- [Optional] Security training (assuming that Established groups would have already completed it)

TAILORED | Established

- Media and communication strategies
- Advanced M&E training
- Women's leadership (building confidence in public speaking, especially in mixed-gender groups)
- Engagement strategies with different audiences (e.g., young women vs. older women) to remedy the challenge around sustaining participation of constituents to workshops.
- Support more proactive alliance-building strategies and participation in conferences
- Fundraising
- [Optional] Theoretical training around disaster/emergency settings response with a gender lens

Moving forward, to select grantee-partner organizations under the Resilient Communities program area, **we recommend keeping the focus on first-timers in a bid to involve harder-to-reach, most underserved communities**. Within the WRC, there were 42% of newcomers vs. 58% of experienced organizations, but this proportion will likely change as the project becomes a long-term program area. Indeed, one of the criteria to respond to Fondo Semillas' call for applications is that organizations must justify at least one year in existence. While we think reverting to that criteria would make sense in the context of a permanent program area and allow for greater efficiency from an accompaniment strategy perspective (as well as equity with other applicants), there is a rationale for retaining a strong percentage of first-timer organizations—organizations that have been working together for at least one year but have never accessed funding before. By priming first-timer organizations within the Resilient Communities, we ensure the diversity of our funding for the women's movement in the country and that Fondo Semillas can also reach more isolated women's groups, working in partnership with historically underserved and ignored communities.

c) Implications for the different operational areas within Fondo Semillas

Recommendations in this section are presented by categorizing the implications for each operational area of Fondo Semillas, and following a timeline that aims at prioritizing implementation efforts:

	Programs
	Selection process
Short-term	Review criteria for grantee selection: • **ESTABLISH A MINIMUM % OF FIRST-TIMER ORGANIZATIONS** (e.g. which didn't access prior funding) • **ESTABLISH PRIORITY GEOGRPAHIC AREAS**: based on WRC, a mix of areas more vulnerable to natural hazards (the south-west coast, Oaxaca, Chiapas and south-east Quintana Roo) and areas still recovering from S17 (e.g. specific neighbourhoods in Mexico City, for example, which are over-populated, or with migrant settlements, often more vulnerable) • **PRIORITIZE GROUPS WORKING AT THE INTERSECTION OF CLIMATE CRISIS x DEFENSE OF TERRITORIES** • **ENSURE A VARIETY OF 'TIERS' IN GRANTEES ARCHETYPES** (as with the other programs, mix of Grassroots Base, Consolidation, Mid-sized and Large organizations, in order to ensure intra-support from grantees within the program area itself) • **DETERMINE A FIXED NUMBER OF GRANTEE-PARTNERS FOR SELECTION** (more efficient to carry on fundraising and support) Retain these criteria: • **Organizations led and formed by women** (even though there can be men in the participant community) • **Ensure diversity in represented women** (e.g. indigenous, Afro-Mexicans, rural, urban…) • **Group members must be localized in the same location or within close proximity to participant communities** • **Relationship and perception to women's rights** • **Not related to political parties or religious groups**
	Keep collecting this information (useful for Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning / MEL): • Date of creation of the group • Operating budget (if relevant) • Legal constitution status /Authorized tax status and potential proxy alliance • Number of members / Profiles / Number of women members / role distribution (if relevant) • Mission of the group (self-defined) • Type of strategies/activities implemented or proposed • Contact details • Other donors (if relevant) • Amount requested / Amount also secured with other funders (if relevant) • Information about the communities (self-informed), especially in terms of gender dynamics, population composition (e.g. % of women, older, younger…), infrastructure (risk area, disaster preparedness, resources) and challenges faced locally (mega-projects, attacks on human rights defenders…)

	Programs
	Accompaniment model

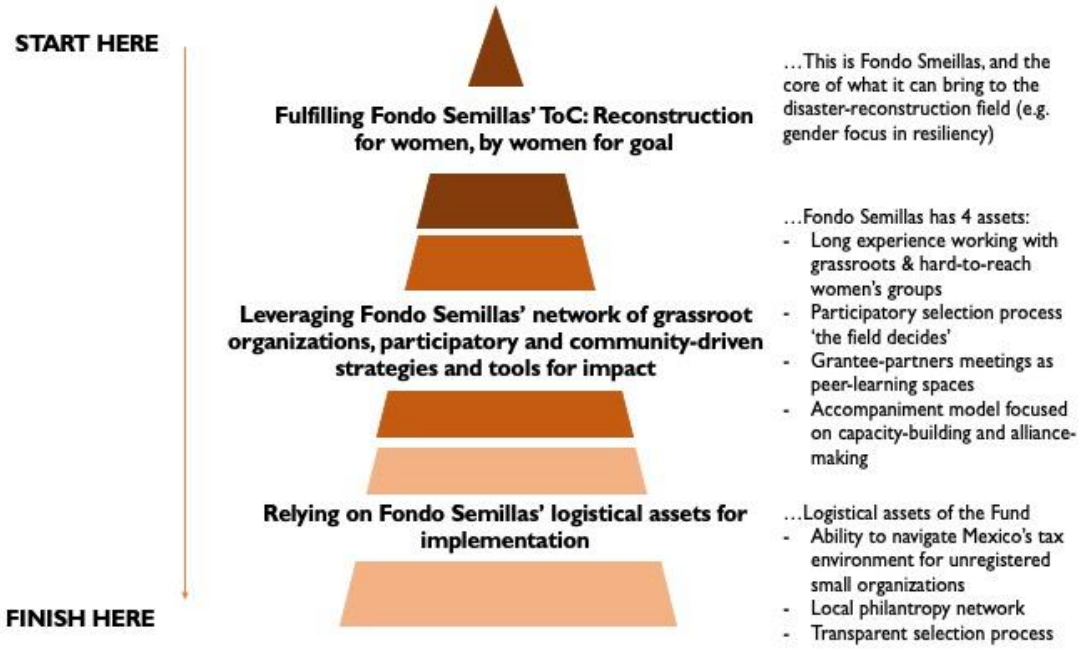
Short-term	• Leverage existing Fondo Semillas' partners network on the ground to relay creation of Resilient Communities and first call for proposals to existing + new organizations (similarly to what was done for the WRC selection process)
	• Adapt capacity-building curriculum as per recommendations, according to newcomer vs. established profile
	• Adjust alliance-building support according to mid-term strategic planning recommendations:
	  • **Newcomers**: first stage of 'alliance-making' (e.g. who are the actors, what are their strategies). Focus on identifying who can be of use to them in a tactical way (with little sense yet of what they can offer to the movement themselves) → Fondo Semillas can help by orientating them towards other groups which are using similar strategies and who are geographically close.
	  • **Established**: greater need for strategic alliances to amplify the reach of women they support, extend their thematic capacities or amplify their public policy strategies → Fondo Semillas can play a 'connector' role following recommendations of grantee-partners
	• Establish automatic feedback loops for grantee-partners after key deliverables (Auto diagnostic / Work Plans / Mid-term reports / End-of-term reports)
	• Support tax proxy ('*paso administrativo*') procedure by offering to review contract set in place by grantee-partners with their proxy organization

Mid-term	• Think about how to deepen and focus partnerships with allied organizations in the field (Oxfam, UNDP, Community foundations like in Puerto Rico, etc.) – **especially in cases of grantee-partner organizations that require assistance with technical expertise** (such as water shortage) • Carry on and deepen capacity building partnerships with these organizations in particular: CREA / Reinas Chulas / Comaletzin • Ensure cross-learnings are shared across the different program areas, including Resilient Communities • Build mechanisms to allow for transfers of knowledge from prepared communities to those at risk. (Research from the Center for Disaster Philanthropy shows that 'cities and countries that experience the most frequent smaller earthquakes often are extremely well-prepared while others that are due for a major earthquake may not be'.)
Long-term	• Think about inter-exchanges for capacity-building, in a similar way to other programs (e.g. former grantee-partners of the WRC could shadow or receive some of the least experienced/new grantee partners from Resilient Communities) • In partnership with the communication team, develop a strategy for short-term communication in the immediate aftermath of disasters, as research shows that 'Experts perceived as independent from politics should have a major role in communication' (as populations in the context of a fatalistic risk culture like Mexico tend to have high levels of distrust towards official authorities, which can hinder the circulation of information)

	Administration	Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning	Communication	Development / Philanthropy
Short-term	• Recruit a program officer for Resilient Communities program area • Decide on which % of full general support should be allocated to the emergency fund • Design and implement emergency protocol assigning roles to each member of the Fund's team and Board in case of an emergency (can be done in conjunction with allied orgs.)	Investigate other allies in the field both domestically and internationally to build learnings and potentially leverage them in donors' spaces (e.g. TEWA, FAU LatAm…)	• Consider frequency of communicating to donors for a newly created area (for example, Global Giving has quarterly reports for donors of their disaster fund) • Leverage communication opportunity presented by the creation of a new program area	• For local and corporate donors – build a priority list of Resiliency funding partners (e.g. insurance companies etc.) • Assess intersection of donors that may be interested in funding Resilient Communities program area: Disaster Philanthropy / Environmental Climate Crisis / Environmental Territorial defense / Feminist women's rights / Human right defenders
Mid-term	Establish a contingency review plan: annually review the funds available, what was used this year to review total amount that needs to be dedicated to the emergency fund	• Update contextual elements on a regular basis (this could be part of the role of the officer in charge of the Resilient Communities program) • Review annually and update potential vulnerabilities and threats linked to climate crisis X defence of territories	Investigate new donors' spaces that could have an intersectional interest in women X disaster-reconstruction	• In partnership with Communication, publish learnings of success and failures of the WRC from a fund-raising perspective (e.g. Amplifica fund-raiser concert challenges 'what we learnt') on Fondo Semillas' website and on specialized philanthropy websites
Long-term		Develop rolling learning practices: once the program area is up and running, consider organizing a convening of Grantee-Partners within the first two years to gather learnings, challenges, opportunities	Work closely with MEL area to leverage learning and showcase it via reports / films / podcasts based on Resilient Communities	In partnership with MEL, consider opportunity of setting-up FEEDBACK loops across donors of the Resilient Communities program area, some grantee-partners and Semillas team to generate new philanthropic interest

d) Introducing Resilient Communities to external audiences

Recommendations in this section aim at showing which elements to highlight in the storytelling of Resilient Communities, in terms of both showing ***why*** Fondo Semillas turned the WRC into a permanent area within Programs and showcasing ***how*** Fondo Semillas' assets will enable it to take on this new challenge:



V. CONCLUSION

In *Black Wave*[54], Daniel Aldrich suggests that communities in Japan that displayed strong connections prior to the earthquake and tsunami in 2011 sometimes rebuilt even stronger and better than before the disaster. He suggests five rebuilding solutions:

- Get to know your immediate neighbors, who are, in effect, the first responders;
- Build a sense of the large neighborhood, the broader expanse of social ties;
- Build better communities in the sense of the physical landscape (e.g., a third space such as commune houses and women's centers);
- Improve civic engagement by getting people involved in political process;
- Encourage volunteering through community currencies that stay in the local region and do not go to big corporations.

This is, in essence, what the WRC did, and what the women's groups it supported on the ground managed to set in motion:

- WRC got women outside the confines of their home and battling their isolation, so they could get together in women-only spaces to socialize and get to know one another.
- The women's groups also organized activities, workshops or local cultural events that brought together the broader community (including men, elders, children), and sometimes neighboring towns or villages, and initiated new networks of collaboration.
- Some women's groups secured their space to gather and organize reunions, as well as contributed to the construction of women's centers, which previously did not exist.
- While women's participation in public assemblies is still underway and will require more time to blossom, there is a clear sense from the women themselves that they have a new-found identity and voice, and a recognition of their reconstruction abilities.

Of course, recovery does not end when the WRC grant stops: 'I think what ultimately is the sad reality is that the rebuilding, the reconstruction and recovery process for even just the 2017 earthquakes is going to be so extensive. I don't want to put a number on it, but it's like 10 plus years, at least. And then the other sad reality is that there's going to be many other types of disasters that take place in Mexico, in the near term, medium to long term, including earthquakes' (*WRC Donor interview*). There is still a long way to go—our grantee-partners know this, our donors know this, and Fondo Semillas knows it too. From the disaster framework we developed based on the learnings from the WRC experience, it is clear that there is a need for long-term solutions that can be proactive, sustained and participatory.

This requires a major mindset shift when thinking of 'disasters', whereby we no longer just look at disasters through the lens of social disintegration. While all natural hazards have high costs, it is important to consider how the learnings of the WRC, and the experience of the women's groups it supported, also entail new opportunities for women in Mexico, and how advocating for Resilient Communities for Fondo Semillas constitutes a deliberate choice to keep on supporting women's participation and leadership in all spaces.

---

[54] Aldrich D (2019) Black Wave, how networks and governance shaped Japan's 3/11 Disasters. *Summary talk at Department of Asian Studies, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.* Available at https://asianstudies.unc.edu/summary-of-prof-aldrichs-black-wave-talk/

The critical contribution of women's groups in the reconstruction area is not just recommended and promoted by disaster specialist actors such as the GFDRR (the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery), it is validated by empirical cases like that of the WRC and others across the world: 'Women's community organizations have insights, information, experiences, networks, and resources vital to increasing disaster resilience. The time challenges of rapid assessments conspire against fully engaging grassroots and community organizations in the aftermath of a disaster, while in fact most such organizations are already engaged in the immediate response. Working with established women's community organizations will therefore increase the efficiency of the recovery and reconstruction efforts'[55].

Recognizing the importance of women-led organizing and grassroots communities' leadership has been at the heart of Fondo Semillas' mission. Like our sister funds and allies, Fondo Semillas believes in the systemic importance of shifting the power towards those who are embedded in the realities and contexts where relief aid tends to get directed. Shifting the power in this context means, according to the Global Fund for Community Foundations, 'understanding and recognizing that 'big is best' when it comes to measuring impact and results is a fallacy, and replace it with 'small is beautiful' to rid ourselves of the myths and misconceptions of scalability; ridding ourselves of our colonial mindset of doing things for people, and rather enable people to do things for themselves; shifting the control of resources from a centralized to a distributed model, so that power moves to the edge of our systems'[56]. These beliefs will be at the forefront of Fondo Semillas' new program, Resilient Communities.

[55] GFDRR (2018) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Disaster Recovery, *Disaster Recovery Guidance Series* Available at https://www.gfdrr.org/en/publication/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-disaster-recovery

[56] Knight B (2019) Systems to shift the power. *Global Fund for Community Foundations* (19)

APPENDIX

List of 24 grantee-partner organizations

1. 06600 Plataforma Vecinal y Observatorio de la Colonia Juárez
2. Escuela para Defensoras en Derechos Humanos y Ambientales Benita Galeana A.C
3. Unión de Pueblos de Morelos, A.C.
4. Centro de Asesoría para el Desarrollo Indígena A.C
5. Mujeres de la tierra y el sol
6. Xochiteopan en pie
7. Acciones para la Justicia y la Igualdad (AGIJ) A.C.
8. Alianza Cívica Pinotepa Nacional, A.C.
9. Asamblea de Pueblos Indígenas del Istmo de Tehuantepec en Defensa de la Tierra y el Territorio (APIIDTT)
10. Binni Biaani AC
11. Centro de Acción para el Desarrollo CODICE
12. Centro para los Derechos de la Mujer Nääxwiin A.C.
13. Comité Ixtepecano en la Defensa de la Vida y el Territorio
14. Consorcio de mujeres y muxhe mujeres para la reconstrucción social, económica y cultural del Istmo de Tehuantepec
15. Mujeres Luchando por la Autonomía, A.C.
16. Mujeres Pescadoras del Manglar
17. El Sueño de Huejotengo
18. Mujeres por la reactivación económica de Jojutla
19. Monapaküy
20. Casa x Casa x Morelos
21. Una Mano para Oaxaca
22. Asociación Estatal de Mujeres Indígenas y Campesinas Xasasti Yolistli A.C.
23. Xochimilcas Disidentes
24. Comité de Mujeres de la Asamblea del Pueblo de San Dionisio del Mar

REFERENCES

Aldrich D (2019) Black Wave, how networks and governance shaped Japan's 3/11 Disasters. *Summary talk at Department of Asian Studies, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.* Available at https://asianstudies.unc.edu/summary-of-prof-aldrichs-black-wave-talk/

Appleby-Arnold S, Brockdorff N, Jakovlej I and Zdravkovic S (2018) Applying cultural values to encourage disaster preparedness: Lessons from a low-hazard country. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 31: 37-44

Arnold M and Cosmo S (2015) Building social resilience protecting and empowering those most at risk, *Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery,* Available at https://www.gfdrr.org/en/publication/building-social-resilience-protecting-and-empowering-those-most-risk

Chew L and N. Ramdas K (2005) Caught in the storm: the impact of Natural disasters on women. *The Global Fund for women* Available at https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/11/disaster-report.pdf

Center for Disaster Philanthropy (2019):Measuring the state of disaster philanthropy: data to drive decisions. Available at https://disasterphilanthropy.org/event/measuring-the-state-of-disaster-philanthropy-2019/

Cornia A, Dressel K and Pfeil P (2016) Risk cultures and dominant approaches towards disasters in seven European countries, *Journal of Risk Research* 19(3): 288-304

Danladi A, Siong H.C. and Teck G.L.H (2018) Importance of Indigenous Knowledge in Flood Risk Reduction: A Review. *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Sciences and Engineering Technology* 11 (1): 7-16

GFDRR (2015) Community-led partnerships for resilience. *The World Bank Group* Available at https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/Community_led_partnership_JUNE24.pdf

GFDRR (2018) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Disaster Recovery, *Disaster Recovery Guidance Series* Available at https://www.gfdrr.org/en/publication/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-disaster-recovery

Hewitt K (2009) Culture and risk: understanding the sociocultural settings that influence risk from natural hazards, *Synthesis Report from a Global E-Conference organised by ICIMOD and facilitated by the Mountain Forum*

Islam R and Walkerden G (2014) How bonding and bridging networks contribute to disaster resilience and recovery on the Bangladeshi coast. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 10(A): 281-291

Knight B (2019) Systems to shift the power. *Global Fund for Community Foundations* (31). Available at: https://globalfundcommunityfoundations.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/SystemsToShiftThePower.pdf

Kulatunga U (2010) Impact of Culture towards Disaster Risk Reduction. *International Journal of Strategic Property Management* 14(4): 304-313

Mexico City, Mexico Disaster Risk Management Profile (last update 2006), *3CD City Profiles Series*, Available at https://www.eird.org/wikien/images/Mexico_Disaster_Profile.pdf

Moreno J and Shaw D (2018) Women's empowerment following disaster: a longitudinal study of social change. *Natural Hazards* 32: 205–224

Pincha C (2019) Women's Voices & Agencies in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction: Facilitating Factors & Constraints from the Experiences of the Afghanistan Resilience Consortium. *AFGHANISTAN RESILIENCE CONSORTIUM (ARC) (ARC) and UK AID (UK AID)*

Ottenhoff R.G. (2020) How Philanthropy Is Transforming Resilience Theory Into Practical Applications at the Local Level. *Optimizing Community Infrastructure, Resilience in the Face of Shocks and Stresses* 15: 247-260

Sörensen B (1998) Women and post-conflict reconstruction: issues and sources'. *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies* (45)

Vachette A (2016) Developing a culture of preparedness: embracing vulnerability to build resilience. *Conference Proceedings 6th International conference on building resilience*, Auckland, New Zealand

World Disasters Report (2018) Leaving no one behind: The international humanitarian sector must do more to respond to the needs of the world's most vulnerable people. Available at https://reliefweb.int/report/world/2018-world-disasters-report-leaving-no-one-behind

World Health Organization (2014) Gender, Climate Change and Health. Available at https://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/reports/gender_climate_change/en/

Yonder A, Akcar S and Gopalan P (2005) Women's Participation in Disaster Relief and Recovery. *Women, Gender and Disaster: Global Issues and Initiatives* 15: 11