

BOOK REVIEWS

The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women's Eyes. Edited by Elaine Enarson and Betty Hearn Morrow. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1998. 288 pp. \$65.00 (U.S.; hardback)

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As a researcher in the world outside of academia, the criteria I use to determine whether information is useful to others are pragmatically biased. Specifically, I look for information that can directly help planners and others in the fields of emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. *The Gendered Terrain of Disaster: Through Women's Eyes* does all of this and more. This edited collection presents both case studies and theory that together demonstrate why gender should be an essential element in disaster research and mitigation measures. The discussions will also be useful to feminist sociological theorists and to planners and policymakers engaged in assessing and mitigating the vulnerability of communities, in both high density urban areas and in traditional rural economies.

Editing by Enarson and Morrow has been precise as well flexible. Starting with the preface and moving through the twenty chapters to the concluding unit on recommendations for restructuring disaster policy and priorities, one has the sense that a nail is being driven through the very underpinnings of disaster research theory and practice. The concluding chapter serves to reinforce the previous chapters and provides recommendations that will likely cause severe consternation among those in upper management in emergency preparedness. The implications for policy change worldwide are developed within a framework of case studies from both the developed (Australia) and developing (Mexico) countries. The argument that gender and vulnerability are implicitly woven into sustainable communities is well articulated throughout most of the chapters.

Whether actual change will occur as a result of the issues raised is problematic because, as the various contributors point out, the problems may need to be hammered out in the political arena before change occurs for those in the trenches. But some authors, as in Bari's case study on female empowerment in Pakistan, offer hope and examples of where some change is happening in acknowledging gender as an important independent variable in studying disaster vulnerability. Other authors, such as Enarson and Morrow in their case study on women's efforts during recovery from Hurricane Andrew, in Dade County, Florida, vividly elucidate the difficulty in maintaining postdisaster activism and having those efforts translated into the political arena.

Some chapters will stretch the perseverance of readers outside the field of sociology. Sociologists tend to use special words and invent vocabularies which require an understanding of theories that are not part of the less abstracted world of most practicing emergency managers. Although this may be effective in building sociological theory and introducing new paradigms, such language can bog down readers looking for direction to address recurring problems. The organization of chapters, however, allows the reader to pick up and leave off reading as necessary. And it is definitely worth the task of carrying the book around to make sure all chapters are read. This book provides a trail blazing collection of evidence that gender issues can no longer be ignored or dismissed if we are truly interested in reducing vulnerability and increasing sustainability of communities. It is not likely to be the last collection, and we hope follow-on efforts by the editors are in the works.