

## Commentary Paper For USAID/University Of Hawaii Gender Workshop

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Communicating risk and loss prevention strategies for natural, technological and human-caused disasters is growing as one of the most critical professional challenges in our international disaster management community. The requirement for effective risk communication is increasing as the complexities of globalization increases. Many of our colleagues—those in the disaster management profession and others in related areas such as community sustainability—are realizing the need to craft our development strategies, community outreach and assessments to support the need of our individual populations and of our communities. We must reach these “communities with the community.” This step is often dismissed, and those most at risk are those remain greatly marginalized.

As participants in this Gender Workshop, we are challenged to find ways to institutionalize a focus on the socio-cultural components of analysis, assessment, and community outreach strategies. How do we move our governments and NGOs to incorporate the *softer sciences*, needed to break through the cultural barriers, to reach women and other marginalized populations in the regions around the Pacific Rim and throughout Asia?

Many of us are working on innovative approaches and techniques—these efforts need to be shared, collected as case studies, and firmly placed into the harder discussions of land use planning, economic impact analysis, capacity development. Further research needs to be done to move us from understanding to field implementation. Educational institutions need to embrace these approaches in their coursework and literature. Laws need to be passed. I encourage us to work together for greater social-cultural customization in each phase of emergency management and sustainable development.

As a network of dedicated professional we are also challenged to find new outreach approaches that reflect the social and cultural sensitivities of the target audiences. We can use tools such as theoretical frameworks of cross-cultural communications to assist us. Let’s work together and push for funding and research for increased innovative efforts. Ultimately, our discovery and implementation will lead to a more effective, holistic institutionalized approach.

Suzanne Frew is an international consultant in cross-cultural risk communications, socio-economic assessment and disaster management. For nine years Suzanne worked with the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) where she worked on disaster operations throughout the U.S. and US Pacific Island Jurisdictions. She worked at the forefront of many agency mitigation initiatives to build community level sustainability. She left public service in 1999 to work independently. Since that time her projects have focused on disaster risk communications and impacts in Southeast Asia and U.S., social cultural communications issues, public sector outreach to vulnerable populations, partnership development, and socio-economic assessment and analysis. She is an instructor for FEMA, CA OES, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center and Sonoma State University. Prior to disaster management Suzanne worked as a writer/producer/director in the private sector.