

**SIDE EVENT – FORUM OF THE COUNTRIES OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**UNDG LAC event coordinated by the Interagency Gender Group (IGG) of the United Nations**

**MEXICO, 27 APRIL 2017**

**Commitments and Roadmap towards a Planet 50-50 by 2030**

**Planet: Women’s Role in the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources and in the building of Capacities and Mechanisms for Resilience Against Climate Change and Disaster Risks**

Question from the Moderator: ***What are your recommendations to strengthen the participation and leadership of women in national and local decision-making on climate change adaptation and disaster risk management?***

**1.0 Background/Context**

- 1.01 As indicated in the Concept Document, the Latin America and Caribbean Region is known to have one of the highest levels of exposure to geological and hydro-meteorological hazards. This hazard exposure is exacerbated by a high level of degradation of the natural environment as well as unsustainable land use practices, which further increases the vulnerability of communities to disasters and impacts to livelihoods and nutrition security. Such practices include deforestation, the limited control over urbanization, occupation of watersheds, the number of people living in areas of low elevation above sea level, among others
- 1.02 According to the UNISDR, it is a well-known prediction that women in the developing world will suffer the most from the effects of climate change. Women are also known to be disproportionately affected by disasters. According to a study by the London School of Economics in 141 countries<sup>18</sup>, it was identified that more women than men die from natural hazards and that this disparity is linked to the unequal socioeconomic status of women. The dangers of climate change are more pronounced for children than for adults.
- 1.03 There has been an increasing recognition over the past decade or so globally of the different ways in which women and girls are affected by disasters and climate change and of the need for increased emphasis on gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, so that appropriate support can be given to women and girls to improve their own resilience to disaster events and by extension, the resilience of their families and communities.
- 1.04 It has been our experience in the Caribbean that disasters can have devastating effects on our key economic sectors and consequently the livelihoods of persons that depend on them. With between 22 and 44 percent of households in the CARICOM region being headed by women, disasters can result in the reduction of women’s share of productive activities in the informal sectors, through direct damages to their means of production like small farms or equipment associated with micro businesses, and in the formal sector when temporary unemployment may result from damages to formal production systems.
- 1.05 Women who may not experience direct impacts may lose income indirectly, if they have to take time away from work to care for children when schools are closed because of damage or when they are being used as shelters.

- 1.06 Moreover, severe emergency events can also increase the risks of girls dropping out of school to care for their younger siblings or to work to supplement the family income, and it could also lead to an increased risk of them becoming the victims of sexual violence or exploitation.
- 1.07 The gender-differentiated consequences of disasters and climate change intensify factors that negatively affect women who depend on agriculture and the use of natural resources for their livelihoods, health and access to water.
- 1.08 In many places within LAC, women and girls are still marginalized from community discussions about development planning, which has implications for the success that can be achieved in building resilience.
- 1.09 These issues support the case for integration of gender considerations into our disaster risk management approaches and interventions. They also highlight the need for greater participation of women and girls in disaster risk management to increase their resiliency to disasters and to protect during and after a disaster event.
- 1.010 True community-based development must facilitate the involvement and sharing of knowledge, experience and ideas of all segments of the community.

## **2.0 Recommendations for Addressing Gaps**

In advancing any initiative aimed at protecting the planet and ensuring the participation of all of society in such an endeavor it is going to be important for us to foster greater social and economic independence for all as this is the only pathway to individual and national resilience. In noting the key messages for this session I therefore offer the following recommendations to address the gaps identified. In making these recommendations however it is important that we not seek to “broad brush” all of LAC given the culturally differentiated circumstances between Latin America and the Caribbean especially in the area of advancing gender equality:

- 2.01 CDEMA has through the regional Comprehensive Disaster Management Agenda, promoted the mainstreaming of gender in disaster risk management, through the establishment of a gender working group to provide policy and technical guidance.
- 2.02 **Recommendation #1:** Emphasis needs to be placed not only on increasing awareness of the differential impacts of climate change and disasters on women, but also on the fact that women also represent an immense source of potential and power to combat the increased disaster risks that climate change will bring. In the Caribbean, many women are involved in community groups that foster disaster preparedness and adaptation to climate change. Women are typically the ones who know other community members and are familiar with the way in which the community functions. They are therefore able to provide information on persons who may need assistance before, during and after emergency and can provide guidance on how to get that assistance. Women understand how they are affected by climate change and disasters and can influence the shaping of policies, plans and programmes to ensure that these needs are addressed.

It is therefore proposed that we promote the good experiences of women leadership in these areas as a catalyst for fostering efforts towards further equality in this area. There are many women lead Community Based Organizations who are unable to successfully negotiate the

various funding opportunities available in an effort to advance their contribution to building the resilience of their communities against Disaster and Climate Risk. In this regard we must seek to deliberately target capacity building for leaders in of Community Based Organizations especially those that are Women led.

In the Caribbean CDEMA promotes the youth engagement in Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) through what is termed the CDM Youth Champion Programme. The Caribbean youths are currently afforded opportunities to participate in key lobbying and advocacy spaces and as such these youth Champions can leverage these spaces to contribute efforts at advancing community resilience.

- 2.03. **Recommendation #2:** As a follow on from increasing the level of awareness of the contribution that women can make to the process of planning for climate change and disaster risk reduction, it is important to make the necessary changes to the societal structures that hinder the full participation of women. This includes facilitating equitable representation of men and women on community committees, task forces etc. Where there is need for capacity building of women to be able to participate more effectively, this should be integrated into whatever initiative is being undertaken. It has been shown that in cultural contexts where women have very little public role, women can be supported to take a much more important role in reducing disaster risk, and in helping their entire communities adapt to climate change.

We further are advocating for Local Government Authorities and Community Development Organizations to facilitate vulnerable groups to be represented on community committees. Local Development Planning and Governance needs to be strengthened to allow greater citizen participation in decision-making. This will allow the deliberate inclusion of women among other key demographics in these spaces or strengthening their participation where they already exist.

- 2.04 Recommendation #3:** There is a need for greater efforts globally and within the LAC region to generate data relevant to decision making on addressing climate and disaster risk which is disaggregated in a manner that will support the development of appropriate interventions for meeting the needs of vulnerable people, including women and girls. That is by gender, age, ethnicity, and disability.

Here it is important that we identify and understand the barriers to achieving the desired end state of gender considerations being mainstreamed in the decision making process. One step will require the institutionalization of the capture and analysis of key data sets perhaps through the resumption of demographic studies. This may help to entrench the processes thereby impacting or guiding policy, strategy and programming.

- 2.05 Recommendation #4:** In the undertaking of research, emphasis needs to be given to attaining a better understanding of the factors that affect the vulnerability of women. This will in turn support the development of more targeted interventions for addressing the building of community resilience and sustainable development. It should also be recognized that in many societies and communities, women often already have adaptive strategies and mechanisms in place which can be strengthened and up-scaled. This kind of research will encourage a shift

from simply researching about gender issues, towards research that can generate change led by women themselves.

- 2.06 **Recommendation #5:** It is important to promote the development and replication of Gender sensitive tools for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. It is important to strengthen the understanding of what this should look like according to better understanding of the gaps or opportunities within Latin America and the Caribbean this may require the further development of knowledge products and guidance tools. CDEMA and UN Women are seeking to collaborate to contribute to this area.

In closing it is important that much of the efforts to achieve resilience and resolving some of these gender disparities lay within the achievement of the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals especially those that seek to address the underlying Risk Drivers.