



**Submission by the Women's Environment and Development Organization to the CEDAW Committee on the "Gender-related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change"**

The Women's Environment and Development Organization<sup>1</sup> welcomes the opportunity to submit a written contribution to the CEDAW Committee Discussion and General Recommendations on the Gender-related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change.

WEDO commends the CEDAW Committee for addressing this critical linkage of gender equality, women's human rights, climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR). WEDO has worked at this intersection for decades and the attention and engagement from a human rights body is critical to further worldwide progress.

Recently, links between gender, climate change and disaster risk reduction have been recognized internationally to a degree not seen before. The December 2015 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement explicitly references gender equality and the empowerment of women in both the Preamble and the Decision concerning the adoption of the text, thus providing the framework for all the actions under the agreement. Other internationally agreed documents from 2015 also link gender, climate change, DRR and sustainable development. The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction both have language making the links to different degrees.

These words on paper are important but they risk being rhetoric only. Gaps remain in advancing more substantive understanding of gender and climate dynamics in policymaking and in ensuring that decisions are acted upon. At the same time, advancing gender equality can leverage progress in different areas, delivering co-benefits for disaster risk reduction and climate change.

As the concept note broadly recognizes, the impact of climate change and related disasters is already causing widespread socio-economic and environmental loss and human suffering around the globe. Climate change erodes human freedoms and limits choice, and the impacts of climate change are not felt equally. Importantly, without measures to address the injustice of climate change, those with the fewest resources, countries and individuals alike, will be most susceptible to its negative effects; and those in positions of wealth and power will be the first to benefit from transitions in the economy towards a low carbon society. Climate change impacts and solutions, when viewed through an intersectional lens, encompass a wide diversity of experiences due to age, ethnicity, class, and in particular, gender.

Guidance for linking gender equality and women's human rights with addressing climate change and disaster risk reduction is important for advancing sustainable development and equality. Not least because disasters tend to kill more women than men, which is a "direct result of women's lack of influence or control over decision-making, social networks, transportation, information, land, personal

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<sup>1</sup> As a global women's advocacy organization, WEDO envisions a just world that promotes and protects human rights, gender equality and the integrity of the environment.

mobility or secure housing and employment, coupled with differences in self-rescue abilities (many of which are mediated by socially constructed gender differences).”<sup>2</sup>

Below, WEDO highlights key aspects of climate change and disaster risk reduction for consideration by the CEDAW Committee as it prepares its General Recommendation.

### **Women’s leadership and participation in decision-making**

Article 7 of CEDAW identifies the need for governments to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in decision-making in all spheres and at all levels. We need effective institutional measures that will consistently diversify the actors who have access and influence within decision making processes, which in turn will ensure greater responsiveness of disaster and climate policies. Leadership and participation must recognize the diversity of women and girls.

During the development of the Sendai Framework, Parties and stakeholders expressed an overall commitment to mobilize women’s leadership in DRR, but the language was not a given. To deliver on government commitments to leadership and participation requires increased financing and setting gender specific targets at all levels for tracking and measuring progress. It requires policies that do not create or exacerbate the share of women’s unpaid care work. We must also shift the narrative and recognize and support women’s capacity for leadership in DRR and climate activities, not just focus on reducing their vulnerability.

### **Data and monitoring**

Leadership and capacity building are fundamental building blocks for resilience. But understanding progress for each and every person requires disaggregated data, which should include at least sex, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and income. In many instances, available data is limited and so is capacity to collect and report on data; however, it is critical to support continued efforts to collect it in order to understand and address inequalities, including how they are exacerbated by policies and proposed solutions to climate change. Disaggregated data makes accountability possible – and not just for women and girls, but for people with disabilities, for the elderly, for indigenous women and those often marginalized. The data can be used to track progress on rights, participation, leadership, and resource allocation.

### **Communication**

Communication is important in education, information and training, in outreach, awareness raising, capacity building, early warning systems and disaster response, linked to CEDAW Article 10. Both the means and the content of the communication have nuanced and gendered aspects to be carefully considered. In communities where the role of women and girls is to remain in the house, they miss messages made via loud speakers or through public announcements. Similarly, men may be less likely to receive information via the television in a country or community where men are primarily in locations that may not have access to TV’s or radios. Research suggests that the very wording of a text message or voicemail can make certain gender groups feel left out or marginalized. States should ensure inclusive strategies to develop effective communication strategies regardless of social, economic or cultural differences.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Report of the Secretary General, “Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters”

<sup>3</sup> Kevin Blanchard, DRR Dynamics

### **Health and gender-based violence**

Access to sexual and reproductive health care services, and sexual and reproductive rights, are key to resilience in disaster and development contexts and aligns with CEDAW Articles 10 and 12. The high incidence of gender-based violence in post-disaster situations requires a gender lens in policies and planning for emergency shelters and recovery operations.

### **Mitigation**

A crucial aspect to addressing climate change and human-induced climate-related disasters is mitigation. This is important because through mitigation States will reduce climate change impacts overall. Both the *who* and the *how* of mitigation are also important. The concept of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) supports a rights-based and justice approach in that countries who have contributed most to causing climate change have a historical responsibility to take action to address it, and that countries with resources – particularly those gained by using fossil fuels – should take greater responsibility for solving the crisis. Further, mitigation efforts require a gender lens to understand how the proposed climate solutions could exacerbate gender inequalities both in their development and in their application (considering whether it generates decent work and for whom, impacts on community health and health of workers, environmental impacts on water supplies, displacement for large scale project, etc).

### **Structural issues, root causes and influencing norms**

Gender mainstreaming is a tool. It should be applied to shift toward gender-responsive policies and actions that incorporate action to address inequalities and to change norms. CEDAW's Articles 2 and 3 have relevance in this context. Often, as in the Sendai Framework, the responsibility of implementing gender-sensitive or gender-responsive policy is framed as an important role for women. This puts the burden on women to make the change and to commit resources of time, capacity and finances that women may not have. Implementation of these policies and actions must be shared by all.

Mainstreaming cannot be implemented at the expense of addressing structural issues, such as unpaid domestic and care work, and the gendered division of labor. This is one of the root causes, and symptoms, of gender inequality. Women may not be in formal employment and are often also taking care of children or elderly. After disasters or as a result of climate stress, if they cannot get to their work they lose wages, or in some cases then lose their jobs. In the climate change and disaster context, the burden of such unpaid work on women is increasing. It is time to not only recognize, but redistribute care work and ensure social protection, so that women and men can effectively participate, in all phases of planning, implementation, response and recovery.