

ActionAid’s Written Submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

On the

“Gender-related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in a Changing Climate”

ActionAid welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against of Women on the draft general recommendation on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate. ActionAid commends the Committee on the high quality of the draft general recommendation.

ActionAid is an international federation working with over 15 million people in 45 countries to advance social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. We would like to emphasise the Importance of this general recommendation in providing coherent and thorough gender analysis to climate change and disaster contexts, where the existing international agreements often make generalised and fragmented reference to the consideration and inclusion of women and girls. This general recommendation will make an important contribution to guiding state parties towards gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation that complements the key existing international agreements; the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk reduction, The Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sustainable Development Goals. Specific comments on various sections are outlined below:

Introduction

1. There could be more specific reference to the multiple dimensions of climate change to ensure it also includes ongoing and cumulative impacts or disasters, pandemics and disease, and the documented links between climate change and conflict, migration and displacement¹.
2. There could be a clearer definition of disasters – does it include man-made disasters, or is it confined to natural disasters, and particularly climate related disasters?
3. Cross-reference could be made to the relevant articles of CEDAW on conflict.
4. Paragraph 3 states “...the structural barriers faced by women in accessing their rights could exacerbate existing gender-based inequalities.” Suggest changing the word “could” to “will”. These links have been evidenced through the ActionAid/Economist Intelligence Unit collaboration on the South Asia Women's Resilience Index²

Objectives of the General Recommendation

5. The objective should specifically consider girls and boys, in addition to women and men. It is important to ensure the gendered impacts on children are highlighted including protection

¹ CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security Website, “Climate change, food security and the refugee crisis: connecting the dots to avoid future tragedy”, Accessed online at <https://ccafs.cgiar.org/blog/climate-change-food-security-and-refugee-crisis-connecting-dots-avoid-future-tragedy#.WJBq67Z96Aw>

² ActionAid and the Economist Intelligence Unit (2014) “The South Asia Women’s Resilience Index”, Accessed online at <http://www.actionaid.org/australia/aboutWRI>

risks facing unaccompanied minors, increases in early, child and forced marriages in rapid and slow onset disasters, and increases in school dropout rates among girls due to increased unpaid work demands.

Applicable General Principles of CEDAW

6. Suggest that Paragraph 19 (c) –should be amended to state: “women and girls whose rights have been affected by disasters, directly and indirectly...”. This is to ensure psychosocial impacts on women are also taken into consideration.
7. Suggest that Paragraph 25 (e) could include reference to free, prior and informed consent and the Voluntary Guidelines on the Governance of Tenure, which provide safeguards for women who have been able to access some rights over their land.
8. Women should be provided with more than opportunities for participation. Women should be afforded opportunities for leadership and decision making, and an analysis of the structural inequalities preventing this should be undertaken to inform what measures should be implemented to promote women’s equal representation in decision making on climate change and disasters. Paragraph 30 should be strengthened to give greater emphasis to this important aspect of transforming gender relations.
9. Paragraph 32 (b) should extend beyond providing women with information on their legal rights, to empowering women to understand and claim their rights.
10. There should be some mention of women’s protection in relation to accessing justice in Paragraph 32 (b) as this is often one of the most difficult barriers for women to overcome. There should also be consideration given in Paragraph 32 to reparation payments and ensuring they go directly into the hands of the women being compensated.

Key Convention Provisions

11. In Paragraph 38 (b) stronger reference could be made to supporting women themselves to identify their own livelihoods.
12. Insurance is mentioned in various sections throughout the general recommendation. ActionAid’s position³ is that insurance schemes are not a panacea to disaster risk reduction and should be viewed with caution, as they can sometimes be exploitative of women with little or no education and limited income. Suggest Paragraph 38 (c) is amended to account for women’s awareness and understanding of alternative risk reduction schemes and their empowerment to ensure they choose a scheme that is right for their situation.
13. Paragraph 43 mentions “lifesaving technologies”, and it is suggested that this is expanded to include other forms of technology such as labour reduction technologies to help lift production, particularly in smallholder agriculture, and new technologies to support climate adaptation and uptake of renewable energy.
14. Paragraph 54 does not mention that simple disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation messaging should be part of the regular school curriculum. This will help to reach the girl-child and will have a spillover effect to the household level.
15. Paragraph 57 (a) should be broadened to take account of the various types social protection support that can be provided, including, but not limited to, cash transfers and food relief. It

³ ActionAid (2016) “Ten concerns about climate and disaster insurance schemes – and one rights-based alternative”, Accessed online at <http://www.actionaid.org/2016/05/ten-concerns-about-climate-and-disaster-insurance-schemes-and-one-rights-based-alternative>

is important here to also consider the provision of affordable credit that is preferably handled by women themselves. Insurance is also mentioned in this section – please see ActionAid’s concerns about insurance as a risk reduction strategy in Point 15 above.

16. In addition to the needs of rural women and the barriers they face outlined in Paragraph 63, suggest also including violence against women and access to justice as two further key areas for consideration.
17. Suggest including psychological and economic violence in the forms of gender-based violence against women listed in Paragraph 70 (a).
18. In Paragraph 65, additional factors restricting women’s ability to migrate include women’s literacy and social mobility as limiting factors.

General Comments

19. Women’s leadership is critical to shifting the gender norms that prevent women from adequately addressing the risks they face and overcoming their vulnerabilities. This should be more pronounced throughout the entire recommendation to highlight the importance of women claiming positions of power where the greatest impact can be made. Suggest incorporating more directions to state parties in Section VI to promote and enable women’s leadership at all levels including targeted measures where there are significant gender inequalities in women’s access to decision-making and leadership.
20. There could be more consistency throughout the recommendation to how LGBTI women are referenced. In some cases, it refers to minorities and in other cases particular genders are mentioned, such as transgender.
21. There is an issue of mobility and freedom of association for women that needs to be addressed, although it is not clear where would be the best place in the document this could be referenced. Women’s ability to organise is a critical component of their empowerment towards claiming their rights. With a shrinking civil society space in many countries, it is worth noting the importance of protecting this space for women as integral to building their resilience to disasters and climate change.
22. There is an issue with the numbering of the paragraphs throughout the document where some paragraphs have the numbers repeated.

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