

Plan International, Inc.

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT GENERAL RECOMMENDATION ON GENDER-RELATED DIMENSIONS OF DISASTER RISK REDUCATION IN A CHANGING CLIMATE BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)**

**Geneva, January 2017**

*Founded in 1937, Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organisation with no religious, political, or governmental affiliations. We strive for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls, working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners. Plan International is active in more than 70 countries and is in special consultative status with ECOSOC.*

*We thank the CEDAW Committee for the Draft General Recommendation on Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in a Changing Climate and we welcome this opportunity to highlight some suggestions that would further strengthen the General Recommendation and below address some paragraphs of the draft Recommendation.*

**I. Introduction**

**(p3) Paragraph 2: Situations of crisis exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and also compound intersecting forms of discrimination that affect some women, such as women living in poverty, women with disabilities, adolescent and younger girls and older women, to a different degree or in different ways than men or other women**

**Suggestion:**

Include 'adolescent girls and younger girls' to examples of women that face discrimination.

**Rationale:**

Adolescent girls face unique needs in times of disasters; the threats that girls face can be compounded by their age, and evidence shows that adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to violence and exploitation during disasters and displacement – including rape, sexual and gender-based violence and abuse, early and forced marriage and trafficking.<sup>1</sup> Adolescent girls are at a particularly vulnerable time in a transitional period between 'childhood' and 'adulthood' as they begin to assume adult responsibilities and roles, but without the key skills, networks and capacities to safely navigate the beginnings of adulthood during times of crisis.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, adolescent girls can become overlooked and excluded from broad-based protection responses, which can group their needs and vulnerabilities with those of younger children or adult women.<sup>3</sup> Further, if girls are removed from school to help with household chores, not only after a disaster but also before, they are less likely to be educated, informed and have access to timely and life-saving information, like where to go in the event of a disaster, or how climate change impacts lives.

**V. Key Convention provisions that address disaster risk reduction in a changing climate**

**A. Assessment and data collection**

Plan International supports this section which should be a key priority of States. Without sex and age disaggregated data, it is impossible to understand the full impacts of disasters and climate change on

girls and women. For example, in the Philippines child-centred organisations identified the lack of post-disaster disaggregated data at the national level and by some local authorities. Although there is a reporting template for collecting this data, many local authorities did not collect the data and where it was collected there was no mechanism for ensuring it was transferred to the national level. As part of a new children in emergencies law (R.A 10821, Section 9)<sup>4</sup>, collecting disaggregated data by age, gender, ethnicity, and special needs is now mandatory for all relevant local government agencies and the national government in the aftermath of a disaster.

## VI. Thematic areas of concern

### A. *Health*

**(p15) Paragraph 47 (c): Ensure the removal of all barriers to women and girl's access to health services, education and information, including in the areas of mental and psychological health, sexual and reproductive health, and, in particular, allocate resources for programmes directed at mental health and counseling as well as the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, before, during and after disasters. Health services, education and information should be gender-responsive, rights-based, adolescent- and youth-friendly and available to all women and girls, including the most vulnerable and excluded.**

#### **Suggestion:**

Include 'before during and after disasters' AND 'health services, education and information should be gender-responsive, rights-based, adolescent- and youth-friendly and available to all women and girls, including the most vulnerable and excluded'

#### **Rationale:**

It is crucial for women and girls to have access to health services, education and information at all times, i.e. there should be a continuity of access. These services should be gender-responsive, rights-based, adolescent- and youth-friendly and available to all women and girls. Services should be available and accessible to the most vulnerable and excluded women and girls, including but not limited to migrants, those from ethnic minorities and indigenous groups, those living with disabilities and those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, questioning.

**(p15) Paragraph 47 (d): Prioritize the provision of family planning and reproductive health care services including access to emergency contraception and safe abortion and reduce maternal mortality rates through safe motherhood services and prenatal assistance; before, during and after disasters**

#### **Suggestion:**

Include 'before during and after disasters'

#### **Rationale:**

Girls and young women should be able to realise their sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially during disasters, but there must also be a continuity of services before and after disasters. Disaster risk reduction, resilience building and the planning and implementation of humanitarian responses must take full account of the risks faced by children, adolescents and young people, in particular girls and young women, and protect and fulfil their sexual and reproductive health and rights. In line with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights General Comment No. 14,

contraceptive services should be provided free of discrimination, stigma and coercion, and free of spousal, parental, guardian or judicial consent, and in accordance with the evolving capacities of the person in question.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are not only critical in their own right, but also to achieving objectives in other sectors such as child survival and education. The sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescent girls should be protected and fulfilled before, during and after disasters.

Plan International believes that all sexually active adolescents, including younger adolescents, and young people with an unmet need for family planning should be able to access sexual and reproductive health services, including modern contraception, and feels very strongly that this paragraph be retained in the Recommendation.

### *C. Education and information*

**(p17) Paragraph 54 (d): Allocate adequate resources and budgets to ensure that schools and other educational facilities are reconstructed and rendered operational as quickly as possible following disasters and prioritise the reintegration of girls and other groups for whom education has not traditionally been valued. To this end, specific outreach programmes should be designed with a view to ensuring that girls and women are not excluded from education in the wake of disasters.**

#### ***Suggestion:***

This theme should include a bullet point on ensuring schools are safe before, during and after disasters, drawing on the three pillars of the comprehensive safe school framework<sup>5</sup>. For example: Allocate adequate resources and budgets to ensure that students and educators are protected from harm in schools, develop plans to ensure the continuity of education through different hazards and threats, safeguard education sector investments and strengthen risk reduction and resilience through education. To this end, school infrastructure should be assessed and retrofitted to withstand disasters, school disaster management committees established to develop plans for education continuity and school-based DRR plans and DRR should be integrated into formal and non-formal curricular.

#### ***Rationale:***

This suggestion is based on the comprehensive safe school framework which identifies three pillars as key to ensuring the safety of schools and those attending them. The goals of the comprehensive safe schools approach are consistent with the Sendai Framework's seven targets, and focus on ensuring physical safety for children and adults in schools (Target 1 & 2), educational continuity (Target 4), safeguarding education sector investments (Target 3), and developing a culture of safety. Safe school activities involves conducting participatory risk assessments to identify unsafe areas and relocate, rebuild or retrofit school buildings and manage the environment, establishing school disaster management committees (SDMCs) with equal participation of girls and boys to develop DRR plans, contingency plans, conduct evacuation drills and develop standard operating procedures, and integrating DRR and CCA into the formal and informal curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

### *H. Gender-based violence against women*

**(p 20) Section title: Gender-based violence against women and girls**

#### ***Suggestion:***

Include 'and girls'.

**Rationale:**

As mentioned in paragraph 67 of the draft Recommendation, gender-based violence also affects girls and transgender persons disproportionately in times of disaster.

**(p20) Paragraph 70**

**Suggestion:**

Include a bullet point on protection in camps and evacuation centres. **For example:** States parties should provide women and children, especially girls, with safe spaces and privacy in evacuation centres or camps (for example child friendly spaces and separate sanitation facilities), through the mapping of child protection services, establishment of clear referral pathways for child protection concerns, and the engagement of girls in camp decision-making processes.

**Rationale:**

Measures to ensure girls' and boys' protection in all accommodation centres should include accommodating unaccompanied children separately to adults;<sup>6</sup> provision of gender sensitive child-friendly spaces; mainstreaming child protection across other sectors, mapping of child protection services and establishment of clear referral pathways for child protection concerns. Further, the needs of girls must be incorporated into activities in coordination with protection and camp/evacuation centre management agencies. Girls need to be consulted on site plans, cooking spaces, lighting for common areas and sanitation facilities and in ensuring adequate privacy in camps and collective accommodation.

A comprehensive approach to preventing and responding to sexual gender-based violence must be prioritised in all responses, including ensuring that measures to protect women and girls and mitigate risks of gender-based violence are implemented in all accommodation centres, procedures to identify and support survivors and psychosocial support for those who have experienced SGBV. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence – must become a standard operating procedure in all forced displacement responses.

*I. Forced migration*

**(p21) Paragraph 68**

**Suggestion:**

Include a bullet point on contingency planning/systems mapping and child protection in displacement settings. **For example:** States parties should ensure national and local contingency plans are developed and current systems that support girls and women during displacement are identified and mapped.

**Rationale:**

Forcibly displaced girls face specific threats, including harmful practices and high levels of sexual exploitation and violence. Forced displacement can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and discrimination, leaving girls and women extremely vulnerable whilst also facing barriers to assistance and protection.<sup>7</sup> Responding to the stress and trauma of forced displacement, heightened insecurity and economic hardship, communities can resort to negative coping mechanisms which can impact on girls' rights, including early and forced marriage, transactional sex and exploitation.<sup>8</sup> To this end, it is

recommended that States build their preparedness for displaced persons by developing contingency plans and map current and potential systems that can support children and women during displacement. Further, national and local child protection systems should be strengthened both with economic and human resources to make them accessible and responsive to the specific needs of children, and specifically girls, on the move at all stages of the migration process. Local communities should be encouraged to develop their own mechanisms and practices for child protection through financial and technical support.

VII. *Dissemination and reporting:*

**(p22) Paragraph 69: Dissemination of gender-sensitive and child sensitive information and data concerning the development of strategies, policies and programmes designed to address gender inequalities, reduce disaster risk and increase climate resilience.**

**Suggestion:**

Include 'gender-sensitive and child-sensitive' information

**Rationale:**

Disseminating information that is inaccessible to much of the population negates the reasons for doing it. The information should be gender-sensitive and also age-sensitive. According to the *Because I am a Girl – The state of the world's girls 2013* report, many adolescent girls feel they do not have enough information on disaster and climate change impacts and sexual reproductive health. In order to address this gap policies and frameworks from international to local level should take this into account and be gender- and age- sensitive. This will ensure they understand the impacts of disasters and climate change and what their States have done to reduce these, but also ensure they are able to participate in decisions that affect them. This is also important for addressing other points mentioned in this document (paragraph 71 (c)) on the monitoring of international frameworks. States should therefore strengthen mechanisms and dedicated spaces to ensure the gender-balanced and meaningful participation of children and youth, prioritizing the most vulnerable groups, in the implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework, SDGs and the Paris Agreement at all levels. The Children in a Changing Climate coalition<sup>9</sup> developed the Sendai Framework for children to respond to this identified gap.

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<sup>1</sup> Children aged 10-19 are defined as adolescents by the United Nations.

<sup>2</sup> Women's Refugee Commission (WRC), 2014: *I'm Here: Adolescent Girls in Emergencies*. USAID

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Government of the Philippines (2016), [Republic Act No. 10821: Children's Emergency Relief and Protection Act](#)

<sup>5</sup> More information can be found [here](#)

<sup>6</sup> "Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

Separated children are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members." *Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005), General Comment No.6: Treatment of Unaccompanied and Separated Children outside their country of origin CRC/GC/2005/6*

<sup>7</sup> [Joint Statement on Women and Girls Towards the Global Refugee and Migrant Summits](#) (2016)

<sup>8</sup> O'Neil, T. et al (2016): *Women on the move: Migration, gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Overseas Development Institute

<sup>9</sup> [Children in a Changing Climate Coalition](#) is comprised of ChildFund Alliance, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision