**Government of Guyana**

**Response to Call for Information – SR Right to Development**

 **Climate Justice: Loss and Damage; and the right to development**

***29th February, 2024***

*Question 1: Right to Development and Impact of economic and non-economic loss and damage from climate change.*

The world’s climate is warming because of the increase in greenhouse gases, and this process of change has been underway for several decades. The atmosphere and oceans have warmed, glaciers are retreating, the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets are diminishing and sea levels are rising. These changes have caused impacts on natural and human systems on all continents and across the world’s oceans. Increases in temperature, changes in precipitation and in the frequency and intensity of extreme events such as droughts, heat waves, floods and wildfires have led to impacts such as reductions in food production, disruptions to water supply, damage to infrastructure and settlements, impacts on ecosystems as well as consequences for health, human well-being and livelihoods. The impacts of climate change will cause further changes in all components of the climate system, and in turn increase the likelihood and consequence of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems.

The adverse, and potentially catastrophic, impacts of climate change are already being experienced in Guyana. Since the 1960s, Guyana has observed marked increases in temperatures, sea levels and the frequency and intensity of extreme rainfall events. The impacts on Guyanese people, society, economy and environment, during flooding events in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2015 and the droughts of 1997-8, 2009-2010 and 2015 are poignant examples of the devastation which can be caused by climate change. Flooding in 2005, for example, caused damage estimated at US$ 465 million (60% of GDP) and during the drought in April 2015 potable water had to be trucked into communities in Regions One and Nine. The potential increase of the frequency and intensity of extreme events is especially alarming given Guyana’s particular vulnerability to climate change.

The first half of 2021 saw catastrophic flooding which for the first time all ten (10) Administrative Regions and impacted large parts of the population. Over 74,000 acres (43,473 acres of cash crops and 30,684 acres of rice) of farmlands and over 20,000 farmers were affected on the coastal belt. Subsistence farmers in the interior experienced very high water levels in the rivers due to the rain and flooded rivers from the Amazon basin which destroyed their cassava. The 2021 flood is likely to be comparable to the 2005 flood which affected close to 37% of the population and caused economic damage equivalent to 60% of GDP. Some areas experienced 120-150 centimeters of standing water, which remained for several days. In the interior the rivers remained dangerously high for weeks with overtopping.

A socio-economic assessment of the damage and loss caused by the 2005 flood revealed major impacts on the agriculture sector, particularly in the regions of West Demerara/Essequibo Islands, Demerara/Mahaica, and Mahaica/West Berbice. Administrative Region Four was most severely affected in the 2005 flood (though less affected in the 2021 flood), experiencing close to 55% of the total damage, followed by Administrative Regions Two (23%) and Administrative Five (19%). Considerable losses were recorded in the sugar, rice, livestock, and other crops (fruits, vegetables, roots and tubers, and herbs and spices) subsectors.

An assessment was also carried out on the 2021 floods and the conclusion was that the impact was most severe in the agriculture sector.

Climate models project that temperatures will increase and that sea levels and the height of storm surges will rise. Projections also indicate that average annual precipitation will decrease and that the proportion of heavy rainfall events will increase, though there is greater uncertainty about these values. This in turn is expected to exacerbate adverse social, economic and environmental impacts and act as an additional stress factor on systems with vulnerabilities derived from non-climate drivers.



At a global level, Guyana ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1994. Since that time, two National Communications have been prepared and submitted to the Convention. In 2015, Guyana submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to the UNFCCC. Further, Guyana ratified the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in 1994 and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 1997.

Guyana’s forest store approx. 19.5 GtCO2 and is a high forest cover low deforestation country that has maintained low deforestation rates.
Guyana has already started to take action to build resilience to change impacts and to enhance capacities to adapt.

At the national level, Guyana has prepared a Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) to foster low carbon and climate resilient development. The LCDS, prepared in 2009 and updated in 2013, highlighted the importance of adaptation and building resilience and in this regard identified thematic priorities such as upgrading infrastructure to protect against flooding, hinterland adaptation, addressing systematic and behavioural concerns, and developing innovative financial risk management tools among others. The LCDS is supported by sectoral policies including the National Integrated Disaster Risk Management Plan, the National Strategy for Agriculture in Guyana, and the Sea and River Defense Policy among others. Guyana has also made progress in implementing adaptation and resilience building actions principally through interventions to the drainage, irrigation and sea defense systems to reduce the risks of flooding.

Guyana has expanded, updated and developed the LCDS 2030; this was adopted in the National Assembly in 2022 after a year of consultation with indigenous communities, farmers and other stakeholders across the country. This is the national developmental agenda of Guyana which is based on a green and climate resilient economy with people- oriented programmes to prepare for the impact of climate change while ensuring that Guyana’s sustainable development trajectory is maintained in the face of climate change.

At the moment, Guyana has been experiencing drought like conditions as three rainy seasons have been missed. In the interior, rivers are very low and impassable making it difficult to get supplies into many communities. This will also impact on the cost of living.

*Question 2: Obligations of States and other actors to prevent, mitigate and remediate impacts of climate related loss and damage on human rights.*

**Financial capacity**

Economic resources, or finance, is a key determinant of adaptive capacity and an enabling factor for implementation of adaptation measures. Separate from the national budget, the main source of climate finance in Guyana has been via its Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Kingdom of Norway through which Norway pledged to provide eq. US$ 255.5 million between 2010 and 2015 to help deliver ‘low carbon, low deforestation, climate resilient development’ in Guyana. Guyana has also received grant and loan based funding, though a relatively small amount in comparison to other Caribbean countries.

In its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), the GoG indicated that given its limited resources, Guyana will continue work on water management infrastructure; sea defenses rehabilitation; improving water supply and sanitation; introduction of new agricultural techniques such as hydroponics and fertigation; and the inclusion of climate change considerations in sectoral planning documents.

Nonetheless, it noted that significant resources will be required to build resilience in Guyana including through the implementation of the Climate Resilient Strategy and Action Plan (CRSAP). It was estimated that Guyana will require up to US$ 1.6 billion in the period to 2025 for adaptation and resilience building. The Financing Strategy, presented below, is intended to chart the course for accessing the financing Guyana needs to adapt and build resilience to climate change. Financial institutions have a significant role to play in this process.

**Policy/ regulatory environment**

Guyana’s long-term vision for a green and climate resilient economy is guided by the LCDS. Significant strides have been made in the policy and regulatory environments of the most vulnerable sectors. For example, the National Strategy for Agriculture in Guyana 2013 – 2020, outlines its plan for enhancing climate change management including through a disaster risk reduction programme. Further, the National Adaptation Strategy to address Climate Change in the Agriculture Sector outlined specific actions to reduce sectoral vulnerability and mainstream climate considerations into agricultural policy and practice.

Climate change was one of the key rationales in the development of the National Land Use Plan including considerations of the viability of long-term settlement on the coast and the consideration of climate change impacts in zoning areas for development. Moreover, the Sea and River Defenses Policy includes a strategic direction on sea defense goals including goals for climate resilience.

The key climate related strategies, policies and plans are presented in Guyana’s response to **Question #** **4 below**. Stakeholders have indicated that although the policy and regulatory environment are in place, the long term vision is not fully appreciated by some organisations and the wider public. In this context, the Government’s commitment to continually undertake a nationally inclusive approach based on transparency and meaningful stakeholder involvement on issues of national importance can bridge this gap.

*Question 3: Legal or Moral Basis for States and Other Actors to contribute to the Loss and Damage Fund*

The legal and moral basis for developed countries to significantly contribute to a loss and damage fund for climate change lies in their historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and their greater moral responsibility to address the impacts on developing countries. International agreements, like the Paris Agreement, emphasize the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Morally, it reflects a sense of global equity, acknowledging that those who contributed most to the problem should help those most affected by its consequences.

*Question 4: Non-Financial components relevant to Climate Justice*

Guyana is of the view that advancing climate justice involves a combination of policy, economic, and social measures. Some key steps include:

1. **Emission Reductions**: Implementing and enhancing policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions globally, with an emphasis on the largest emitters, to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Guyana’s forest store approx. 19.5 GtCO2 and is a high forest cover low deforestation country that has maintained low deforestation rates.

2. **Adaptation Support:** Providing financial and technical assistance to vulnerable communities to adapt to the current and anticipated impacts of climate change, ensuring they are not disproportionately affected.

3. **Finance Mechanisms**: Establishing and strengthening funds that support climate-resilient and sustainable development in vulnerable regions, funded by contributions from developed nations.

4. **Technology Transfer:** Facilitating the transfer of climate-friendly technologies from developed to developing countries, enabling them to leapfrog to cleaner and more sustainable practices.

5. **Capacity Building:** Investing in building the capacity of developing nations to respond effectively to climate change, including education and training in sustainable practices.

6. **Public Awareness:** Raising awareness and fostering a sense of shared responsibility among individuals, communities, and nations to drive collective action towards climate justice.

Guyana addresses each of the above areas in its Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030 that presents local and global priorities. Combining these measures can contribute to a more just and equitable response to the global challenge of climate change.

*Question 5: Non-Financial components relevant to Climate Justice*

A human rights-based approach to loss and damage in the context of climate change emphasizes the need to protect and fulfill the fundamental rights of individuals and communities affected by the adverse impacts of climate-related events. The concept of loss and damage acknowledges that, despite mitigation and adaptation efforts, some communities will still face irreversible harm. This approach intertwines the principles of climate justice with the recognition of human rights, addressing the ethical dimensions of climate-related losses.

Firstly, the right to life is paramount within a human rights framework. Extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and other climate-related phenomena pose direct threats to life. A human rights-based approach to loss and damage underscores the obligation to prevent, mitigate, and address the consequences of such events to safeguard the right to life for vulnerable populations.

Secondly, the right to an adequate standard of living is integral in addressing loss and damage. Climate change-induced events can disrupt livelihoods, jeopardizing access to basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter, and even their ability to engage in economic activities. A human rights perspective requires that measures be taken to restore and ensure these fundamental elements of a dignified life for affected individuals and communities.

Additionally, the right to self-determination plays a crucial role. Indigenous communities, often disproportionately impacted by climate change, have the right to control their own destinies. A human rights-based approach empowers these communities to actively participate in decision-making processes, ensuring that policies addressing loss and damage are inclusive and respect cultural diversity.

Furthermore, the principle of non-discrimination is essential. Vulnerable groups, including women, children, and marginalized communities, may bear a disproportionate burden of climate-related losses. A human rights approach insists on policies that mitigate existing inequalities, promote inclusivity, and protect the rights of these groups in the face of climate impacts.
In terms of accountability, a human rights-based approach emphasizes the responsibility of states and other stakeholders to address loss and damage. This involves not only providing immediate relief but also establishing mechanisms for long-term recovery and adaptation. Such measures should be transparent, participatory, and guided by the principles of accountability and justice.

Adopting a human rights-based approach to loss and damage in climate change acknowledges the interdependence between climate justice and the protection of fundamental human rights. It demands a proactive response that prioritizes the well-being and dignity of affected individuals and communities, striving for equitable and sustainable solutions in the face of an increasingly uncertain climate future.