

**Concept note for the General Discussion on
Gender-related dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change**

Table of Contents

I. Introduction and Rationale for a General Recommendation by the CEDAW Committee on Gender-related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change	1
II. Mainstreaming Gender into International Instruments on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction	3
III. Selected Issues on the Gender-related Dimensions of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and Obligations under the CEDAW Convention	6
Appendix A: Glossary of Terms.....	12
Appendix B: International Instruments for Addressing Gender Equality in Disaster Risk Reduction.....	14

Concept Note for the Half-Day of General Discussion on Gender-related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change

I. Introduction

1. This concept note has been prepared for the CEDAW Committee's half-day of General Discussion on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change. Its purpose is to gather preliminary information and background material for presentation to stakeholders in order to facilitate discussions on a draft General Recommendation on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change.

2. Global climate change is modifying hazard levels and exacerbating disaster risks.¹ Decades of experience with disasters, including frequent and intense weather events as well as slow onset disasters associated with climate change, reveal that capacities to prevent and recover from disasters are intrinsically connected to prevailing social, economic, cultural, political and environmental conditions.² The UN Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction (2015)³ notes that 'sustainable development cannot be achieved unless disaster risk is reduced.'⁴

3. The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines disaster risk reduction (DRR) as the 'concept and practice of systematic efforts to analyze and manage the causal factors of disasters. Reducing exposure to hazards, lessening vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improving preparedness and early warning for adverse events are all examples of disaster risk reduction.'⁵

4. States and other actors have obligations under international law to take steps to reduce risk and to address the effects of climate change and other disasters. The UN International Law Commission has developed a draft convention on the Protection of persons in the event of disasters. The draft Convention reiterates existing international law concerning the duties of states to cooperate in disaster risk reduction (art. 10) and to reduce the risk of disaster (draft art. 11). Many other international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, also contain implicit provisions requiring States and other stakeholders to take effective measures to prevent and respond to the impact of climate change and disasters.

5. Climate change and disasters affect women and men, girls and boys differently, with many women experiencing disproportionate risks and impacts from disasters and climate change. Situations of crisis exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities and also compound intersecting forms of discrimination that affect some women to a different degree or in different ways than men or other

¹ UNISDR. 2015. Making Development Sustainable: The Future of Disaster Risk Management. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, ix. Expected annual losses from disasters are now estimated at US\$314 billion in the built environment, with increased loss from climate change for climate-related hazards, such as US\$1.4 billion experienced by the Caribbean annually in cyclone wind damage. These estimates are primarily targeted at structures, and do not account for losses in livelihoods, development, social infrastructure (health care professionals, social workers, teachers, etc.), food security, and opportunities foregone, the costs of which are difficult to estimate.

² See the Glossary of Terms in Appendix A.

³ UNISDR coordinates the development of a biennial UN Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction that was first launched in 2009. The report assesses disaster risk trends and analyses progress on disaster risk reduction and the implementation of Hyogo and Sendai Framework for Action. All reports available on: <http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/?pid:3&pil:1>

⁴ UNISDR. 2015. Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, v.

⁵ UNISDR, home page, <http://www.unisdr.org/who-we-are/what-is-drr>.

women.⁶ Discriminatory barriers that limit many women's equal access to education and information, capital, property, land and productive resources, civil and political rights, legal and justice systems, health care, adequate housing, employment and social protection, increase their exposure to the negative effects of climate change and disasters. These same obstacles also prevent women from being able to actively contribute to decision-making and the development of activities related to climate change mitigation, disaster prevention and reconstruction efforts.

6. The CEDAW Committee has recognized in its Concluding Observations on State Party reports and in some of its earlier General Recommendations, that State parties and other stakeholders have obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to take steps to address the gender-related dimensions of disasters and climate change through the adoption of targeted, country specific policies, strategies, legislation, budgets and other measures.⁷ During its 44th session in 2009, the Committee stated, 'All stakeholders should ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction measures are gender responsive, sensitive to indigenous knowledge systems and respect human rights. Women's right to participate at all levels of decision-making must be guaranteed in climate change policies and programmes.'⁸

7. There is strong evidence from around the world to show that participatory, gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and climate resilience programmes are more successful in mitigating the negative effects of disasters for women and men.⁹ Women from different social groups bring specific knowledge and experiences to discussions and decision-making on climate change and action for reducing disaster risk.¹⁰ Too often, however, women have not been provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in the conceptualization, development, implementation and monitoring of local, national, regional and international policies, strategies and programmes on climate change and disaster risk reduction. The equal and active participation of women and men in DRR will make it possible to achieve the overarching goals of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, as well as the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

8. This brief concept note will outline the rationale for the CEDAW Committee's adoption of a General Recommendation on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change. The first section of the note describes the existing policy and legal frameworks that have been adopted by the international community to respond to climate change and disaster risk reduction. These initiatives have, in the main, developed outside of the international system for the

⁶ See, for example, General Recommendation no. 27 on Older Women and the Protection of their Human Rights, CEDAW/C/GC/27, 2010, para. 25.

⁷ UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Concluding observations on the Solomon Islands, CEDAW/C/SLB/CO/1-3, 2014, para. 40-41; Concluding observations on Peru, CEDAW/C/PER/CO/7-8, paras. 37-38; Concluding observations on Guinea, CEDAW/C/GIN/CO/7-8, para. 53; Concluding observations on Grenada, CEDAW/C/GRD/CO/1-5, paras 35-36; Concluding observations Jamaica, CEDAW/C/JAM/CO/6-7, paras. 31-32; Concluding observations on the Seychelles, 2013; Concluding observations on Togo, CEDAW/C/TGO/CO/6-7, para. 17; Concluding observations on Algeria, CEDAW/C/DZA/CO/3-4, paras 42-43; Concluding Observations, New Zealand, CEDAW/C/NLZ/CO/7, para. 9, 36-37; Concluding Observations, Chile, 2012, CEDAW/C/CHI/CO/5-6, para. 38-39; Concluding observations, Belarus, CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/7, paras 37-38, Concluding observations, Sri Lanka, CEDAW/C/LKA/CO/7, paras 38-39; Concluding observations, Nepal, CEDAW/C/NPL/CO/4-5, para. 38; Concluding observations, Tuvalu, CEDAW/C/TUV/CO/2, paras. 55-56. See also, General Recommendation no. 27 on Older Women and the Protection of their Human Rights, CEDAW/C/GC/27, 2010, para. 25.; General Recommendation no. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention, CEDAW/C/GC/28, 2010, para. 11.

⁸ CEDAW, 44th Session, August 2009, "Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change.

⁹ See, for example, Views From the Frontline 2011.

¹⁰ Ibid.

promotion and protection of human rights. Human rights-based approaches, including gender mainstreaming, have been largely overlooked in both the substantive and procedural aspects of international agreements on climate change and disaster risk reduction. The second part of the note examines the specific concerns that have been raised in connection with the gender-related dimensions of climate change and disaster risk reduction and links these with the relevant provisions of the CEDAW Convention.

II. Mainstreaming Gender into International Instruments on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction

9. The core principles on the promotion and protection of human rights, human development, environmental protection, disaster risk reduction and climate change are established through numerous international treaties and soft law instruments. These instruments were not developed as part of a coherent whole, however, and while some of them make passing reference to gender equality or human rights-based approaches to disaster risk reduction and climate change, it is only recently and in an *ad hoc* manner that attempts have been made to link these fields.

10. The **Hyogo Framework For Action (HFA)**, which was the UN disaster risk reduction plan adopted for the period 2005-2015, identified gender as a cross-cutting issue in disaster risk reduction and underscored gender integration as a core factor in its implementation. The HFA emphasized the importance of a gender perspective for building resilience and called for gender issues to be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management and education and training.¹¹

11. HFA National Reports informing on Gender: A review of 98 national reports submitted in the HFA report cycle 2011-2013, which are self-assessed and available for public consultation, reveals many acknowledgements by countries of the important role of gender issues and women's roles in disaster risk reduction.¹² Nevertheless, the report notes that the increased recognition of gender-related factors in shaping capacities in connection with disaster risk reduction has not translated into concrete plans, measures or data collection by States parties. There are reportedly few women leaders participating in national platforms, little evidence of the implementation of gender-sensitive vulnerability and capacity assessments, and only a small number of countries reported the availability of gender-specific, sex and age-disaggregated data, and application of this data to decision-making for risk reduction and recovery activities.

12. While progress has been made in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), serious gaps and challenges remain in delivering on the international community's commitments to gender equality and women's rights in disaster risk reduction efforts. The engagement of women as change agents in their societies is still often overlooked in disaster risk management, where women are often categorized as a 'vulnerable group.' Periodic reviews on HFA implementation progress show the status of gender equality and women's social, economic and political empowerment are considered limited and unsatisfactory. Gaps remain in linking political acknowledgment and commitments to well-resourced implementation mechanisms and accountability frameworks.

¹¹ World Conference on Disaster Reduction, A/CONF/206.6,

¹² UNISDR, Implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, Summary of Reports 2007-2013, 7.

13. At the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), which took place in Sendai, Japan in March 2015, particular attention was placed on mainstreaming gender in the disaster risk reduction agenda. WCDRR adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, which was endorsed in June 2015 by the UN General Assembly. The Sendai Framework calls for engagement by all sectors of society through ‘empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective in all policies and practices; and the promotion of women and youth leadership; in this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens.’¹³ Furthermore, the Sendai Framework emphasized that ‘women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for preparedness as well as build their capacity for alternate livelihood means in post-disaster situations’.

14. In a 2012 decision, the States Parties to the **UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** acknowledge that further steps need to be taken, in line with the CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to improve women’s participation in the bodies and programmes established under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol and to ‘inform more effective climate change policy that addresses the needs of women and men equally.’ To this end, the Parties resolved to add ‘gender and climate change’ as a standing item on the agenda for discussion during the Conferences of States Parties (COP).¹⁴ Two years later, the COP adopted the Lima work program on gender and requested that the Framework Convention Secretariat convene a workshop on gender-responsive climate policy with a focus on mitigation action and technology development and transfer.¹⁵ This workshop, which was held in Bonn, Germany in June 2015, identified key challenges in implementing gender-responsive climate policies and made a strong link with the need to use human rights-based approaches grounded in the CEDAW Convention and other international human rights instruments in the ‘conceptualization and implementation of gender-responsive policies and projects at the national level.’¹⁶

15. The Paris Agreement, adopted by the Conference of States Parties to the UNFCCC in December 2015, notes in its preamble that ‘Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.’¹⁷ This acknowledgement, while not contained in an operational provision of the agreement, represents the first time that the gender-related dimensions of climate change have been explicitly recognised by the States Parties to the UNFCCC.

¹³ United Nations. 2015. *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*. http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrrren.pdf.

¹⁴ UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP 18). December 2012. Doha, Qatar, Decision 23/CP.18.

¹⁵ UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP 20), December 2014, Lima, Peru, Decision 18/CP.20.

¹⁶ Subsidiary Body for Implementation, Gender and Climate Change, Report on the in-session workshop, September 2015, FCCC/SBI/2015/12, para. 90.

¹⁷ Conference of the Parties, Adoption of the Paris Agreement, FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1.

16. The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** is the United Nations' body that assesses climate change. Importantly, however, while the annual reports adopted by the IPCC refer to social aspects of risk and vulnerability due to the damaging impact of climate change and highlight the difficulties faced by people living in failed or fragile States, as well as the potential for armed conflict to increase as both a cause and a consequence of climate change, there is no mention of the gender-related dimensions of risk.¹⁸

17. **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The SDGs emphasize the importance of mainstreaming gender equality for the realization of human rights, sustainable development and disaster reduction. In particular, Goal 5 of the SDGs focuses specifically on gender equality, and Sustainable Development Goal 13 urges States to take immediate action to combat climate change and its impacts. As yet, the relationship between the various goals is not clear, however, it is to be hoped that they will be interpreted as part of a coherent agenda within which the gender-related dimensions of climate change are systematically addressed through effective policies, legislation, budgets and strategies.¹⁹

18. The brief survey of the existing work on gender mainstreaming in connection with climate change and disaster risk reduction demonstrates that while there has been recent progress in recognizing the need to integrate human rights and gender-responsive approaches into these areas, there is still a long way to go to ensure that these issues are included within policies and practices at the local, national, regional and international levels. A General Recommendation by the CEDAW Committee could assist States and other stakeholders in the conceptualization, development, implementation and monitoring of more consistent, coordinated and effective measures to address the gender-related dimensions of climate change and disaster risk reduction from a human rights perspective.

III. Selected Issues on the Gender-related Dimensions of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction and Obligations under the CEDAW Convention

19. The CEDAW Convention is the most specific international human rights treaty for the promotion of equality between women and men. The focus of the Convention is to ensure that men and women 'enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights' on a basis of substantive equality. States parties have obligations under Article 1 of the Convention to take targeted and concrete measures to guarantee equality in all areas covered by the Convention, including in relation to the adoption of participatory and gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and climate change policies, strategies and programmes across every sector.²⁰ The periodic state reporting system established under the Convention enables the CEDAW Committee to review country reports, assess the difficulties and challenges faced by State parties in implementing measures for the realization of gender equality, and recommend actions to overcome the obstacles found in various areas.

¹⁸ IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, P.R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, 1132 pp.

¹⁹ See, Transforming Our World : The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1.

²⁰ General Recommendation no. 28 on the Core Obligations of States Parties under Article 2 of the Convention, CEDAW/C/GC/28, 2010.

20. Some of the specific issues that States and other stakeholders need to consider in developing participatory, gender-responsive climate change and disaster risk reduction measures are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

21. **Gender-based inequalities** and intersectional forms of discrimination based on other attributes such as age, disability, indigenous or minority status, may limit access to information, political power, resources, and assets for preventing disaster or for recovering from the effects of disasters, including climate change associated impacts. Economic, social and political inequalities between men and women mean that many women have less capacity to prevent, adapt to or recover from the impacts of climate change and other disasters.²¹

22. The definition of discrimination contained in Article 1 of the CEDAW refers to ‘any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.’ The standard of discrimination can, therefore, be used to measure the performance of States and other duty bearers in taking steps to ensure that women are not disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and disasters.

23. Article 2 of the CEDAW Convention identifies specific core obligations of State parties to ensure the substantive equality between women and men in all areas of life and to take legislative, policy-based and other measures to this effect.²² The obligation to take ‘all appropriate measures’ including legislation, in all fields, to guarantee the full development and advancement of women on a basis of equality with men, is further expanded in the Convention’s Article 3.

24. **Temporary Special Measures to achieve substantive equality, Art. 4:** In its General Recommendation no. 25 (2004), the CEDAW Committee reiterates that measures taken to accelerate *de facto* equality between men and women are not prohibited by the Convention’s definition of discrimination. Temporary special measures may be necessary to ensure that women are actively involved in planning, implementation and monitoring of disaster management and mitigation strategies and policies at all levels.²³

25. **Economic Inequalities:** Economically marginalized segments of the population, women living in poverty in particular, face gender-related, social and economic obstacles that limit their capacity to mitigate the impact of climate change and disasters on their lives and livelihoods. For example, women, who make up the majority of the world’s agricultural and informal-sector workers, are often excluded from social protection and insurance schemes.²⁴ As a result, many women face specific barriers to accessing necessary resources to enable them to adapt to or recover from climate change and other disasters (e.g. they do not have vehicles for evacuation or machinery such as pumps to limit damage to crops and other assets; may have no alternative shelter; may not have insurance; may not have access to formal employment for aid in recovery). Articles 3 and 13 of the CEDAW

²¹ Wakefield, Shauna and Oxfam. 2014. The G20 and Gender Equality. Oxfam, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/g20-and-gender-equality>. And World Bank Gender Data Portal. <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/key%20gender%20employment%20indicators>. See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures#notes>

²² See General Recommendation No. 28 (2010) on the Core Obligations of States Parties under article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

²³ See, for example, Concluding observations, Tuvalu, CEDAW/C/TUV/CO/2, paras. 55-56.

²⁴ Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change, CEDAW 44th Session, August 2009.

Convention contain obligations for States parties to ensure that women have equal rights in economic and social relations, including access to social security and financial services.

26. In its 2009 Statement on Climate Change, the CEDAW Committee noted that, ‘while CEDAW recognizes that all women have the right to adequate standards of living, housing and communications as well as immediate shelters during crisis situations due to natural disasters, women often face discrimination to access these.’²⁵

27. **Social Inequalities:** Unequal caretaking responsibilities increase women’s ‘double’ or ‘triple’ burden during and following disasters and frequently make it difficult for them to access resources, including information and education, that would enable them to recover from or adapt to climate change and disasters.²⁶ There is evidence to suggest that the family situation of women, in particular their marital status, may also have a decisive impact on their capacity to adapt to climate change and reduce the impact of disasters.²⁷ Social and legal inequalities further restrict the ability of women to move to safer, less disaster-prone areas and may limit women’s rights to acquire credit, social security benefits, and secure tenure over land and other productive resources.²⁸ These factors are all addressed in the CEDAW Convention, in particular in the definition of discrimination in Article 1, the core obligations of States parties in Article 2, in Article 5 in obligations to identify and modify social and cultural patterns of conduct grounded in gender-based stereotypes, in Article 13 on duties to take measures to eliminate discrimination in economic and social life and in the provisions of Article 16 on equality in marriage and family relations.

28. **Women’s political leadership and participation in decision-making on development planning, climate change and disaster risk management:** The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has noted that most local communities develop indigenous-based adaptation practices that could and should be identified and followed in order to tailor effective preventive and responsive strategies related to climate change and disaster risk reduction.²⁹ This assertion is in line with the many provisions in the CEDAW Convention, including Articles that call upon States parties to ensure that women are provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in development planning and in political decision-making.

29. Articles 7 and 8 of the CEDAW Convention provide that women should have equality in political and public life at all levels from the local to the national and international and Article 14 reiterates that women have the right to participate in development planning and agricultural reform activities. This guarantee of political equality covers women’s leadership, representation, and participation, which are essential in the development and implementation of effective risk reduction programs and policies. These articles support actions to promote women’s leadership and participation in planning and program design for gender equality in sectors that reduce risk (e.g., agriculture, urban planning, economics, government, health, education, environmental resource management), disaster preparedness, training, relief coordination, recovery resources, and ensure equal access to disaster preparedness resources and opportunities.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See, for example, CEDAW Concluding Observations on Belarus (2000), A/55/38, para. 339.

²⁷ See, Katrien van Aelst and Nathalie Holvoet, ‘Intersections of Marital Status in Accessing Climate Change Adaptation : Evidence from rural Tanzania,’ *World Development* Vol. 79, pp. 40tAelst and

²⁸ See CEDAW General Recommendation no. 29 (2013), Economic Consequences of Marriage, Family Relations and their Dissolution and the forthcoming General Recommendation on rural women.

²⁹ IPCC Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri, A. Reisinger (Eds.), Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, Geneva (2007)

30. **Education, Information and Training:** Article 10 of the CEDAW Convention concerns the elimination of discrimination in education.³⁰ Education improves the capacity of women to participate within their households, families, communities, and businesses to identify means to reduce risk and to develop more effective recovery strategies, thus building more resilient communities. Education also increases access to opportunities, resources, technologies and information that aid in disaster risk reduction.³¹ The prevention and mitigation of climate change and disasters requires well-trained women and men in multiple disciplines including economics, agriculture, water resources management, climatology, engineering, law, telecommunications and emergency services.³² As the CEDAW Committee noted in its 2009 Statement on Climate Change, ‘Policies that support gender equality in access, use and control of science and technology and formal and informal education and training will enhance a nation’s capability in the areas of disaster reduction, mitigation and adaptation to climate change.’³³

31. **Right to Food, Water, Land and Productive Resources:** The impacts of climate change and related disasters are already being experienced in many areas in connection with decreased food security and more limited availability of water resources. There is evidence that the effects of food and water insecurity are not gender neutral and that it is often women who are more likely to suffer from undernourishment in times of disaster and food scarcity.³⁴ Articles 12 and 14 of the CEDAW Convention – on health and on rural women – contain specific guarantees on nutrition and women’s equal involvement in decision-making about food production and planning. In addition, the core obligations of States as outlined in Article 2 of the CEDAW Convention, equality before the law guaranteed in Article 15 and the specific issue of equality within marriage and family relations in Article 16 are of central importance in addressing women’s equal access to land and productive resources that are vital for ensuring food security.

32. **Health and Mortality:** Studies have shown that when there are gendered inequalities in access to economic, social and cultural rights, women suffer from higher rates of mortality as a consequence of natural disasters.³⁵ In relation to the health impacts of climate change and natural disasters, ‘a direct correlation has been observed between women’s status in society and their likelihood of receiving adequate health care in times of disaster and environmental stress.’³⁶ Article 12 of the CEDAW Convention specifically calls on States parties to guarantee equality between women and men in the provision of health care services, including reproductive and sexual health.³⁷

33. **Gender-based violence and human trafficking:** Reports from disaster response and recovery reveal that men’s violence against women and transgender communities increases

³⁰ See the forthcoming General Recommendation on Women’s Right to Education.

³¹ Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change. Rep. IUCN, UNDP, Global Gender and Climate Alliance. Web. <http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/2009-012.pdf>

³² UNISDR Background Paper ‘Issues of Vulnerability with Specific Reference to Gender in the Asia-Pacific: Post - 2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction Consultations’.

³³ Statement of the CEDAW Committee on Gender and Climate Change, CEDAW 44th Session, August 2009.

³⁴ See, for example, CEDAW Concluding Observations on Nepal, CEDAW/C/NPL/CO/4-5.

³⁵ Neumayer, Eric. The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981-2002,

London School of Economics, 2006.

³⁶ WHO (2008) “Gender inequities in environmental health”. 25th Session of the European Environment and Health Committee. (EUR/5067874/151).

³⁷ See, General Recommendation no. 24 (1999), Article 12 of the Convention (women and health).

significantly in disaster.³⁸ Furthermore, the societal dysfunction and economic disruption resulting from disasters enable human trafficking, especially within areas of poverty and food insecurity. Women and girls form the majority of people who are most vulnerable to human trafficking.

34. Article 6 of the CEDAW Convention provides that States must take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of trafficking in women. In its General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women the Committee states ‘traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion, such as family violence and abuse, forced marriage, dowry deaths, acid attacks and female circumcision’.

35. The CEDAW Committee has also noted that ‘sexual violence is common in humanitarian crises and may become acute in the wake of a national disaster. In a time of heightened stress, lawlessness and homelessness, women face an increased threat of violence, and will find it harder to support themselves, the children, the elderly, the injured, the disabled and other survivors who are in their care’.³⁹

36. **Rural Women**, Article 14: The knowledge of local environmental conditions and farming techniques that women in rural areas possess may strengthen the capacity of rural communities to adapt to climate change. This is particularly important with respect to the traditional knowledge on climate adaptation and change mitigation held by indigenous women.⁴⁰ This knowledge has not, so far, been adequately valued or incorporated within policy-making on climate change and disaster risk reduction.

37. Article 14 of the CEDAW Convention identifies the specific needs of rural women who frequently face barriers in equal access to land, financial resources, education, technology, health care and participation in development and decision-making.⁴¹ Situations of disaster and climate change make these barriers even more acute and women in rural areas should be a priority in policy-making and strategies to prevent, mitigate and monitor the impact of climate change and disasters.⁴²

38. **Access to justice**: Article 15 of the CEDAW Convention guarantees women equality before the law, which is extremely important in situations of disaster and climate change, particularly when women, who often face barriers to accessing justice, wish to claim reparations to cover their losses and to enable them to adapt to change. The recognition of an equal legal capacity with men and equality in access to justice are therefore essential elements in disaster mitigation and recovery policies and strategies.⁴³

³⁸ WHO (2008) “Gender inequities in environmental health”. 25th Session of the European Environment and Health Committee. (EUR/5067874/151) http://www.euro.who.int/Document/EEHC/25th_EEHC_Milan_edoc15.pdf. See also The High-Level Dialogue on mobilizing women’s leadership at the 2015 World Conference on Disaster Reduction which also highlighted the importance of planning to prevent violence and trafficking, <http://www.wcdrr.org/uploads/Dialogue-1-co-Chairs-Summary1.pdf>

³⁹ Statement by the CEDAW Committee on the situation in Haiti, E/CN.6/2010/CRP.2

⁴⁰ See, UNFCCC, 2014, Report on the meeting on available tools for the use of indigenous and traditional knowledge and practices for adaptation, needs of local and indigenous communities and the application of gender-sensitive approaches and tools for adaptation, FCCC/SBST A/2014/INF.11.

⁴¹ See, for example, Concluding observations on Peru, CEDAW/C/PER/CO/7-8, paras. 37-38.

⁴² See, for example, Concluding observations on Peru, CEDAW/C/PER/CO/7-8, paras. 37-38; Concluding observations on Grenada, CEDAW/C/GRD/CO/1-5, paras 35-36.

⁴³ See also CEDAW General Recommendation no. 33 on Women’s Access to Justice.

39. **Equal rights in marriage and family relations:** Article 16 of the CEDAW Convention defines the principle of equal rights in marriage and family relations, and details its various elements, including the right to enter marriage only with free and full consent, rights to acquisition, management, ownership, inheritance, and transfer of property. These become particularly important in disasters, when political and economic disruption, generalized violence and poverty may motivate parents to marry off their daughters, or where surviving widows or partners of civil partnerships or de facto unions (where recognized) may not have legal rights to property, which results in increased inequality and a reduced ability to recover from disasters.

III. Conclusions and Issues for Future Discussion

40. Gender equality has recently been acknowledged an important consideration within international law and policy-making on climate change and disaster risk reduction. To date, however, efforts to mainstream gender equality within these frameworks that are not grounded in human rights obligations have not been systematic or coordinated. A General Recommendation by the CEDAW Committee on the gender-related dimensions of climate change and disaster risk reduction could facilitate a more consistent and human rights-based response by providing detailed guidance to States parties and other actors concerning their obligations to consistently adopt, implement and monitor gender-sensitive measures to address climate change and DRR.

41. The current discussions should be informed by the Committee's Concluding Observations on State party reports as well as its earlier General Recommendations including those on the core obligations of States Parties, rural women, access to justice, violence against women, education, health, asylum and conflict.

42. In addition to the Committee's own jurisprudence, the draft General Recommendation should consider the work of other human rights monitoring bodies including the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Human Rights Committee and that of Human Rights Council and its Special Procedures. Relevant provisions of international instruments on climate change and disaster risk reduction should also be integrated within the discussion.

Appendix A: Glossary of Terms⁴⁴

Adaptation - The adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.

Climate change –

(a) The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines climate change as: “a change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g., by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use.”

(b) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines climate change as “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.”

Disaster - A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.

Disaster Risk - The potential disaster losses, in lives, health status, livelihoods, assets and services, which could occur to a particular community or a society over some specified future time period.

Disaster Risk Management - The systematic process of using administrative directives, organizations, and operational skills and capacities to implement strategies, policies, and improved coping capacities in order to lessen the adverse impacts of hazards and the possibility of disaster.

Disaster Risk Reduction - The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

Early Warning System - The set of capacities needed to generate and disseminate timely and meaningful warning information to enable individuals, communities and organizations threatened by a hazard to prepare and to act appropriately and in sufficient time to reduce the possibility of harm or loss.

Gender-responsive - “Creating an environment...that reflects an understanding of the realities of women’s lives and addresses the issues of the women.”⁴⁵ A gender responsive training or program recognizes several important differences (in areas of histories, life circumstances, and behaviors) between females and males, and takes these differences into account when designing programs. [NOTE: UN Women, WEDO, GGCA, and the Women’s Major Group for the UNFCCC process and UNISDR are using this term in application to consideration of governance, climate adaption planning, and increasingly in the recommended language and research for disaster risk reduction.]

⁴⁴ Terminology primarily comes from the updated 2009 publication by UNISDR available on the website: <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>, access 05 January 2015. The exception is the explanation for ‘gender-responsiveness.’

⁴⁵ Miller, J.B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. (As quoted by INSTEPP in *Gender Responsive Strategies*.)

Hazard - A dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.

Prevention - The outright avoidance of adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters.

Preparedness - The knowledge and capacities developed by governments, professional response and recovery organizations, communities and individuals to effectively anticipate, respond to, and recover from, the impacts of likely, imminent or current hazard events or conditions.

Recovery - The restoration, and improvement where appropriate, of facilities, livelihoods and living conditions of disaster-affected communities, including efforts to reduce disaster risk factors.

Resilience - The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.

Response - The provision of emergency services and public assistance during or immediately after a disaster in order to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected.

Risk - The combination of the probability of an event and its negative consequences.

Risk Assessment - A methodology to determine the nature and extent of risk by analysing potential hazards and evaluating existing conditions of vulnerability that together could potentially harm exposed people, property, services, livelihoods and the environment on which they depend.

Sustainable Development - Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Vulnerability - The characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard.

Appendix B: International Instruments for Addressing Gender Equality in Disaster Risk Reduction

Legally-Binding Instruments

- 1) **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)**: Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.
- 2) **Rio Conventions (1992)**:
 - i. The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** is an international legally-binding treaty with three main goals: conservation of biodiversity; sustainable use of biodiversity; fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. Its overall objective is to encourage actions which will lead to a sustainable future. Paragraph 13 of the Preamble to the CBD states: “Recognizing also the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation...”;
 - ii. The **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** is the sole legally binding international agreement linking environment and development issues to the land agenda. The UNCCD addresses specifically the arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, known as the drylands. The Convention’s 194 Parties are working to improve the living conditions in the drylands, to maintain and restore land and soil productivity, and to mitigate the effects of drought.
 - iii. The **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)** is the third binding agreement opened for signature at Rio *Earth Summit*. The Convention on Climate Change sets an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. It recognizes that the climate system is a shared resource whose stability can be affected by industrial and other emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. and the Kyoto Protocol lack specific language related to gender, there are numerous international legal instruments that mandate the incorporation of the gender perspective which also apply to the existing climate change framework.
 - iv. The **Joint Liaison Group among the secretariats of the CBD, the UNCCD and the UNFCCC** was established in 2001 with the aim of enhancing coordination among the three conventions, including for information sharing and outreach.

Non-Legally Binding Instruments

- 1) The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** reaffirms the equal rights of men and women, prohibits discrimination, and accords equality before the law;
- 2) **International Framework for Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1989)**;

- 3) **Agenda 21** (UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992), which establishes a blueprint for sustainable development. It includes a complete chapter entitled “Global Action for Women towards Sustainable Development,” which calls upon governments to make the necessary constitutional, legal, administrative, cultural, social and economic changes in order to eliminate all obstacles to women’s full involvement in sustainable development and in public life;
- 4) **World Conference on Human Rights** (1993);
- 5) **Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World** (1994);
- 6) **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995). It was recognized that environmental degradation and disasters affect all human lives and often have a more direct impact on women and that it was recommended that the role of women and the environment be further investigated;
- 7) The **Millennium Declaration** (2000);
- 8) The **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation** (World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), (2002);
- 9) The **Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters** (2005);
- 10) The **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DECRIPS)** (2007). DECRIPS specifically prohibits discrimination against women, providing that all the rights and freedoms recognized in the declaration be guaranteed equally to male and female indigenous people.
- 11) The agreed **conclusions of the 46 session** of the **Commission on the Status of Women** of 15 March 2002 Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters: a gender perspective; The agreed **conclusions 49/5 of the Commission on the Status of Women resolutions 49/5** of 11 March 2005; the agreed **conclusions of the 55/1** of 4 March 2011 on Mainstreaming gender equality and promoting empowerment of women in **climate change policies and strategies**;
- 12) **General Assembly resolutions** including **A/RES/66/9** and **A/RES/66/120**; General Assembly resolutions **66/227** and **67/231** are both concerned with improving the effectiveness of humanitarian action in the context of natural disasters. It highlights the need to ensure women’s full and equal participation in decision making as well as gender mainstreaming in all aspects of humanitarian action, including disaster risk reduction, response and recovery; General Assembly resolutions **66/288- The Future We Want**;
- 13) The **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**, in its **resolutions 2012/3** and **2013/6**, reiterated the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into humanitarian action, requesting all actors to ensure that all aspects and phases of humanitarian action address the needs of women and men of all ages and abilities by improving the collection and use of data disaggregated by sex, age and disability;
- 14) **Report of the Secretary-General on Gender equality and the empowerment of women in natural disasters** of 23 December 2013;
- 15) **The United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience**, endorsed by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination in April 2013 presents a joint strategy for the integration of disaster risk reduction into all United Nations work at the country level. The Plan of Action states that

gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and resilience policies, programs and investments will be promoted.

- 16) The United Nations Development Group (UNDG), the World Bank and the European Union issued a **joint *Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Tool***, May 2013, which dedicates a chapter to integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in the post-disaster needs assessment process with deliverables. Gender analysis becomes a relevant section of the overall assessment, and should consider the effect of disaster on gender power relations, to capture important gender dimensions and implications, when assessing the economic impact on productive activities in the informal sector, subsistence farming and unpaid work.⁴⁶
- 17) The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 adopted at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, held in Sendai, Japan 14-18 March 2015. Sendai Framework has been endorsed on 3 June 2015 by the UN General Assembly in its 69th session.
- 18) The Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 adopted by the General Assembly in September 2015.

⁴⁶ United Nations Development Group, the World Bank, and the European Union, "Post-Disaster Needs Assessment," (2013); available at www.recoveryplatform.org/outfile.php?id=1005&href=http.