



CARICOM Statement

Preparatory to the Sixty-Sixth Session of the
Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 66)

**“Achieving gender equality and the empowerment
of all women and girls in the context of climate
change, environmental and disaster risk reduction
policies and programmes.”**

17 February 2022

This document has been drafted within the context, in 2022, of the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66), which will focus on the priority theme of “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes”. It provides the basis for a shared CARICOM position on the theme.

We, the Member States of CARICOM, having met on 17 February 2022, reaffirm our commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment. As Small Island Developing States, we note the critical role of gender-responsive climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes to sustainable development. As such:

1. We reaffirm the commitments we have made at United Nations conferences and summits such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the outcome documents of the General Assembly and the declarations adopted by the Commission on the occasion of the tenth, fifteenth, twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries of the Fourth World Conference on Women.
2. We reiterate that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and their Optional Protocols thereto, as well as other relevant conventions and treaties including the Sendai Framework, S.A.M.O.A. Pathway, Paris Agreement and the Escazu Agreement. We also urge the Member States who have not yet acceded to the Optional Protocols to do so.
3. We are concerned about slow or stagnant economic growth and development, the rising inequalities within and among small island developing states, volatile food and energy prices, insufficient investment in development which have been precipitated or amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the residual effects of the world financial and economic crises, especially in the region’s highly indebted and fragile tourism-dependent economies. Notwithstanding the crippling economic impacts, the social fallout of the pandemic further threatens to derail the hard-earned gains towards sustainable development goals.
4. Recognising that Caribbean countries are particularly prone and therefore vulnerable to natural technological and biological hazard impacts, also of great concern is access to potable water, water scarcity, epidemics, demographic changes, and rapid urbanization of populations, unsustainable fishing practices and use of marine resources, disasters, and environmental degradation. We continue to be challenged by continuing food and energy insecurity, humanitarian emergencies, displacement caused by volcanoes, earthquakes, migration, violence and the adverse impacts of climate change, all of which exacerbate the disadvantages, vulnerabilities, and inequalities that women, particularly rural, indigenous and tribal women and their families face, and which the pandemic has highlighted and further exacerbated.

5. We reiterate that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development needs to be implemented comprehensively, prioritising the building of resilience to the multiple hazards facing our region, reflecting its universal, integrated and indivisible nature, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting each country's policy space, while remaining consistent with relevant international rules and commitments, including by developing cohesive sustainable development strategies to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. CARICOM affirms that Governments have the primary responsibility for the follow up to and review of the 2030 Agenda which supports the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the national, regional, and global levels regarding progress made.
6. We recognize that the impact from extreme climatic, health, other hazards, and natural disasters are not gender-neutral. They affect women, men, girls, and boys differently due to gender inequalities caused by socioeconomic conditions, cultural beliefs, and traditional practices which have repeatedly put women at a disadvantage. Gender roles, norms, and values determine how women and men perceive, prepare for, react to, and recover from disasters, and they often result in unequal distribution of power and economic opportunities. Worthy of note, in countries where women's socioeconomic status is low, the mortality rate of women and girls during disasters can be higher than that of men and boys.
7. We note that the most frequently cited reasons for women's increased vulnerability to climate change impacts (including reduced resilience and adaptive capacity) when compared to men, included discriminatory, patriarchal laws, norms, customs and institutions that resulted in women's exclusion from participating in decision-making and community processes for climate change and hazard mitigation and response in particular and decision-making more broadly; limited awareness of legal rights, including human rights; limited or no access to or control over resources and assets including access to technology; unequal burden of unpaid domestic and care responsibilities; limited access to necessary sexual and reproductive health care (particularly in natural hazard situations); increased exposure to gender-based harassment and violence and lack of access to justice; and limited or no opportunities to return to paid work and hence depletion of savings and therefore impoverishment in especially single female-headed households.
8. CARICOM remains deeply concerned that all women and girls, especially in developing countries, including Small Island Developing States and particularly those in vulnerable situations, are often disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, extreme weather events and natural hazards including health and epidemiological events and other environmental issues, such as volcanic eruption, land degradation, deforestation, forest fires, sand and dust storms, squalls, tornados, high influx of sargassum, persistent drought, floods, sea-level rise, coastal erosion and ocean acidification, saltwater intrusion, salination of agricultural lands, over-fishing and depletion of stocks. There's also disproportionate exposure to risk and increased loss of life and livelihoods, and

CARICOM reiterates its deep concern about the challenges posed by climate change to the achievement of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

9. We recall that the parties to the Paris Agreement in 2016 acknowledged that they should when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and intergenerational equity and in this context, also recall the adoption of the second gender action plan by the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change at its Twenty-Fifth Session.
10. CARICOM reaffirms the need to promote women's full and effective participation and leadership, in decision-making on the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, recognizing women's and girls' important roles as agents of change in their own right; their indigenous knowledge of natural resources management, as well as to mainstream a gender perspective in the design, management, resourcing and implementation of climate change, environmental, disaster risk reduction and biodiversity policies, plans and programmes, including ensuring that they are disability-inclusive. Initiatives are also needed to strengthen women's and girls' adaptive capacities and the resilience to respond to and recover from the adverse impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, extreme weather events and natural hazards and other environmental issues.
11. We acknowledge the necessity for the full benefit of every person, especially women and girls with disabilities and the elderly of present and future generations, having access to an environment adequate for their health, development, and well-being, and the critical importance of ensuring such access for the empowerment of women and girls, for driving sustainable development and the resilience of communities.
12. We recognize that indigenous and tribal women including women with disabilities and the elderly are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, primarily due to their reliance on natural resources for their livelihoods and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face daily due to their gender, ethnicity, level of poverty, and education. Other key populations identified as being more vulnerable due to marginalization include, the LGBTQI population, the urban poor, rural and remote and migrant communities, with women often considered the most socially and economically oppressed. This gendered asymmetry in vulnerability to disaster risk is rooted primarily in geographic, economic, social, educational/informational, and political power imbalances along with the systemic discrimination in societies.
13. We note that these vulnerabilities translate into women having limited or no access to economic and social resources in general, decision-making, and education and information that would allow them to act upon early disaster warnings. Women also tend to live nearby and work closely with natural resources and geographical features that are most affected by disasters and shocks such as marginal lands and informal settlements. Men and boys also live in these areas, but women are less likely to be able to cope with the shocks, owing to the previously stated context as a result of

gender inequalities. Further, cultural norms about gender roles sometimes limit women's ability to make quick decisions in disaster situations and, in some cases, the clothes they wear, their unpaid care work of children, care for the sick and the elderly and household responsibilities, may restrict their ability to escape disasters (particularly water-related hazards).

14. We recognize that despite the critical role that women play in food production, they often face barriers to accessing agricultural land, training, credit, agro-processing facilities and marketing facilities for their products and services. The agricultural production that women and girls do is often considered part of women's household responsibilities. Climate change impacts, combined with these challenges, will make it even more difficult for them to make a living from agriculture.
15. The 40% of female-headed households in the region must be taken into consideration when developing climate and disaster risk policies for the Member States as they face increased climate risk. Women generally head larger households than men, therefore their vulnerabilities of risk as it relates to their ability to earn and or maintain their livelihoods to provide for their families including meeting their food and health needs can pose a challenge when impacted by a disaster. (UN Women – Gender Inequality of Climate Change and Disaster Risk Studies). Women may also struggle more than men to find alternative livelihoods and enter the formal employment sector, due to cultural barriers and lack of economic opportunities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic which has disproportionately increased women's care burden and resulted in severe job losses in all Member States.
16. We are concerned that reduced availability of land, locally grown food and fish stocks, as well as reductions in income from aquaculture and agriculture, threaten the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger, and future sustainable development. Women's increasing unpaid care burden and domestic work especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, mean they will have less time available for income generation and education, further limiting their opportunities and increasing rates of poverty. It also means less time to contribute to community-level decision-making processes, including water management, climate change and disaster risk reduction.

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment during a disaster and COVID-19 recovery

17. We acknowledge that women and girls are not inherently predisposed to climatic and disaster risks; their heightened exposure to risk is attributable to poverty and inequitable socio-political structures, policies, programmes, and actions where a gender lens has not been applied. To address the gender imbalances, prudent policy, and planning for reducing and managing climatic and disaster risks would save lives and be a useful tool for advancing general socio-economic growth. From the perspective of gender equality and women's empowerment, any effort to

address adaptation and disaster risk reduction policy needs to be cognizant that climate change and disasters can reinforce, perpetuate, and increase gender inequities and that women's contributions greatly enhance adaptation and reduce disaster risk and impacts.

18. We acknowledge that gender equality is a fundamental human right. It is also a powerful driver of sustainable development, poverty alleviation and eradication, peace, security, and environmental sustainability. Mainstreaming gender into policy processes, programmes and projects can help ensure that such processes equitably benefit women and men while allowing optimal use of the unique knowledge and skills of women and men. Gender mainstreaming can advance and transform social policy (including gender equality) while ensuring greater returns on adaptation and disaster risk reduction investments.
19. We recognize that rural women nurture and sustain entire nations and need specific resources to support their work, wellbeing, and families. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage lives and economies, rural women have been quietly leading, in sustaining and revitalising their communities.
20. We recognize that there can be no sustainable development without empowering the 1.7 billion women and girls who live in rural areas across the globe and face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination daily. Empowering rural women does more than benefit the women themselves; it benefits their families and communities as well (SDG 1,2,3,5, 10,11). Countries with lower GDPs and high inequality and poverty rates tend to be disproportionately exposed to climate-related disaster risks. Such exposure is a function of, among other things, a lack of resilience and limited capacity to adapt to disaster situations. In general, Small Island Developing States, land-locked developing countries and least developed countries have diminished capacity to respond to and recover from disaster impacts. At the heart of these circumstances are women with low or no education; among them are the rural poor, disabled, elderly and indigenous women and girls.
21. We note that while women's vulnerability is almost always assumed, their unique capacities and contributions to adaptation across the disaster management cycle (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery) have not been well documented. Their individual and collective knowledge and experience in natural resource management and other societal activities at the household and community levels equip them with unique skills that benefit adaptation and disaster efforts across scales and sectors (WEDO 2007). For example, the work of women in Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda, post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria (2017), and in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines after the volcanic eruption in 2020.
22. We recognize that with climate change, the magnitude and frequency of stresses and shocks are changing and approaches such as adaptive social protection across the Member States, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation will be

needed to bolster local resilience and supplement people's experience, especially that of women and girls. Integration is important to address the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and region (especially women). Studies show that countries with higher representation of women in parliament or congress are more likely to designate protected land areas and to ratify multilateral environmental agreements (UNDP 2011).

Prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls in times of emergencies and disaster

23. We express deep concern that women and children, especially those with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to all forms of violence because of multidimensional poverty and limited or lack of access to justice, effective legal remedies, and services, including protection, rehabilitation, reintegration, and health-care services. We emphasize that violence against women and children is a major impediment to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and that it violates, impairs, or nullifies their full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially during times of disaster.
24. We remain concerned that women and girls are at risk for sexual assault and rape during emergencies, especially if food, water, or fuel sources are far from settlements or located in poorly lit, unsafe areas or where emergency shelter management is not properly designed and effectively implemented. They are typically more physically vulnerable and less mobile than men and often find themselves exposed to violence as they carry out their gender-specific roles as caregivers, providers, and labourers along with other unpaid care work. Physical assault and sexual violence from intimate partners and male family members generally escalate during emergencies and increase as the crisis worsens, where there is increased economic pressure on the household and family violence is normalised. This has been especially evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic.
25. We recognize that women and girls are also at risk for sexual exploitation including sexual bartering in exchange for essential goods and services, trafficking and sexual slavery during times of emergencies and unrest. Armed forces can humiliate and 'emasculate' men by committing sexual violence against their wives, children, and themselves. Sexual violence against men and boys has been reported in at least 25 conflict situations. Soldiers (including child soldiers) are extremely vulnerable to physical and sexual violence and may be forced to 'prove' their manhood by using rape and sexual violence as weapons of war against women and girls.
26. We acknowledge that the Sendai Framework (2025-2030) has adopted a disaster risk management approach that aims to broadly strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters, emphasizing the need for dovetailing climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts. In both domains (adaptation and DRR), there is increasing recognition of the need for gender-responsive action in response to climatic and disaster risk. Gender equality and women's empowerment are key to the success

of all post-2015 multilateral agendas, including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework, and all future actions on reducing climatic and disaster risk.

27. We acknowledge that climate change is disproportionately severe for vulnerable groups, particularly rural women, women with disabilities, who are often poorer, receive less education, have less access to land, and are excluded from political, community and household decision-making processes that affect their lives. Small scale women farmers, particularly migrant women have the least access to financial support for hazard-proofing their crop and livestock farms. These economic and social inequities translate into women possessing fewer assets and meagre means to cope with the negative effects of the changing climate and to build forward climate-resilient farms.
28. We acknowledge that natural hazard impacts and climate-related changes affect entire communities and impede sustainable development. And although they affect whole communities, they impact men and women very differently, especially women with disabilities, the elderly, rural women, and domestic workers. Unequal social, political, and economic relations, combined with physical differences, expose the different vulnerabilities of women and men, usually putting women at greater risk.

Women and water in times of peace and disaster

29. We acknowledge the importance of clean water and sanitation, SDG 6, to gender equality and women's empowerment. Today, women around the world will spend a collective 200 million hours collecting water. Access to safe water is critical to the health of women and their babies during pregnancy and post-pregnancy as well as for rural women farmers, especially in times of droughts. Walking to collect water and carrying heavy vessels of water can be dangerous for a pregnant woman. Further, the consumption of unsafe water can be harmful to the health of both mother and baby.
30. We further acknowledge that from maintaining a healthy pregnancy to nourishing a newborn child, women need safe water at home. For women, the water crisis is personal. They are responsible for finding a resource their families need to survive - for drinking, cooking, sanitation, and hygiene. They may stand in line and wait for water, they may walk long distances to collect water, or they may pay exorbitant amounts of money to secure water. In their efforts to get water for their families, they often face an impossible choice: certain death without water or possible death due to illnesses from unsafe water. Women and children often bear the primary responsibility for water collection, and neither can enjoy the full complement of their rights without the "public good".
31. We recognize that as increasing water demand and climate change lead to higher rates of water scarcity and conflict, water management is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. Water scarcity is an important factor driving social instability and conflict around the world. A community's risk of water stress is a

function not only of droughts and floods but also of its ability to be resilient in the face of these natural hazards. Women play important roles in both formal and informal peace processes, and policymakers now widely recognize gender as a key factor in how communities experience and can reduce conflict. Given that women can be powerful water stewards, their involvement in water management and decision-making can also reduce water-related risks and conflicts.

32. We recognize that women are already the primary water decision-makers at the household level and that increasing the number of women on local water boards and committees is a significant first step. However, women's leadership nationally and regionally on matters related to water would result in even greater benefits. Research shows that when women influence water management by their active participation, their communities get measurably better outcomes—including better-functioning water systems, expanded access, and economic and environmental benefits. Yet women's representation in the overall water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector is dismal. They are particularly underrepresented in technical fields as engineers, hydrologists, and hydrogeologists and leadership roles such as policymakers, regulators and managers.
33. We note that the Caribbean is one of the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change and global warming and as such we commit to addressing climate change in keeping with Climate Action (SDG 13), considering the Paris Climate Agreement that acknowledges respect for the promotion and consideration of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls and intergenerational equity.
34. We recognize the important role of sustainable development in averting the loss and damage associated with the effects of climate change and in reducing the risk of loss and damage, especially for women and girls in vulnerable situations, as well as the active role of women as agents of change in safeguarding the environment.
35. We acknowledge that women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as their leadership, can help to support their empowerment in other sectors, including the arts, culture, sports, the media, education, religion, politics, engineering, ICT, agriculture, business and finance. We further recognize that sports and the arts have the power to change perceptions, prejudices and behaviours and challenge social norms perpetuating gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls, break down racial and political barriers and are important enablers of sustainable development and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.
36. We recognize that the more women and men participate on an equal basis in managing natural resources, designing, informing, and implementing early warning and recovery plans and policies, the more resilient societies will become. In response to these challenges, the Member States, partners, academia, CSOs and the private sector must include gender equality principles in disaster and climate risk reduction policies, plans and budgetary frameworks. Data collection, analysis, and utilisation must be central to any effort to assess disaster risk from a gender

perspective; strengthen the capacities of women's organizations to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and strategies; and promote women's and men's equal involvement in decision-making, employment creation and reintegration programmes in post-disaster situations.

Strengthen normative, legal, and regulatory frameworks

37. We urge the Member States to ratify and implement the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization and note the importance of other relevant international labour standards, namely the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102); 24 the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202); and the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), of the International Labour Organization. Also, the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), 25 on decent work for domestic workers, and other relevant standards of the International Labour Organization. The International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Decent Work Agenda offers an integrated framework for rural women's empowerment, underpinned by international labour standards, social dialogue and the recognition that rural women play a key role in climate action.
38. Ensure that the perspectives of women and girls, especially the vulnerable are taken into account in times of disasters, humanitarian emergencies, armed conflict and post-conflict situations that they effectively and meaningfully participate on equal terms with men, in the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies and activities related to conflict prevention, peace mediation, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as take into account the perspective of women and girls who are displaced and who are refugees; and ensure that the human rights of all women and girls are fully respected and protected in all response, recovery and reconstruction strategies, and that appropriate measures are taken to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against them.
39. Strengthen the capacity of national statistical offices and other relevant government institutions, NGOs and women-led organisations to collect, analyse and disseminate regional comparable data including gender and census statistics disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts, to support the design, implementation and tracking of policies aimed at improving women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as to assess laws, policies, strategies and programmes to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls, and enhance women's resilience and adaptive capacity in climate action.
40. By 2025, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans toward inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change and resilience to disasters; and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

and support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance.

41. Therefore we commit at all levels and as appropriate, to collaborate with the relevant entities of the United Nations system and international and regional organizations, within their respective mandates and bearing in mind national priorities, and invite civil society, inter alia, women's organizations, youth-led organizations, feminist groups, the private sector, national human rights institutions, where they exist, and other relevant stakeholders, as applicable, on the following actions: (Based on CSW Agreed Conclusions)

Strengthen women's engagement in addressing the Climate Crisis

- *Adopt* special measures taken to secure gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (SDG 5) and in keeping with all Conventions ratified by the CARICOM Member States including upholding the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).
- *Actively engage* rural, indigenous, and tribal women who, through their traditional knowledge and environmental stewardship, have over time sustained, conserved and managed the tropical rain forests and a range of other eco-systems, which significantly contribute to building a climate-resilient world for all (SDG 13).
- *Include* rural, indigenous, and tribal women and girls in decision-making generally, and specifically in terms of Climate Action as recognised in the UNDRIP, in the Gender Action Plan of the UNFCCC, in the SIDS SAMOA Declaration and the UN Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP). Support REDD+ (countries' efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and foster conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks) initiatives in the CARICOM region. Present opportunities for women, in particular rural and indigenous women, across generations, to occupy key climate leadership, management, monitoring and research positions at community and national levels.
- *Support* women's economic empowerment to enable more women to re-enter the workforce, aware that in some Member States, women make up almost half the workforce. CEDAW also highlights the need to raise women's labour force participation rates. Economies grow faster when more women participate in the labour force, with equal pay for work of equal value. We commit to adopting policies to promote equal pay for work of equal value and, in addition to appropriate legislation, strengthen the data collection, data analysis and oversight required to implement it.
- *Dedicate* resources, to shock and gender-responsive social protection, including accessible healthcare facilities and services, comprehensive care systems that support universal access to childcare and the provision of cash transfers, to rural women and their communities. Also redesign social protection instruments to ensure women entrepreneurs operating in the informal economy, particularly medium, small and microentrepreneurs running small service businesses, e.g., hairdressers, fishery sector

workers, domestic workers and market stall vendors, who would also face loss of livelihoods in times of natural hazards, can have access to financial support.

- *Commit* to working with the regional development banks to ensure they are more gender-responsive, applying innovative financing mechanisms for gender equality including using gender lens investing to inform climate financing processes.
- to a review of financial policy to allow greater consideration of guarantees or other de-risking mechanisms that could allow the banking and insurance sectors to play a more active role in resilience building.
- to flexible social protection insurance and financing mechanism for women to support economic and social displacement arising from drought i.e. climate and disaster risk financing and insurance.
- to increased budgetary support for more diverse women's attendance at international meetings and as part of delegations on par with men for more balanced decision-making.
- *Recognise* the importance of and commit to providing psychosocial support after large extensive events or after smaller intense events, specifically including for those farmers who are women, and single heads of households with a high number of dependents. Support innovative farming techniques for women farmers among them the use of hydroponics systems.

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