



EnGenDER

Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery,
Climate and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean

Gender Inequality of Climate Change and Disaster Risk in the Water Sector

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14 of 18



Natural hazards and climate change impact women and men differently due to differences in societal expectations of their roles and responsibilities in families and communities, and the means by which they earn their livelihoods. Women generally have lower

incomes, less access to credit and decision-making authority, and limited control over resources, which increases their vulnerabilities to many natural hazards and climate change impacts. The impacts of climate change and disasters often magnify existing gender inequalities between women and men; thus, the approach to policy development and service delivery by institutions needs to take into consideration gendered differences. In particular, climate change and disaster risk preparation and response demand initiatives that identify and address existing gendered differences to ensure that women and girls, and men and boys have equal access to disaster risk resilience and climate change and environmental solutions.



CLIMATE CHANGE

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 period.



DISASTER

a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic and environmental losses and impacts.



HAZARD

a process, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impact, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation. Hazards maybe natural, anthropogenic or socionatural in origin.

Through a series of comprehensive studies, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women) under the Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean (EnGenDER) Project has identified gender inequality of

climate change and disaster risk impacts across the water sector. The water sector includes water engineering, operations, water and wastewater plant construction, equipment supply and specialist water treatment chemicals, among others.

Why a Gender Lens (Analysis)?

Water is a necessity for life; therefore, lack of access to safe, sufficient and affordable water will have devastating effects on the health, dignity and well-being of people. Water is also required for conducting economic activities, such as agriculture, tourism and health care. Rising temperatures and sea water levels are leading to sea water intrusion, which decreases freshwater resources and the quality of water, and leads to water scarcity. In rural communities, women are the main collectors of water for households, which is why they are more likely to be affected by water scarcity caused by droughts and rising sea levels, as well as water contamination caused by flooding. Although women lead household activities related to collecting, storing and using water, men often dominate technical water management roles. Thus, decisions in the water sector are often made without women's participation. An inadequate water supply also poses challenges for women and girls' health during menstruation. Children and the elderly also face risks when there is a lack of access to safe water.



Climate Change and Disaster Risks

Across the Caribbean, an analysis of gender inequality due to the impacts of climate change, hazards and disasters on the water sector revealed:



Children fall ill due to a lack of safe water, and children's education may also be disrupted by lack of access to water.



There are exacerbated health risks related to a lack of safe water and lack of access to health care.



Limited access to water and safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities pose serious implications for all communities, but particularly for women and children.



There is the possibility of damage to water infrastructure, in which case people are forced to rely on external water sources, which can cause physical stress and health and safety issues.



Water contamination puts women, men and children at-risk of contracting waterborne diseases (i.e., illnesses caused by microscopic organisms, like viruses and bacteria, that are ingested through contaminated water or by coming in contact with feces).

Coping Mechanisms Identified

In the Caribbean, people who have been impacted by climate change events and hazards

have adapted and coped in one or more of the following ways:



Women and girls, and men and boys access household toiletries to maintain hygiene; this is particularly critical for women and girls during their menstruation.



Rainwater harvesting.



Increasing water storage capacities.



Opportunities for Gender-Responsive Disaster Resilience

What can be done to ensure that climate change policies and strategies are gender-responsive? What can be done to reduce the gendered risks for vulnerable populations?



Policymakers can:

Distribute WASH relief kits for vulnerable groups during times of inaccessibility to water.

Mainstream gender and disability perspectives within leadership structures where systemic change can occur to improve WASH.

Develop structural interventions to connect vulnerable households to safe potable water.

Conduct gender-specific studies and collect more detailed sex-disaggregated data related to WASH.

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