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Gender Perspectives on Climate Change

Written statement*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Introduction

Gender and climate change have increasingly become important issues of our time. Both are closely related to each other, considering that women who constitute the majority of the world's population, have a significant role in the global effort to address climate change and its adverse impacts on human societies. The truth of the matter is that women serve as agents of change in addressing the climate change issue.

The fact is climate change has now become an undeniable global phenomenon. It is causing seasons to shift tremendously, raising the concern of the international community. The shifting of the seasons is marked by, among others, the changing pattern of rain intensity, which has resulted in flood and landslides, longer dry seasons that lead to drought, and extreme changes in air pressure that cause hurricanes and tornados. These effects of shifting seasons have brought about a number of social problems such as food scarcity, endemic diseases and natural disasters.

Among those adversely affected by climate change, women are the most vulnerable. They are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. So too are children. Therefore, considering the massive impact of natural disasters on women, it is important to underline the contributions they have to make in addressing this issue. No woman should allow the adverse impact of climate change to become a barrier to the realization of her full potential. Women from all walks of life should therefore join hands and move toward clear and achievable targets.

This paper is aimed at exploring the need of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management and offers some possible insights to promote it. Some descriptive details have been drawn from cases relevant to Indonesia's experience, in particular its experience with tsunami disaster.

Why do we need gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management?

In March 2005, a **comprehensive concept** of disaster risk management was promoted by the International Tsunami Information Centre consisting of 4 (four) pillars:

1. Policy Making
2. Operational/Technical works
3. Capacity building on science and technology preparedness/awareness
4. Adaptation - Mitigation

This concept has been **recognized** worldwide as the main reference point when dealing with disaster related issues. Indonesia used this frame of reference in the establishment of both the Indonesia Tsunami Warning System (Ina TWS) and the Meteorological - Climatological Early Warning System (MC-EWS). However, gender mainstreaming has not been well integrated into this concept of disaster risk management. In fact, women are often **marginalized** as a consequence of the absence of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management.

Furthermore, it is recognized that many international forums have not yet focused comprehensively on the gender dimension of disaster risk management efforts. One such

forum is the International Oceanographic Commission (IOC), a subsidiary body of UNESCO which has as part of its mandate the provision of tsunami early warning system and related capacity building.

It is important to note that natural disasters affect women differently from men. The difference can generally be attributed to traditional values and social norms which assign different roles and responsibilities to men and women. Thus, climate change and its harmful consequences directly and indirectly affect women's condition, status and role in the community. In Aceh, for example, many women were found dead with babies still clutched in their arms. This condition clearly reflects the primacy of their care-giving obligation. Because of their care-giving obligations, many women fell victims to the disaster.

However, it is undoubtedly true that women should not only be victims of natural disasters caused by climate change, they must also be a driving force in facing and tackling its adverse impact. There is ample evidence to show that even as potential victims, women in disaster areas continue to fulfill important household obligations. As a result, women find themselves facing a "double burden" in disaster related situations.

Yet, despite their vulnerability, women are poorly represented in decision making or policy formulation processes related to planning and evaluation for disaster risk management. Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that woman should play an important role in policy formulation. Women's vulnerability was exacerbated by the lack of policy and regulations which are sensitive to women's needs. Women's involvement in policy formulation will ensure that women's needs are addressed appropriately.

Therefore gender equity in disaster reduction requires above all empowering women to play increasing roles in leadership positions as well as management and decision making processes.

Lesson learned from the Aftermath of Tsunami in Asia particularly Indonesia

It is widely recognized that Indonesia was the country worst affected by the 2004 tsunami. The dead & missing in Indonesia numbered 95.000 and 133.000 respectively, while in Srilanka the corresponding numbers were 31.000 and 5.637. For India, they were 10.744 and 5.640. The overall data for Aceh reveals the number of women dead and missing in the earthquake and tsunami disaster in Aceh amount to 56% of the total, compared to 44 % for men.

In the early weeks after tsunami struck Aceh and in some other parts of Indonesia, the survivors experienced a severe crisis and great material deprivation. Since then, 41.4 % of women of productive age have become involved in productive work and they provide 34.4 % of household incomes. This data suggests that the capacity of women to recover from tsunami's impact and to find productive work afterwards has proven to be greater than that of men.

This is a unique phenomenon, considering that there is no education gap between the two groups, while there is a huge gap in accessing external aid. Following from that, concern has been expressed with regard to some issues of importance to women, inter alia, health, aid

delivery, human rights and security. These sensitive matters should be addressed in accordance with the prevailing social, cultural and religious norms.

Given that women are the ones mostly affected by natural disasters, it is important that disaster risk management be designed to incorporate gender mainstreaming in the planning, implementation and evaluation processes. In this regard, the situation in Aceh has revealed that the absence of gender sensitive policy has caused untold misery for women who were victims of the tsunami.

How to incorporate gender mainstreaming into disaster risk management?

In view of the urgent need to develop gender mainstreamed disaster risk management policies, it is therefore imperative to focus further on the gender dimension at all levels: international, regional and national. At regional level, organizations such as ASEAN will in the future face the challenge of integrating gender issues into its disaster mechanisms, among them the ASEAN Earthquake Information Centre (AEIC), ASEAN COST/ SCMG (Sub-Committee on Meteorology and Geophysics) and ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). At the international level, it is important to encourage international agencies to strengthen the management and information sharing of early warning systems at the regional, national and community levels. An encouraging example is the one recently demonstrated in the WMO, the UN Specialized Agency responsible for weather, climate and hydrology issues including hydro-meteorological disaster risk management. The promotion of gender mainstreaming in this organization is materialized by the establishment of the Executive Council Advisory Panel on Gender Mainstreaming which is expected to promote, encourage and facilitate gender equality across WMO and its Members as well as to establish a mechanism by which progress on gender mainstreaming can be measured.

At the national level, Indonesia has been developing a Tsunami Warning System (TWS), which involves the deployment of equipment for detecting, observing and monitoring – processing – analysis as well as delivery the warning information. These have been established at regional centres along the coasts of Sumatra, Java, Bali and Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua. The TWS regional centers form a network coordinated by the TWS national centre in Jakarta, which in turn connects with a network of national centers in ASEAN countries and countries on the Indian Ocean rim linked by AEIC.

Recognizing the crucial role of women in disaster risk management, it is our hope that women will be further involved in TWS, particularly its policy making activities. The table below shows that the participation of women in TWS policy making activities is very low. Only 8 % of those taking part in the operational work of TWS are women. However, women make up 65% of those involved in preparedness-awareness activities. This figure reflects the lack of women's participation in TWS' planning process has resulted in the ineffective and unbalanced distribution of aid and health supplies.

TABLE: WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN TSUNAMI EARLY WARNING SYSTEM RELATED ACTIVITIES IN INDONESIA

	PILLARS	COMPONENTS	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN INVOLVEMENT
TWS	Policy Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grand Design - Target Achievement - Evaluation Method 	Less than 1 %
	Operational Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site Survey - Deployment - Processing Analyzing - Dissemination 	8%
	Capacity Building on Science & Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modelling – Hazard Assessment - Preparedness – Awareness 	<p>Less than 1 %</p> <p>65 %</p>
	Adaptation and Mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Emergency response - Rehabilitation - Reconstruction 	Inconsiderable

In this regard, it is important to strengthen efforts to encourage women to become further involved in TWS and other disaster risk management initiatives. There should be a firm commitment by high level leaders to deepen considerably women’s involvement in the area of policy formulation (which is less than 1% in the case of Indonesia and very likely similar in other countries) while maintaining the already high degree of women’s participation in the area of preparedness and awareness (65% in Indonesia). The more women participate in this area, based on their capacity and expertise, the more effective disaster risk management strategies will be in addressing women’s needs.

Financing Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Management

In line with the priority theme of the 52nd Session Commission of Status of Women, “Financing Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women”, financing gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management is clearly an important aspect of this undertaking.

As in many other cases, an initial and fundamental action to do is carrying out an overall mapping of the present status of women’s involvement in disaster risk management at all levels and across all regions. This is then followed by identifying/ formulating the targets to achieve as well as developing the evaluation methods including the establishment of the indicators of success, employed to measure the progress made by gender mainstreaming within the framework of disaster risk management. To this end, it requires financial supports to carry out the aforementioned mapping. Based on this, we can develop more comprehensive

financing mechanism for promoting effective disaster risk management in order to address women's needs better.

Pursuant to this, it is also important that in delivering their aid, donor agencies should incorporate priority criteria which ensure gender mainstreaming in accordance with the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization and sustainability as stipulated in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The Way Forward of the Gender Participation in Disaster Risk Management

Long before it was fashionable to talk about adverse impact of climate change, Indonesian women had begun to do their part in adapting to and helping to mitigate climate change as a form of disaster risk management through **traditional practices born of local wisdom**. This wisdom is part and parcel of the daily life of communities in remote areas. A good example is that of the Gayo-Sumatran community, which launch their annual farming cycle with a ritual called *munene*. Another example can be drawn from the **Tri Hita Karana tradition in Balinese culture** on the island of Bali. The tradition is based on the three main elements: namely, managing human activities with God, with other humans, and with the environment.

Being aware of the effect of climate change on human beings, particularly women and children, and realizing that women can serve as the driving force in the community, Indonesian women feel the need to respond to the challenge of climate change and contribute to a global regime of climate stability. For this purpose, the seven largest women mass organizations acted in concert to hold a Conference of Indonesian Women's Local Wisdom in Addressing the Global Climate Change (Adaptation and Mitigation). This was held in Jakarta, 27-28 November 2007. The main outcome of the Conference is the Declaration on the "Plant and Nurture" movement committing participants to planting more than 13.000.000 seeds and responsibly nurturing them. Indonesia's First Lady, Her Excellency Hj. Any Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono officially launched the movement on 1st December 2007.

Very much in line with the Conference and Declaration, a Side Event on "Gender and Climate Change" was convened by Indonesia as the host country during the CoP-13 UNFCCC, held in Bali. This event further enlisted and recognized women as **agents of change** who have a significant role to play in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. They have an essential role in protecting the current global environment. In addition, they have an important role in **educating** and **passing on knowledge** about the **environment to future generations**. This means the early inculcation in children of valuable knowledge, attitudes and wisdom about the environment and climate change.

All of these facts, especially those concerning the response to the tsunami emergency, **highlight the value of women's leadership and commitment**. They serve to strengthen the case for gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management measures. It is our conviction that these **initiatives could be further developed** and replicated across the region.

In future, women's vulnerability to disasters will become more exacerbated when they are forced to cope with massive natural disasters, as in the case of the 2004 tsunami. But arrangements made based on the **existing disaster risk management have not provided adequate gender sensitive policies to adequately address women's needs**. However,

reforming these arrangements is possible as long as there is strong **political leadership** and **commitment** to do so. Even in some cases, women's leadership in anticipating disaster challenges in Indonesia is proven reliable and commendable.

Based on the lessons learned from Indonesia, which has recently been affected by a series of natural disasters such as floods, landslides, cyclones, excessive rainfall, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunami, women's voices should form part of the climate change and disaster risk management dialogue, as a matter of urgency.

In view of the **daunting** challenges related to disaster risk management and climate change that women will have to face in the future, the following are recommended as key elements in addressing the issue:

- a. The essentiality of incorporating appropriately a gender perspective into **all phases of disaster management** at all levels of operation -- international, regional and national.
- b. The importance of establishing sustainable evaluation and monitoring systems to ensure that women take an active and equal role in the decision-making processes of disaster risk management.
- c. The need to ensure the link and match between the financial mechanism and the study of the current status and future expectation of women involvement in disaster risk management.

In conclusion, gender mainstreaming is a cross cutting issue of high importance. It is no less of a challenge in the context of disaster risk management. Given their lack of capacity, technology and resources to achieve this goal, developing countries face serious challenges in dealing with natural disaster related matters. Even so, the compelling need to mainstream gender in disaster risk management is becoming more acute for all countries and needs to be resolved as a matter of urgency. Failing to address this concern will only make women who are at risk even more vulnerable and prevent them from realizing their full potential. Placed within the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, this is an alarming situation which undermines women's empowerment. Appropriate changes will therefore have to be made.

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