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**Plenary Session 1: Promoting policy changes for gender-sensitive disaster management and
disaster risk reduction**

Madame Chairperson
Fellow panelists and participants

I would like to congratulate the All-China Women's Federation and the Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction for the initiative to hold this international conference on gender and disaster risk reduction – a critical issue for the achievement of both gender equality and effective and sustainable disaster management and risk reduction. I also express appreciation to the All-China Women's Federation, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China and the United Nations system in China for co-hosting the meeting.

Over the past decade, major disasters, such as the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Hurricanes Mitch and Katarina, the Kashmir and Wenchuan Earthquakes, Cyclone Nargis, and recurrent droughts in Africa, as well as a myriad of other less visible more minor recurrent disasters, have brought to the fore some of the critical gender perspectives on disasters, including the ways in which gender-blind disaster preparedness and responses can worsen the situation for women and girls and hinder sustainable resilience and recovery. The increased attention to climate change over recent years has strengthened the focus on gender equality in relation to disaster risk reduction. There is also growing awareness that poverty increases vulnerability to disasters, and that women are over-represented among the poorest of the poor. It is generally accepted that in many parts of the world, for a variety of reasons - including inequality and discrimination- there is a difference, sometimes very significant, between the potential of women and men to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.

The strengthened attention to gender equality from researchers and activists/advocates, from the UNISDR Secretariat and System and other UN entities, from governments – including development cooperation agencies, and from NGOs working at all levels, has increased awareness of gender equality issues and led to a number of policy commitments on gender mainstreaming in disaster management and risk reduction. To date, however, the formulation of explicit, measurable policy recommendations in the global context has been minimal and, as a result, there has not been broad-based and sustained substantial change in policies, legislation, and planning, implementation and evaluation of activities on the ground.

My presentation will therefore focus on what needs to be done to utilize the increasing awareness to bring about more concrete policy commitments promoting real change in mainstreaming gender perspectives in disaster management and risk reduction activities. I will focus primarily on the global level since others will give detailed attention to regional, sub-regional and national and local levels later in the conference. I shall begin with a brief historical overview of the evolution of efforts over the past decade to increase the focus on gender equality and empowerment of women at global policy level and the impact of this attention. Considerable work has already been done, and it is important to find ways to build on the gains made and to translate the experiences, lessons learned, and good practices into systematic, effective and sustainable gender mainstreaming practice across all areas of disaster risk reduction. It is important to recognize that the global policy context can be used effectively to support achievement of critical goals at national and local levels.

What has been achieved to date?

Attention to gender equality in intergovernmental processes

Although the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly (2000) gave some attention to gender perspectives in natural disasters, this was only one issue among many in these outcomes. The first significant attention to gender perspectives in intergovernmental contexts was achieved when the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – the global body with primary responsibility for gender equality and empowerment of women - decided to focus on “*Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters*” as one of its priority themes in 2002. The Commission adopted by consensus a set of policy recommendations (agreed conclusions) on the theme which recognized that women play a vital role in disaster reduction, response and recovery; that disaster situations aggravate vulnerable conditions and some women face particular vulnerabilities; and that women’s strengths in dealing with disasters and supporting their families and communities should be utilized to rebuild and restore their communities and mitigate against further disasters. Member States called for actions to protect and promote women’s rights, enhance their capabilities, and ensure their full participation, as well as to ensure their access to information, education and to all economic opportunities in relief and recovery projects. Efforts to fully incorporate gender perspectives in all actions, to collect sex-disaggregated data and to document good practices and lessons learned, were also called for.

At its 49th session in 2005, the Commission on the Status of Women also adopted a resolution on natural disasters, including the tsunami, which urged Governments to integrate gender perspectives into all phases of their planning for disaster preparedness and responses to natural disasters and to ensure that women play an active and equal role. Member States called for, among other things, training on the protection, rights and particular needs of women and girls and for efforts to promote gender balance and gender sensitivity among representatives and staff.

More recently, in 2008, the Commission addressed climate change as its emerging issue through an interactive expert panel. The panel noted the vulnerability of women, particularly poor women and indigenous women, to the effects of climate change. The effects of women’s exclusion from development processes and decision-making was raised by participants, as well as the lack of access to training, including on simple skills required for survival, such as swimming and tree-climbing. Participants emphasized, however, that women are not just victims of climate change; they are also powerful agents of change. Women have demonstrated unique knowledge and expertise in developing strategies to combat the effects of climate change and promote disaster management and community organization, especially at the grassroots level.

In 2004, in the consideration of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction under the General Assembly agenda item on Sustainable Development, the resolution (58/214) adopted encouraged effective contributions from major groups identified in Agenda 21 (one of which is women) but did not specifically mention women (para 16). In the resolutions adopted on this issue since 2006, there has been a reference to gender mainstreaming in one paragraph, although without elaboration on how this will be achieved. Most recently, in the resolution adopted in 2008 (63/216), Member States again recognized the importance of integrating a gender perspective and empowering and engaging women in the design and implementation of all phases of disaster management, as well as in risk reduction strategies and programmes, but went further than previous resolutions by encouraging the Secretariat of the Strategy to continue to increase the promotion of gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women (para 17).

The “*Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters*,” - the current principal framework guiding work on disaster risk reduction adopted at the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction, called for the integration of a

gender perspective 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. It also called for the promotion of gender and cultural sensitivity training as integral components of education and training for disaster risk reduction.

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction plays a critical role as the main global forum for facilitating exchange of experience and information between representatives of governments and other stakeholders, including United Nations entities, financial institutions, civil society, private sector and academic communities,. The summary of the first Global Platform in 2007 noted the disproportionate impact of disasters on women and girls while also recognizing that their capacities and potential to contribute to disaster risk reduction were largely untapped. The need to increase understanding of the contributions of women to disaster prevention was recognized. UNISDR partners were encouraged to undertake awareness-raising and action to address gender perspectives and promote women's active participation and leadership.

In addition to global intergovernmental bodies, it is important to note that, following the tsunami disaster in South East Asia at the end of December in 2004, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women- the body of independent experts which monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - prepared a statement which stressed the need to identify and address the gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls in all humanitarian and recovery responses.

Regional intergovernmental processes

Experience with the integration of gender perspectives into regional intergovernmental processes has been mixed. It is hopeful, however, that there have been a number of positive regional-level processes. The “*Delhi Declaration*” from the Second Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2007, for example, recognized the important role women play in disaster risk reduction and called for national efforts to implement gender mainstreaming. Gender perspectives were raised in the High-Level Conference on Risk Reduction, Mitigation and Recovery from Natural Disasters in the Greater Caribbean, held in Haiti in November 2007. In addition, Africa has developed a “*Regional Plan of Action and Guidelines for Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Assessment in Development*” which includes some attention to gender perspectives.

National reports to intergovernmental processes

There has been limited attention to gender perspectives in national reports to intergovernmental processes on disaster risk reduction. In 2004, only 19 of 118 countries raised gender perspectives in their reports prepared for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Three years later in 2007, only 8 of 61 reports prepared for the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction raised gender equality issues.

Advocacy, awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts for gender-sensitive policy-making

Global advocacy efforts gained momentum in the preparations for the discussion of gender perspectives on disaster management in the Commission on the Status of Women in 2002. The Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with UNISDR Secretariat, organized an Expert Group Meeting in Ankara, Turkey, in November 2001 to support the Commission. The Division subsequently prepared a publication on gender perspectives on natural disasters “*Women 2000 and Beyond: Making risky environments safer. Women building sustainable and disaster-resilient communities*” to ensure follow-up to the work of the Commission.

Since then, there have been many efforts by Member States, United Nations entities, other international and regional bodies and NGOs, to advocate, raise awareness and develop capacity at global, regional and national levels for change in both policies and programmes. A workshop on “*Gender equality and disaster risk reduction*” organized in Honolulu, Hawaii in 2004, for example, promoted awareness that failure to address gender perspectives had implications for the impact and sustainability of disaster risk reduction interventions. The theme of “*Gender and disaster risk reduction*” was also included on the agenda of the 2006 International Disaster Reduction Conference in Davos, Switzerland. The Stockholm Forum for Disaster Reduction and Recovery in 2008, organized by The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery in collaboration with the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and UNISDR, recognized the importance of gender-responsive interventions for addressing the underlying vulnerability and poverty affecting the resilience of communities to disasters, including climate change.

Most recently, the “Manila Declaration for Global Action on Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction” from the Third Congress on Women in Politics and Governance, on Gender in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction held in the Philippines, in October 2008, underscored that women are vital agents of change, holders of valuable knowledge and skills, and can be powerful leaders from community to global level in climate change mitigation, adaptation and in disaster risk assessment. Among other things, the Declaration called for support to Governments in developing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, allocation of adequate resources and support to women’s grassroots initiatives.

This international conference here in Beijing provides another important opportunity to further elaborate what needs to be done, and will be particularly strategic since it will feed into the second Global Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva in June this year.

The Secretariat of UNISDR has played a key role in translating these policy commitments into action by consistently focusing attention on gender equality aspects and providing policy guidance to inform planning and programming at regional, national and local levels. For example, the Secretariat produced a guide for implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action - “*Words into action: A guide for implementing the Hyogo Framework*” in 2007-2008 which highlights that gender is a core factor in disaster risk and in the reduction of risk. It calls for the use of gender-differentiated information to ensure the effective targeting of interventions at the most vulnerable groups; the use of gender assessments; the disaggregation of data by sex and the development of gender-sensitive indicators; the involvement of both women and men; and the use of gender-balanced teams.

In 2007, the UNISDR Secretariat launched an initiative to build global partnerships for gender mainstreaming to provide a platform for sharing information, increasing the visibility of women’s roles and contributions, and providing policy guidance. UNISDR also brought gender perspectives to the attention of participants at the June 2007 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction which increased understanding of the importance of gender perspectives. Two UNISDR publications “*Gender perspective: Working together for disaster risk reduction*” (2007) and “*Gender perspectives: Integrating disaster risk reduction into climate change adaptation*” (2008) compile useful good practice examples and lessons learned from efforts to implement the Hyogo Framework recommendations in policies and programme and national and regional levels. Working with multiple partners, the UNISDR Secretariat also held an expert meeting, developed databases, published information materials in support of gender mainstreaming and supported the work of the Gender and Disaster Network of academics. The Secretariat is currently developing policy guidelines, including for gender-sensitive risk assessment and early warning systems, with supporting tools such as training modules, gender-inclusive indicators and a resource guide.

Leadership on work in the United Nations system is also provided by the Interagency Taskforce for Disaster Reduction. The Interagency Standing Committee working on humanitarian

issues contributes inputs from its specific perspective. OCHA works to ensure attention to gender perspectives in the interface between relief, recovery and development to avoid a perpetuation or exacerbation of risks, using a rights-based approach and identifying underlying causes, vulnerabilities and capacities. OCHA focuses on women as potential resources in disaster risk reduction. The importance of sex-disaggregated data is emphasized and efforts are made to increase attention to gender perspectives in National Adaptation Plans of Action.

Individual United Nations entities work to strengthen the focus on gender equality in their work on disaster risk reduction. A number of other entities, such as UNDP, UNFPA, HABITAT and UNIFEM, give attention to gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction, including in the context of crises. The UNDP “*Eight Point Agenda: Practical, positive outcomes for girls and women in crisis*” raises the need to promote gender equality in disaster risk reduction, including through valuing women’s knowledge and experience. In the Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery, UNFPA and UNDP are leading a project on developing gender-aware profiles for countries at risk of disaster and/or conflict.

Moving towards stronger policy commitments for enhanced gender mainstreaming

Taking stock of progress so far, there are a number of global policy commitments to gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction in place, which - while not adequately elaborating how this should be achieved – do provide important mandates for an accelerated focus on the gender perspectives in all aspects of disaster management and risk reduction. It is important to take a closer look at what has already been specifically recommended in global policy contexts and ways these can be built upon and further developed; to identify the gaps and constraints in implementation; and to develop means to improve follow-up..

The Hyogo Framework, (2005) the General Assembly resolution 63/216 (2008), and the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) (2002), provide recommendations for the following concrete actions. Although there have been many recommendations made in other contexts, the actions below are agreed policy commitments formally adopted by Member States in global intergovernmental contexts.:

Increasing awareness-raising and information development:

- Collect demographic and socio-economic data and information disaggregated by sex and age, develop national gender-sensitive indicators and analyse gender differences with regard to environmental management, disaster occurrence and associated losses and risks and vulnerability reduction (CSW-7f);
- Document good practice and lessons learned, particularly from effective community-based strategies to disaster reduction, response and recovery, which actively involve women as well as men, and widely disseminate this information to all stakeholders (CSW-7q).

Strengthening women’s participation:

- Ensure equal access to appropriate training and educational opportunities for women and vulnerable constituencies; (Hyogo Framework- 18m)
- Ensure the full participation of women in sustainable development decision-making and disaster reduction management at all levels: (CSW-7c);
- Make women full and equal partners in the development of safer communities and in determining national or local priorities for disaster reduction, and incorporate local and indigenous knowledge, skills and capacities into environmental management and disaster reduction (CSW-7m).

Reducing women’s vulnerability and empowering women

- Ensure the full enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development - including in disaster reduction, response and recovery; in this context special attention should be given to the prevention and prosecution of violence against women (CSW-7d);
- Develop, review and implement, as appropriate, with the involvement and participation of women’s groups, gender sensitive laws, policies and programmes, including on land-use and urbanization planning, natural resources and environmental management and integrated water resources management, to provide opportunities to prevent and mitigate damage (CSW 7g)
- Encourage, as appropriate, the development and implementation of national building standards that take into account natural hazards so that women, men and their families are not exposed to high risk from disasters (CSW-7h);
- Ensure women’s equal access to information and formal and non-formal education on disaster reduction, including gender-sensitive early warning systems, and empower women to take related action in a timely and appropriate manner (CSW 7j);
- Promote income-generating activities and employment opportunities, including through the provision of microcredit and other financial instruments, ensuring equal access to resources, in particular land and property ownership, including housing, and take measures to empower women as producers and consumers, in order to enhance the capacity of women to respond to disasters (CSW-7k);
- Design and implement gender-sensitive economic relief and recovery projects and ensure equal economic opportunities for women, including both in the formal and non-formal sectors, taking into account the loss of land and property, including housing and other productive and personal assets (CSW-7l);
- Improve and develop physical and mental health programmes, services and social support networks for women who suffer from the effects of natural disasters, including trauma (CSW-7r).

General Assembly resolution 63/216 did not call for specific action but it recognized the importance of empowering and engaging women in the design and implementation of all phases of disaster management as well as in risk reduction strategies and programmes.

Capacity development

- Promote gender equality and cultural sensitivity training as integral components of education and training on disaster risk reduction; (Hyogo Framework – 17m)
- Support capacity-building at all levels aimed at disaster reduction, based on knowledge about women’s and men’s needs and opportunities (CSW- 7n);
- Introduce formal and non-formal education and training programmes at all levels, including in areas of science, technology and economics, with an integrated and gender-sensitive approach to environmentally sound and sustainable resource management and disaster reduction, response and recovery in order to change behaviour and attitudes in rural and urban areas (CSW -7o);

Implementing gender mainstreaming:

- Integrate gender perspectives into all disaster risk policies, plans and decision-making, including on risk assessments, early warning, information management, and education and training; (Hyogo Framework -13d and 18d)
- Pursue gender equality and gender-sensitive environmental management and disaster reduction, response and recovery as an integral part of sustainable development (7a);
- Take measures to integrate a gender perspective in the design and implementation of, among other things, environmentally sound and sustainable resource and disaster management mechanisms, and establish mechanisms to review these efforts; (CSW-7b)
- Mainstream a gender perspective into ongoing research by, inter alia, the academic sector, on the impact of climate change, natural hazards, and related environmental vulnerability,

- including their root causes, and encourage the application of the results of this research in policies and programmes (CSW-7e);
- Include gender analysis and methods of mapping hazards and vulnerabilities at the design stage of all relevant development programmes and projects in order to improve the effectiveness of disaster risk management, involving women and men equally (CSW-7i);
 - Ensure the implementation of their commitments by all Governments, made in Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, including those in the areas of financial and technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries, and ensuring that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into all such assistance and transfers (CSW-7p);
 - Strengthen the capacity of ministries, emergency authorities, practitioners and communities to apply a gender-sensitive approach to environmental management and disaster reduction and the involvement of women professionals and field workers (CSW-7s);
 - Forge constructive partnerships between Governments, international organizations and civil society, including the private sector and NGOs, and other stakeholders in integrated and gender-sensitive sustainable development initiatives to reduce environmental risks (CSW-7t);
 - Encourage civil society, including NGOs, to mainstream a gender perspective in the promotion of sustainable development initiatives, including in disaster reduction (CSW-7u);
 - Ensure coordination in the United Nations system, including the full and active participation of funds, programmes and specialized agencies to mainstream a gender perspective in sustainable development including, inter alia, environmental management and disaster reduction activities (CSW-7v).

General Assembly resolution 63/216 (2009) recognized the importance of integrating a gender perspective and empowering and engaging women in the design and implementation of all phases of disaster management, as well as in risk reduction strategies and programmes, but did not call for specific actions by Member States. It encouraged the Secretariat of the Strategy to continue to increase the promotion of gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women.

Efforts have been made by Member States (including some development cooperation agencies), United Nations entities, other international and regional organizations, and NGOs, to build on these policy commitments by advocating and providing support for gender mainstreaming. As a result, even more detailed understanding of the required action at regional, sub-regional and national and local level has been established. A lot more is now known about what needs to be done in practical terms to increase attention to gender perspectives in disaster management and risk reduction. This knowledge is, however, fragmented and not disseminated and lessons learned and good practices are not sufficiently disseminated and replicated.

Further work needs to be undertaken to bring this increased awareness of concrete actions needed into the global policy context in order to utilize the legitimacy and credibility of formally adopted recommendations and to take advantage of the potential of intergovernmental processes for regular follow-up and the convening power which provides opportunities for exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices. To build on the existing commitments and to develop them further, three key questions have to be raised:

- How can these global policy commitments be used more systematically and effectively to inform policy and programme development at regional, sub-regional and national and local levels?
- What are the main constraints to their full implementation at different levels and how can these be addressed?
- How can follow-up through monitoring and reporting and exchange of experience be strengthened?

UNISDR and others have clearly identified some of the major constraints to implementation of these recommended actions, including continued lack of awareness on the linkages between gender equality and disaster risk reduction, particularly at the level of practice; the related lack of information and data; and the lack of leadership, accountability, resources and capacity (including methodologies and tools for gender mainstreaming). All actors are repeatedly requested to mainstream gender perspectives at both policy and programme level, but too little clear guidance is available.

What more can be done to strengthen and effectively utilize global policy commitments to enhance gender mainstreaming?

In addition to the excellent work already undertaken, in particular by UNISDR and partners, there are some additional actions that can be recommended at global level to accelerate attention to gender perspectives, with concrete outcomes. This includes promoting stronger, more explicit policy commitments and strengthening their implementation at national level through awareness-raising, information and communication and promotion of methods and tools for gender mainstreaming, as well as developing more opportunities for follow-up and exchange of experiences.

Increase policy attention

Policy attention to gender mainstreaming in disaster management and risk reduction needs to be strengthened through elaborating what needs to be done in practical terms. Innovative ways of making the General Assembly resolutions on the ISDR more action-oriented in this respect need to be developed. One way to do this may be to establish a group of Member States' "Friends of Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Reduction" to advocate for more detailed policy attention to gender mainstreaming, including by developing appropriate text for resolutions and other intergovernmental outcomes. Member States can also request that increased attention to gender perspectives is included in all reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, as a means to influence outcomes and improve monitoring and reporting on implementation.

If policy commitments were more concrete and practically-oriented, follow-up could be facilitated. Member States, and other stakeholders including United Nations entities, could be requested to report in global policy contexts more systematically on practical efforts to implement such commitments and to share experiences, lessons learned and good practices.

The existing concrete commitments on gender mainstreaming in the Hyogo Framework – to integrate gender perspectives in all policies, planning, decision-making, including on risk assessments, early warning, information and training - should be widely disseminated and guidance provided on how these can be implemented at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels.

Similarly, the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on *Environmental management and the mitigation of natural disasters* could be used more systematically and effectively, since these provide the most detailed recommendations on the issue of disaster management and risk reduction. The Agreed Conclusions are available in all six languages of the United Nations and should be disseminated widely and used to advocate for change at regional and national level. Member States could also request the Commission to find ways to follow-up more systematically on the practical implementation of these agreed conclusions. The Commission on the Status recommendations could be replicated and followed up in the General Assembly context.

In the forthcoming priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2012 on *"The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges,"* efforts can be made to ensure that there is a clear focus on disaster risk reduction and climate change under the heading of "current challenges". This would allow for further

elaboration of concrete policy recommendations in relation to disaster risk reduction, to follow-up the earlier agreed conclusions on disaster mitigation.

Unique opportunities for increasing attention to gender perspectives in disaster management and risk reduction exist in the forthcoming 15 year review of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to be organized in the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2010, and in the focus on gender equality in the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review in July 2010. UNISDR partners could both raise the importance of gender mainstreaming of disaster risk assessment in statements during these two important intergovernmental processes, and work to ensure a strong focus on gender equality in disaster management and risk reduction in any outcomes of these processes.

Increased attention needs to be given to the linkages between climate change and disaster risk reduction, particularly because of the important global processes currently underway in relation to climate change. Concerted efforts will be needed to successfully overcome the challenges involved in integrating gender perspectives into these processes.

While it is critical to have gender perspectives incorporated in all policy outcomes, there is also a need for specific outcomes focused on gender equality, such as the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women or its resolution on the tsunami. Member States and other stakeholders could advocate for a strong resolution on gender perspectives of disaster risk reduction, for example in the context of the Commission on the Status of Women, possibly linking disaster risk reduction with climate change and poverty eradication. Through the experience with Security Council resolution 1325, we know how powerful a global intergovernmental outcome can be for promoting change at national and local levels, where utilized systematically and effectively.

Consistent attention should also be given to the agendas and outcomes of global and regional conferences. While these events may not produce negotiated and binding outcomes, they are critical in developing guiding principles, shaping agendas, and providing direction in relation to approaches, strategies and actions. It is important not to miss major opportunities in this respect, particularly when such conferences are focused on implementation of the Hyogo principles. The experiences, lessons learned and good practices identified in such contexts can be fed into policy development in intergovernmental processes.

Strengthen advocacy and awareness-raising

Awareness-raising needs to be significantly strengthened if implementation of policy commitments is to be accelerated. Adopting gender perspectives on disaster risk reduction as the theme for an International Day for Disaster Reduction could significantly increase awareness and attention. A dynamic programme around the world – at global, regional and national levels - with a very concrete focus, engaging the media, including through United Nations Information Centres (UNICS), as well as UNISDR partners, could have a substantial impact on both policy and programme development.

Another opportunity which could be effectively utilized is the recently instituted annual International Day for Rural Women, on October 15. A particular focus on disaster management and disaster risk reduction could be proposed for 2009 or 2010, with activities undertaken at global, regional and national levels.

Another way to raise awareness and to follow-up on gender equality outcomes of global processes is to organize “parallel” networking events during the annual sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women and the agenda item in the General Assembly on Sustainable Development where the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is considered. These events can engage

multiple stakeholders – Member States, UN entities and NGOs, and develop new constituencies for work on mainstreaming gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction. In this way, attention can also be maintained in intergovernmental processes on achievements and gaps and challenges in relation to the implementation of the gender equality outcomes at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels..

The opportunities for advocacy and awareness-raising on disaster management and risk reduction in the forthcoming 15 year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and in the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review on gender equality should also be fully utilized.

Advocacy and awareness-raising on gender perspectives in disaster management and risk reduction should also include attention to the issues of violence against women raised both by the Commission on the Status of Women and the CEDAW Committee. The attention to this issue should be linked to the ongoing United Nations Secretary-General’s Campaign on eradicating violence against women: “*Unite to End Violence against Women*” (2008-2015). The Secretary-General has called on all stakeholders – Member States, United Nations and NGOs - to take action to incorporate attention to preventing and addressing violence against women. The violence against women implications in disaster management and disaster risk reduction need to be mapped out and guidance developed on what should be done to prevent and adequately respond to such violence.

Strengthen information systems

Information is key to accelerating implementation of global policy commitments. Information on existing policy commitments, such as those in the Hyogo Framework and the Agreed Conclusions from the Commission on the Status of Women, must be widely disseminated and well utilized if they are to have any impact on the ground. In addition, it is important to ensure that data is available from regional, sub-regional, national and local levels, to both support evidence-based policy-making and to facilitate effective follow-up to such policies.

Enhancing the gender-sensitivity of all information generated, and ensuring that there is sufficient gender-specific information in critical areas, for example in relation to social vulnerabilities in disaster-prone contexts as well as the important contributions of women, is also important.

The importance of sex-disaggregated data has been raised on numerous occasions. Efforts to build capacity of national statistical offices to strengthen the collection and use of statistics would be valuable. Where such disaggregated statistics are not available, this needs to be clearly pointed out as a significant gap requiring urgent attention. If not already done, it might be useful to establish contact with the Statistics Commission (another important functional commission of ECOSOC) on the importance of, and best means to, strengthen sex-disaggregated statistics and gender indicators on disaster management and risk reduction. Regular collaboration with this important body could be invaluable in improving access to critical data.

Some work on indicators has already been initiated. It would be important to ensure that there is a core set of key indicators for which reliable, comparable data is available in all parts of the world. Capacity-building on the use of such data and indicators would be necessary.

UNISDR might wish to consider creating a feature page on disaster risk reduction for the United Nations interagency portal on gender equality - WomenWatch. Since WomenWatch is a much-visited gateway to the work of the United Nations on gender equality, this could increase the dissemination of information on gender equality and disaster risk reduction to a wide range of stakeholders, and broaden the constituency base for work in this area. In addition to linking to information on the important work of the UNISDR Secretariat, other UN entities would be encouraged

to provide links to their work on disaster risk reduction to strengthen gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction.

Further efforts could be made to engage national mechanisms for women in outreach and communication since these mechanisms have broad constituencies reaching down to grass-roots level. In addition to the traditional ministries or departments for women, national-level mechanisms today include Gender Equality Commissions and parliamentary caucuses. Strengthening the engagement of parliamentarians is a well-tested effective means to increase policy commitment and monitoring of implementation. Experience of United Nations' collaboration with the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) on developing practical handbooks for parliamentarians on gender equality issues – such as violence against women and gender-responsive budgeting – has been very positive, and similar collaboration could be considered in relation to disaster risk reduction.

There is a need for further research in some areas to strengthen the evidence-base on the gender-specific implications of disaster risk reduction. Documentation of practical experiences, lessons learned and good practices, as already effectively initiated by the UNISDR Secretariat, is also important for feed-back in policy processes.

Translate policy commitments on gender mainstreaming into action in practice

The most common global policy recommendation on disaster risk reduction is for gender mainstreaming, usually put forward in very general terms. Successful implementation of gender mainstreaming requires identifying and influencing critical frameworks, institutions and instruments, and is often dependent on the ability to identify key entry-points and opportunities for promoting attention to gender perspectives. For example, considerable efforts are made today to mainstream disaster risk reduction as an integral part of other development processes, including, for example, in poverty reduction strategies, sustainable development strategies and action plans, and implementation plans and reports for the achievement of the MDGs. This is an important opportunity which should be utilized through efforts to ensure that such mainstreaming efforts include explicit attention to gender perspectives.

In its work, the Secretariat for UNISDR has very appropriately focused attention on supporting implementation of the *Hyogo Framework* and its five priorities for action as well as on the biennial Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. Risk assessments and early warning systems have been identified as critical instruments. Information management systems and education and training programmes are other important areas. These should continue to be priority areas of focus.

While much has been done to promote gender mainstreaming on disaster risk reduction, serious constraints to implementation remain. Particular efforts are needed to strengthen attention to gender perspectives in national and local level processes, including in outcomes such as national reports, policies, legislation, strategies, platforms and action plans. This requires efforts to establish an enabling environment for full implementation of policy commitments, through, for example, policy guidance, capacity-building, other support to local knowledge and initiatives and improved attention to consultation with, participation of and leadership development for women as well as men. Efforts already underway in these areas will be elaborated on in other presentations during the conference.

I will focus attention here on some overall recommendations on what needs to be done at global level, which apply also at other levels. A critical issue is the need to ensure that the responsibility for identifying and addressing gender perspectives is placed on all regular personnel in organizations working with disaster management and risk reduction and not left to gender focal points.

At the same time, the mandates, position, support from management and access to decision-making processes and resources of gender focal points and other gender equality experts must be strengthened to ensure they can play a strategic catalytic role at both policy and operational levels.

One way to ensure that gender perspectives are recognized as integral to successful disaster management and risk reduction, and given attention as part of routine activities, is through capacity-building for all levels of staff. Capacity-building must be linked to the everyday work of personnel and provide practical guidance on actions which can be taken to increase the gender-sensitivity of all areas of work – including for example, data collection, research and analysis, awareness raising, risk assessment, information management, programme development, and capacity-building.

Since senior managers have a major role in ensuring that all personnel are given responsibility, and in providing the necessary incentives and support to ensure that these responsibilities are systematically and effectively acted upon, they must be provided with executive briefings which clarify how they can provide adequate leadership, demand accountability and monitor and report on progress.

Ensuring accountability of personnel requires incorporating responsibility for gender mainstreaming in terms of reference, job descriptions and in performance assessment mechanisms. Staff must be required to demonstrate adequate awareness, commitment and capacity and to report regularly on progress in implementing gender mainstreaming in their specific areas of responsibility.

Clear guidance and supportive methodologies and tools must be provided to assist personnel undertake their responsibilities. Such methodologies and tools should always be appropriate to the task, and as simple and practical as possible. In other sectors, the development of brief, practically-oriented factsheets - or “quick references” / “tip sheets” has been found useful. Such factsheets on key processes - such as risk assessments or early warning - could provide easy access to useful facts and tips to guide personnel in addressing gender perspectives in their work in very concrete ways. While responses always have to be context-specific, it is possible to identify generic issues which might arise and questions which should always be posed relating to the roles, contributions and priorities and needs of both women and men.

One serious constraint identified in gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction is the lack of resources. Efforts could be made to develop gender-responsive budgeting processes which allow for the analysis of resource allocations and expenditure from a gender equality perspective. This facilitates assessment of the extent to which policy commitments are matched with appropriate resources. Gender-responsive budgeting methodologies can be applied at national level as well as within institutions.

Conclusion

Gender equality issues are significant in the construction of social vulnerability to risk in the context of natural disasters as well as in the development of capacity to promote sustainable resilience to disasters. Gender-based differences and inequalities interact with social class, race and ethnicity and age to put some women and girls in particularly vulnerable situations, for example older women, pregnant women, disabled women and women with small children. At the same time, however, women should be recognized as important agents of change, actors and contributors at all levels. Full understanding of the roles, contributions, knowledge of women as well as men in relation to the natural resource base is an essential starting point in working with natural disasters, particularly in terms of risk assessment and management.

It is critical to develop awareness, commitment and capacity to incorporate gender perspectives into all dimensions of work on natural disasters at all levels. Women can be marginalized

if all attention is focused on men and if women's contributions and potential are not recognized. The inputs of external actors can unintentionally perpetuate or even exacerbate the existing differences and inequalities between women and men. Programmes which provide training, credit and other resources, and are focused on development of new skills, must be explicitly targeted to women as well as men to ensure the development of women's capabilities and greater recognition of their potential. Efforts must be made to further develop partnerships between women and men supporting the promotion of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction.

It is important to recognize that development and equality-promoting opportunities can arise in the context of natural disasters. Unique possibilities for empowering women and advancing their situation and position within their households and communities can arise if women are perceived as full contributors and targeted and involved as full partners in all aspects of disaster management and risk reduction. Gender stereotypes can be challenged as women take on new roles and learn new skills, both in the household and community; as men develop new understanding and acceptance of the importance of women's full involvement and contributions; and as gender roles are adjusted to new realities. This can lead to changes in attitudes and practices over the long-term, with significant benefits for both women and girls and men and boys.

In this context, it is critical to strengthen our efforts to ensure more explicit policy commitments to incorporating gender equality perspectives in all work on disaster management and risk reduction, and to accelerate implementation of these commitments. The global policy context must be used more effectively to map out concretely what needs to be done to promote gender mainstreaming in relation to each of the commitments in the Hyogo Framework, as well as the emerging recommended actions on climate change, within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication. Greater efforts are needed to effectively use the convening power of intergovernmental contexts to strengthen follow-up through monitoring and reporting processes and provision of opportunities for interactive exchange of experience, lessons learned and good practices

These strengthened efforts are needed to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women, a critical global goal in its own right, as well as to provide effective disaster management and risk reduction.

Thank you.