

Gender-Responsiveness and Disaster Resilience during the COVID-19 Crisis

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The online meeting on [Gender-Responsiveness and Disaster Resilience during the COVID-19 Crisis](#), organized in collaboration with the UN Women Multi-Country Office - Caribbean and the Parliament of Saint Lucia, fostered a dialogue among parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, technical staff, and civil society on gender inequality in the impacts of and experiences during emergency situations caused by various hazards. It further examined how to incorporate a gender perspective in prevention, response, and recovery measures to ensure that the differentiated needs created are met with the aim of building disaster resilience.

 Access the recording of the session [here](#).

THEME
Integrating gender-transformative considerations to disaster management to achieve resilient and inclusive societies

LOCATION
Virtual meeting

DATE
July 22, 2020

PARTICIPANTS
More than 85 parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, technical staff and civil society from 15 countries

5 GENDER EQUALITY



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES



13 CLIMATE ACTION



This activity was aligned with SDG 5, 9, 10, and 13.

Summary

The online meeting was inaugurated by Ms. **Tonni Brodber**, Head of Office a.i., UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean; the host of the meeting, Speaker of the House of Assembly the Honourable **Andy Daniel** (St. Lucia), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change; and Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas. The Honourable Dr. **Gale Rigobert** (St. Lucia), Minister for Education, Innovation, Gender Relations, and Sustainable Development moderated the meeting.

The meeting discussions were informed by presentations about gender inequality in disaster and crisis situations drawing upon the expertise of Ms. **Angie Dazé** from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and Ms. **Kyana Bowen** from the UN Women MCO for the Caribbean, followed by a presentation by Ms. **Elizabeth Riley** from the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) about the differences between hazard types and national response methods. Participants were also introduced to the EnGenDER project by Mr. **Massimiliano Tozzi** from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which connects these themes and illustrates how a holistic and gender-inclusive approach to climate change and disaster risk reduction will accelerate positive change and achieve greater impact.

In addition, short presentations were given on resources developed for parliamentarians. **Mr. Jack Hardcastle** introduced a recent Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) climate change toolkit designed specifically for small island states. The Honourable Speaker Daniel presented on the ParlAmericas co-authored publications, [COVID-19: An Analysis of the Legislative Agenda and the Centering of Gender Equality in Legislative Responses](#) and the [Parliamentary Protocol for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation](#).

Tonni Brodber, Head of Office a.i., UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean



“It is impossible to be disaster resilient without thinking about how hazards impact our lives differently; we are not all the same, in fact not all women are the same. As Audre Lorde once said, ‘It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.’ Integrating gender into humanitarian response and enhancing women’s self-reliance and empowerment lead to better humanitarian outcomes. Planning, preparing, and mitigating against disasters, taking into account the lived realities of men, women, boys, and girls is gender-transformative programming.”

“The health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis can’t be viewed in a vacuum. These impacts play out differently for different groups of people, as with other disasters, so building resilience must focus on addressing, reducing, and, if possible, eliminating all together inequalities that can deepen and create compounded issues for us.”



The Honourable Dr. **Gale Rigobert** (St. Lucia), Minister for Education, Innovation, Gender Relations and Sustainable Development

The presentations were followed by an engaging dialogue and question and answer period through which participants shared good practices that are being implemented by their own institutions, including approaches to address the COVID-19 crisis. Discussion also highlighted the increasing indebtedness of the region and challenges posed by the current measures used to assess official development assistance eligibility.

The meeting concluded with remarks by President of the Senate **Chester Humphrey** (Grenada), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality; and by Ms. **Tonni Brodber**. Both speakers highlighted the need for a more holistic approach to resiliency in the Caribbean, with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and reducing the inequalities in society that exacerbate the vulnerabilities of the Caribbean to disasters.

This meeting is the first in a series of meetings planned for ParlAmericas and UN Women MCO-Caribbean to work with policy makers and parliamentarians in the Caribbean to support their adoption of gender-responsive and resilient disaster measures.

“Tourist-based economy like ours, and throughout the Caribbean region, have limited social safety nets. This means that our people, economy, and future are far more likely to be wrecked by COVID-19 than a nation with a more diversified economy. The data informs us that the COVID-19 has resulted in approximately 14,000 jobs lost in the tourism industry, and over 75% are women’s [in the case of Saint Lucia]. Additionally, we find ourselves in a season that does not bring joy and cheer but a season that brings fear, the dreaded hurricane season. These realities require us to prepare and react to upcoming disasters in a different fashion.”

Member of the National Assembly **Elizabeth Cabezas** (Ecuador), President of ParlAmericas



Speaker of the House of Assembly the Honourable **Andy Daniel** (St. Lucia), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change, Host of the Meeting



“ParlAmericas believes deeply in the importance of examining all issues from the perspectives of gender equality and sustainability. This meeting provides space for a critical, collaborative dialogue among various actors in the region on how to take action in the face of disasters of many kinds in a way that is informed by the needs of women and vulnerable groups, and is inclusive in its design and implementation.”

Gender inequality in disaster and crisis situations

The first [presentation](#) by Ms. **Angie Dazé**, Associate of the Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation division of IISD, stressed that it is first essential to comprehend that people experience the impacts of disasters and climate change in different ways depending on where they live, how they work, and the roles they play in their family and community. Vulnerability is also influenced by socially determined factors and personal characteristics like age, disability, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, which determine access to opportunities and services. These differences matter when it comes to building resilience, as they must be taken into consideration in planning and investment so that no one is left behind. Ms. Dazé outlined three elements of applying a gender responsive approach: recognizing gender differences in needs and capacities for managing climate and disaster risk; ensuring gender equitable participation and influence in planning and decision making; and equitable access to finance. She concluded by discussing some of IISD's work in this area, including developing a "[Toolkit for a Gender-Responsive Process to Formulate and Implement National Adaptation Plans \(NAPs\)](#)" as well as future work with UN Women MCO-Caribbean, through the EnGenDER project, on conducting an analysis that examines individual and institutional biases related to gender in climate change and disaster risk management coordinating bodies in the Caribbean.

"Many of the people who are most vulnerable to climate and disaster risks are excluded or lack the power to influence actions taken in their community or country. Effective resilience-building brings everyone to the table, recognizing the value of their knowledge and their potential as agents of change."



Angie Dazé, Associate, Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation, IISD

Continuing the session, Ms. **Kyana Bowen**, Programme Officer - Humanitarian, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Resilience for UN Women MCO for the Caribbean, [presented](#) on the gender equality issues in disaster and crisis situations and how regions can become more gender-transformative through preparedness, responses, and recovery. She noted that the Caribbean is among the most exposed to natural hazards in the world; these hazards are being further exacerbated by climate change.

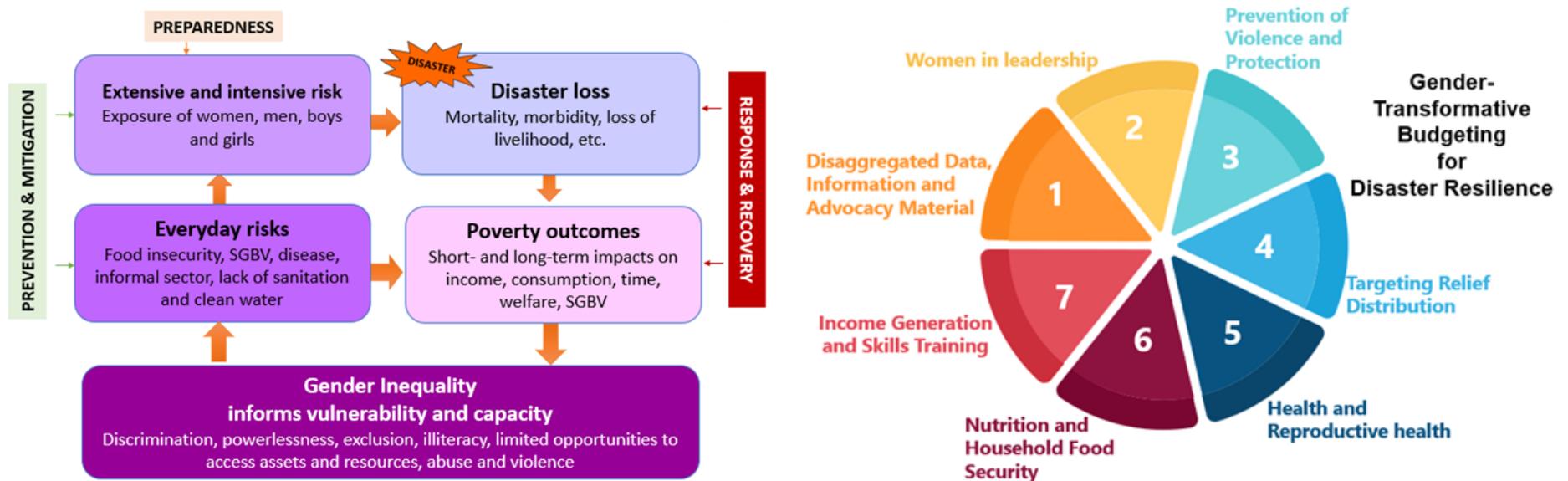
"When we're looking at skills training we are really asking: how are we ensuring that both men and women are in positions that promote disaster resilience, how many men and women have first responder roles, and how many work in sectors that are highly vulnerable to shock? For example, if the majority of women are working in the tourism sector and they are first to [be] let go after the hazard impact, what does this mean for their ability to generate income and the need of the State to look at re-training skill programs?"

Kyana Bowen, Programme Officer - Humanitarian, Climate Change, and Disaster Risk Resilience, UN Women MCO for the Caribbean



In her presentation, Ms. Bowen illustrated how gender-transformative disaster risk reduction and management must consider everyday risk and needs. This requires that decision-making be informed by sex-disaggregated data across sectors (including on gender-based violence, which may be heightened during hazard impacts such as COVID-19) with proper analysis and the implementation of [gender-responsive budgeting](#) (considering the seven aspects outlined in the graphic). Ms. Bowen noted the importance of ensuring that existing issues are not exacerbated when examining resource distribution. She provided the example of prioritizing dignity kits in communities where there are larger proportions of women and girls.

She shared that the UN Women MCO has supported the production of cloth masks by women and men as an economic empowerment activity, as well as assisted [women farmers in Dominica](#) to sell their products online, including through Facebook and WhatsApp. Ms. Bowen also shared the policy briefs the office developed to provide technical support on the [care economy](#), [shelter guidelines](#), [hurricane resilience](#), and [economic empowerment](#).

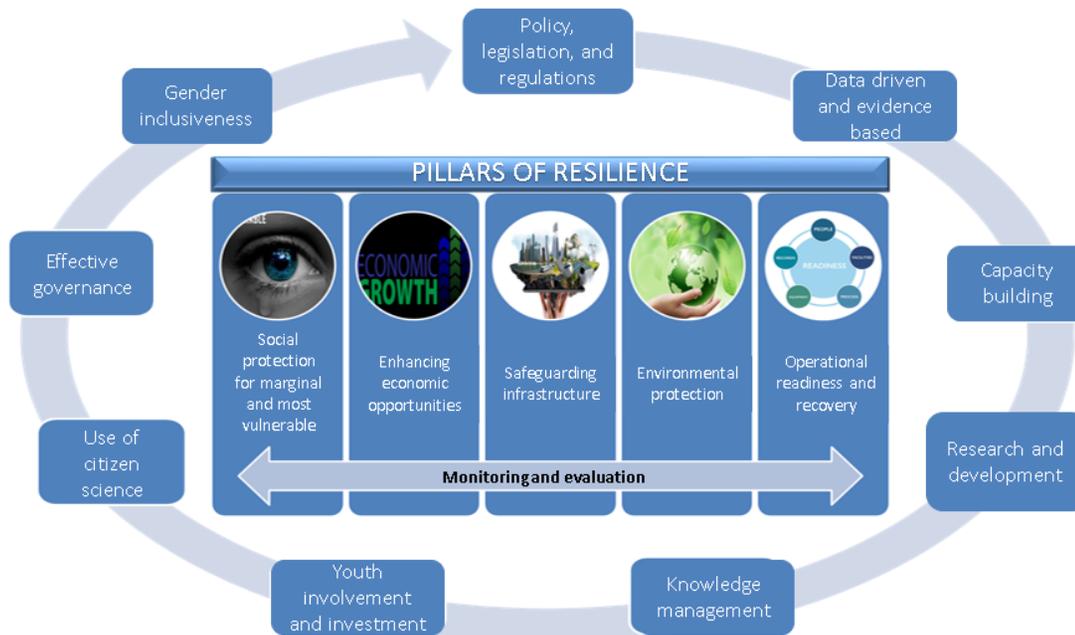


Differences between hazard types and national response methods

Ms. **Elizabeth Riley**, Executive Director (ag) of CDEMA, began her [presentation](#) by explaining the different types of hazards and the trends being observed with weather systems. These systems are continually breaking records (as seen by hurricanes Irma and Dorian), and the rate at which they intensify is increasing.

Ms. Riley’s presentation also covered the Caribbean response and impacts of COVID-19, revealing that countries were not sufficiently prepared for a pandemic. She noted that in contrast to a hydro-meteorological hazard, biological hazards are public health issues requiring the health sector to be sufficiently prepared and robust to manage a pandemic and provide adequate data, that is gender disaggregated, to inform policy decisions.

The final segment of the presentation discussed the complex multi-hazard environment scenario the region is currently facing. Ms. Riley reported that this year’s hurricane season is expected to be above average, which is resulting in complex operational scenarios. In addressing both the COVID-19 pandemic and the hurricane season there is a potential of undermining the [regional response mechanism](#) which is based on horizontal cooperation between Caribbean countries. In addition, domestic priorities and limited fiscal space could delay or prevent traditional support. Health protocols will impact the response timeliness and key functions such as shelters, relief management evacuation, and search and rescue. To address these changes, she pointed out that shelters will need to modify their operations and provide trainings for shelter teams that consider gender and child protection issues. Moreover, she revealed that use of drones and satellite imaging is expanding to monitor the situation; there is a multi-sectoral coordination between the health sector and traditional disaster response bodies, and CDEMA will also support the procuring of critical items to the region through the COVID-19 Humanitarian Logistics Supply Chain. Overall Ms. Riley emphasized the importance of being flexible and adaptable during this crisis and ensuring gendered realities are put in the forefront of responses.



Elizabeth Riley, Executive Director (ag), CDEMA

“An all-of-government-and-society response is an absolute requirement for gender issues and similarly for treating the COVID-19 pandemic... It is important for gender bureaus to be present at the table in national level conversations.”

Addressing inequalities through disaster and crisis prevention, response, and recovery

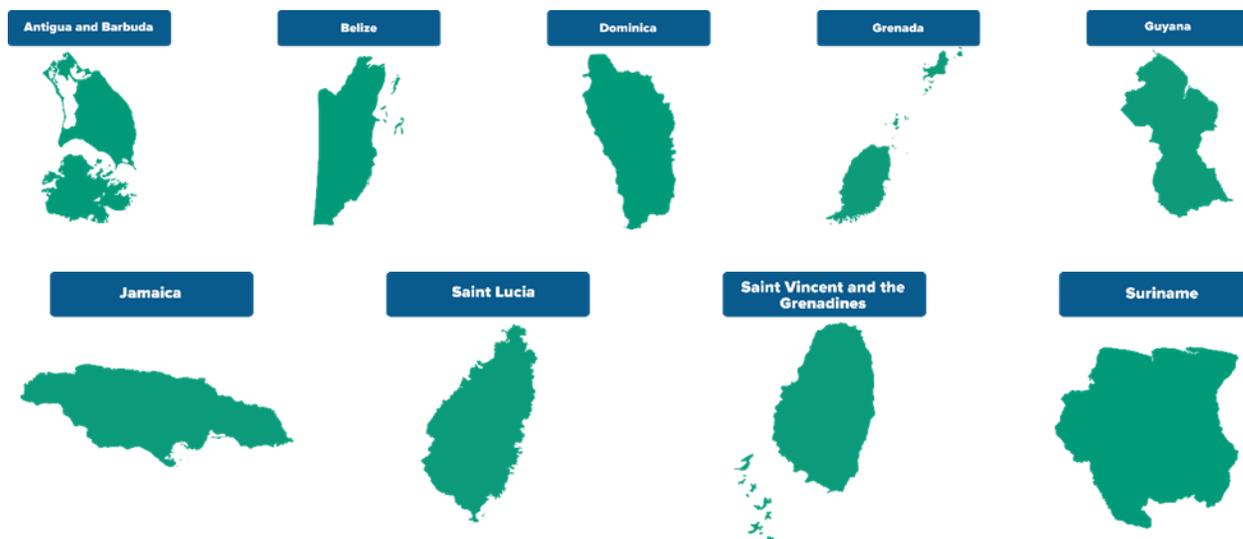
The “Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate, and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean” (EnGenDer) project was [presented](#) by Mr. Massimiliano Tozzi, EnGenDER Project Manager for UNDP. He explained that the project is being implemented in nine Caribbean countries and aims to ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction actions are better informed by an analysis of gender inequalities, and that decisions taken alleviate, rather than exacerbate, existing inequalities. EnGenDER holistically addresses issues of climate change adaptation and mitigation, disaster recovery, gender equality, and behavioural change. The main objectives of each facet include:



- **Climate change:** improve climate resilience for women, girls, and the most vulnerable by working for and with them in a sustainable matter, as well as ensure a healthy planet for future generations;
- **Gender equality:** support gender machineries for a detailed analysis of gender inequalities of climate risk and its associated costs in the Caribbean;
- **Disaster recovery:** enhance gender-responsive and inclusive recovery approaches and solutions for resiliency; and
- **Behavioural change:** support the implementation of gender-responsive behavioural change strategies to design and implement strategies.

Mr. Tozzi also brought attention to the project’s efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project is providing essential goods and services to the most vulnerable and those who have lost employment income, as well as supporting initiatives that address gender-based violence.

EnGenDER Participating Countries



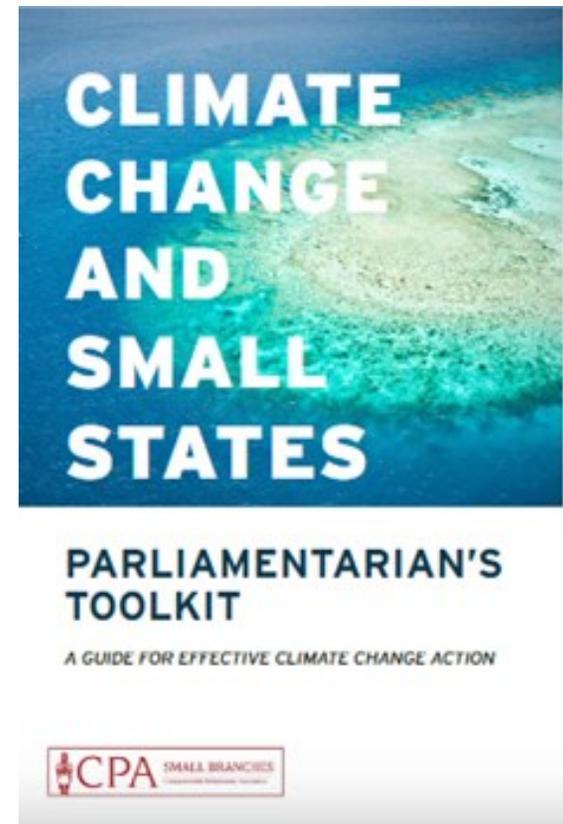
Resources for parliamentarians on climate change, gender equality, and disaster risk reduction

Mr. Jack Hardcastle of the CPA discussed the publication, [Parliamentarian's Toolkit: A Guide for Effective Climate Change Action](#), developed to assist parliamentarians in being more proactive actors in the climate change and environmental agenda by providing practical and actionable points and avenues for driving positive change. The toolkit highlights how SIDS can work together to influence the international climate agenda and negotiations, as seen by the [Alliance of Small Island States](#). Mr. Hardcastle remarked on how this tool could be useful for parliamentarians in thinking of how to incorporate climate considerations into post-COVID-19 economic recovery strategies.

“SIDSs and small states can also in many respects with their policies showcase how ambitious and inclusive economic recovery plans or even climate-related initiatives can be achievable and can have a broad regional impact across the whole territory. This is important not only on a national level, but their success means that they can be great examples and showcases of how these successes can be scaled up to larger territories, I think that is particularly pertinent when it relates to climate change and the mitigative policies that are needed to be implemented by the larger emitters' global emissions.”



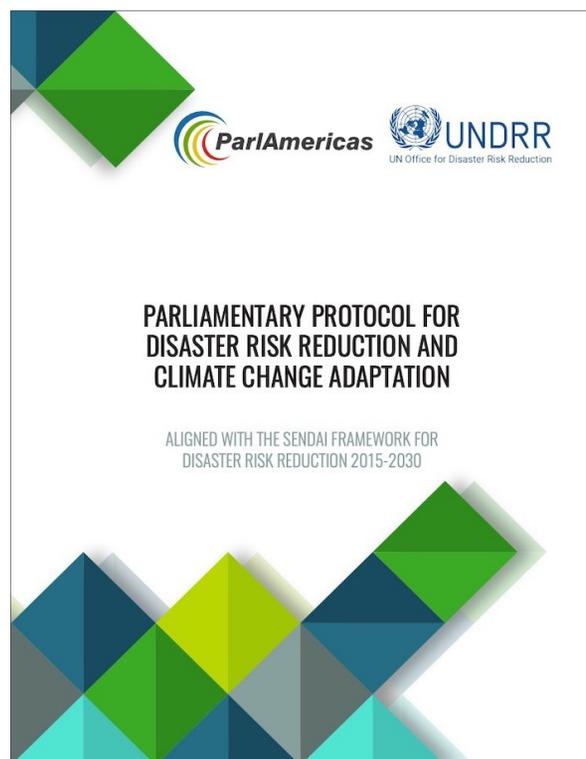
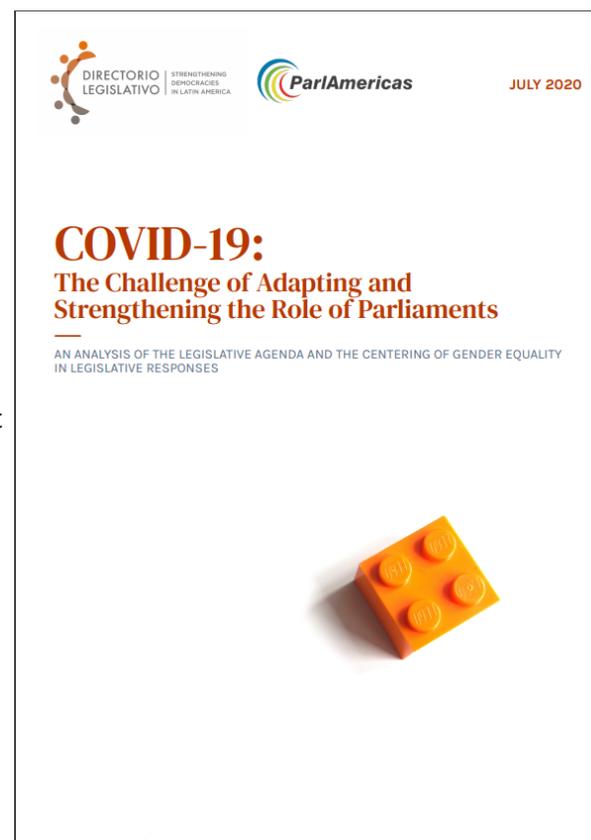
Jack Hardcastle, Programmes Assistant, CPA



Speaker of the House of Assembly **Andy Daniel** (St. Lucia) and Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network on Climate Change presented two ParlAmericas publications:

[COVID-19: An Analysis of the Legislative Agenda and the Centering of Gender Equality in Legislative Responses](#)

Developed in collaboration with Directorio Legislativo, this publication provides an overview of the legislative agendas of parliaments from across Latin America and the Caribbean during the pandemic, with special attention to social issues. It also presents good practices that parliaments and individual parliamentarians can adopt to promote gender equality by building on and strengthening the different adaptation strategies that parliaments are currently employing in the region to maintain their functioning during the pandemic.



[Parliamentary Protocol for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation](#)

Developed in collaboration with the Latin America and Caribbean regional office of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Protocol seeks to support the legislative branch's contributions to the implementation of the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#), which is an international agreement adopted in 2015 to protect development gains from the risk of disasters. The Protocol provides tools to help parliaments strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change.

Discussion period: Sharing of good practices and national experiences

The informative presentations were followed by a discussion period in which participants shared good practices that are being implemented by their own institutions. Participants learned about the experiences of other countries and shared some approaches that were taken to address the COVID-19 crisis. Participants noted the heavy economic impact of the pandemic and the increasing levels of indebtedness of the Caribbean region which will seriously impact resiliency efforts during the hurricane season. Within this context, they flagged the need to update the regulations around official development assistance as these can prevent countries in real need (i.e. recovering from disasters) from accessing grants and concessionary resources.

After this engaging discussion, the meeting was brought to a close with remarks by President of the Senate the Honourable **Chester Humphrey** (Grenada), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality, and by Ms. **Tonni Brodber** of the UN Women MCO. In his comments, President Humphrey noted both the current, real impacts of COVID-19 in Grenada and the clearly disproportionate impacts of these on women, as well as the long-term psychological and other effects the crisis is expected to have. Ms. Brodber emphasized the urgent need for collective action in the Caribbean for long-term, holistic, gender-responsive resilience planning. She explained that this will help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to reduce social inequalities so that the Caribbean is better equipped to manage any future disaster, be it a pandemic or a hurricane.

President of the Senate the Honourable **Chester Humphrey** (Grenada), Vice-President for the Caribbean of the ParlAmericas Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality



“We’ve had to re-allocate budgetary allocations, putting a significant amount of money in health. As was mentioned, this disaster has greater negative effects on women, certainly on the tourism sector – about 65% of employees are women. All our hotels by and large are closed; none were able to see through the tourism season; added to that are the small and micro businesses and taxi drivers. Additionally, front line workers, which are predominantly women, and other related fields. Women are disproportionately affected, particularly in the smaller economies.”

Tonni Brodber, Head of Office a.i., UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, reflecting on a [blog post](#) by author and activist Adrienne Maree Brown



“[Something I was reading earlier today] identified that the original pandemic is supremacy, and I want to shift it to say that the original pandemic is inequality. That inequality might have its source in race, gender, class, ableism, age, access, or anything else, but if we can address this original pandemic of inequality, we will be better able to manage... anything that comes our way.”

“The pandemic is affecting Canadian women and men differently and, as mentioned, by age, location, Indigenous origins, occupations, and disability status. For instance, women represent 82% of social and health care system workers in Canada; therefore they might have a higher risk of exposure than their male counterparts... As well, since the start of the pandemic many individuals have experienced greater child care, home schooling, elder care, and household responsibilities, and women, who in most countries, including Canada, were spending more time than men in unpaid work before the pandemic, are disproportionately affected by these increases.”



Member of Parliament **Marc Serré**
(Canada), ParlAmericas Board Member

Dr. **Jacinta Higgs** (Bahamas), Director of the Department of Gender and Family Affairs



“As we grapple with the shocks of COVID-19 and the new spiked cases that are happening again, we recognize that a comprehensive approach that is gender-responsive is necessary. And so, like SIDS and the other CARICOM countries, we are forming an intergovernmental panel on climate change within the country. We have the University of Bahamas leading our climate change initiatives along with the Ministry of Environment. Cabinet itself has a Going Green platform where they are trying to go paperless to show we are respecting the environment.”

Key Considerations

- Socially determined factors and other identity characteristics influence an individual's vulnerability to disasters and other crisis situations.
- Disaggregated data should be collected and used to inform policy decisions in recognition of the differential needs, capacities, disaster risks, and impacts of disasters and climate change on people, especially on women and girls.
- Gender-responsive budgeting is an important tool for ensuring that disaster resilience is achieved in practice for all.
- There should be gender equitable participation in disaster planning, response, and decision making.
- Countries can put in place disaster management plans for the future that include biological/health-related hazards, not just natural/hydro-meteorological hazards.
- Addressing multiple hazards at once (e.g. COVID-19 and the hurricane season) requires increased collaboration between traditional response units and the health sector. PPE and sanitation products, including water, will be needed in shelters, as well as adherence to physical distancing protocols.
 - ⇒ Examples of gender-responsive disaster responses include: protocols that consider the needs of women and girls, trainings to specifically address gender considerations, ensuring the presence of women responders, protecting women from exploitative situations, offering services that meet women's health and reproductive needs, and relief that is distributed in an inclusive manner.
- COVID-19 can be seen as an opportunity to build resilience by ensuring that disaster management frameworks include gender considerations, that systemic biases and injustices are challenged, and that economies integrate social and environmental values.

Participating Countries



Bahamas



Dominica



St. Kitts and Nevis



Trinidad and Tobago



Barbados



Guyana



St. Lucia



United Kingdom



Belize



Grenada



St. Vincent and the Grenadines



United States



Canada



Jamaica



Suriname

Canada



This gathering was made in collaboration with the UN Women Multi-Country Office - Caribbean, the generous support of the the Parliament of Saint Lucia and the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.

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