

Primer on Gender-Responsive Disaster and Crisis Planning for the Caribbean

This brief provides parliamentarians with guidance on the gender implications of disasters and crisis situations, as well as examples of actions that can contribute to ensuring that national planning, preparedness, and response measures take into account the different realities and needs of all members of the population. It highlights information shared firsthand by parliamentarians and specialists in the Caribbean region who are committed to building greater resilience and equitable solutions for their communities, leaving no one behind.

In July and September, 2020, ParlAmericas and the UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean organized online meetings that highlighted actions being taken by countries in the Caribbean to plan for disasters -- and especially hurricane season -- in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

- [“Gender-Responsiveness and Disaster Resilience during the COVID-19 Crisis,”](#) an online meeting hosted by the Parliament of Saint Lucia on July 22, 2020
- [“Supporting the National Adoption of Gender-Responsive Disaster and Crisis Planning,”](#) a roundtable hosted by the Parliament of The Bahamas on September 2, 2020

This brief presents and builds on knowledge shared in these meetings by parliamentarians, ministers, and technical practitioners. Though the meetings focused on the COVID-19 context, many of the good practices can be adapted or applied in ongoing efforts to build resilience and take inclusive action in the context of climate change and disasters and when addressing other crises and hazards.

The challenge, in context

Around the world, individuals and groups experience particular and differentiated vulnerability in disaster situations and in the face of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic; they have different capacities to respond and recover. These vulnerabilities can be the result of geographic location, underlying socio-economic inequalities, and other individual characteristics. For example:

- Some individuals are at greater risk of exposure to health hazards (such as frontline and healthcare workers and caregivers, which tend to be predominantly women);
- Some experience greater threats to their livelihoods during disasters (such as those in informal employment or who depend on household food production for subsistence); and
- Some are at greater risk of suffering violence in emergency situations, as levels of gender-based violence tend to be heightened during hazard impacts.

In the Caribbean, these challenges are compounded by the region’s greater incidence of disasters and vulnerability to climate change. COVID-19 has further led to severe economic impacts on Caribbean economies, limiting fiscal space for both hurricane preparedness and potential future hurricane recovery. Planning has also been complicated by the fact that measures required to contain the spread of COVID-19 (e.g. sheltering in place to limit social contact) run contrary to practices usually followed in the case of hurricane response (e.g. evacuating populations to centralized hurricane shelters to meet group needs and ensure safety).

Comprehensive and inclusive planning is more crucial than ever in this context to ensure that resources are strategically allocated and the needs of all members of the public are taken into account. Incorporating a gender

perspective across planning (including budgeting) will help in achieving this goal; meaning that policies and programmes are informed by and responsive to an understanding of how women, men, and children are differently impacted by and able to respond to disasters and crises.

Adopting such an approach is a goal for many countries but can present obstacles. The following are specific examples expressed by parliamentarians and other stakeholders:

- Climate change effects and the pandemic have been slowing down progress, as well as disaster recovery from past natural hazards reduces national and individual response capacities.
- Identifying the needs of the population requires access to data, as well as an ability and the political will to ensure this is effectively used within planning and decision-making processes.
- There can be shortages of the financial, staff, and capacity resources that are necessary to design and implement the programmes and supports needed by the population.
- Underlying systemic issues negatively affect general resilience and adaptive and response capacity.

Learn more about the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters and crises:

- [Gender-Transformative Hurricane Resilience During the COVID-19 Crisis](#). UN Women, 2020
- [Gender-Responsiveness and Disaster Resilience during the COVID-19 Crisis](#). ParlAmericas, UN Women Multi-Country Office for the Caribbean, and the Parliament of St. Lucia, 2020
- [Inter-American Commission of Women Repository: COVID-19 in Women's Lives](#), webpage

Foundations for gender-responsive disaster and crisis action

Adopting an inclusive approach to crisis and disaster planning and action does require commitment and investments at the national level, but it pays dividends by increasing public resilience, enhancing the safety and wellbeing of the population, and strengthening decision-making processes overall by ensuring these are representative of and responsive to public need. Furthermore, there are strategies that can be employed to support the national uptake of gender-responsive planning in this and other areas of governance:

Examine existing data collection mechanisms for opportunities to gather disaggregated data.

- Prepare forms for social assistance and other government programmes in a way that yields data on users and allows for an understanding of the unique vulnerability of the applicants.
- Modify census surveys to ask questions about time use, social protection, alimony, and more.
- Undertake a [gender data assessment](#) to identify gaps.
- Be sure that materials also facilitate an understanding of elements like disability, ethnicity, etc.

Apply gender mainstreaming across policy streams, and in climate/disaster/crisis policy in particular.

- Appoint and train [gender focal points](#) within the legislature, ministries, and other agencies, including those with responsibility for climate change and disaster planning and management.
- Draw on the expertise of national gender machineries to help design programmes and policies.
- Ensure there is gender balance and diverse representation in the leadership and staff of all decision-making bodies, and in the composition of any ad-hoc task forces or advisory groups established on crisis and disaster responses.

Foster collaboration with various actors and across sectors.

- Undertake wide consultation with experts in various fields, women's rights organizations and other civil society actors, and members of the population in decision-making processes to understand the true scope of an issue's social and economic impact; integrate these diverse voices in the formal composition of crisis management bodies as well.

- Consider establishing partnerships with local agencies and organizations across the country to facilitate the implementation of programmes and projects.
- Draw on partnerships with regional authorities like CDEMA, UN Women, and UNFPA, among others, to access specialized expertise and other supports.

Work to address the root causes of insecurity and inequality.

- Amplify efforts at all levels to educate on and address the harms of gender norms and stereotypes.
- Advocate for and adopt inclusive economic and social protection policies to strengthen safety nets and the levels of security, resilience, and wellbeing in the population.

Learn more about integrating a gender perspective in disaster and crisis responses and recovery:

- [COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean: How to Incorporate Women and Gender Equality in the Management of the Crisis Response](#). UN Women, 2020
- [COVID-19: An Analysis of the Legislative Agenda and the Centering of Gender Equality in Legislative Responses](#). ParlAmericas and Directorio Legislativo, 2020
- [Parliamentary Protocol for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation](#). ParlAmericas and UNDRR, 2019
- [Sustainable Responses for a Post COVID-19 Economic Recovery](#). ParlAmericas, 2020

Examples of specific actions being taken in the Caribbean

The chart below summarizes specific actions reported by Caribbean decision-makers that have been taken in their countries with the goal of responding to public need during the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises, and of setting up for a recovery that builds back better and with greater equity. These are grouped by common areas of attention.

Examples of Actions	Country-Specific Examples
SOCIAL SERVICES AND SUPPORT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing regular monetary support to individuals and families that have lost sources of income. • Establishing a digital wallet for individuals to receive their financial assistance to prevent long lines. • Providing rent relief either through application-based governmental assistance programmes or by working with landlords. • Working with financial institutions to allow mortgage and rent deferral to prevent evictions. • Providing tax deferrals and reducing interest for small businesses or individuals in need. • Ensuring access to essential utilities by providing needed infrastructure and/or preventing shutdowns due to overdue payments. • Providing food/food vouchers and care packages, in collaboration with businesses, community groups, and/or dedicated task forces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbados: Created a dedicated team that ensures families, individuals living alone, those with HIV/AIDS, homeless populations, shelter populations, and other vulnerable populations are safe by collecting data on infrastructure, family communication, and needs for additional social service support and care. • Grenada: Implemented the My Sister’s Keeper programme in order to prevent the incidence of suicide in young women. • The Bahamas: Mandated online access to social programmes to limit the need for physical access and to prevent fraud. • Saint Lucia: Developing a gender equality strategy and gender development policy.
ACCESS TO CARE	

- Working with the private sector to allow flexible work hours for employees.
 - Establishing public phone lines to provide counselling services as a mental health measure.
 - Identifying community volunteers that can help with caregiving responsibilities.
 - Providing family planning services.
 - Opening safe nurseries for use by first responders.
 - Considering and ensuring there is gender balance in the staff among first responders and essential services.
 - Developing plans to support communities with limited numbers of first responders.
- **Grenada:** Modified law to allow for flexible work hours to ensure employers and employees are not disadvantaged.
 - **Barbados:** The National Assistance Board and other community entities helped identify volunteers/households with first responder skills and experiences who could step in as a contingency plan.

PREVENTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

- Working with UN agencies and other organizations to train first responders and other individuals on the prevention of domestic violence.
 - Working with health care providers to prevent and respond to GBV emergencies.
 - Training and re-training first responders and shelter managers on issues of gender-based violence, gender norms, and sexual violence.
 - Developing a plan to ensure the physical and economic security of sex workers.
- **Grenada:** Working in collaboration with university students to develop a website on gender-based violence.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

- Holding seminars/training sessions for NGOs and individual entrepreneurs to learn about grant writing, starting/expanding/managing their small business.
 - Making funds available for women to start or expand their businesses.
 - Encouraging civil society groups to register as official NGOs to be able to access governmental funding.
 - Training individuals in new skills (i.e. sewing) or to leverage their skills (i.e. baking) to provide income.
 - Promoting leadership training to ensure women are moving into decision-making roles.
 - Providing seminars/training on the SDGs, gender mainstreaming, and other development topics.
- **The Bahamas:** Restricted mask imports to create a market for locally-produced masks.
 - **Antigua and Barbuda:** Launched the Youth Education Empowerment Programme to provide youth with an opportunity to obtain education and diversify their work opportunities. The programme is being promoted during the pandemic when individuals may have more time available.
 - **Grenada:** Provided grants for individuals to establish backyard and community gardens.
 - **Saint Kitts and Nevis:** Developing a gender-based economic assessment to help the government make informed decisions.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Critically analyzing the climate change trends and potential future impacts.
 - Ensuring [National Adaptation Plans](#) (NAPs) and [Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions](#) (NAMAs) are [gender-responsive](#).
 - Ensuring coherence and collaboration between the gender and climate change focal points in government.
 - Leveraging and integrating the UNFCCC gender action plan and its pillars in national climate strategies.
- **Jamaica:** Developing a [climate change gender action plan](#) (ccGAPs) to give the government guidance on how to integrate and implement actions on these two issues.
 - **Antigua and Barbuda:** Implementing the [Sustainable Island Resource Fund](#) to channel and be a source of funds to build resilience for single-headed homes (e.g. help retrofitting homes to be more resilient).

- Training public officers engaged in environmental sustainability in gender mainstreaming.
- Recognizing that there should be understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate change agenda are intersectional. A green and inclusive recovery should be pushed so that solutions and investments go towards securing a sustainable future.
- Participating in efforts of the Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience (EnGenDER) in the Caribbean project, being implemented by UNDP with the support of partners including Dfid, GAC, UN Women, WFP, and CDEMA.

HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

- Providing housing repairs to prepare individuals in circumstances of need for the hurricane season.
- Auditing shelters to ensure they are in good shape and addressing any repairs as needed.
- Ensuring [shelters are gender-sensitive](#) (e.g. dedicated, separate spaces for women and men; accessible facilities for people with disabilities).
- Assessing the resiliency of infrastructure and ensuring compliance with building codes.
- **Barbados:** Relocating 200 houses that are in high-risk areas for natural hazard impacts.
- **Antigua and Barbuda:** Developing a gender-responsive early warning system.
- **The Bahamas:** Developing a build-back-better manual and implementing the small home repair programme through the Disaster Reconstruction Authority.

Summary of key points

- Socially-determined factors and individual characteristics (gender, age, geographic location, race or ethnicity, etc.) influence an individual’s vulnerability to disasters and other crisis situations and their ability to respond.
- 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.
- There should be wide, inclusive, and gender-equitable participation in the planning, design, and implementation processes of all disaster and crisis responses – in terms of formal decision-making processes and in consultations and implementation.
- Gender-responsive budgeting can be employed to ensure the most effective and efficient use of scarce financial resources.
- Addressing complex hazards and meeting public need requires collaboration between traditional response units and other actors at the local and regional levels.
- 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.