



EnGenDER

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



Policy Brief

Gender Inequality of Climate Change and Disaster Risk in Belize

November 2021



BACKGROUND

The Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean (EnGenDER) Project is funded by Global Affairs Canada and the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, which is led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and jointly implemented by UN Women, World Food Programme (WFP) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). The aim of the project is to identify and address any gaps to ensure equal access to disaster risk resilience, climate change and environment solutions for women, men, boys and girls in nine beneficiary Caribbean countries including Belize. The **three priority sectors** selected by the National Decision-Making Mechanism for Belize under EnGenDER are **agriculture**, **water** and **coastal communities**.

In December 2020, the UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) Caribbean completed a comprehensive review of the Gender Inequality and Differential Impact of Climate Change and Disaster Risk and Cost of Inaction for Belize. This study focused on the gender-responsiveness of climate change policies and strategies and incorporated a mapping of the coping adaptive capacities for key vulnerable groups through stakeholder consultation.

The MCO, through collaboration with the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), also completed a gender-responsive resilience-building Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behaviours (KAPB) Study in July 2021. This study provided a better understanding of any institutional gender biases that are not captured in policy documents, which can influence the ways in which gender is mainstreamed in their work.

Results from both studies confirm that natural hazards and climate change impact men and women differently for a host of factors, which include their different roles and individual and family responsibilities, and policy development and service delivery by mandating bodies.



VULNERABILITY: A GENDER LENS

Vulnerable groups in Belize include women who are isolated financially as well as legally, and usually left out of decision-making. The Gender Inequality of Climate and Disaster Risk and Cost of Inaction (GICDR) Study has shown that there is no sector-wide policy that informs, promotes or supports the equal participation and representation of women and men in the fight against climate change and disaster risk implications in Belize. Gender and age vulnerabilities in Belize can be generally categorized in two main ways: *institutional and cultural*.



Institutional vulnerability



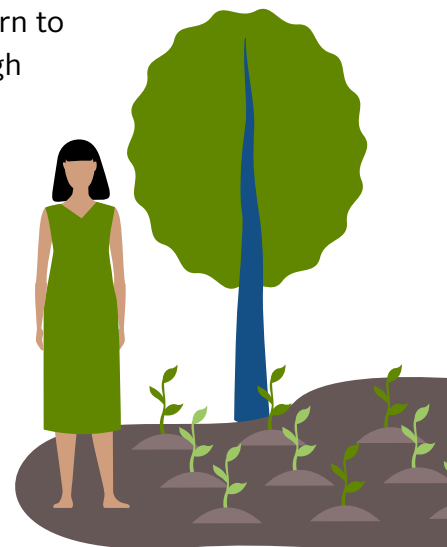
There is a need for a policy that incorporates a sectoral approach to gender and age inequalities, which also includes clear and contextual actions. For example, training in the agriculture sector is often led by men, which can deter women from participating because this sector is male-dominated. Therefore, the lack of female training facilitators poses challenges for women participants, since they may not be as receptive and adaptive toward the training, which can further empower them to become more climate-resilient in their agricultural practices.

Cultural vulnerability

Gender biases in Belize also perpetuate gender inequalities. For example, among indigenous communities, productive land is often passed down from the father to the son or male relative, and **not** to the daughter or female relative. Hence, girls tend to be excluded from land inheritance and land ownership. Therefore, since men are the holders of titles for land ownership, women are often denied loans. Moreover, women are not allowed to seek loans from legitimate institutions. Women are often forced to turn to private lenders, which can put them at greater financial risk due to high interest rates and unrealistic expectations.

There have been a high number of deaths of men during disasters, which may be correlated with the types of roles men play during disasters, particularly during extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

In addition, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) community is often left out of decision-making, which results in cultural exclusion.



The main hazard risks for Belize are:

1. Hurricanes



2. Droughts
(most recent in 2019)



3. Storm surges



4. Flooding



5. Heavy precipitation

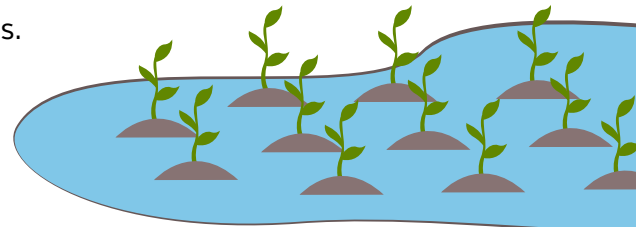


GENDER INEQUALITY ISSUES – CLIMATE AND DISASTER RISK

The agriculture sector

The National Agriculture and Food Policy (2015–2030) incorporates climate and gender strategies. However, gender strategies are not presented separately, but rather are integrated across the policy.

Belize experiences inland flooding during periods of prolonged rainfall events, which results in crops and livestock being at risk. Small-scale women farmers, particularly migrant women from neighbouring countries, have the least access to financial support for hazard-proofing their crop and livestock farms. As a result, women are most at risk of their farms being affected or challenged in building forward climate-resilient farms.



The water sector

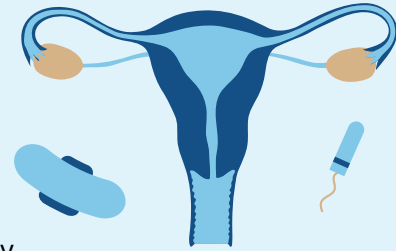
There is a 2015–2020 Business Plan for the Belize Water Services but it does not include a **gender-inclusive strategy**.

Belize has seen rising temperatures, which have resulted in a reduction of water levels in aquifers and rivers, and the knock-on effect of saltwater intrusion due to reduced freshwater pressures against sea water incursion. This saline impact on freshwater quality poses threats to communities who depend on this natural resource for household consumption, food security and other key livelihoods.

Women in Belize's rural communities are the main collectors of water for the household. Therefore, water scarcity would result in their having to travel further distances to collect clean water.



Inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) resources also pose significant challenges for women and girls, particularly during their menstrual cycle, which increases their exposure to health crises. With the added pressures of COVID-19, for example, which requires the frequent use of anti-bacterial soap and water, limited water availability poses even more of a threat to the health and well-being of communities. **The elderly** are also at risk from the exacerbation of these conditions. Also, **children**, particularly those under five, are also at risk of waterborne parasites and child mortality.



Since men often dominate water management roles, decisions on hazard-proofing water resources are often made without women's participation. However, women have the major responsibilities concerning the supply of water, both for household use and family farming.

The coastal communities sector

In Belize, there is a Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI), the Coastal Zone Management Act 1999, and a National Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan 2016, but **no gender-inclusive strategy**.

Belize coastal communities are highly vulnerable to the negative impacts of hurricanes and tropical storms, because economic activities, particularly tourism, come to a halt, which reduces household income. There has been a major shift from agriculture to arts and crafts among women, and to tour operations among men in response to the growing interest across the tourism sector. Although women occupy **46%** of jobs in tourism along the coast, roles and responsibilities are **unequal**. Men occupy more *higher paying* positions because they work as tour guides and operators. This allows them to capitalize on the more high-profile aspects of tourist activities, such as the coral reefs and sport fishing. Men also tend to have access to gear, whereas women do not. In 2017, for example, there were 2,716 licensed fishers registered in Belize, of whom only 70 were women (**2.6%**).



Cases of flooding and wind damage prevail, which have affected homes on the coastline. This is particularly a concern among those who live in poor-quality housing, because they are at very high risk; the majority of whom are women. Indeed, women are especially impacted because they have lower levels of income, combined with higher rates of unemployment.















Members of the Belize Youth Hostel receives cloth masks produced by Port Loyola Organization for Women (PLOW) Women’s Group in the aim of strengthening capacity as part of EnGenDER’s COVID-19 response activities.






Source: NGM Belize, 2020.

Table 1 provides further details on gendered climate change and disaster impacts in the agriculture, water and coastal communities sectors, and the cost of inaction.

Table 1:
Gendered climate change and disaster impacts in the agriculture, water, and coastal communities sectors, and the cost of inaction

 Hazards	 Climate-related impacts and risks	 Sector	 Gender impacts	 Cost of inaction/ potential impacts
INLAND FLOODING	Prolonged rainfall events/ flash floods	Agriculture Water	Women suffer the most due to poor housing and insufficient resources to build forward better. Impacts include: poor school attendance and/or school dropouts among both boys and girls, as well as increased crime among adolescent boys. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) experience a loss of assets and food insecurity.	Communities experience increased poverty
	Herds and livestock become stranded or drown	Agriculture	Poor communities, particularly migrant communities, lack resources to mitigate this occurrence (e.g. raised pens). Women do not have access to alternative financial means. There are seasonal hardships, such as lack or over-abundance of water and incessant pests. Also, women may lack knowledge of adaptive technologies to meet climate risks and are not included in decision-making.	There are fewer communities looking towards agriculture Details on gender roles in livestock rearing are needed to understand who is most affected when herds are impacted

 Hazards	 Climate-related impacts and risks	 Sector	 Gender impacts	 Cost of inaction/potential impacts
INLAND FLOODING	Groundwater is contaminated by saltwater intrusion	Water	Children fall ill due to lack of clean water Communities are dependent on groundwater and have little access to fresh water	Health risks are exacerbated
	HURRICANES/TROPICAL STORMS	Tourism is affected	Coastal communities	Men have had a higher death rate during hurricanes and tropical storms Women and men lose their livelihoods
Increased frequency and intensity of storms/hurricanes		Coastal communities	Although all suffer from property damages, women suffer the most due to their limited access to resources for hazard-proofing their properties	Sex-disaggregated data are key in Damage and Needs Assessment (DANA) Reports to better inform recovery plans
Damage to land and water systems		Coastal communities Water	Access to water and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities becomes limited, with serious implications for all communities, and for women and girls in particular	A gendered and age-disaggregated risk management plan is needed for highly disaster-prone areas
DROUGHTS & WATER AVAILABILITY	Insufficient forecasting and planning to deal with drought conditions	Agriculture Water Coastal communities	Men and women are not able to prepare Funding is only available for women and men with less than 20 acres	It is necessary to understand drought effects on girls and boys. A comprehensive study to identify climate drivers and return periods (e.g. paleo studies) is needed
	Increasing sea temperatures leading to coral bleaching and reduction in quantity and diversity of aquatic life	Coastal communities	Men in the fishing and tourism industry are greatly affected because they mostly hold the positions of tour guides and fishers Loss of tourism could disenfranchise women who depend on the arts and culture sector as a major form of livelihood	Without alternative opportunities, such as eco-tourism or seaweed mariculture, men and women from these rural coastal communities risk being driven into greater levels of poverty

 Hazards	 Climate-related impacts and risks	 Sector	 Gender impacts	 Cost of inaction/ potential impacts
DROUGHTS & WATER AVAILABILITY				
	Sea level rise leading to saltwater intrusion on productive coastal lands	Coastal communities Agriculture	Female farmers with limited resources who relocate or travel to work on interior lands risk an interruption in their farming livelihood Men are more likely to travel longer distances than women to seek employment away from areas where saltwater intrusion is prevalent	If women are not included in the adaptation measures, such as the identification of inland areas to develop, or given access to opportunities, appropriate actions will not be employed
	Loss of beach, causing loss of economic opportunities	Coastal communities	Male tour guides and operators lose their livelihoods (e.g. sport fishing)	Rural communities with already limited resources run the risk of being driven into poverty. To combat this, a comprehensive and engineered mitigation plan should include gendered impact and mitigation measures



ADAPTIVE COPING MECHANISMS

The GICDR Study was also flexible and participatory to ensure that the findings would reflect the gendered impacts identified. Using a mapping exercise, a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) was held with government agencies, multilateral stakeholders such as UNDP Belize, and other special interest groups to explore the coping mechanisms used by the sector as a result of climate and disaster impacts (see Table 2).

Generally, people utilize savings, loans and remittances when impacted by disasters. National and non-governmental organizations (NGO) agencies also support impacted persons. Moreover, there is a high rate of migration to other regions or countries due to the lack of economic opportunities. In many cases, as men and boys are more mobile, they are often categorized as the breadwinners of their household.



Table 2:
Stakeholder coping mechanisms by sector

 Sector	 Coping mechanisms cited in FGDs
Agriculture	<p>Accessing the Government's Building Opportunities for Our Social Transformation (BOOST) Funding: Women and men farmers with less than 20 acres of farmland affected by natural hazard impacts and COVID-19 seek support to alleviate their loss of income.</p> <p>Sale of physical assets: Small livestock owned by women and youth are often the first to be sold in order to alleviate household shocks.</p> <p>Climate-smart practices: Indigenous farmers are being trained by NGOs in climate-smart agricultural practices such as the exploration of new spaces for agriculture, agroforestry, and training on more resilient crop types.</p>
Agriculture and Coastal	<p>Migration (under duress and distress): Due to lack of economic opportunities, men mostly travel to seek other employment opportunities in other regions or countries, leaving women to manage the household.</p>
All	<p>School dropouts: Because some families have found it difficult to continue to pay school fees, they have taken their children out of school, most commonly, secondary school.</p> <p>Accessing financial assets: Accessing loans are common among men, who receive 61% of bank loans, compared to 39% for women. With respect to residential lending, more loans were provided to men, but the sizes of the loans are similar for men and women. Among indigenous communities, it is men who hold land and property, which explains why there are more cases of men accessing these financial assets.</p>
Coastal	<p>Sex work: Women and older girls may resort to sex work during times of shocks and stresses.</p> <p>Increased gender-based violence: Men may be bound to attitudes and behavioural patterns that lead to violence against women and children. During times of stress, these attitudes and practices are exacerbated, which has been most notably indicated in police reports, and not national ministry reports that focus on these cases. Women-led groups have also noted the rise in GBV, and with shelters closed due to COVID-19, the institutions responsible for monitoring these cases are observing several setbacks.</p> <p>Criminal activities tend to occur to supplement lack of income. There has been an increase in crime rates among young men due to COVID-19 restrictions and their inability to find work. Theft has been recorded to have increased as a result.</p>
Water	<p>Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) relief: Men, women, boys and girls are being given household toiletries to ensure hygiene. This is particularly critical for women and girls during their menstrual cycles.</p>

THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOURS STUDY

There is an assumption that individual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours can influence institutional practices, and vice versa, and policies create the environment in which individual and institutions operate.

In addition to a policy institutional mapping, which identified the key policies and institutions (in the priority sectors) related to gender, climate change, disaster risk reduction, a survey including stakeholder consultation was conducted for Belize. Findings revealed that while women and men have equal rights in the workplace, there were a few areas for strengthening gender resilience.

Respondents to the survey indicated the following:



At the individual level



Although individuals perceive themselves as “gender champions”, there are knowledge gaps with respect to understanding gender and its concepts. For example, there seems to be a poor understanding of equality vs. equity.



Women are more vulnerable than men to climate change and disasters; therefore, opportunities for strengthening resilience must take the varying risks into consideration.



The biggest knowledge gaps among individuals identified relate to applying tools for gender mainstreaming.



Gender issues are perceived to be of great importance in the workplace and its culture.



There are aspects of bias in gender attitudes. For example, some respondents believed that women should prioritize their family, regardless of the impact on their career. Respondents also believed that women were better at planning and multi-tasking than men. Survey results also revealed a strong belief that it is more important for men to work outside the home than women in Belize.

At the institutional level



Hiring practices do not discriminate against sex; results revealed that women and men are in similar senior positions in institutions.



The lack of expertise, data, information, analysis and a mandate remain the main barriers to gender being incorporated at the institutional level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident that there is a need to access sex-disaggregated data and understand how to use such in order to make effective decisions on addressing gender inequalities to tackle climate and disaster risks. With barriers such as lack of access to decision-making power, education, technologies, and lucrative markets, women are prevented from participating equally in adaptation and mitigation strategies across the three major sectors reviewed under EnGenDER.

Should disaster and climate risks be mitigated, Belize can potentially benefit from institutional strengthening and mainstreaming of gender and human rights-based considerations moving forward. Key recommendations are as follows:

- Improve reporting of gender data and understanding of how to translate data for all stakeholders responsible for the implementation of programmes.
- Provide access to microfinance tailored to low-income households and female-headed households.
- Use a gender-transformative approach to the disaster risk management policy.
- Use a greater cross-cutting approach for gender policies targeting PWDs.
- Increase the number of women in leadership positions.
- Involve social organizations and NGOs that are successful at addressing climate risks and gender inclusion in national work programmes.
- Carry out strategic long-term interventions with technological capacities.

In essence, the lack of a gender-sensitive disaster risk management policy in Belize increases vulnerability. Without such a policy, the work of the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) and other key partners is likely to have a less effective impact on disaster mitigation and response. **A gender-sensitive policy** is therefore needed to guide the work of all staff and stakeholders.



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