



EnGenDER

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



SURINAME



Policy Brief

Gender Inequality of Climate Change and Disaster Risk in Suriname

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 Suriname. The **four priority sectors** selected by the National Decision-Making Mechanism for Suriname under EnGenDER are **agriculture, water, energy** and **forestry**.

In December 2020, the UN Women Multi-Country Office (MCO) Caribbean completed a review of the Gender Inequality and Differential Impact of Climate Change and Disaster Risk and Cost of Inaction for Suriname. 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 cooperation 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, including the different roles of women and men's individual and family responsibilities, as well as policy development and service delivery by mandating bodies.

VULNERABILITY: A GENDER LENS

Rural and indigenous populations, together with unempowered women would most likely be affected by climate change and disaster events in Suriname. During the flooding event of 2006, for example, it was reported that **54%** of female-headed households were affected, versus **46%** male-headed households. This demonstrates the need to target both men and women in disaster risk reduction and disaster recovery in the aim of effectively reaching all individuals concerned and eliminating all avoidable costs.



It is estimated that a global rise in sea level by 1 metre could generate a decrease of the national gross domestic product (GDP) by **6.4%** and increase the possibility of flooding by **5.6%**, which would strongly impact Suriname's main economic activity – agriculture. Indigenous and isolated farmers who conduct subsistence farming are particularly vulnerable to these types of hazards, and populations living in mountainous areas may suffer from landslides and the loss of livelihoods. Flooding may also result in the contamination of freshwater resources, which results in water-borne diseases, making it unsuitable for consumption.

Droughts, in contrast, first threaten the 'beating heart of the Amazon' forest in Suriname from destruction by wildfires, putting at risk its diverse flora and fauna from which surrounding communities benefit. The depletion of the water resources also impacts livestock and farming sustainability, communal drinking water management, and hydropower generation, which represents **95%** of the national electricity supply. Wildfires also impact electricity distribution, engendering power losses and reducing the security of its network.



Women's vulnerability to natural hazards in Suriname derives from their traditional roles and responsibilities in the household and community. There is a clear gender-based division of labour in the household where **women do most of the unpaid care work**. Women also are the ones who maintain their agricultural plot, which is an anchor of their food security.



However, the Gender Inequality of Climate and Disaster Risk and Cost of Inaction (GICDR) Study revealed the following:

1. There is male dominance in village governance, which results in unequal access to services, education and information.
2. Geographic isolation impacts women more due to cultural practices that place restrictions on their movement.

There is a **very limited availability of age-and gender-disaggregated data during and after disasters**. Although there is a policy-level commitment for the collection of relevant sex-disaggregated data, it needs a corresponding action plan and resources.



GENDER INEQUALITY ISSUES – CLIMATE AND DISASTER RISK



Current gender policies

There are two main documents that define the vision of gender policies in Suriname: The Gender Action Plan (2019–2029) and the Gender Vision Policy (2021–2035). In Suriname's National Adaptation Plan (2019), there are strategic outcomes requiring climate change adaptation that respects Surinamese values and culture, and gender and other social inequities. It has been observed that **women play a crucial role** in natural resources management and other value-adding activities, not just in households but also in communities. Tables 1 and 2 highlight the possible disaster impacts on the various vulnerable groups by gender and age in Suriname.

Table 1:
Mapping gender-based vulnerabilities, by sector










|  Sector |  Disaster impact |  Most vulnerable groups |
|--|---|--|
| Agriculture | Loss of crops and livestock; loss of income | Subsistence farmers mostly in indigenous communities of Interior Suriname (Sipaliwini, Brokopondo) and single female-headed households . |
| Forestry | Destruction of the forest (landslide/ wildfire) | Persons (indigenous communities of the Interior Suriname) who utilize the forest for shelter and natural resources, for instance materials for house construction or livelihoods (crafts-making). |
| Water | Water scarcity | Rural women are the most vulnerable to water scarcity as rural areas have lower access to water than urban areas (90 percent in 2017). There is a general perception that women are responsible for fetching water to cook, clean and provide care. Therefore, this burden is increased on women and even girls who may be forced to quit school to help at home. |
| | Water contamination | Women living in areas with poor waste management are exposed to a high prevalence of open defecation and low access to basic sanitation. Taking into consideration women's roles as the caregivers in the household, they are more exposed to contaminated water, and are at greater risk of contracting diseases. Girls helping in the home and pregnant women are also vulnerable to diseases. |
| Energy | Loss of electricity | Women and children particularly suffer from the lack of electricity. This increases the burden of women's household duties and it is challenging for children to study in the dark. |

Table 2:
Gender- and age-disaggregated impact from disasters in Suriname

|  A. DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF FLOODS, BY AGE AND GENDER | | |
|--|---|--|
| |  Men |  Women |
| Adult (25+) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to housing • Loss of livelihoods • Restricted access to health services and supplies | <p>SAME AS MEN BUT ADDITIONALLY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to societal role, higher propensity to be in the house during flood • Less access to information and early warning systems (EWS) • Increased burden from their caregiving role • Increased risk of disease due to their proximity to contaminated water when performing household duties • No access to health services, which is critical for pregnant women • Lower livelihood resilience than men • Increased gender-based violence and sexual trafficking |
| Youth (14–24) | <p>SAME AS MEN +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption of education | <p>SAME AS WOMEN +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher propensity of education disruption because they must help with house duties • Risk of early marriage in desperate cases |
| Child (0–14) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerability to floods (inability to swim) and diseases • Disruption of education • Risk of child trafficking in desperate cases | <p>SAME AS FOR BOYS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher propensity of education disruption to help with house duties • Risk of early marriage and child trafficking in desperate cases |
|  B. DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF DROUGHTS PER AGE AND GENDER | | |
| |  Men |  Women |
| Adult (25+) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food insecurity • Loss of livelihoods, which can lead to migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food insecurity, which particularly puts at risk pregnant women • Increased burden in their caregiving role • Low livelihood resilience, especially for single female-headed households, which can lead to migration • Increased gender-based violence and sexual trafficking |
| Young (14–24) | <p>SAME AS FOR MEN +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruption of education following the drought due to the inability to pay for school fees | <p>SAME AS FOR WOMEN +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher propensity of disruption of education to help with house duties and inability to pay school fees • Increased risk of early and non-consensual marriages in desperate cases |



B. DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF DROUGHTS PER AGE AND GENDER

| | Men | Women |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Child (0 – 14) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Particular vulnerability to food insecurity • Risk of disruption of education • Child trafficking in desperate cases | <p>SAME AS FOR BOYS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher propensity of disruption of education to help with house duties • Increase in the risk of early and non-consensual marriages in desperate cases |



C. DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS PER AGE AND GENDER

| | Men | Women |
|----------------------|--|---|
| Adult (25+) | <p>SAME AS DURING FLOODS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trauma and increased alcohol consumption • Socio-economic inequalities impacting resilience | <p>SAME AS DURING FLOODS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased gender-based violence and sexual trafficking also as a result of increased alcohol consumption by men • Socio-economic inequalities impacting resilience |
| Young (14–24) | <p>SAME AS DURING FLOODS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young men with no prior employment have difficulty in building livelihoods • Trauma and increased alcohol consumption • Migration | <p>SAME AS DURING FLOODS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young women with no prior employment have difficulty in building livelihoods • Increased gender-based violence and sexual trafficking also as a result of increased alcohol consumption from men • Migration |
| Child (0– 14) | <p>SAME AS DURING FLOODS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerability to separation from family due to house damages • Trauma and development of aggressivity • Victim of child abuse | <p>SAME AS DURING FLOODS +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerability to separation from family due to house damages • Better coping capacities with trauma • Victim of child abuse |

Adaptive coping mechanisms

The mini-focus group discussions highlighted the Association of Indigenous Village (VIDS) Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) Project, which relates to safeguarding indigenous peoples. Results indicated that although there is inequality between men and women, their roles complement each other.



While indigenous communities have strong, independent governance practices with less interference from the state, which is necessary in managing crisis situations such as the occurrence of natural hazards, **women are not involved in decision-making**. Consequently, women's needs are not represented or addressed. They are less likely to be involved in risk management and have minimal control over emergency recovery. Their and their families' access to aid is also affected. Indigenous women and tribal associations need to be more involved in disaster risk reduction and climate issues. And currently, there is no structure/system for consulting with indigenous women.

Women and their families also need support from the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to identify locations for new agricultural plots. They also **need technical assistance in terms of agricultural skills and techniques** since agriculture is their anchor of food security. Due to lack of participation in the risk management decision-making, **women are less likely to be represented at the community level and hence less likely to have access to aid**.



The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries is tackling climate change adaptation by improving **technical and technological capacities** and developing **climate-smart agricultural technologies**. These efforts are made in collaboration with the Bureau of Gender Affairs (BGA). Moreover, the Ministry has collected gender-disaggregated data on farming practices, capacities and revenue in order to best orient its efforts. Although the data are not quantified with the highest accuracy, they successfully demonstrate that they help uncover vulnerable groups and enables the programmes for building climate resilience to provide significant results.



The cost of inaction

The Government of Suriname is committed to the Sendai Framework for Action 2005–2015. Previous studies carried out in Suriname demonstrate that the use of early warning systems (EWS) 24 hours prior to a hazard allowed **30%** of damages to be prevented. A further analysis on the implementation of EWS and flood forecasting in Paramaribo estimates that such a system would cost US\$3 million/Surinamese Dollar (SRD) 28 million and generate a return on investment of US\$291.5 million/SRD4.6 billion over 15 years. Awareness and prevention are also highly valuable in the agricultural sector where it is estimated that for each

US dollar invested in climate services, US\$10/SRD16.00

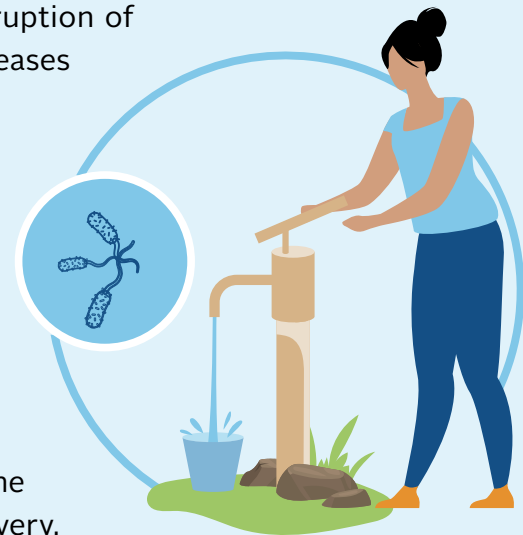
would be gained from climate and disaster mitigation, which strongly contributes to the strengthening of food security, especially in times of disaster.

Damages and losses are commonly expressed in monetary amounts, which may fail to encompass the qualitative impacts of the disasters on the affected individuals and communities, such as under-nourishment, a higher prevalence of gender-based violence, child trafficking, prostitution, insecurity, increased poverty, trauma, child marriages, early pregnancies, disruption of education, poor sanitation, the spread of diseases and migration.

Beyond disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation measures, the study also promotes the reduction of precariousness as a means to decrease vulnerability and strengthen resilience across the population. In the rural areas of Suriname in 2017, only **90%** of the population had access to water and **74.82%** to at least basic sanitation services. These conditions can lead to increased vulnerability in times of disaster with a higher risk of contamination from water-borne

diseases, impeding recovery. And in terms of recovery, it is speculated that each US dollar invested in access to water and sanitation would result in a benefit of US\$6.40/SRD97.60. These computations show that the costs related to the impact of disasters are reversible through appropriate disaster risk reduction and recovery strategy actions.

Moreover, an improved detailed damage and loss reporting helps design the disaster risk reduction and disaster recovery strategy in terms of prioritizing adequate actions that best minimize impacts from disasters.





Promotional flyer for radio broadcast by Women 's Rights Centre on Friday 13 August 2021 on Radio Apintie. Ms. Cheryl Dijksteel, currently a member of the National Assembly of Suriname, was interviewed. The subject was women in leadership positions and the social importance of women's education. Source: BGA, 2021.

THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, PRACTICES AND BEHAVIOUR 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 and disaster risk reduction, a survey including stakeholder consultation was carried out for Suriname. 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 versus equity. |
|  | Women are more vulnerable than men to climate change and disasters; therefore, opportunities for strengthening resilience must take the varying risks into consideration. |
|  | There are aspects of bias in gender attitudes. For example, some respondents believe 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 that there was a high consensus that it is more important for a man than for a woman to obtain a university degree and work outside the home. |

At the institutional level

| | |
|---|--|
|  | There is evidence of limited awareness of the importance of gender considerations in institutions. Gender strategies and action plans are rarely in place. |
|  | The lack of disaggregated data is the main barrier to gender being incorporated at the institutional level. |



RECOMMENDATIONS

AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL



Enabling environment:

Support gender mainstreaming in national policies, relevant laws, plans, and budgets related to disaster risk management.



Institutional arrangements

- Facilitate the establishment of disaster risk management committees, with representation from national ministries and/or line agencies responsible for women and social welfare and women's organizations, together with mechanisms in place to review decisions through a gender lens.
- Give voice to representative indigenous actors, which will ensure that their views and traditions are taken into consideration.



Access to finance

- Facilitate access to loans to households headed by women or women from low-income households to strengthen their livelihoods resilience.
- Ensure that eligibility for training programmes and microcredit is not dependent on land-owning status or gender.



Data collection – Facilitate national capacity for sex-disaggregated data collection through information management systems and capacity building of disaster management officers and focal points.

AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL



Disaster preparedness

- Develop community education and awareness-raising initiatives at schools and in public places, especially targeting women and girls.
- Use informal games to engage youth on disaster preparedness strategies.
- Establish EWS that can be accessed and understood by all the members of the community.
- Support communities in organizing preparedness drills involving women and girls.



Local disaster risk management plans

- Map vulnerabilities at the community level.
- Incorporate targeted risk management activities into community-based programmes and train women to conduct vulnerability assessments.
- Identify critical facilities for evacuation, health and sanitation.
- Collect gender-disaggregated data at the community level.



Women's participation

- Ensure women's participation in vulnerability assessments, in local disaster risk management (DRM) committees.
- Promote gender equity in participation in DRM-related activities and management.

Training

- Build women and girls' coping strategies skills.
- Provide training to women on safety techniques, coping strategies and risk assessments.
- Train women to understand EWSs.
- Provide training on climate resilience and livelihood resilience.



RECOMMENDATIONS BY PRIORITY SECTOR



Agriculture

- Include disaster risk reduction and gender elements in sectoral plans.
- Diversify agricultural livelihoods to strengthen resilience of women, men, and other vulnerable groups.



Energy

- Include disaster risk reduction and gender elements in sectoral plans.
- Plan for stronger and more resilient electrical infrastructure.
- Consult women in the development of energy plans.



Water

- Include disaster risk reduction and gender elements in sectoral plans.
- Consider vulnerability analyses of different districts in Suriname based on gender-disaggregated data.
- Formulate a comprehensive natural disaster mitigation strategy for drinking water and sewerage systems taking into account women, men and vulnerable groups.



Forestry

- Include disaster risk reduction and gender elements in sectoral plans.
- Consider vulnerability analyses of forestry areas in Suriname based on gender-disaggregated data, and a situation analysis of indigenous peoples in general, and indigenous women in particular.
- Apply ecosystem-based approaches such as reforestation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS

- Raise awareness of gender policies and mandates across different institutions.
- Promote continuous learning by investing in gender training and mentoring.
- Foster a safe and inclusive workplace culture.
- Create incentives for positive behaviours and practices related to gender equality.
- Put institutional mechanisms in place to support gender-responsive approaches.
- Build accountability by tracking and reporting on progress, both internally and externally.

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