

A REVIEW OF
GENDER
AND THE **SENDAI**
FRAMEWORK

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PURPOSE OF THIS REVIEW

Gender inequality, coupled with climate and environment crises, is the greatest sustainable development challenge of the present time. Climate change, environmental degradation and disasters affect the entire planet and all peoples, although not in the same way or to the same degree, while gender inequality results in the denial of full human rights to half of humanity. Climate change, and environmental crises and disasters, disproportionately affect women and girls, in particular those in vulnerable and marginalized situations. In turn, gender inequality and the unequal access of women to land and natural resources, finance, technology, knowledge, mobility and other assets, constrain the ability of women to respond and cope in contexts of climate and environmental crises and disasters.

Report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.6/2022/3)

This review, for countries and all stakeholders in disaster risk reduction (DRR), makes the case that gender is such a fundamental part of the social organization in all societies, that gender inequality is a key driver of disaster risk, requiring much greater attention and more focused action and resources than have been directed to this issue during the first seven years of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (A/RES/69/283). It also outlines how, despite some gaps, the Sendai Framework provides an ample mandate for governments, United Nations agencies, and other stakeholders, to pursue gender-responsive DRR as part of the core business of building resilience.

The Sendai Framework concept of all-of-society DRR is a shared responsibility with stakeholders at local, national, regional and international levels. As with most technical international agreements, the Sendai Framework does not articulate the reasons why women or the other specified groups may experience worse impacts from disasters, or provide detailed descriptions of what needs to be done within disaster risk governance to empower them and better meet their needs. Yet, these references in the Sendai Framework are a clear policy guidance and an indication that disasters do not affect everyone within households,

communities and nations in the same way, and the detail needs to come from research, guidance and plans for implementation to address the different needs in practical ways.

As the Sendai Framework itself does not set out the details of how to put its words into action, it is part of UNDRR's mandate to provide such analysis. This will often require very specific research and consultations and different strategies for action, depending on the sources of inequality or disadvantage in relation to disasters and the identified needs for each group. This is especially so because the groups listed in the Sendai Framework are very different in nature, ranging from relatively permanent characteristics (being a woman, an indigenous person or someone living with a disability) to potentially temporary socio-economic states of being (poor people, migrants), to the phases of life from childhood through youth to old age. Within each of these groups, there is also wide diversity and every context gives rise to different types of vulnerability and resilience. To accelerate progress in meeting these diverse needs, there is a need to focus on the particularities of each group in consultation with them as stakeholders.

The objective of policy coherence means that the Sendai Framework needs to be interpreted in light of the other post-2015 international agreements and also existing human-rights obligations. The need for coherence includes, but goes beyond, the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the New Urban Agenda. It also includes the international human-rights conventions which, with regard to women, have at their centre the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW Convention\)](#). 187 of the 194 UN Member States are parties to the CEDAW Convention.

An important aspect of policy coherence that is rarely mentioned when discussing DRR and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is the cross-cutting nature of SDG 5, to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. SDG 5 was never intended to be a separate goal pursued only by specialist agencies such as UN Women and UNFPA, but a broad cross-cutting goal to be integrated across all 17 SDGs, including those more commonly tied to DRR. Indeed, gender-related elements are included within the

targets and indicators of most of the SDGs in the [Global Indicator Framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development after 2019 Refinement \(A/RES/71/313, E/CN.3/2018/2, E/CN.3/2019/2\)](#) but gender-disaggregated data reporting on these indicators remains very low, as noted in [GAR2022](#) (Chapters 2-4).

Specifically in relation to women, policy coherence also means addressing the implications of SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls in the context of DRR, and recognizing that States have accepted a binding obligation to implement the CEDAW Convention. CEDAW requires States parties to avoid direct and indirect discrimination and promote equality in their own actions, and also to ensure these rights are honoured by other actors in their territory, including by making and implementing laws and policies. Hence, both States and other DRR actors have mandates to pursue gender equality as an integral part of all DRR, including both gender mainstreaming and specific gender-transformative policies and actions that aim to reduce discrimination and increase equality.

2

WHY IS GENDER IMPORTANT IN DRR?

2.1 WOMEN AND GENDER

Gender is not only about women, but about the way society is organized around particular characteristics and roles that are associated with people's sex and sexuality, most predominantly in the social definitions of what it means to be a woman or a man in a given culture. The concept of gender also includes a diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities, which can affect risk and experience of disasters due to social exclusion from DRR activities, or insufficient recognition of different needs in response and recovery.

Gender in relation to women and DRR encompasses differences between women and men in areas such as paid or unpaid work and care roles, access to resources, and roles in decision-making and communities, response and recovery, that often create differences in risk and impacts of disasters and climate change.

Gender issues in disasters vary between countries and localities and are also very dependent on the way societies reduce risk, prepare for and undertake response and support recovery. For

example, in some contexts, more women have died or been injured in disasters mainly due to gendered work and care roles meaning they were in the home during a tsunami or earthquake while the men were outdoors. But in other cases, more women died because they had reduced access to warnings or any means of evacuation with the children and older people in their care, or they were more impoverished by gender bias in recovery support, or suffered an increase in gender-based violence. In other situations, more men have died because they were engaged in dangerous rescue and relief work, or they took greater risks in protecting property in accordance with social norms of masculinity, or they were working away from home in an affected area. In others, people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have been discriminated against in access to shelter, relief and recovery assistance. These factors vary hugely between contexts and between types of hazard, but the focus of gender and DRR needs to be on taking gender differences into account, including the impacts of existing gender inequality and discrimination, which primarily disadvantages women.

Vasiti Soko is the first female Director of the Fiji National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and was the first winner of the Women's International Network for Disaster Risk Reduction Excellence Leadership Award in 2021. With a background in geo-science and data analysis, Vasiti says that working in the male-dominated field of disaster response and management has not deterred her.

I think it has inspired me, I often think about why women have not ventured into this space and what can I do to lay the foundation for other women to enter and succeed in this field. Everyone is given an opportunity to make a difference, I encourage them to start small and do it from the heart. Doing our part well will have a ripple effect which will touch the lives of many in our community.



Photo © Vasiti Soko 2021

Box 1. Direct or systemic (indirect) gender discrimination

People often assume that discrimination on the basis of sex or gender comes from a deliberate intention to exclude or disadvantage one sex or gender. Direct discrimination certainly includes such intentional actions, but it also includes decisions made based on biases or stereotypes, where certain characteristics are attributed to an individual based on their sex or gender. For example, assumptions such as “women can’t drive big trucks” or “men don’t know how to look after babies”, or “gay men are not strong” can prevent an individual’s skills, experience and attributes from being considered, resulting in discrimination against them based on perceived gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Systemic or indirect discrimination is not widely understood even amongst people who advocate for gender equality. It is often not apparent without a clear gender analysis of the different impacts of an event or policy. For example, a recovery programme based on compensation for owners of land or property sounds fair, but in most cases this would (a) not provide any support for the poorest people and (b) advantage men over women if in that context men are more likely to be named on marital property titles, or men in general hold more assets and therefore obtain greater economic support in recovery. Livelihoods programmes that focus only on formal employment can have the same effect. This is indirect or systemic discrimination, when an apparently neutral policy has the effect of disadvantaging one group, even if this was not intended.

Gender-responsive DRR often focuses on women rather than men, because no country has yet achieved full gender equality and women as a whole begin from a position of socioeconomic disadvantage relative to men, which is then exacerbated by disasters and climate-driven socioeconomic change. This can include direct, or more often indirect or systemic sex discrimination in access to relief and recovery assistance, which could be avoided by using gender analysis to identify different impacts and needs (e.g. related to care roles, different jobs and work patterns and other economic activities of women and men in the particular context).

Risk reduction, response and recovery activities can also perpetuate the direct and systemic discrimination that led to the unequal starting points for women and men, unless they specifically address these factors through positive measures and ensure effective participation of women as well as men; that is, unless the policies and DRR activities are gender-responsive.

To achieve substantive gender equality in DRR takes more than treating everyone the same. It requires a recognition of the different starting points and existing advantages or disadvantages based on gender, such as men’s greater share of land, property and other economic assets, or women’s under-representation in government or community decision-making. Achieving substantive equality often requires a specific focus on empowering women, and positive measures to increase substantive gender equality, and to ensure that women as a group are not left behind in DRR.

A crucial element in achieving gender-responsive DRR is to ensure the meaningful participation of women, as well as men, as stakeholders, and the use of gender analysis to ensure that (a) potential gender differences in risk and impacts are taken into account in risk assessment and preparedness (especially early warning systems and means of evacuation), and (b) that direct or systemic sex discrimination is avoided in needs assessments and recovery assistance.

2.2 INTERSECTIONAL RISK

The Sendai Framework also addresses the different needs of other recognized groups, including children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, and older persons (paragraph 7). Practical progress on reducing disaster and climate change risk requires that the needs of each of these groups receives specific attention and research, and that they or their advocates have an opportunity for meaningful participation in DRR policy formulation and implementation as key stakeholders. Their needs are not sufficiently served by grouping them together with women or describing them as marginalized or vulnerable groups, and there is also significant diversity within these groups, just as there is among women. Women and girls are also part of all these other groups. All-of-society DRR needs to include the different stakeholders, to ensure their diverse needs are met and that fulfilment of their human rights to dignity, participation in public life and substantive equality are an integral part of the way disaster risk is governed.

Gender-based inequality or social exclusion also interacts with other sources of social and economic disadvantage based on factors such as poverty, disability, age, perceived race, ethnicity, religious

affiliation, mobility or displacement due to disasters or climate change. For example, women and girls with disabilities often face higher risk from disasters. People living in poverty who are also members of minority ethnic groups may face worse disaster impacts in poor housing and also have more limited access to recovery support. These interacting sources of disadvantage in relation to disasters can be described as intersectional risks, an aspect of the idea of ‘intersectionality’, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1990 that understands every person as having layered and intersecting identities and roles, which can be both positive and negative.¹

Gender analysis is designed to identify gender-based differences within a society or community, but it also helps to unpack intersectional risks. This is because it looks at the informal power structures, social rules and outcomes in distribution of economic and social assets, and the degree of agency and autonomy enjoyed by different individuals or groups. It thus provides insights into the drivers of vulnerability and what needs to be addressed to increase resilience. The use of gender analysis in DRR contributes significantly to understanding how gender and other personal characteristics, social identities or situations of vulnerability intersect.

Box 2. Gender parity, equality and equity

Gender parity generally refers to equal numbers or proportions of women and men in a workplace or institutional setting. It is an important element of gender equality that is still not achieved in most DRR contexts at national, regional or international levels. However, even if there are equal numbers of women and men, other important elements of equality are meaningful participation and decision-making power, as well as the agency and resources to make decisions about their own lives. For example, women may be the majority in a consultation meeting, but by tradition men may do most of the talking and women therefore do not have an effective voice.

In thinking about gender equality, it is important to note that there is formal equality, where rules or policies do not discriminate against women or men, and usually aim to treat everyone the same. This is fine if they are starting from the same place, but they rarely are. So the concept of substantive equality is very important in DRR, because this is about the end result or impact of a policy or approach, and it usually requires active and positive measures to achieve it, due to past disadvantage or inequality.

The term ‘equity’ is sometimes used to refer to substantive equality, especially in North America, but this can be confusing. The preferred term under international human-rights law, especially CEDAW, is ‘equality’, to refer to both formal and substantive equality.

¹ Katy Steinmetz. “She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to, Her Today (Kimberlé Crenshaw).” Time, February 20, 2020. <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>

3

ANALYSIS OF THE STRENGTHS AND GAPS OF THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK ON WOMEN, GENDER EQUALITY AND DRR

The Preamble to the Sendai Framework principally addresses the social dimensions of DRR in terms of decreasing mortality and displacement and more effectively protecting “persons, communities, countries and their livelihoods, health, cultural heritage, socioeconomic assets and ecosystems, and thus strengthen their resilience” (para. 5). However, it also recognizes that poverty and inequality are underlying disaster risk drivers (para.6), and specifically states that a more people-

centred and preventive approach to DRR is needed and that this requires governments to “engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards” (para 7). Women are thus identified as key stakeholders, although the issue of gender as such is not raised at this point.

3.1 OUTCOME AND GOAL

The Outcome and Goal in Part II of the Sendai Framework do not mention any specific groups or the issue of gender, but they are cast in broad terms that do include social and equality issues. The intended Outcome is:

“The substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries” (para 16)

The Goal is to:

“Prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and

inclusive economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and thus strengthen resilience” (para 17)

It aims for “integrated and inclusive” measures that address “exposure and vulnerability” to strengthen resilience, which is a broad mandate, without identifying groups.

3.2 THE SEVEN TARGETS AND THEIR INDICATORS

The brief and broad statements of the intended Outcome and Goal in Part II of the Sendai Framework lead to the 7 Targets and Indicators, which are very global quantitative measures of progress in DRR to 2030. In summary, these are to: (a) reduce disaster mortality, (b) reduce the number of disaster affected people, (c) reduce direct economic loss from disasters, (d) reduce disaster damage to infrastructure and basic services, (e) increase the number of countries with national and local DRR strategies, (f) enhance international cooperation to developing countries to support DRR, and (g) increase the availability of early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessment to people (para 18).

Arguably there has been a tendency to define the Goal of the Sendai Framework only in terms of these quantitative targets (and the indicators that were developed to measure them), because the first five especially have become the basis for States to report disaster statistics through the Sendai Framework Monitor. In this context, the Sendai Framework itself emphasizes the importance of gender inclusion and of sex-disaggregated data (paragraphs 19(g) and 25(a)). In addition, the [Report of the Open-Ended Intergovernmental Expert Working Group on Indicators and Terminology Relating to Disaster Risk Reduction \(A/71/644\) \(OEIWG\)](#) indicated data disaggregation as highly desirable. Furthermore, the UN General Assembly resolutions on disaster risk reduction in recent years have urged states to work towards the collection of information disaggregated by income, sex, age and disability. It is now widely recognized that the lack of sex-disaggregated data (including qualitative data) on gender and disasters continues to hamper gender analysis of disaster impacts and the effectiveness of DRR measures globally. Hence there is increasing encouragement to establish such reporting as the normal standard, to enable

more effective targeting of DRR measures. In particular, this has come from:

- a. The recommendations of the UN Joint Study that were endorsed by the UN Senior Leadership Group on DRR for Resilience in July 2021, [Beyond Vulnerability to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction: Critical Actions for the United Nations System. A United Nations Joint Study on the Status of Gender Equality and Women's Leadership in DRR](#), (UNDRR, 2021) (see page 54 and Recommendation 6 on page 64); and
- b. The outcome of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) March 2022 CSW66 [Agreed conclusions: Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes \(E/CN.6/2022/L.7\)](#) (para 56 expressing concern at the lack of data and paras (ss) and 9 (tt) make recommendations to 'Enhance gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex').

If the Sendai Framework mandates on women and gender ended at paragraph 18 with the 7 targets, there would be little guidance for action on these issues, but it is much more than these tools of measurement. It does in fact give considerable guidance, although it also has gaps. Hence, the goal and targets must be read in light of the Part III Guiding Principles that follow them, as well as the most substantial and developed elements of the Sendai Framework in Part IV Priorities for Action, and Part V the Role of Stakeholders. Part VI on International Cooperation and Global Partnership also addresses the question of support from international organizations.

3.3 THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guiding Principles in Part III of the Sendai Framework, set out in paragraph 19 (a) to (m), are intended to underpin its interpretation and implementation, but they are often left out of discussions.

Essentially, the principles set out that each State has the primary responsibility to prevent and reduce disaster risk, but this is shared between central and local authorities and other stakeholders in an all-of-society approach. They emphasize that the primary purpose of DRR is protecting people, including their property, health, livelihoods, productive assets, cultural and environmental assets, *“while promoting and protecting all human rights, including the right to development” (italics added)* (19(c)). Human rights are thus fundamental to DRR, and this is not only formal equality before the law but also a positive right to development.

In referring to human rights in this way, the Sendai Framework refers not only to the “international bill of human rights”, (the [universal declaration](#) and the international covenants on [civil and political rights](#), and on [economic, social and cultural rights](#)), but also to the other [core human rights treaties](#). These include the [CEDAW Convention](#), the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), among others. These are binding obligations for States parties and the high level of ratification of the CEDAW Convention makes it effectively a universal obligation to prohibit sex discrimination and to promote substantive gender equality. This applies equally to all aspects of DRR as to other aspects of life and governance.

The Guiding Principles make some of these requirements explicit, including how they should be integrated into DRR, stating that:

“Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted. In this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens;” (Paragraph (19(c)))

Again, when emphasizing the need for a multi-hazard approach, the Guiding Principles state that DRR requires:

“...inclusive risk-informed decision-making based on the open exchange and dissemination of disaggregated data, including by sex, age and disability...”. (19(g))

The Guiding Principles further emphasize the importance of policy coherence across sectors and risks, the importance of understanding the “local and specific characteristics” of risk, and of building back better (19 (h),(i),(k)), as well as the necessity for international cooperation (19(l)(m)).

The integral connection between risk governance and the human right to gender equality for women has been recognized by the United Nations-appointed expert group, the CEDAW Committee, that is the treaty-monitoring body for the CEDAW Convention. Treaty bodies are listed in the Sendai Framework as key international organizations to support its implementation (Paragraph 48(e)). The CEDAW Committee’s detailed 2018 General Recommendation 37 on the Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in the Context of Climate Change (CEDAW/C/GC/37), was produced after significant consultation with States and the wider international community. It carefully relates each aspect of the CEDAW Convention rights to equality and freedom from discrimination to the practical issues faced in DRR and climate change. This connection has now been made very strongly by the UN Commission on the Status of Women at its 66th Session in March 2022, in Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes (E/CN.6/2022/L.7) with its agreed conclusions including:

“The Commission reiterates the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in disaster risk management, taking into account the perspectives of all women and girls including those in vulnerable situations and women and girls with disabilities. It recognizes the need for the inclusive participation and contribution of all women and girls, older women, widows, indigenous women and girls, local communities, youth, volunteers, migrants, academia, scientific

and research entities and networks, business, professional associations, private sector financing institutions and the media, in all forums and processes related to disaster risk reduction, in accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.” (Paragraph 27).

The Guiding Principles alone provide a clear mandate to countries, United Nations system entities and other international and regional organizations to support a human-rights-based approach to DRR, including the specific human rights of women detailed in the CEDAW Convention. CEDAW General Recommendation 37 is a highly authoritative interpretation of what it means to apply the CEDAW Convention to DRR, while the Commission on the Status of Women’s CSW66 agreed conclusions reiterate the centrality of “the inclusive participation and contribution of

all women and girls” in exercising these rights. Human rights are not separable from DRR because, fundamentally, DRR is about the realization of human rights.

The Co-Chair’s Statement from the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction 2022 (APMCDRR) also called on governments and stakeholders to “uphold the guiding principles of the Sendai Framework and ensure that the capacities, networks, resources, and insights of all people are incorporated into planning, decision-making and implementation of disaster risk reduction initiatives.” (Paragraph 6). With regard to gender, it specifically mentioned the need for a gender-transformative and human-rights-based approach, and the importance of engaging with women and LGBTQI+ people (Paragraph 6).

3.4 THE FOUR PRIORITIES

The four priorities for action set out in the Sendai Framework Part IV, Paragraph 20, are:

- Priority 1:** Understanding disaster risk.
- Priority 2:** Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk.
- Priority 3:** Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.
- Priority 4:** Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to ‘build back better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

The actions needing to be taken under each priority, at national and local levels, and at global and regional levels, are further detailed in Paragraphs 21-34 (over some 8 pages) and make up the most substantial component of the Sendai Framework.

Women or gender are not mentioned in the text relating to priorities 1 and 2, although mention is made in Priority 3 of sexual and reproductive health, while wider issues relating to women and gender are mentioned under Priority 4. But these must at all times be interpreted in light of the Guiding Principles, which apply to all DRR measures and actions.

With regard to Priority 1, there are frequent references to the concepts of vulnerability, capacity and exposure, and much focus on scientific and

technical information concerning hazards, as well as community and local engagement, and indigenous and traditional knowledge. It does not provide guidance on identifying differentiated risks within communities or societies due to social, cultural or economic factors, such as gender equality as a driver of risk, and this is a notable gap. However, it also needs to be read in the context of the Guiding Principles in the previous section and the identified stakeholders in the following section, which reiterate the centrality of human rights, and name women as a key stakeholder group. For example, when conducting risk assessments, this means these processes need to be gender-responsive, both to ensure rights to gender equality and to obtain the full set of relevant data for a realistic and practical assessment of the risks.

Priority 2 on strengthening disaster risk governance does reiterate the importance of the “participation of relevant stakeholders” (Paragraph 26 and recurring mentions) and of actions by “persons, households, communities and businesses” as well as “community consultations” (Paragraph 27). Again, although there is not specific guidance on which groups need to be engaged in risk governance, these references need to be read in light of the later section on stakeholders, which does identify the stakeholders, including women. The Guiding Principles’ human-rights-based approach, and indeed States’ own obligations under international human-rights law, include the rights to equality, participation in society, public life and work etc., which provide a strong foundation to support women’s meaningful participation and leadership in risk governance. For example, an important application of these principles is that the institutions established to govern risk need to be representative of the key groups in that society, especially those who are most at risk, including women and people with disabilities.

Priority 3 on investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience includes both “structural and non-structural” measures to enhance “the economic, social, health and cultural resilience of persons, communities, countries and their assets, as well as the environment.” (Paragraph 29). The non-structural measures include education, health and social protection, and in this regard the following is significant as it states that to achieve this at national and local level it is necessary:

“To strengthen the design and implementation of inclusive policies and social safety-net mechanisms, including through community involvement, integrated with livelihood enhancement programmes, and access to basic health-care services, including maternal, newborn and child health, sexual and reproductive health, food security and nutrition, housing and education, towards the eradication of poverty, to find durable solutions in the post-disaster phase and to empower and assist people disproportionately affected by disasters;” (italics added) (Paragraph 30 (j))

The focus of the text on inclusive policies and social safety-nets, and on sexual and reproductive and maternal and child health, addresses many issues that affect women’s and girls’ resilience, especially if they are living in situations of poverty or displacement. These descriptions would also encompass the health issues of gender-based violence, which commonly increase during and after disasters. As regards structural measures, which also have a gender dimension, the text does not give guidance, but again it must be informed by the Guiding Principles. In practice, this might mean consulting with local women about a proposed major road upgrade intended to increase economic activity and access to the city. If it passes through the community, the women might be concerned to ensure safe and accessible routes for themselves and children to and from local markets and schools. Or, if given the choice, they may prioritize investment in local health and education services, or increased employment and business opportunities for women and girls.



Photo © Anuradha 2021

Anuradha has been working to mainstream disaster risk management in the state of Himachal Pradesh - one of the most disaster-prone states of India. Doers is the organisation she founded and leads.

We work with children, orphans, women groups, the elderly as well as persons with disabilities and build their capacities in disaster risk mitigation and preparedness.

She says women practitioners in DRR are supporting other women leaders, creating a wider impact in the workplace, especially with women who bring a tech or science background to their disaster work. Anuradha was a finalist in the 2022 Women’s International Network for Disaster Risk Reduction Excellence Leadership Award.

The text under Priority 4 on enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to build back better in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction speaks explicitly about empowerment of women and people with disabilities, and how central it is that they are enabled to “lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction approaches.” (Paragraph 32). The proposed steps to achieve Priority 4 include to:

“To invest in, develop, maintain and strengthen people-centred multi-hazard, multisectoral forecasting and early warning systems, disaster risk and emergency communications mechanisms, social technologies and hazard-monitoring telecommunications systems; develop such systems through a participatory process; tailor them to the *needs of users, including social and cultural requirements, in particular gender*; promote the application of simple and low-cost early warning equipment and facilities; and broaden release channels for natural disaster early warning information” (*italics added*) (Paragraph 33(b))

The remainder of the text under Priority 4 uses generic terms such as persons and communities, but it sets out strategies for effective early warning, preparedness and recovery that apply equally to gender-responsive systems once the different user needs are identified through participatory processes and the systems are tailored to meet them. For example, early warning systems need to engage and reach different groups within society and so the accessibility of the warning systems and the nature

of the messages is very important. This includes questions of whether they use accessible language and terminology, whether poor or rural communities have access to mobile-phone services, and whether both women and men carry mobile phones. There may also be constraints for women about acting on warnings, such as social norms or personal security concerns about leaving their homes or going to shelters unaccompanied by male family members, or practical questions for women with carer responsibilities on how to physically evacuate small children and people with limited mobility.

With regard to Priority 4 it is also noted that the [Co-Chairs’ Summary: Bali Agenda for Resilience](#) of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022 (GPDRR 2022) reflects discussion on the nature of recovery funding, saying:

“Currently, the vast majority of public spending in recovery has been allocated to infrastructure and not in support of affected people. Recovery and reconstruction are most successful when they are community driven, and address inequalities through gender responsive and human-rights based approaches.”(Paragraph 40)

Overall, the implementation details given for the four priorities do not give much emphasis to gender or other social inclusion, and this is a gap. However, all of the text needs to be read in light of the Guiding Principles and the human-rights-based approach they establish and, additionally, some specific gender issues are highlighted in relation to Priorities 3 and 4.

3.5 THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

The section on the role of stakeholders in Part V of the Sendai Framework includes the most comprehensive statement on women and gender (Paragraph 36):

“When determining specific roles and responsibilities for stakeholders, and at the same time building on existing relevant international instruments, States should encourage the following actions on the part of all public and private stakeholders:

- (a) Civil society, volunteers, organized voluntary work organizations and community-based organizations to participate, in collaboration with public institutions.... On this point, it should be noted that:

- (i) Women and their participation are critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes; and adequate capacity building measures need to be taken to empower women for preparedness as well as to build their capacity to secure alternate means of livelihood in post-disaster situations;”

This is a strong statement, and likewise a strong mandate for implementation of DRR that empowers women and builds their capacity.

3.6 GAPS IN THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK

While the Sendai Framework mentions women, as one among other identified groups, and separately on some occasions, it by and large characterizes women as one group among many stakeholders. In this sense it does not adopt a gender analysis of the social structures embedded in all societies that mean that women as a whole (50 per cent of the population) have less access to power and resources than men, including decision-making on DRR, and that wherever gender inequality is high, women are likely to suffer worse impacts and greater impoverishment from the same events compared with men. However, it appears that awareness of the impacts of structural or systemic gender inequality is growing.

The **Co-Chairs' Summary: Bali Agenda for Resilience** of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022 (GPDRR 2022) noted that half of the panellists and 40 per cent of participants in the platform were women, an encouraging statistic towards full parity in women's participation at the international level. However, the Co-Chairs also reflected wider discussion on women's participation and underlying gender issues in DRR, reiterating that:

“Disaster risk reduction leadership must be more inclusive. More can be done to strengthen gender equality and the participation of women and girls in decision-making, implementation, and leadership. Specific targets and timelines to achieve gender balance and a gender action plan to achieve the Sendai Framework should be established. Policies and programmes must also be supported by an understanding of gender

dimensions of disaster risk. Greater investment in women-led civil society organizations and networks should be facilitated for their meaningful participation in and influence on decision-making.” (Paragraph 27)

The Co-Chair's Statement from the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction 2022 was even more specific on the inclusive, human-rights-based approach, stating:

“In line with the principles of 'leave no one behind' and 'nothing about us, without us', disaster risk reduction must be inclusive and people-centred. Systemic discrimination and inequality are drivers of risk. Intersecting inequalities further exacerbate risk, including gender-based violence and access to sexual and reproductive health in emergencies. It is essential to learn from each other and begin education about disaster risk reduction and climate change at an early age. A gender-transformative, disability-inclusive and human rights-based approach that promotes and supports diverse participation and leadership of women, youth, persons living with disability, LGBTQI+ people, indigenous people and older persons reduces disaster risk.” (Paragraph 6)

This emphasizes the importance of women in decision-making and leadership roles, and in implementation of DRR, as well as the most basic measure of equal numbers that is still far from being achieved in most countries; and it supports the use of gender analysis to understand the gender dimensions of disaster risk.

4

THE MIDTERM REVIEW OF THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK

The Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework (MTR) provided an opportunity to accelerate progress to achieving the goal, outcome and targets of the Sendai Framework, and to contribute to implementation of the SDGs. This has been a key opportunity for countries to take stock and, also with the support of international partners, adopt

the necessary domestic measures to transform the findings into further action.

The 2021 United Nations Joint Study [Beyond Vulnerability](#) made a specific recommendation relating to the Sendai Framework MTR (Box 3)

Box 3 2021 United Nations Joint Study [Beyond Vulnerability](#)

Recommendation 1 – to review gender-responsive implementation of the Sendai Framework

It is recommended that the United Nations takes the opportunity of the forthcoming Midterm review of the Sendai Framework to call for a stronger focus and dedicated gender-responsive and gender-transformative actions in its implementation, including by triggering systematic work planning on gender equality and women's empowerment and leadership in DRR (GEWEL-DRR). Proposed mechanisms to do this include:

1.1 Gender-responsive Midterm review and reporting process

- a. Ensure the Midterm review process itself is gender-responsive, by agreeing specific GEWEL-DRR objectives and ensuring equitable and meaningful participation of women, women-led, and women's-rights organizations in all Sendai Framework implementation assessment processes at global, regional and national levels;
- b. Establish a global consultative group of gender experts, with a majority from the global south, to ensure that the Midterm review includes necessary partners to incorporate GEWEL in the process, and encourage the formation of similar groups in each region; and
- c. Building on the existing SFM targets and indicators that request reporting on sex, age, income and disability disaggregated data, aim to enable Member States to provide disaggregated data, informed by the work undertaken by the global and regional working groups on disaster-related statistics.

1.2 Gender work planning and implementation

Call for a gender work plan, as a priority, and explore with Member States the potential to agree a Sendai Framework gender action plan to carry implementation through to 2030; assign a convening role to relevant United Nations entities to progress a gender work plan. Comparable models are seen in the global gender action plans agreed for the climate change and biodiversity conventions, and integrated approaches or implementation with these plans should also be considered.

The CSW66 [Agreed Conclusions](#) also:

Urged that, in strengthening normative, legal and regulatory frameworks, governments and United Nations system entities, international and regional organizations, with support from civil society and other stakeholders:

“Respect and fulfil existing commitments and obligations under the Rio conventions, the Paris Agreement, the Glasgow Climate Pact and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 related to climate change, biodiversity, desertification, environment and disaster risk reduction in a holistic and integrated manner, taking into account their gender action plans and calling for the creation of such plans where there are none...” (Extract of Paragraph 62(c)); and to

“Give due consideration to incorporating gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the review of global progress in the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, including through the global and regional platforms on disaster risk reduction and the 2023 Midterm review of the Sendai Framework, as part of its integrated and coordinated follow-up processes to United Nations conferences and summits, aligned with the Economic and Social Council, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the quadrennial comprehensive policy review cycles.” (Paragraph 62(d)).

The call for a gender action plan was also made in the 2022 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction [Co-Chairs’ Summary](#), and the [Co-Chair’s Statement](#) from the 2022 Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction.

5

THE SPACE FOR ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY UNDER THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK

What is the scope for action on gender and DRR by countries, United Nations entities, and stakeholders at international, regional, national and local levels? Although the outcome and goal are general in nature, and there has not yet been substantial reporting of sex-disaggregated data under the seven targets and indicators, the Sendai Framework is based on strong guiding principles that provide a clear mandate to support a human-

rights-based approach to DRR, which includes the specific human rights of women detailed in the CEDAW Convention.

This is an area that requires specific attention. In an operational sense, it is useful to consider how the broad mandate to address gender in DRR can be characterized in terms of the four Sendai Framework Priorities.

As part of Priority 1: Understanding disaster risk, much more information is needed on the gender dimensions of risk. Actions may include to:

- gather and use data (quantitative and qualitative) on the gendered nature of disaster risk and how gender inequality is a risk driver that can be reduced through gender-responsive DRR programmes and actions, including risk assessments and needs assessments
- encourage and build capacity for countries to collect, report and use sex-disaggregated data to inform national and local DRR strategies, plans and programmes
- use and promote the use of gender analysis as a tool to identify how gender differences in disaster and climate risk and impacts can arise in each context due to different social and economic roles between women and men in affected populations
- research and adjust DRR guidance and capacity-development to integrate awareness of how structural gender inequality and discrimination compounds disaster and climate risk by creating unequal starting points, primarily for women and people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

As part of Priority 2, Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, attention is needed on the levels and forms of women's participation and leadership in DRR, which vary between different countries and are also specific to local communities. The effort to reduce disaster risks caused or exacerbated by gender inequality needs to be underpinned by increasing the proportion of women in both formal and informal roles in DRR and ensuring their meaningful participation and empowerment for the benefit of all. Some specific actions may include to:

- address urgently the need to increase the meaningful participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles, and in significant numbers, as key actors in local and national government, to ensure their needs and interests are met and to help ensure that DRR for everyone benefits from access to the best human resources and capacities in each context
- recognize and support the formal and informal leadership roles women already take on from national to local levels, as well as in regional and international forums.

As part of Priority 3, Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience, some specific focus areas on gender may include to:

- promote investment in practical opportunities for more women to become technical experts and leaders in DRR
- ensure that disaster and climate risk financing is accessible to women and addresses gendered differences in needs and risks to ensure its effectiveness
- use gender analysis in areas such as infrastructure planning and investment, and essential services, to ensure they enhance resilience for all
- undertake and promote gender-transformative investments where required, to achieve equality of outcomes through DRR.

As part of Priority 4, Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to build back better in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, some specific focus areas on gender may include to:

- build early warning, early action and evacuation systems that are gender-responsive
- design gender-responsive recovery efforts on an understanding of the different economic and social roles and differing levels of overall gender equality in each context, and include gender-transformative approaches to increase gender equality as part of the concept of building back better.

