



Australia's New International Gender Equality Strategy

Inputs provided by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

12 December 2023

Gender inequality, coupled with the climate and environment crises, is the greatest sustainable development challenge of the present time.¹ Reducing disaster risk is essential to achieve gender equality; and understanding the impact of gender norms, roles and relations on people's lives within a given culture and society is critical to reducing disaster risk. Yet inadequate attention has been given to the ways in which gender inequality and disaster risk buttress each other, and how this synergy can more effectively be utilized to achieve gender equality and reduce disaster risk. And more can be done to leverage human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to strengthen the foundations of DRR action, and apply a human-rights approach to DRR.

With the development of a new International Gender Equality Strategy, Australia has an opportunity to further demonstrate its global leadership in championing gender-transformative disaster risk reduction, and effectively mainstream gender equality and women's leadership as central components of all risk reduction and resilience building efforts across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

In the past twenty years, climate-related disasters have almost doubled compared to the previous twenty-year period, exacerbating inequalities within and between countries.² Too often disasters set-back gender equality, and at the same time gender inequalities result in gender-differentiated disaster impacts. 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

¹ Report of the Secretary-General, E/CN.6/2022/3

² <https://www.undrr.org/climate-action-and-disaster-risk-reduction>

assistance. These factors vary hugely between contexts and between types of hazard, but these differences must be taken into account to ensure that disasters do not exacerbate existing gender inequalities in a given context, which primarily disadvantage women.³

Gender discrimination can impact the control that women and girls have over the decisions that govern their lives, as well as their access to resources and opportunities, which heightens exposure to risk and can result in disasters having a disproportionate impact on women and girls. Ideas and understandings of masculinities and the roles and responsibilities of men in a society can also result in men and boys experiencing higher mortality in some disaster contexts.⁴ But the vulnerability and exposure to disaster risk that disproportionately impacts women and girls is economically, socially and culturally constructed and can be reduced.⁵

To improve gender outcomes in DRR there is a need to address broader, underlying risk factors and socioeconomic disparity, particularly in the wake of COVID-19. Limited understanding of the gendered nature of disaster risk and insufficient disaggregated data means decision-making and priorities is not based on sound evidence.⁶ Insufficient sex, age and disability disaggregated data remains a significant barrier to understanding and analysing differential impacts and formulating gender-transformative disaster risk reduction programmes. The concept of data that is relevant to resilience building needs to be understood more broadly to include information on existing gender inequality, economic information for recovery, and the extent of women's participation, empowerment and leadership roles.

While the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction recognizes the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all DRR policies and practices, and the need to empower women to publicly lead and promote gender equitable and universally accessible response, recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction, the midterm review of the Sendai Framework found that insufficient progress has been made and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction was acknowledged as a priority for a large portion of Member States in order to accelerate achievement of the Sendai Framework.⁷

The good practices collected through the midterm review of the Sendai Framework found that addressing gender inequalities in DRR requires active intervention, not only passive intentions. Key to this is ensuring DRR actions and investment are gender-responsive – as a minimum requirement - as otherwise risk reduction, response and recovery activities can perpetuate the direct and systemic discrimination that led to the unequal starting points for women and men, and people of diverse genders. Gender-transformative DRR policies and activities can help to specifically address these factors through positive measures and ensure effective participation and leadership of women and gender diverse people.

³ UNDRR (2023), A Review of Gender and the Sendai Framework, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

⁴ www.undrr.org/gender

⁵ 'Towards Gender Equality and Women's Leadership for Resilience to Disaster Risks in Latin America and the Caribbean', Regional Consultation prior to the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women

⁶ UNDRR (2021), Policy brief: Gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

⁷ UNDRR (2023). Accelerating Action on Gender Equality in Disaster Risk Reduction by 2030: A Cross-cutting Analysis of Reports to the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework Highlighting Good Practices and Areas to Strengthen for Gender-responsive and Socially Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction. UNDRR: Geneva, Switzerland.

Recognising this, UNDRR is co-leading global efforts to develop *The Gender Action Plan to support implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030* (Sendai GAP). Australia's contribution to this process has been invaluable, and Australia's continued political support and advocacy, as well as investments to support implementation of the Sendai GAP is needed. The new International Gender Equality Strategy is an opportunity for Australia to accelerate progress towards achieving the mutually reinforcing goals of gender equality and the prevention and reduction of disaster risks by⁸:

1. **Mainstream gender equality across DRR laws, policies and institutions, informed by relevant international treaties and agreements, including CEDAW**
 - Include gender equality and non-discrimination policy objectives in climate, environmental and disaster risk management laws, policies and programmes.
 - Institutionalise representation, leadership and meaningful participation of women and their organisations in climate, environmental and disaster risk governance institution.
 - Build upon the convergence between the criteria for CEDAW reporting and Priorities 1, 3 and 4 of the Sendai Framework, and make more explicit and extensive use of General recommendation No. 37 to strengthen a human rights-based approach to DRR.⁹
 - Measure the impacts of programming on gender equality and women's empowerment in climate change, disaster and environmental risk governance. This would improve the feedback information to show what is working and what is not, and so to adjust policies, programming, resources and implementation capacity to be more effective in improving gender equality and women's empowerment.

2. **Addressing disaster risk as a driver of gender inequality, and gender inequality as an underlying driver of risk in DRR laws, policies, programmes and governance**
 - When recovering from a disaster the "building back better" principle must be understood not only as an opportunity for DRR, but also to address and transform underlying inequalities. Plan and implement structural, social and economic recovery and reconstruction that resources activities that reduce gender inequality as an underlying driver of risk.
 - Ensure multi-hazard early warning systems are developed, budgeted, monitored and evaluated to achieve greater access to early warning for all through gender equitable and inclusive outcomes, with the ongoing and resourced engagement and leadership of key gender and inclusion stakeholders, especially women's organizations. All communities should have easy access to information on disaster risks, associated impacts, and the cost of inaction, to better appreciate the impact of their actions.
 - Urban planning needs to address gender inequality in order to promote more resilient, safer and inclusive cities.

⁸ UNDRR (2021), Policy brief: Gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

⁹ UNDRR (2023), Scoping study on the use of CEDAW General recommendation No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate. © 2023 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

3. **Increasing the availability of disaggregated data and qualitative information on gender and disaster risk**
 - Demonstrate the application of disaggregated data for inclusive planning, and identify and remove barriers to reporting, including wider systems issues such as linkages between subnational and national data collection systems.
 - Ensure women lead and participate in the collection and use of disaggregated disaster and climate data.
 - Consolidate data collected by a range of actors on disaster risk reduction and gender equality, to better understand disaster risks, exposure and vulnerability, and improve transparency by making relevant and current data accessible and usable to inform policy and guide decision making and investments.

4. **Deepen understanding of the root causes of vulnerability and the gendered nature of risk**
 - Invest in examining the root causes of disaster risks, and gender-related exposure and vulnerability, analysing gender norms, roles, responsibilities and relations to identify actions to reduce gender differential disaster risk. This should include both quantitative and qualitative socio-economic data as the basis for gender analysis to plan effective disaster risk reduction.
 - Use gender analysis to generate and apply disaster risk knowledge in decision-making.
 - Recognize diversity and the ways in which multiple and intersecting identities overlap to create an individual's unique risk profile.

5. **Increase meaningful participation and leadership of women and gender stakeholders in disaster risk governance, in line with CEDAW**
 - Ensure women are involved in the design, management, resourcing and implementation of gender-responsive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes.
 - Recognise women's diverse knowledge, skills and capacities, ensuring they are supported and invested in.
 - Strengthen the resilience of women and girls to climate and disaster risk by financing and provision of sustainable infrastructure, accelerating access to decentralized renewable energy and safe fuel, and increased access to public services, adaptive social protection and social safety nets, and decent work for women.
 - Increase horizontal engagement between national and local institutions for DRR and the national women's machinery. Ensuring that women's ministries, commissions, departments and national women's rights organizations are represented on platforms and standing committees for DRR and are engaged actively in the DRR law and policy making process.¹⁰

¹⁰ UNDRR (2023), Scoping study on the use of CEDAW General recommendation No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in a changing climate.

- 6. Mainstream gender equality criteria into disaster risk reduction investments.**
- Increase investment in gender-responsive disaster and climate risk management.
 - Fulfil pledges for an equitable division of climate finance to support mitigation and risk-informed adaptation action. Support gender and risk tagging and tracking of budgetary and expenditure flows to enable a clearer understanding of how much countries ought to spend, which areas are being prioritised, and better measurement of gender-responsive risk reduction and adaptation approaches.
 - Promote gender-responsive financing strategies to implement national and local DRR strategies, climate adaptation plans and risk-informed development strategies.
 - Promote shock-responsive social protection mechanisms as an effective vehicle to implement a range of adaptation and disaster risk reduction programmes. Such initiatives must be universal, considering the need to address the social protection gaps in the informal sector that often increase the vulnerabilities faced by women who are usually overrepresented in the informal economy.
 - Investments in resilient infrastructure systems need to be informed by comprehensive gender and risk assessment to ensure they do not create or exacerbate gender inequality and future risks.
 - Climate and disaster risk analytics need to better account for inequitable and systemic risks, knock-on impacts, and the medium to long term effects of various climate scenarios. Cost-benefit analyses must integrate a gender analysis into the projected costs of future disaster impacts, recognizing under and unpaid care burden disproportionately carried by women.
 - Invest resources to strengthen capacities in gender responsive disaster risk reduction and enhance collaboration among diverse stakeholders across the sectors at the national and local level.
- 7. Increase availability and access to financing for DRR initiatives that advance gender equality.**
- Policies should value, reward, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, recognizing the ways such work is exacerbated during disasters, and unpaid care and domestic workers should participate in policy dialogues.
 - Mobilize and sustain financial resources, promote decent work, secure land and property rights, ensure access to education and training, and support technological and digital development to support women's resilience to disasters.
 - Women's advancement and participation in the workforce, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields where there are still significant gender parity gaps, will also help support diverse leadership in reducing disaster risk.
 - Financing instruments and layered financing mechanisms should be scaled-up to enhance preventive and anticipatory actions. Disaster risk financing, insurance and climate change funds must be gender-responsive and accessible to women.
 - Partnership with the private sector should be leveraged to co-develop innovative financial instruments, including to manage residual risk e.g., through bonds, insurance products and other contingent financing mechanisms. Incentives and regulatory mechanisms should catalyze action and accelerate investment pathways as part of a transition to low carbon, resilient economies.

Contact

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)
Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
United Nations Secretariat Building, Raj Damnern Nok Avenue, Bangkok, 10200, Thailand
E-mail: undrr-ap@un.org