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EMERGING ISSUES PANEL

Gender Perspectives on Climate Change

Written statement*

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Introduction

Gender and climate change have increasingly become important issues of our time. Both are closely related to each other, considering that women who constitute the majority of the world's population, have a significant role in the global effort to address climate change and its adverse impacts on human societies. The truth of the matter is that women serve as agents of change in addressing the climate change issue.

The fact is climate change has now become an undeniable global phenomenon. It is causing seasons to shift tremendously, raising the concern of the international community. The shifting of the seasons is marked by, among others, the changing pattern of rain intensity, which has resulted in flood and landslides, longer dry seasons that lead to drought, and extreme changes in air pressure that cause hurricanes and tornados. These effects of shifting seasons have brought about a number of social problems such as food scarcity, endemic diseases and natural disasters.

Among those adversely affected by climate change, women are the most vulnerable. They are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. So too are children. Therefore, considering the massive impact of natural disasters on women, it is important to underline the contributions they have to make in addressing this issue. No woman should allow the adverse impact of climate change to become a barrier to the realization of her full potential. Women from all walks of life should therefore join hands and move toward clear and achievable targets.

This paper is aimed at exploring the need of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management and offers some possible insights to promote it. Some descriptive details have been drawn from cases relevant to Indonesia's experience, in particular its experience with tsunami disaster.

Why do we need gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management?

In March 2005, a **comprehensive concept** of disaster risk management was promoted by the International Tsunami Information Centre consisting of 4 (four) pillars:

1. Policy Making
2. Operational/Technical works
3. Capacity building on science and technology preparedness/awareness
4. Adaptation - Mitigation

This concept has been **recognized** worldwide as the main reference point when dealing with disaster related issues. Indonesia used this frame of reference in the establishment of both the Indonesia Tsunami Warning System (Ina TWS) and the Meteorological - Climatological Early Warning System (MC-EWS). However, gender mainstreaming has not been well integrated into this concept of disaster risk management. In fact, women are often **marginalized** as a consequence of the absence of gender mainstreaming in disaster risk management.

Furthermore, it is recognized that many international forums have not yet focused comprehensively on the gender dimension of disaster risk management efforts. One such

forum is the International Oceanographic Commission (IOC), a subsidiary body of UNESCO which has as part of its mandate the provision of tsunami early warning system and related capacity building.

It is important to note that natural disasters affect women differently from men. The difference can generally be attributed to traditional values and social norms which assign different roles and responsibilities to men and women. Thus, climate change and its harmful consequences directly and indirectly affect women's condition, status and role in the community. In Aceh, for example, many women were found dead with babies still clutched in their arms. This condition clearly reflects the primacy of their care-giving obligation. Because of their care-giving obligations, many women fell victims to the disaster.

However, it is undoubtedly true that women should not only be victims of natural disasters caused by climate change, they must also be a driving force in facing and tackling its adverse impact. There is ample evidence to show that even as potential victims, women in disaster areas continue to fulfill important household obligations. As a result, women find themselves facing a "double burden" in disaster related situations.

Yet, despite their vulnerability, women are poorly represented in decision making or policy formulation processes related to planning and evaluation for disaster risk management. Nevertheless, we need to acknowledge that woman should play an important role in policy formulation. Women's vulnerability was exacerbated by the lack of policy and regulations which are sensitive to women's needs. Women's involvement in policy formulation will ensure that women's needs are addressed appropriately.

Therefore gender equity in disaster reduction requires above all empowering women to play increasing roles in leadership positions as well as management and decision making processes.

Lesson learned from the Aftermath of Tsunami in Asia particularly Indonesia

It is widely recognized that Indonesia was the country worst affected by the 2004 tsunami. The dead & missing in Indonesia numbered 95.000 and 133.000 respectively, while in Srilanka the corresponding numbers were 31.000 and 5.637. For India, they were 10.744 and 5.640. The overall data for Aceh reveals the number of women dead and missing in the earthquake and tsunami disaster in Aceh amount to 56% of the total, compared to 44 % for men.

In the early weeks after tsunami struck Aceh and in some other parts of Indonesia, the survivors experienced a severe crisis and great material deprivation. Since then, 41.4 % of women of productive age have become involved in productive work and they provide 34.4 % of household incomes. This data suggests that the capacity of women to recover from tsunami's impact and to find productive work afterwards has proven to be greater than that of men.

This is a unique phenomenon, considering that there is no education gap between the two groups, while there is a huge gap in accessing external aid. Following from that, concern has been expressed with regard to some issues of importance to women, inter alia, health, aid

delivery, human rights and security. These sensitive matters should be addressed in accordance with the prevailing social, cultural and religious norms.

Given that women are the ones mostly affected by natural disasters, it is important that disaster risk management be designed to incorporate gender mainstreaming in the planning, implementation and evaluation processes. In this regard, the situation in Aceh has revealed that the absence of gender sensitive policy

TABLE: WOMEN INVOLVEMENT IN TSUNAMI EARLY WARNING SYSTEM RELATED ACTIVITIES IN INDONESIA

	PILLARS	COMPONENTS	PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN INVOLVEMENT
	Policy Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grand Design - Target Achievement - Evaluation Method 	Less than 1 %
	Operational Work	-	

financing mechanism for promoting effective disaster risk management in order to address women's needs better.

Pursuant to this, it is also important that in delivering their aid, donor agencies should incorporate priority criteria which ensure gender mainstreaming in accordance with the principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization and sustainability as stipulated in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

The Way Forward of the Gender Participation in Disaster Risk Management

Long before it was fashionable to talk about adverse impact of climate change, Indonesian women had begun to do their part in adapting to and helping to mitigate climate change as a form of disaster risk management through **traditional practices born of local wisdom**. This wisdom is part and parcel of the daily life of communities in remote areas. A good example is that of the Gayo-Sumatran community, which launch their annual farming cycle with a ritual called *munene*. Another example can be drawn from the **Tri Hita Karana tradition in Balinese culture** on the island of Bali. The tradition is based on the three main elements: namely, managing human activities with God, with other humans, and with the environment.

Being aware of the effect of climate change on human beings, particularly women and children, and realizing that women can serve as the driving force in the community, Indonesian women feel the need to respond to the challenge of climate change and contribute to a global regime of climate stability. For this purpose, the seven largest women mass organizations acted in concert to hold a Conference of Indonesian Women's Local Wisdom in Addressing the Global Climate Change (Adaptation and Mi

reforming these arrangements is possible as long as there is strong **political leadership** and **commitment** to do so. Even in some cases, women's leadership in anticipating disaster challenges in Indonesia is proven reliable and commendable.

4. H.E. Madam Ani Bambang Yudhoyono, 2007; “*Women as the Driving Force to Fight Climate Change*”; Keynote Speech the First Lady of the Republic of Indonesia at the Side event of COP – 13 UNFCCC Gender and Climate Change”.
5. UNFCA, 2007; Gender and Change in Tsunami – Affected Villages in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province.
6. *Gender and Climate Change*, <http://www.gencec.org/About.html>
- 7.