



Enhancing Gender Visibility in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change in the Caribbean

Country Assessment Report for Belize



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Published in Barbados

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List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
BCPR	Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
CDERA	Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency
CDI	Commonwealth Debt Initiative
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRMI	Caribbean Risk Management Initiative
CSO	Central Statistical Office
DHS	Department of Human Services
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (United States)
PAHO	Pan American Health Organisation
PAR	Pressure and Release Model
POWA	Productive Organisation for Women in Action
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWI	University of the West Indies
WIN	Women's Issues Network
YES	Youth Enhancement Services
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association



1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) which emanated from the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Japan, describes disaster risk as arising when hazards interact with physical, social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction [ISDR], 2005, p.1). The HFA further asserts that most hazards have hydrometeorological origins (ibid). In the Caribbean, increasing frequency of such hydrometeorological events, e.g. tropical cyclones, over the past decade has resulted in a marked rise in the level of hazards and risks to which communities are exposed. Belize's location in the Caribbean Basin means that it has been affected by this trend as well.

Belize has ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and is committed to sustainable development objectives including those outlined in the HFA. The HFA commitments include measures for integration of gender perspectives in “all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment, early warning, information management, and education and training” (ISDR 2005, p.4). HFA implementation therefore requires, inter alia, focus on women's inclusion in decision-making processes, and in preparedness, mitigation and response mechanisms for disaster risk management.

This report presents the results of the Caribbean Risk Management Initiative (CRMI) study in Belize, which included a survey of institutions with responsibility for disaster risk management and gender affairs. It fulfils the main objective of the regional study, which was to determine the structure and gender composition of these agencies, the extent of their awareness of gender issues and the incorporation of gender into their plans and procedures. The survey results are analyzed in the context of gender differences in vulnerability and risks. The second section outlines relevant socio-economic indicators that set the context. The third section contains responses from the survey of the institutions. The fourth section presents key issues, and the fifth section presents conclusions and recommendations. A list of references used is also included.

1.2. Objectives and analytical framework

The objectives of the study are to:

- assess whether the agencies with responsibility for disaster risk management and gender/women's affairs incorporate gender considerations in their plans and procedures; and
- identify measures to better incorporate gender analysis in disaster risk management policies and programmes for improved resilience.

The Pressure and Release (PAR) Model as explored in Twigg (2006, p.6) provides an analytical frame for reporting. Assessment of gender visibility is therefore done in terms of root causes, dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions that make up vulnerability.

1.3. Research methodology

The study included a literature review and elite interviews using the CRMI research instruments. Through the interviews, respondents identified the most common hazards in Belize and made an assessment of the sources of vulnerability, including gender. The information provided was supplemented with research to identify key issues that impede the full integration of gender in disaster risk management policies, plans and procedures, and also to identify measures that could be adopted to enhance gender sensitivity in disaster risk management. Interview topics included:

- the structure, legislative framework, policy and mandate as well as a gender breakdown of the staff;
- gender considerations incorporated in the organisation’s policies, plans and decision-making processes;
- interviewees’ perspectives on the vulnerability of Belize’s population, and on the role of gender in disaster management policies, plans and processes at the national level;
- the level of individual or institutional awareness of, and commitment to the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) Plan of Action, the HFA and ISDR priorities on incorporating gender in the national disaster risk management plan, policies and procedures;
- factors that need to be addressed in order to incorporate gender more effectively.

Table 1 indicates that all persons interviewed were heads or senior technical officers in their respective agencies and have been involved in disaster response through an agency or committee linked to the National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO). Only two of the persons interviewed were men.

Table 1: Agencies surveyed by mandate and gender of Head

Name of agency	Area of responsibility	Gender of Head
National Emergency Management Organisation	Disaster preparedness and response	Female
Women’s Department	Promoting/supporting women’s affairs	Female
Human Development Department	Supporting family affairs	Female
Belize Police Department	Domestic security	Male
The Belize Defence Force	Coordination of air transport logistics, assistance in search and rescue and in shelter security	Male
Belize Red Cross	Disaster response and preparedness	Female
Women’s Issues Network Belize	Gender affairs	Female
Productive Organisation for Women in Action	Gender affairs	Female
United Nations Development Programme	Capacity development	Female

1.4. History of disasters in Belize

Hurricane Mitch in 1999 was Belize's first hydrometeorological hazard since Hurricane Greta in 1978. Early disaster response systems in Belize were very much reactive with no structured mechanisms and very little inter-linkages with international conventions and strategies. In the wake of Hurricane Mitch, and in recognition of the emerging impact of climate change, disaster risk management has become an increasingly important national priority. Since Hurricane Mitch, Belize has been directly affected by the following named storms:

- Hurricane Keith (2000);
- Tropical Storm Chantal (2001);
- Hurricane Iris (2001);
- Hurricane Dean (2007);
- Tropical Storm Arthur (2008);

There were also localised flash floods in June 2008 which resulted in five deaths and significant losses of homes and household items in the Stann Creek District. The passage of Tropical Depression No. 16 on October 2008 also resulted in two weeks of widespread flooding in riverbank communities - mainly in the Belize, Cayo and Orange Walk Districts. This last event slowed economic activity countrywide for several days and led to significant damage to homes and loss of crops, livestock and productivity due to closure of schools and businesses. The event also disrupted transportation. A final assessment of the economic impact of the floods has reportedly not yet been undertaken.

Belize is highly vulnerable to hurricanes because of its geographical location. More than one-third of the population lives in five urban centres located on the coast (SIB, 2007, p.5), and a significant proportion resides in coastal villages, three of which are major tourism centres: Caye Caulker, Hopkins and Placencia Villages.

2. Socio-economic influences on gender and risk configuration

While there has been some attention to focusing on gender issues in health, family life and economic opportunities in Belize, little has been done on gender and disaster risk management. However there is overwhelming evidence from the socio-economic indicators that disasters have differential impacts on men and women.

One of the main indicators of the difference in vulnerability between men and women is employment/income. As seen in Table 2, the labour force participation rates for women in Belize are significantly lower than they are for men, and unemployment rates are higher. As a result, women make up slightly more than one-third of the workforce. With the general proportion of working age men and women almost equal (SIB, 2007, p.198), this suggests major livelihood challenges for women that may impede their ability to deal with and recover from disasters.

Labour force statistics for the 2004 to 2007 period (see Table 3) show that overall women made up an average of 34.2 percent of the working population over the period. In terms of the areas of occupation, more than 50 percent of all clerks, service workers and shop sales workers and more than 40 percent of legislators, senior officials, and managers and of professionals were women. On the other hand, men dominated in the defence force and in the agriculture, forest and fisheries sectors, where women's participation was marginal.

‘Although gender equality in Belize has made noticeable strides in recent years — many women now hold senior management posts in the public, private and NGO sector; females now outnumber males in the country’s secondary and tertiary institutions, for instance — gender roles operate from within a male-dominated and entrenched culture.’

Belize National Report to the World Summit on Environment, 2005.

Table 2: 2007 Unemployment and participation rates by gender and district

Area and district								
Survey point	Gender	National	North		Central		South	
			Corozal	Orange Walk	Belize	Cayo	Stann Creek	Toledo
Unemployment								
Apr. 2007	Male	5.8	1.5	4.6	8.1	4.1	6.2	10.2
	Female	13.1	8.3	16.6	10.1	11.2	19.3	30.5
Participation rates								
Apr. 2007	Male	77.9	83.5	79.7	75.9	75.2	76.8	82.0
	Female	45.8	40.9	44.9	53.9	38.1	55.2	25.9

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

Despite women's lower labour force participation rates, data from initiatives such as the Gender Equality Fund Small Grants Programme show that women in Belize are very active in the informal economic sectors and in community work.¹ Thus, an economic impact assessment of Hurricane Dean undertaken by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) showed that damage to backyard gardens and fruit trees seriously affected the cultivation and sale of fruits, which were some of the key sources of income for rural women and their families.

Table 3: Women's share of working population by occupation

Occupational category	2004	2005	2006	2007
Defence Force	7.4	9.1	3.7	(0.0)
Legislators senior officials and managers	43.5	41.3	43.2	46.9
Professionals	42.3	47.3	50.1	48.2
Technicians and associate professionals	51.3	51.3	47.4	49.3
Clerks	69.3	68.2	63.3	68.4
Service workers and shop sales workers	53.3	56.3	54.9	55.4
Agricultural forestry and fishery workers	3.3	3.1	4.3	5.7
Craft and related workers	15.9	15.6	11.7	12.1
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	4.5	9.0	5.9	8.2
Elementary occupations	31.1	31.1	36.9	34.1
Other	60.7	14.5	34.7	50.1
Total	33.8	34.2	33.6	35.3

Source: Derived from Data Provided by Statistical Institute of Belize, October 2008

Involvement of women in decision-making processes is one of the priorities for the CDERA Action Plan and the HFA. The interviews showed a fair distribution of women in decision-making positions within the gender and disaster management agencies, but the number of males was significantly larger.

Table 3 indicates that there are almost equal numbers of women and men in professional and technical positions. The majority of women are employed in basic occupations that make up the largest proportion of the labour force. Approximately 60 percent of working women are employed as service and shop sales workers and clerks, or in elementary occupations. Women also make up 18 to 20 percent of the labour force that are professionals, legislators, senior officials and managers.

¹ ECLAC (2007); GEF Evaluation Office and UNDP Evaluation Office, 2007, p.17-18

Table 4 shows average earnings of males and females which reflect inequality in earnings, and demonstrates that women are at a higher risk of poverty, as the proportion of women earning less than \$600 was significantly higher than the proportion of males. The proportion of women in the highest income bracket was 1.5 percentage points lower than the proportion of men in the same bracket. In addition the levels of the average, median and modal incomes were lower for women than those for men. Belize has fewer female-headed households than male-headed households.

Table 4: Employment by income brackets and gender

Income brackets	Males	Females
< \$600	22.3	29.6
\$600 to \$1,199	33.1	30.1
\$1,200 to \$1,799	12.7	13.2
\$1,800 to \$2,399	4.2	4.3
\$2,400 to \$2,879	2.0	2.4
\$2,500+	4.2	2.7
Not Stated	21.5	17.7
Mean	\$990	\$908
Median	\$768	\$710

Source: SIB 2007

The 2007 Abstract of Statistics shows that 10.6 percent of households are female-headed households (FHH) and 41.1 percent of households are male-headed households (MHH) (see p.205). This is consistent with data from the 2002 Country Poverty Assessment (CPA), which shows that the ratio of MHH to FHH is 3:1, but indicates that fewer FHH are poor and indigent.² Table 2-1 of the CPA also showed virtually no difference between the number of males and females recorded as poor. The report pointed to the need for more in-depth analysis of the links between poverty, income and household headship as the results appeared counter intuitive (p.24).

² See Country Poverty Assessment Table 2-3, page 24.

3. Institutional assessments

3.1. National Emergency Management Organisation

Profile, leadership and staffing

The National Emergency Management Organisation (NEMO) was established as a department in 2000, and its structure, functions and powers are enshrined in the Disaster Preparedness and Response Act, Cap. 245 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003. NEMO interviewees expressed their mandate as “the preservation of life and property”; but the Act makes extensive provisions for the organisation to lead disaster preparedness assessments, prepare mitigation and response plans, and coordinate disaster response activities. It also gives the National Coordinator a leading role which includes advising the political leadership on disaster issues. The key operating instrument is the National Disaster Preparedness Response Plan which is prepared annually for presentation to the Prime Minister in accordance with the Disaster Preparedness and Response Act. This plan guides the department’s disaster risk management operations throughout the year.

The department is based in the Ministry of Transport, Public Utilities, Communications and NEMO. Interviews were conducted with the Director, the first female and non-military National Coordinator to lead the organisation, and her male Deputy. Table 5 shows that apart from the Director, the entire technical and support staff of the department, and the majority of its volunteers, are males.

Table 5: NEMO personnel by gender

Staff/Volunteer	Women (#)	Women (%)	Men (#)	Men (%)
Director	1	100	0	0
Management	0	0	1	100
Technical	0	0	2	100
Support	0	0	9	100
Volunteers	15	27.3	40	72.7

Perspectives on Belize’s gender and risk configuration

NEMO interviewees see Belize as most often being threatened by hurricanes, floods and fires. They cited the rural sector as vulnerable because early warning systems are limited and community risk management structures are not well organised. They also indicated that the urban sector is vulnerable because of congestion, poor planning, and location of homes and communities in unsafe environments such as swamps. In response to urban vulnerability, the department is working with other stakeholders to introduce building codes that are effective and binding.

Interviewees noted that although disasters impact both men and women, women carry an extra burden because of their responsibilities for family care in planning and preparation for disasters. In comparison, men were concerned mainly with securing family and property. The interviewees also suggested that women feel pressured to ensure that their homes are returned to normalcy after a disaster. Some reports after Hurricane Dean indicated that the loss of family income had often led to greater tensions in the home, and as a result women experienced greater abuse (ECLAC, 2008, p.12).

NEMO maintains no sex-disaggregated data, but was of the view that other agencies collect these data. Their indication of loss of lives in the two most recent disasters is set out in Table 6.

Table 6: Fatalities of most recent disasters by gender

Disaster	Year	No. of Deaths		
		Male	Female	Total
Hurricane Iris	2003	9	2	11
Floods	2008	3	2	5

Gender focus

NEMO does not have a stated gender policy or strategy document. In accordance with the provisions of the Disaster Preparedness and Response Act, the National Coordinator has organised 12 operational committees in various government ministries or departments. Committee members are therefore mainly public officers, and their involvement is generally linked to their areas of responsibility and expertise. Interviewees indicated that NEMO staff members try to be gender sensitive in the execution of their duties and support this conclusion with anecdotes of male staff members being more proactive in ensuring that women's needs are provided for in shelter planning.

The interviewees also recognised the importance of public information and education campaigns, and while there is no discrimination against any specific group while responding to disasters, they do not differentiate between the needs of men and women. Nevertheless, the NEMO officials indicated that women and children are given priority during evacuation and that every effort is made to keep families together.

The NEMO Secretariat liaises closely with the Ministry of Human Development, the Department of Human Services, the Ministry of Health, the Women's Department and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) on gender affairs. It also collaborates regularly with the Red Cross, CDERA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United States Agency for International Development/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) primarily on general disaster responses rather than addressing the gender dimensions of disaster risk management.

The NEMO interviewees were familiar with international policy statements, and particularly with the HFA. They expressed the view that these should be made relevant to respond to the local realities and that some elements of the protocol are already incorporated within Belize's disaster response framework.

3.2. Women's Department

Department's profile

The Women's Department was established in 1986 and has an official mandate of 'promoting gender equality and equity and thereby enabling women to be actively involved and enjoy all the benefits of development'. The Department is a part of the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation, but has no legislation that directly empowers it. It administers the Domestic Violence Act, 2007.

Perspectives on Belize's gender and risk configuration

The representative from the Women's Department's viewed female public officers as being more affected by disasters than their male counterparts because of their need to respond simultaneously to professional responsibilities and care for their families. She cited female police officers and nurses as being especially affected in this way. During a hurricane emergency, teachers and public officers, a high proportion of whom are women, form the core of shelter managers.

The Department's response highlighted differences in perceptions of men and women about gender roles during disaster responses. Men are viewed as focusing more on the security of their homes whilst women deal with food preparation, the care of children and psychosocial issues. In addition, the Department representative perceives that women take the risk of a disaster more seriously than men and are therefore generally better prepared.

The most recent disasters cited were Hurricanes Iris (2001) and Dean (2007). In the case of Hurricane Dean, damage sustained by the papaya industry negatively impacted on women especially because they made up a larger proportion of that workforce. The representative's experience in working with individuals who had suffered hurricane-related damage and household losses suggested that the impact was greater on women.

The Department breaks down statistics by family rather than gender. The officer was not aware of any agency that regularly produced sex-disaggregated data on disaster impacts. The officer also reported that the Department had not undertaken nor commissioned any studies on the gender aspects of disaster risk management, but would be interested in the findings of any such studies.

Policy and coordination mechanisms

The Women's Department's work on policy development, legislation and measures to improve the gender focus in disaster risk management has been mainly internal and informal. The officer was not aware of a gender strategy or policy within NEMO or the Police Department.

On matters of gender and disaster risk management, the Department collaborates with the Department of Human Services within its parent ministry. It was her perception that the main obstacle to integrating gender in disaster risk management policies, plans and procedures is the higher priority given to other areas of work.

The interviewee suggested that integration efforts should be led by CDERA and coordinated by women's commissions in the region. She had attended the 2005 Regional Disaster Risk Management Forum and was familiar with CDERA's Action Plan for gender mainstreaming. The Action Plan is viewed as a high priority for the Department. The interviewee also observed that there are no clear indicators on gender and disaster risk management within the National Gender Policy. The Women's Department will work on its internal gender policy within the next two years.

3.3. Police Department

Profile, leadership and staffing

Following on from an earlier Constabulary Force, the British Honduras Police Force was established in 1902, and in 1973 was renamed the Belize Police Force. The respondent indicated that its official mandate is to maintain law and order. The Force operates within the Ministry of National Security and is empowered by the Police Act, Cap. 138 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000-2003.

The assessment revealed that data is not sex-disaggregated in the Police Force. The organisation's leadership and senior management is almost 100 percent male with women making up approximately 10 percent of the Force. It is publicly recognised that the recent promotion of a female police officer to the rank of Deputy Commissioner was a first in the Force's history, but that officer has now retired.

Perspectives on Belize's gender and risk configuration

The representative of the Police Force identified floods, fires, hurricanes and bird flu as the main hazard threats to Belize. He saw vulnerabilities as dependent on the disaster type and viewed children in the rural and urban areas, and urban women and single parents as the social groups most at risk. With respect to the role of men and women in disaster management, the respondent was of the view that women on the force were assigned to 'lighter' duties where they were less exposed to (physical) danger. On the other hand, the interviewee saw men on the force taking on the more difficult responsibilities of securing families' homes and of facilitating transportation to higher ground. However, this view contradicts the perspectives of female interviewees on the differences in roles of men and women in responding to disasters.

The interviewee stated that they maintain law and order in hurricane shelters as part of national disaster response activities. It was reported that under such overcrowded circumstances the police often have to deal with domestic misunderstandings between couples. The respondent reported that other men sometimes intervene in such situations or take action only when necessary. Interestingly, this view is also different from the perspectives of the women interviewed who generally saw men's responses in these situations as inadequate.

The Department maintains statistics on violence by sex, age, occupation and address, date of birth and whether the victim or perpetrator is an adult or a minor. However, the disaggregation of data by nationality and sex has only recently been undertaken and data collection methods are only now being adjusted to fully accommodate this change.

Gender focus

The Police Department has no gender policy. The interviewee indicated that this supports the practice of career advancement based on performance. He further expressed concerns over the potential impact of a gender policy in an environment where any special considerations for female over male officers could present challenges for policy administration. From this response, it was clear that addressing gender considerations was interpreted as adopting measures that favour women over men.

The respondent indicated that the role of the Police Force in disaster management is to support NEMO's activities, and stated this as the rationale for not having gender considerations incorporated into policies. He indicated that police officers are assigned tasks in relation to the nature of the disaster, and the assignment is based on the availability of work as scheduled on the roster, with no consideration of gender.

The interviewee also reported that the Police Force does, indeed, promote gender integration through internal training and education programmes. In his view, significant progress had been made in the Police Force, and men and women were now treated more equally. Previously there had been a tendency to assign clerical duties to female police officers, which reduced their career mobility, however this was changing.

The Police Officer was not familiar with CDERA's Action Plan, the Comprehensive Disaster Management Strategy, HFA or ISDR. He indicated that there is no regular interface between the Police Force and the Women's Department and also indicated that the female Deputy Commissioner who had recently retired, had been the sole liaison with the Women's Department, and a new person had not yet been assigned. He also said he was unaware of any specific legislation or policy to promote equal opportunities for men and women in the wider society.

3.4. Other national agencies

Profiles of other agencies

This section presents information on four other national agencies interviewed. These included a government department and three non-governmental organisations (NGOs) each with responsibility in disaster risk management or gender affairs:

- i. The **Belize Red Cross** is an NGO established in 1983. The current Director is female. The agency's mandate is to 'relieve suffering' and its operations are guided by seven fundamental principles. These include humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. The Belize Red Cross reports to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.
- ii. The **Women's Issues Network (WIN)** Belize is an NGO established in 1993 and has a mandate to 'facilitate, advocate and coordinate mechanisms for empowerment of women.'
- iii. The **Productive Organisation for Women in Action (POWA)** is an NGO established in 2003. Its mandate is 'protecting women, families and communities against gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS through outreach, education and advocacy.'

Legal framework: The Red Cross is governed by the Belize Red Cross Society Act whilst the other two NGOs are guided by the Non-Governmental Organisation Act.

- iv. The **Department of Human Services (DHS)** is headed by a female director and was established around 1941. The mandate of the DHS is to provide social support and social welfare services, especially to the most vulnerable population groups. The Department's emphasis is on families and children.

Both the DHS (through its parent Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation) and the Belize Red Cross are member agencies of NEMO. The role of the DHS in NEMO is to support the Ministry of Human Development as the agency responsible for leading the Emergency Relief and Supplies Committee. The Belize Red Cross has this as its core mandate and is usually among the first agencies to respond after a disaster strikes.

Perspectives on Belize's gender and risk configuration

Generally, the respondents from these four agencies perceived that there were significant differences in gender roles in disaster risk management in Belize. They felt that women were more aware of and responsive to disaster threats than men because women bear a greater responsibility for the care of their families. The representatives also saw men as taking on roles in a disaster which were suited to their physical strength. For example, they said that men often came together to clean their communities and repair their homes. This view was also shared by one male respondent from the official disaster management agencies.

Three of the four respondents indicated that women had suffered greater economic losses than men in the recent disasters. In contrast to these views, the representative from the Red Cross viewed disasters as having an equal impact on men and women and identified children as being the most adversely affected. This individual also perceived rural women as being less informed than urban women, and therefore more at risk from disasters.

The Red Cross representative reported that the agency collects sex-disaggregated data on the impact of disasters. However, neither WIN Belize nor the Department of Human Development follows this practice. Representatives of these agencies were also unaware of any other agency that collected sex-disaggregated data. None of the agencies have conducted, or commissioned research or studies on the role

of gender in disaster risk management, but all four of them expressed an interest in such studies and a willingness to participate in efforts to integrate gender more effectively in disaster risk management.

Participation in policy work and coordination

With the exception of the Belize Red Cross, which cited collaboration on the National HIV/AIDS Policy, none of the other agencies had worked on policies to integrate gender. They saw the challenges of integrating gender in disaster risk management as:

- breaking cultural and ethnic barriers;
- limitations in mobility and transportation;
- human resource limitations;
- lack of technological resources to distribute information adequately;
- low priority level attached.

In discussing strategies to integrate gender in disaster risk management policies, the representative of the Belize Red Cross suggested that efforts should be undertaken at the community level to solicit input from key stakeholders. Representatives of two of the agencies suggested that policy action should be initiated by an agency other than their own. There was also the suggestion that the Ministry of Human Development and NEMO should lead in the development of such a policy and process. Only one agency representative responded positively to a suggestion that it could initiate work in this area, indicating that there was reluctance among the others to address the issue.

Partnerships

The Belize Red Cross representative reported that their agency collaborates with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF and the National AIDS Commission in addressing gender and disaster risk issues. The agency had also recently made a commitment to the Global Alliance on AIDS and Domestic Violence to focus on gender inequalities, and youth and crime.

The WIN Belize representative reported that the agency collaborates with the Women's Department and with other NGOs on disaster risk management. These NGOs include PLENTY Belize, the YWCA, FAJINA Women's Group and Youth Enhancement Services (YES). The main form of collaboration was in providing relief to disaster victims.

Only one representative of the four NGO agencies interviewed was familiar with CDERA's Action Plan. The WIN Belize representative reported that the agency sent a representative to the 2005 CDERA regional workshop, but that little had been done to implement the Action Plan at the national level. However the agency was committed to encouraging discussions on implementing the Action Plan with NGOs.

3.5. United Nations agencies

Interviews were conducted with representatives of three of the four (4) member organisations of the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Belize. These were the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO). Interviews with individuals representing these agencies indicated that the Belize UNCT provides critical support for the national disaster risk management mechanism. During and after a disaster, the United Nations agencies work at two levels: as a joint response unit; and as individual agencies to support their respective stakeholders. For example, PAHO supported the Ministry of Health's post-disaster response to prevent outbreaks of water-borne diseases.

The responses of these representatives showed that they were more aware of the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in organisational structures, policies and procedures than their national counterparts. As a result, the United Nations agencies are better poised to support national efforts to integrate gender in disaster risk management policies, procedures and decision-making processes.

Positions, agency profiles, leadership and staffing

The UNCT representatives indicated that each agency reports first to its regional offices, then to their headquarters. For example, the UNDP Belize country office reports first to its main office in El Salvador which is in turn accountable to the Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean. The agencies' mandates are as follows:

- UNICEF: Advocate for the provision of children's rights, help achieve basic needs of children and create wider opportunities for children to attain their potential;
- UNDP: Assist the government's national capacity development efforts;
- PAHO: Promote/support strengthening of the national health system.

Interviews with these agency representatives showed that there were equal numbers of men and women on staff, which may reflect United Nations gender equality policies in staffing. All of the United Nations country offices in Belize were currently headed by women and at least two-thirds of their technical staff is female.

Perspectives on Belize's gender and risk configuration

Collectively, representatives of these United Nations agencies cited the following risks to Belize:

- hurricanes and storms;
- floods;
- drought;
- oil spills.

They also reported that the most vulnerable groups were the urban poor, single females, children, women and residents of Belize City. The main vulnerabilities cited were:

- threats to shelter as a result of the location of these groups on the coast;
- the poor conditions of houses;
- food insecurity.

On the matter of differences in the impact of disasters on men and women, one United Nations respondent cited gender-based violence as a risk when a disaster strikes. Other factors cited that would lead to differences in the impact of disasters on women and men included:

- Significant damage to the fisheries industry, in which males are the majority of employees;
- Inadequate access of women in rural areas to information on disasters;
- Unmet needs of lactating mothers for privacy while in shelters.

The respondents also acknowledged that gender considerations are not generally incorporated in risk reduction strategies and consequently national data are not usually disaggregated by sex. It was noted that United Nations agencies rely on data provided by national authorities. The PAHO respondent highlighted the attempts of that agency to support the Ministry of Health in collecting, storing, and disseminating gender disaggregated statistics.

The responses from the United Nations agency representatives indicated that when there is a disaster, the first point of collaboration for the agencies is with NEMO. They also work with regional and global United Nations bodies to secure assistance for Belize as needed from the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

They also reported that the United Nations agencies integrate gender aspects into their programmes, but that this was not the practice of national counterparts. Both PAHO and UNICEF make provisions for gender differences during a disaster strike, such as providing for the needs of pregnant and lactating mothers, and prioritising sanitation and nutrition for children. The interviews also revealed that the first UNCT joint post-disaster initiative targeted to women was undertaken by UNICEF and UNDP. This initiative provided micro-credit to women affected by Hurricane Dean in the Corozal District in order to restore their income earning capacity.

3.6. Summary of issues identified

The interviews highlighted significant differences in people's perceptions about the role of men and women in disaster management, as well as how disaster impacts on both. The perspectives of male and female respondents were often quite different. Most female respondents felt that women had the greater burden and responsibility before, during and after disasters, and that men were less responsive when there was the threat of a disaster. On the other hand, men generally felt that men were more responsive and that the role of men was more important. Analysis of statements of several interviewees showed that both groups believed that the role of their own sex was more demanding than that of the other sex during a disaster.

Nevertheless there was some agreement that women and children faced certain risks. It was also felt that rural women were among the most vulnerable because they had limited access to information, training and employment; and fewer resources to restore normalcy to their families in the short term. The responses also point to some awareness that there is increased risk of domestic abuse when families are in shelters or experience prolonged stress from economic losses associated with a disaster.

The interviews also confirmed that efforts to integrate a gender perspective in disaster risk management are very limited. Only one NGO (Red Cross) had done any significant work to integrate gender, and the staff members of most of the other agencies were not aware of the relevant frameworks. The reasons given point to cultural barriers; human, technical and financial resource limitations; inadequate legislative provisions; lack of training of staff in the relevant agencies to implement such a process; and the low priority given to the issue. The United Nations agencies had more experience in this area and seemed better positioned than their local counterparts to lead the process to integrate gender in disaster risk management.

4. Disaster risk and gender visibility

4.1. Vulnerability and risk management

As indicated earlier, disaster risk management has become an increasingly important national priority. Hurricanes and tropical storms which affect coastal villages reduce earnings from tourism. The location of many communities in coastal areas that are prone to flooding and wind damage from hurricanes and tropical storms also increases their vulnerability. Other vulnerable communities are those located along river banks in the flood plains, since these communities depend on agriculture and livestock production for food security, and as their main source of livelihood. Hurricanes and floods erode their income and reduce food security.

Poor housing is also a source of vulnerability in Belize. Although there have been improvements in the quality of housing with reinforced concrete being used in place of wood and thatch, some groups still remain at high risk because of poor quality housing. Women form the majority of persons living in poor housing, and they are especially vulnerable because of their lower levels of income and their higher levels of unemployment. Inadequate enforcement of building codes and lack of access to appropriate information and resources also increase the risks for both men and women in these situations.

Lack of a gender sensitive Disaster Risk Management Policy in Belize also increases vulnerability. Without a gender sensitive policy, the work of NEMO and its partners is likely to have a less effective impact on disaster mitigation and response. A gender sensitive policy is therefore needed to guide the work of all staff and stakeholders.

4.2. Gender focus

Belize ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992. A National Gender Policy was also approved in 2002 which outlines national progress in promoting gender awareness. While there have been important initiatives, none have specifically promoted the integration of gender in disaster risk management. The report of the National Women's Commission (2002, p.1-2) highlights some key achievements but confirms this reality. Among the achievements were:

- Successful advocacy by various NGOs in support of key legislation protecting women's rights in the 1980s.
- Evolution from the establishment of a Women's Desk in 1978 to a Women's Bureau in 1981 and then a Women's Department in 1986 (then Department of Women's Affairs).
- Establishment of the National Women's Commission in 1982.
- Report analysing the Situation of Women by the Government of Belize in 1994.

- Government and NGO collaboration on a “Strategic Plan for Gender Equity and Equality in Belize” in 1998.
- Approval of a National Gender Policy and passing a number of laws to improve women’s rights and conditions, which were developments included in Belize’s Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Plan of Action (2004).
- Inclusion of marital rape and habitual sexual offences as offences in the Criminal Code Act.
- Recognition of common law unions of five years or more where neither party is married to anyone else for the purposes of inheritance and property rights.
- Provision for economic valuation of home and/or child care in case of divorce.
- Legislation to prevent Trafficking in Persons.
- Preparation of a Gender Budget – an analysis of the fiscal budget.

Another important initiative reported was capacity building of the Central Statistical Office/the Statistical Institute of Belize to consistently produce gender disaggregated data. This was the result of a project funded through the UK/Department For International Development (DFID) Commonwealth Debt Initiative (CDI).³

³ The Commonwealth Debt Initiative is a debt forgiveness programme through which loan repayments to the United Kingdom are diverted towards agreed programmes in governance and poverty reduction.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Despite the approval of the National Gender Policy in 2002, there is still general lack of awareness about the Policy, lack of clarity about gender concepts such as the difference between sex and gender, and limited efforts to integrate gender in national policies and programmes. This situation poses a major impediment to Belizeans understanding how disasters impact women and men differently, and the increased vulnerability of women in certain situations. Responses of some male and female interviewees suggested lack of clarity about the difference between ‘gender blind’, ‘gender neutral’ and ‘gender equity’. There were also misconceptions as some stakeholders equated gender with advocacy for women only. One person interviewed reflected concern that measures adopted to improve women’s conditions will be at the expense of men.

Analysis of the socio-economic data however clearly shows that there are major differences in the social and economic status of men and women, and gender must therefore be used to guide all policies and programmes. The interviews also showed that different roles and responsibilities are assigned to each sex but this information has generally not been used to guide disaster risk management practices.

Awareness of the HFA and CDERA Plan of Action was limited among most representatives of the NGOs and government agencies. It was greater among United Nations staff consulted and one international NGO, the Red Cross.

Belize currently has no policies or legislation to support the integration of gender in disaster risk management, and there were no immediate plans to address this among the main disaster agencies, though there is interest among stakeholders to learn.

Partnerships for Disaster Risk Management exist between various groups of stakeholders such as government agencies, international agencies and NGOs. Several NGOs are already involved in the disaster risk management structure through NEMO. However, neither the NGOs nor any of the agencies consulted indicated that they have activities to ensure that gender issues are taken into consideration in disasters.

Sex-disaggregated data are available though the Statistical Institute of Belize and the Police Department, but this has not been adopted as the normal practice in all agencies, including those responsible for disaster risk management. There is also a need to use sex-disaggregated data to guide the development of gender-sensitive policies. In addition, gender needs to be mainstreamed in all national plans, budgets and development programmes to reduce specific vulnerabilities of, and risks to men and women.

5.2. Recommendations

1. NEMO, the National Women's Commission, the Women's Department and CDERA should collaborate in organising workshops to equip stakeholders with the skills to mainstream gender in national policies, and in the programmes of relevant stakeholder groups in all sectors.
2. WIN Belize and the Belize Red Cross should collaborate to provide training to the wider NGO community to enable these organisations to become more involved in promoting awareness of the importance of gender in disaster risk management programmes.
3. Research should be expanded and practical approaches shared to mainstream gender in national plans and strategies.
4. UNCT members should continue to work with their national counterparts to incorporate gender in the disaster risk management mechanisms and should include the collection of sex-disaggregated data on disasters.
5. A pilot initiative to integrate gender in disaster risk management policies, plans and procedures should be undertaken with the participation of international agencies, national gender and disaster risk management agencies, and national NGOs.
6. The National Gender Policy should be updated to include a commitment to gender mainstreaming in a National Disaster Risk Management Policy that should be formulated.
7. Legislative changes should be made to support implementation of this amendment in the Gender Policy. NEMO and the Women's Department should be empowered to contribute to amendment of the policy, and tasked with monitoring the policy and the new legislation.

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