

Expert Group Meeting on
'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'

Convened by UN-Women
Virtual Meeting
11 – 14 October 2021

CONCEPT NOTE

EGM/CSW/2022/CN
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ENGLISH only

I. Background and objectives

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (2021- 2024), the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2022 will consider “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” as its priority theme. To take stock of current research and practice and assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN-Women will convene an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the priority theme to be virtually from 11 – 14 October 2021.
2. With the overall objective of accelerating the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, the EGM aims to take stock of current research, prepare an analysis of policies and practices and make informed, practical and action-oriented recommendations on advancing gender equality through holistic and integrated climate change, environment and disaster risk reduction strategies and initiatives that uphold rights, build resilience, and foster lasting green recovery. The EGM will assess the interlinkages of the gender dimensions of the applicable climate, environment and disaster risk reduction normative frameworks, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Convention on Biological Diversity, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and their synergies with the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. The EGM will, *inter alia*:
 - Explore the importance of an **integrated gender-responsive approach** to climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes;
 - Identify policies and programmes that build the **resilience** of women and girls to climate change, environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and disaster risks;
 - Explore how to respect, promote and protect the **human rights**, including the **right to a healthy environment**,¹ of **all women and girls in their diversity** in the context of climate change, environment and disasters;
 - Examine the constraints on the **voice and agency** of women and girls, including **women human rights defenders**, in climate, environment and disaster risk reduction arenas and identify pathways to their full, equal and meaningful participation, leadership and decision making;
 - Assess the constraints and opportunities for gender-responsive **financing** for climate, environment and disaster-related policies and programming;
 - Explore how a **just transition** to net zero green and blue economies can advance gender equality and women’s empowerment while building climate, environmental and disaster risk resilience, including through access to decent green jobs and climate-resilient livelihoods;

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment (A/73/188).

- Identify gender-responsive strategies, policies and programmes for advancing **sustainable consumption and production**, including **sustainable energy transitions** and fostering **regenerative food and agricultural systems**;
 - Assess how women’s and girls’ **unpaid care and domestic work** increases in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters, and even in the policies and programmes intended to address them, and propose sustainable solutions that recognize, reduce and redistribute this burden;
 - Consider **sexual and gender-based violence** in the context of climate, environmental and disaster risks, and propose targeted responses in policies and programmes;
 - Identify the gaps in **gender data, statistics, information and knowledge** needed for gender-responsive climate, environment and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes;
 - Explore **accountability mechanisms** for ensuring the development, financing and implementation of gender-responsive climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes; and
 - Develop action-oriented and evidenced-based **recommendations**, based on **good practices and lessons learned**, that accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.
4. The EGM builds on the priority themes of the preceding sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking note of the agreed conclusions of the sixty-second and sixty-third sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, which underscore the need for gender-responsive strategies to address climate change and environmental challenges and to support the resilience and adaptive capacities of women and girls (E/2018/27, E/CN.6/2019/L.3).

II. Global normative and policy frameworks

5. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasizes that environmental degradation affects all, but particularly women’s and girls’ poverty, health, and livelihoods, foremost that of rural and indigenous women. It further notes that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, especially in industrialized countries, are at the root of global environmental degradation, poverty, and inequalities.² The Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2020/3) on the twenty-fifth anniversary of its adoption in 1995 calls for gender-responsive policies, programmes and funding for effective natural resource management, disaster risk reduction, environmental governance and climate action within the framework of a just transition towards climate stabilization and biodiversity conservation with decent work and social protection for all and investment in the care economy.
6. Together with the Platform for Action, the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals make an integral link between sustainable development, gender equality and women’s

² *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II, particularly paras 34, 35, 246, 247.

and girls' empowerment, with a comprehensive agenda to address environmental and climate challenges. Of particular relevance are commitments to achieve food security and nutrition (Goals 2); recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection (Goal 5); promote access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene (Goal 6); ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (Goal 7); provide sustainable transport and safe public spaces for women (Goal 11); sustainably manage and efficiently use natural resources and rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies (Goal 12); increase women's capacity for effective climate change planning and management (Goal 13); and sustainably manage and protect marine, coastal, and terrestrial ecosystems and halt biodiversity loss (Goal 14 and 15).

7. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in its General Recommendation No. 34 (2016) makes the important link between environmental degradation and the human rights of rural women, and underscores State obligations to uphold rural women's rights to land and natural resources, health, education, employment, housing, water, sanitation, energy and participation (CEDAW/C/GC/34). CEDAW General Recommendation No. 37 (2018) emphasizes the disproportionate impact that climate change and disasters have on women and girls and calls for the protection and promotion their human rights in relation to disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation through measures such as reducing fossil fuel use, trans-boundary pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and promoting the transition to sustainable energy (CEDAW/C/GC/37).
8. Under the Rio Conventions, gender equality, women's empowerment and the enjoyment of human rights have been specifically mandated through mainstreaming gender equality considerations in key processes and mechanisms and working towards gender balance in representation. Gender action plans have been adopted and are being implemented, including the Convention on Biological Diversity 2015-2020 Gender Plan of Action, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Gender Plan of Action (2017), and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Gender Action Plan (2018).
9. The Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015, FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1) formally recognized the intersection of climate change and gender equality, women's empowerment, and realization of their rights including the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development. Implementing the Rio Conventions and the Paris Agreement is indispensable for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
10. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 expanded on the mandate of its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework of Action, to integrate gender perspectives into all policies, plans and decision-making processes by recognizing gender considerations as a priority for enhanced disaster preparedness and recognizing women as key players in disaster risk reduction. Sendai recognizes that disaster risk reduction requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation by calling for the integration

of gender, age, disability, and cultural perspectives in all policies and practices, and the promotion of women and youth leadership. It also recognizes women's participation as critical to effectively managing disaster risk and designing, resourcing and implementing gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction policies, plans and programmes. Sendai calls for measures to be taken to empower women for preparedness as well as to build their capacity to secure livelihoods in post-disaster situations (A/RES/69/283).

III. Background and key issues

11. Since the Rio Conventions and the Beijing Platform were adopted, land degradation, biodiversity loss, global warming, pollution, disasters, and zoonotic pandemics such as COVID-19 have accelerated and intensified into widespread and interlinked environmental crises that have affected all of humanity and nature, but with deeper impacts on women and girls, and especially rural, indigenous, and migrant women and girls. Such trends are driven by historic and human-caused global patterns of unsustainable production, consumption and land use, exploitation of marine, coastal, and terrestrial resources, wealth accumulation and the destructive dependency on fossil fuels, in particular in industrialized countries. These patterns are intrinsically gendered and perpetuate the intersecting race and class inequalities (E/CN.6/2020/3).³
12. Human actions, which threaten more species with global extinction now than ever before, are resulting in a disastrous loss of biodiversity and endangering the earth's interconnected ecosystems, human life, settlements, sources of food, clean water and air, and demolishing natural defences against extreme weather and natural disasters. Globally, indigenous peoples, local communities, the urban poor, and women and girls – who are the most affected by land and resource tenure insecurity and environmental degradation – disproportionately suffer the effects of biodiversity loss.⁴
13. Land degradation, caused to a great extent by rapid expansion and unsustainable management of agricultural and grazing lands, is occurring in all parts of the world and most of all in least developed countries. Land degradation exacerbates biodiversity loss and puts ecosystem services vital to all life on Earth and ensuring human well-being at risk.⁵ Drylands, which comprises around 40 percent of the world's land area, mostly affects the very poor, with women and children most impacted by drought, food insecurity, displacement, and other consequences.⁶
14. Linked to degradation of land and water ecosystems, biodiversity destruction and climate change, pollution is the greatest environmental cause of disease and an estimated 9 million premature deaths in 2015, especially affecting the poor, women and children in low- and middle-income countries, and minorities and the marginalized in all countries.⁷ Most air

³ IPBES (2020). Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Bonn, Germany.

⁴ IPBES (2019). Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. IPBES secretariat, Bonn, Germany.

⁵ IPBES (2018). The IPBES assessment report on land degradation and restoration. Montanarella, L., Scholes, R., and Brainich, A. (eds.). Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, Bonn, Germany.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Philip J. Landrigan, "The Lancet Commission on pollution and health", *The Lancet*, vol. 391, no. 10119 (February 2018).

pollution—a major contributor to climate change—is due to fossil fuel combustion in high- and middle-income countries and burning of biomass in low-income countries.⁸

15. Now, the IPCC Working Group 1 Report on the Physical Science Basis of the Sixth Assessment has issued a ‘code red for humanity’.⁹ Global warming is affecting every region on Earth, with many of the changes becoming irreversible. In its Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, IPCC reaffirms that social justice and equity must be core aspects of climate-resilient development pathways that will be difficult to achieve without redistributive measures to overcome uneven power structures and entrenched social inequalities,¹⁰ including gender inequalities which jeopardize the realization of women’s rights, resilience, livelihoods, and wellbeing.
16. Gendered drivers and impacts of environmental degradation and climate change amplify existing gender inequalities. In many contexts women’s dependence on and unequal access to the environment – land, water, and other natural resources – and public services and infrastructure, including energy, transport, water, and sanitation, mean that they are disproportionately affected by climate change, environmental degradation and disasters. Further, women’s unpaid care and domestic workloads intensify due to the outmigration of men, or when women and their families are obliged to seek alternative livelihoods or migrate as a consequence of devastating environmental and climate impacts or disasters on livelihoods and income security.¹¹
17. Women’s capacities to withstand and recover from natural disasters are also strongly affected by gender inequalities. In most disasters, mortality amongst women is significantly higher than that of men and women’s poverty increases in disaster-prone areas. These impacts on women are compounded by their limited mobility and the structural barriers and discriminatory social norms that continue to constrain women’s decision-making power in households and political participation in communities and more broadly.¹²
18. Women and girls are taking climate and environment action everywhere and evidence shows that women’s participation and leadership make it more effective, for example, in natural resource management this lead to better governance and conservation¹³ and application of gender quotas make forest conservation and climate interventions more effective and lead to more equal sharing of benefits.¹⁴ Further, emerging evidence suggests women’s representation in national parliaments can lead countries to adopt more stringent

⁸ International Energy Agency (2016). *Weo-2016 Special Report Energy and Air Pollution*. Paris, France.

⁹ United Nations, “[Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report ‘Code Red for Humanity’, Stressing ‘Irrefutable’ Evidence of Human Influence](#),” press release, 9 August 2021.

¹⁰ IPCC, The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) (Geneva, 2021); IPCC, Climate Change 2021: I The Physical Science Basis. Summary for Policymakers (Geneva, 2021); and IPCC, Global Warming of 1.5C, available at <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

¹¹ Sierra Club and UN Women (2018). “Women on the Move in a Changing Climate: A discussion paper on gender, climate & mobility.” Oakland, CA and Washington, D.C.; IFPRI (2019), *Global Food Policy Report*; UN Women (2019). *Progress of the World’s Women 2019-2020. Families in a Changing World*. New York.

¹² UN Women (2016). *Leveraging Co-Benefits Between Gender Equality and Climate Action for Sustainable Development*. New York.

¹³ Leisher, C., Temsah, G., Booker, F. et al. Does the gender composition of forest and fishery management groups affect resource governance and conservation outcomes? A systematic map. *Environ Evid* 5, 6 (2016) doi:10.1186/s13750-016-0057-8.

¹⁴ Cook, N.J., Grillos, T. & Andersson, K.P. Gender quotas increase the equality and effectiveness of climate policy interventions. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 9, 330–334 (2019) doi:10.1038/s41558-019-0438-4.

climate change policies, according to a study across 91 countries.¹⁵ Yet women's voice, agency, and participation are under-supported, under-resourced, under-valued and under-recognized. Furthermore, women's grassroots organizations, with their vast knowledge of the specific needs of women, girls and communities, are key to combating climate change and environmental degradation and building resilience at the local, national and global levels. Yet too often these groups face multiple barriers from shrinking democratic space, diminishing funding, and threats to their physical security as they defend land, environmental and indigenous peoples' rights.

19. Gender mainstreaming is crucial in climate, environment and disaster risk reduction frameworks through the development of coherent, convergent and coordinated gender-responsive national policies, programmes and actions that will lead to joint and mutually reinforcing national and local implementation. Gender mainstreaming requires integration of a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and budgets in tandem with ensuring women's meaningful participation and leadership at all levels. This is critical to address the needs and priorities of women and girls, overcoming the multiple and intersecting forms of inequalities and discrimination they face in relation to the drivers and impacts of environmental degradation and climate change and ensuring that women and girls equally engage in and benefit from policies and programmes and their implementation.
20. Gender-responsive financing instruments and allocations are central to these efforts. Payment for ecological services, conservation credit instruments and green gender bonds are among the many financing options that are being discussed for financing gender-responsive environmental and biodiversity conservation initiatives.¹⁶ While four of the main public climate finance mechanisms—the Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds (CIF), Green Climate Fund (GCF), and Global Environment Facility (GEF) – now articulate gender considerations to differing degrees, the challenge is to enable equitable access for women's organizations, including those working at the grassroots level, and to ensure their role in design, decision-making, implementation and monitoring. Yet, persistent barriers impede their access to and decision-making in climate finance.¹⁷
21. A just transition is needed to regenerative, net zero blue and green economies geared toward ecological and social well-being through climate stabilization, biodiversity conservation and, at the same time, decent work and social protection for all alongside investments in the care economy ([E/CN.6/2020/3](#)). In specific areas, such as energy, food systems or transportation, gender-responsive actions should be taken to reverse decades of environmental degradation and trends that worsen the gender impacts of climate change and disasters, while simultaneously creating employment and livelihood opportunities for women, facilitating access to goods and essential services, and attaining an adequate standard of living and greater income equality for the full and equal enjoyment of human

¹⁵ Astghik Maviskalyan and Yashar Tarvedi, "[Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make difference?](#)" *European Journal of Political Economy*, Volume 56, January 2019, Pages 151-164.

¹⁶ [The Biodiversity Finance Initiative](#).

¹⁷ Liane Schalatek (2020). [Climate Finance Fundamentals 10: Gender and Climate Finance](#), Heinrich Boll Stiftung.

rights. This means moving away from the linear ‘take, make and discard’ model of resource extraction and unsustainable production and consumption towards a circular economy that restores, regenerates, is resourceful and minimizes waste.

22. Gender equality considerations are integrated across much of the 2030 Agenda with the significant exception of the environmental SDGs, which lack gender-specific indicators: on water and sanitation (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7) infrastructure and industry (SDG 9), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), and marine and terrestrial ecosystems (SDGs 14 and 15).¹⁸ The dearth of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics on climate, environment and related areas is well known. Yet, transformations can only be achieved with increased investments in the collection, analysis and dissemination of such gender data and statistics to undergird the meaningful integration of gender-responsive environmental, climate and disaster risk reduction evidence and analysis into policies and programmes, including in monitoring and evaluation and accountability frameworks that are essential to evaluate the impacts on and benefits for women and girls.¹⁹

IV. Profile of participants

23. The EGM will be attended by approximately 20 experts in the field, appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations, in accordance with the objectives identified above.
24. Observers from the United Nations system, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM on prior approval by UN-Women.

V. Documentation

25. The documentation for the meeting will include:

- Draft background papers commissioned by UN-Women as follows:
 1. "Empowering Women in Climate, Environment and Disaster Risk Governance: From National Policy to Local Action," by Mary Picard.

This background paper will explore the main gender dimensions of climate change, environmental management, and disaster risk reduction; the priorities and challenges in achieving integrated gender-responsive approaches to climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction in policies and programmes at national and local level; and gender-

¹⁸ UN Women (2018). *Turning Promises to Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York.

¹⁹ UNEP and IUCN (2018). *Gender and environment statistics: Unlocking information for action and measuring the SDGs*. UN Environment, Nairobi, Kenya; UN Women (2019); [CSW65 Beijing+25 Expert Group Meeting Report](#).

responsive good practices and innovation in climate and disaster resilience to achieve risk-informed sustainable development that is inclusive and equitable.

2. "Gender, Climate Change and Disasters: Vulnerabilities, Responses and Ways Forward," by Bernadette Resurrección.

This background paper will explore how gender considerations are intrinsically linked with climate change and disasters; the drivers of vulnerability of those most affected by climate change and disasters; lessons learned from adaptation and mitigation programmes from a feminist perspective; and a feminist ethics of care for a resilient future.

- Expert papers: Short written contributions prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise

VI. Organization

26. The EGM will be convened by UN-Women on 11 – 14 October 2021. The meeting will be held virtually via Zoom in two sessions to enable participation from experts across time zones around the globe, who will be divided in two groups: Group A will meet on 11 and 12 October from 8:00am – 12:00pm New York (GMT-4) time. Group B will meet on 13 and 14 October from 8:00am – 12:00pm Bangkok (GMT+7) time.
27. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.

VII. Expected Outcomes

28. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN-Women.