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Gender, migration, climate change and disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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1. General remarks

Women and girls in impoverished regions bear the brunt of the socio-environmental crisis, as climate threats compound pre-conceptualized, structural discrimination that impinges on women's rights.² Environmental degradation caused by climate change interacts with other factors such as poverty,³ violence,⁴ food insecurity,⁵ and the absence of political action,⁶ generating complex and multifactorial causes driving human mobility. Women displaced by climate and environmental risks experience insecure displacement and migration outcomes due to pre-existing vulnerabilities, inequalities and traditional gender roles.⁷ Unsafe migration aggravates women's vulnerability to sexual and gender violence: in 2010, Amnesty International reported that six out of ten migrant women and girls are raped.⁸ All forcibly displaced and socio-economic migrants are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, nevertheless, female migrants are particularly at risk since they represent 71% of the victims of human trafficking.⁹

Among the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, 14 are located in Latin America and the Caribbean, with El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras among the first positions.¹⁰ The lack of visibility of the situation of climate/environmental migrants contributes to increased sexist violence, gender-based discrimination and denial of fundamental rights and freedoms.¹¹ During migration/displacement triggered by climate change, slow-onset hazards, and disasters, "women face situations of abuse such as robberies, physical assaults and sexual violence, as well as kidnapping and homicides [...]. Despite the relevance of the topic, there is little research on environmental migration with a gender perspective in Central America".¹² It is crucial to note that the threats encountered in insecure, violent migratory routes are intensified for marginalized groups (including indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, persons with cognitive and functional impairments, migrants with irregular status, LGBTQIA+ persons and elderly persons), "due to their particular vulnerabilities, heightened risk of violence and societal exclusion".¹³ Thus, women and girls, who are part of all the

² ECODES (2019). *Perspectiva de Género en las Migraciones Climáticas*, p. 4.

³ American Security Project (2019) *The Hidden Driver - Climate Change and Migration in Central America's Northern Triangle*. Available at: <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/perspective-climate-change-and-migration-in-central-americas-northern-triangle/>

⁴ Bolaños Guerra, B. (2018) Biopolíticas del cambio climático para Centroamérica. *Trace* (México DF), México, 74: 135-158.

⁵ Dodd, Cerna, Orellena, Humphries, Sadoine, Zombré, Zinszer, Kipp and Cole (2020) Factors Associated with Seasonal Food Insecurity among Small-Scale Subsistence Farming Households in Rural Honduras. *Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(3):1-16.

⁶ Ruiz-de-Oña, Rivera-Castañeda and Merlín-Urbe (2019) Coffee, Migration and Climatic Changes: Challenging Adaptation Dichotomic Narratives in a Transborder Region. *Social Sciences*, 8(12): 1-26.

⁷ International Organisation for Migration (IOM), (2019), "Submission on Climate Change, Migration and Gender." IOM Migration Environment and Climate Change Division, Geneva.

⁸ Amnesty International (2010). *Víctimas invisibles. Migrantes en movimiento en México*. Madrid: Amnistía Internacional. See also, ACNUDH (2019a). *Estudio analítico sobre una acción climática que responda a las cuestiones de género para el disfrute pleno y efectivo de los derechos de la mujer*. Resolución A/HCR/41/26. Disponible en: <https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=es/A/HRC/41/26>

⁹ UNODC, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.16.IV.6). p. 23.

¹⁰ Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS) (2017) *Americas: population movement, thematic report*. p. 2.

¹¹ ECODES, *supra* note 2 at 4.

¹² Diogo Andreola Serraglio, Fernanda de Salles Cavedon-Capdeville, Lilian Yamamoto, Zenaida Lauda-Rodriguez for Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (IOM), 2021. *La movilidad humana derivada de desastres y el cambio climático en Centroamérica*. IOM, Ginebra. p.15.

¹³ Amelia Bleeker, Briana Mawby, Candice Gonzales, Cristina Liberati, and Pablo Escribano (2021) "Advancing gender equality in environmental migration and disaster displacement in the Caribbean", *Studies and Perspectives series-ECLAC Subregional Headquarters*

abovementioned population groups, have suffered discrimination throughout the history of humanity, in most societies and during all stages of life.¹⁴

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the disproportionate burden carried by women and girls in the context of climate/environmentally-induced migration and displacement, *particularly focusing on Latin American and the Caribbean* (hereinafter LAC). It discusses the gendered dimensions of disaster displacement and how women and girls are vulnerable to it. Nevertheless, the core objective is to recognise the role of women and their leadership in preventing, mitigating, responding and adapting to climate change and environmental disasters, thus emphasising the need to support their efforts, knowledge and capacities.

2. Gender dimensions of disaster displacement and climate/environmental migration: intersectional vulnerabilities

"Migrant women are not vulnerable women, they are made vulnerable".¹⁵

By climate and environmental migration, we refer to the movement of people, groups or communities triggered by the impacts of climate change and/or environmental disasters on their territories, places, or countries of origin. These climate/environmental factors render their means and way of life unfeasible in the short, medium, or long-term, thus preventing or hindering their permanence in the area and threatening their right to a humane and dignified life,¹⁶ thereby being forced to migrate. That climate change disproportionately burdens women is an extensively documented fact, nevertheless, what is often overlooked is that gender disparities shape how climate and environmental migration are experienced, since “the pressure to migrate, risk perception, priorities, strategies, destination choices, employment prospects, access to integration or reintegration activities also vary by gender”.¹⁷

Gender-specific inequalities and vulnerabilities are accentuated by climate change and environmental disasters. The occurrence of disasters affects the lives of women in different dimensions: “climate-induced and environmental threats intensify gender inequality, physical, sexual and psychological violence based on gender, and exclusion”.¹⁸ To adduce an example, behavioural restrictions hinder women’s ability to relocate without the consent of a male figure (be it a husband, father, brother, etc.),¹⁹ therefore women’s options to adapt to and/or survive disasters and climate-induced threats are strongly dependent on socio-cultural gender norms. It is crucial to note that such societal constraints are imposed on women across all of Latin America, stemming from the

for the Caribbean, No. 98 (LC/TS.2020/188-LC/CAR/TS.2020/8), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2021, p. 24.

¹⁴ ECODES, *supra* note 2 at 16.

¹⁵ Jáuregui, J. (15 de agosto, 2017). Desmontando la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres migrantes. *El País*. https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/07/19/migrados/1500462530_104473.html.

¹⁶ Erika Pires Ramos, Tatiana Mendonça Cardoso and Giovanna Gini, “Migrações climáticas: invisibilidade legal e abandono. Até quando?” in *Clima e Direitos Humanos*, Conectas (August 2021): p.56

¹⁷ IOM (2014). IOM Outlook on Migration, Environment and Climate Change. p.103.

¹⁸ Diogo Andreola Serraglio *et al*, *supra* note 12 at XII.

¹⁹ Eric Neumayer, and Thomas Plümpert (2007), “The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981-2002.” *Annals of the Association of American Geography* 97, no. 3, p. 9.

phenomenon of *machismo*,²⁰ in combination with male expectations of exerting power over women, hence subjugating them at the familial and societal level.²¹

Climate/environmental migration can deepen pre-existing gender divides, exposing women “to new vulnerabilities, and [intensifying] gendered experiences of poverty, discrimination and socioeconomic inequality”.²² In addition to the issues emanating from gender injustice, environmental migrant women face a multitude of oppressive factors, which result from the lack of social and legal protection, resulting in discrimination on the basis of place of origin, race, religion or the culture,²³ which raises the need to address the intersectionality of these axes of oppression. This multilayered discrimination generates a number of complex factors of exclusion (wage gap, difficulties in accessing housing for single women, access to information, etc.) that we cannot ignore.²⁴

2.1. Environmental triggers

Marginalised communities have the fewest resources/mechanisms to adapt to and cope with environmental threats are the ones experiencing the worst impacts of climate change, exacerbating their vulnerabilities. For instance, women and girls are disproportionately affected by droughts as these intensify their responsibilities for collecting water and firewood.²⁵

Slow-onset threats resulting from droughts and rising temperatures are the most reported climate phenomena in the literature on the LAC region, particularly in the so-called Central American Dry Corridor (CADC),²⁶ region covering approximately 30% of Central America.²⁷ The increase in temperature, variation in rainfall, scarce economic capital and underpreparedness to respond to climate change impacts hinder the mitigation or adaptation capacity of families. According to the report “*Climate migration in the Central American Dry Corridor: integrating the gender perspective*”, an study commissioned by InspirAction, several communities located in the CADC have solely been able to plant (and reap) once a year, seriously compromising

²⁰ “Machismo represents part of ‘the resultant social order’, because it represents images of the dominant ideal of manhood” in Latin America. See, Stobbe (2005). Doing Machismo: Legitimizing speech acts as a selection discourse. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12(2), p.105. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0432.2005.00265.x>

²¹ Contribution of Fabiana Maria Pineda Sosa, Science in International Development and Management Postgraduate through the University of Lund. Pineda Sosa is author of “Chased Away: An intersectional study on the forced migration of women and girls from Honduras” (2021). Available at: <https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=9044135&fileId=9056746>

²² IOM, *supra* note 17 at 103.

²³ Alianza por la Solidaridad (2018). *Mujeres migrantes como sujetos políticos en el País Valencià: Creando estrategias frente a las violencias*. Valencia: Alianza por la Solidaridad. p. 66.

²⁴ CEAR (2016). *Informe sobre discriminación de personas migrantes y refugiadas en España*. Madrid: Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado. p.15.

²⁵ United Nations, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment*. Resolution A/74/161 of the General Assembly of the United Nations. para. 46.

²⁶ Cristina J. Orgaz. “¿Qué es el Corredor Seco y Por Qué Está Ligado a La Pobreza Extrema en casi toda Centroamérica?” BBC News Mundo. BBC, May 2019. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-48186820> .

²⁷ Salvadoran Research Program on Development and Environment (2014). *Institutionality and Governance in the Central American Dry Corridor*. Policy Brief.

Available at: <https://cdkn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Institutionality-and-Governance-in-the-Central-American-Dry-Corridor.pdf>

"their food security, increasing their poverty situation and opening the door to temporary or in some cases permanent migration".²⁸

Such climate conditions give rise to food insecurity and crises, which statistically affects women more than their male counterparts: in the LAC region, 8.4% of women find themselves in food insecurity compared to 6.9% of men. This translates to approximately 19.2 million women versus 15.1 million men.²⁹ Studies have registered how, in Nicaragua, due to food shortage and insecurity, women tend to eat less, being thus increasingly exposed to health risks that lead them to inevitably decrease their agricultural productivity and consequently suffer a loss of income/livelihood, which can lead to gender-based and domestic violence.³⁰ Furthermore, women's vulnerability to food insecurity is exacerbated by climate change stressors combined with manifold gendered restraints, such as lacking (or in some cases, absent) access to education, land, financial services, social capital, credit and technology.³¹

The extreme variations in climate conditions, such as the lack of rainfall in the Central American Dry Corridor territory, force women and girls to walk longer distances to access water, which increases their vulnerability to experience rape, theft or other abuses.³² Moreover, water shortage has an impact on the access to education, as data reveals that girls' school enrolment, and subsequent attendance, decreases as the distance to find water increases.³³

Environmental and climate threats triggering disasters aggravate women's vulnerability, particularly that of migrant women: a qualitative study on the impact of Hurricane Mitch (1998) on gender in Nicaragua revealed that women displaced by the disaster were in a situation of disadvantage when accessing relief as the aid deployed in the hurricane's aftermath was unequally distributed based on gender. It is important to note that "in most countries relief efforts are almost exclusively managed and controlled by men, systematically excluding women, their needs, competences and experiences from contributing to these efforts".³⁴ Gender-sensitive relief was absent after Hurricane Mitch, women were placed in shelters that lacked security and privacy, which further threatened their survival after the disaster. Furthermore, prior to the disaster, a high percentage of the country's women lived in precarious, insecure housing, thereby suffering extensive economic losses and receiving no governmental support/aid nor reconstruction efforts.³⁵ In Honduras, a country with a history heavily marked by disasters, emergency committees often failed to carry out consultations with the population, and when they do take place, "they were almost always exclusively male, perpetuating the belief that women are merely victims not assets".³⁶ Such committees problematically designed reconstruction strategies assuming all households were two-parent-led, assigning responsibilities to each gender. This forced female-headed households to "choose

²⁸ Christian Aid and InspirAction (2019) *Migraciones climáticas en el corredor seco centroamericano: integrando la visión de género*. Londres. p. 52.

²⁹ UN Environment (2019) *Women and the environment: a preliminary analysis of gaps and opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean*, p. 9.

³⁰ Christian Aid and InspirAction, *supra* note 28 at 57.

³¹ United Nations Development Programme and Global Gender and Climate Alliance (2016), *Gender, Climate change and food security*".

³² Radel, Schmook, Carte and Jiménez (2016) Migración y cambio climático en el noroeste de Nicaragua: una visión crítica y de género. En: *Transformaciones ambientales e igualdad de género en América Latina: temas emergentes, estrategias y acciones* (Gutiérrez, M.V., V.V García, A. Zuria, L. De Capistrán, D.M.S, coords). Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Centro Regional de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias., Ciudad de México. See also, Kellie Tranter, (2008) *Mujeres y cambio climático. Sin permiso*. Available at: www.sinpermiso.info/textos/mujeres-y-cambio-climtico.

³³ Tranter, K. (2008). *Mujeres y cambio climático. Sin Permiso*. Available at: www.sinpermiso.info/textos/mujeres-y-cambio-climtico.

³⁴ Neumayer and Plümper, *supra* note 19 at 12.

³⁵ Cupples, J. (2007) Gender and Hurricane Mitch: reconstructing subjectivities after disaster, *Pubmed*, 31(2):155-75.

³⁶ Smith (2013) *Hurricane Mitch and Honduras: An illustration of population vulnerability*. International Journal Health System and Disaster Management 1 (1): p.56

between their children and their assets. Most chose their children and lost the means to support their livelihood”.³⁷

Women’s socio-economic marginalisation renders them less likely to have the social status or resources to rebuild their homes, return to their communities of origin or find safe, private shelter following a disaster. This in turn perpetuates the discrimination and abuse that women and girls are subjected to.³⁸ To adduce a more recent example of climate change as a phenomenon aggravating women’s fragility: following the 2020 Hurricane Iota, Bilwi, one of the most affected regions in Nicaragua, registered exorbitantly high rates of gender-based violence, child pregnancies and femicides. Additionally, statistics pointed to an increase in violence against women and girls in the emergency shelters.³⁹ As of March 2021, four months after Eta and Iota, “more than half of the Hondurans still living in shelters are women and girls, who are also disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic”.⁴⁰ Reports point to the existence of pronounced gender-based and sexual violence in shelters where the populations victims of Hurricane Iota remain.⁴¹ Such findings emphasise the interrelation of vulnerabilities.

Alarming, women are much more likely than men to die when a disaster strikes: this is not due to biological differences between men and women,⁴² but a consequence of the gender roles derived from social constructs that compound the vulnerability of women, *particularly those in situations of poverty and exclusion*. Women have less access to information in emergency situations, less access to or control over assets, less mobility outside the home and fewer opportunities to acquire certain skills (such as swimming) equipping them with the necessary preparedness when disasters occur,⁴³ thereby drastically reducing survival chances.⁴⁴

2.2. Barriers to resilience: institutionalised and structural gender inequalities

“Patriarchal social structures, such as formal laws and policies (e.g., divorce, inheritance and wage discrimination), as well as cultural norms and attitudes (e.g., the idea that women are better in the domestic space and that men should be the breadwinners for their families), give men better resources and reproduce gender stereotypes. The persistence of

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Amelia Bleeker *et al*, *supra* note 13 at 24.

See also, Dankelman, I. (2009), ‘Human Security, Climate Change and Women’ *UN Chronicle XLVI*, no. 3 and 4. Dunn, L. (2013), Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management. UWI-FES Working Paper Series 7. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2014), Handbook for Disaster Assessment (LC/L.3691).

³⁹ UNICEF (2020) Más de 1,2 millones de niños y niñas afectados por ‘Eta’ en Centroamérica, Notas de prensa. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/lac/comunicados-prensa/tormenta-tropical-eta-mas-de-1.2-millones-de-ninos-y-ninas-afectados-en-centroamerica>

⁴⁰ Sandra Cuffe (March 2021), “In Central America, women and girls bear the brunt of storm disaster fallout”. *The New Humanitarian*, available at: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2021/3/9/central-america-women-and-girls-bear-brunt-storm-aftermath>

⁴¹ Shackelford (2020) La Eliminación de la violencia contra las mujeres es fundamental para el desarrollo de Honduras, available at: <https://honduras.un.org/es/102445-la-eliminacion-de-la-violencia-contra-las-mujeres-es-fundamental-para-el-desarrollo-de>.

⁴² Christine Haigh and Bernadette Vallely (2010) *Gender and the Climate Change Agenda*. Women’s Environmental Network. See also, Sarah Bradshaw & Maureen Fordham. (2013) *Women, girls and disasters - A Review for DFID*. Available at: <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/women-girls-and-disasters-a-review-for-dfid/>.

⁴³ OXFAM (2017). *Desarraigados por el cambio climático. La necesidad de responder al aumento del riesgo de desplazamientos*. Oxford: OXFAM GB. pp. 34-35.

⁴⁴ Neumayer and Plümper, *supra* note 19 at 9.

these structures prevents women from accessing land, but also from having a political voice on urban development and from feeling empowered to demand specific services”.⁴⁵

Policies and responses to disasters must be informed by the needs and demands of those displaced or those threatened by displacement, loss of home or livelihood; such strategies must be implemented with due sensitivity to age, gender, and diversity aspects,⁴⁶ and guided by the principle of non-discrimination. Notwithstanding, institutionalised gender biases and asymmetrical distribution of power and resources between men and women lead governments to neglect the vulnerable position of women and girls, thereby hindering women’s resilience and preparedness *vis-à-vis* climate threats and environmental disasters.

2.2.1. Poverty

Disasters and their potential occurrence depend not only on the threat of danger itself, relative or not to environmental causes, but predominantly on the degree of exposure and vulnerability of marginalised groups.⁴⁷ For instance, poor people are forced to live in disaster-prone areas⁴⁸: low-quality and insecure housing, poorly planned urban infrastructure, the lack of resources to access healthcare, to social protection and/or insurance, the absence of safe infrastructure such as water, sanitation, drainage and roads,⁴⁹ are drivers of people’s vulnerability to environmental/climate hazards and disasters.⁵⁰ Poverty-stricken communities are thus disproportionately burdened by environmental injustice.

Poverty is highly feminised, with a higher percentage of poor people living in female-headed households.⁵¹ Women’s socio-environmental vulnerability is compounded by living under the poverty line and by restricted and lacking access to land tenure and infrastructure, ecosystem health, access to insurance, equity of social and emergency services.⁵² This in turn impacts the ability of women and their family members to (1) pursue mitigation and adaptation responses to disaster-risks, (2) buffer disaster losses, (3) recover from shocks of disasters and climate change stressors, and (4) migrate to safer territories.⁵³

⁴⁵ Development Bank of Latin America, Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and UN-Habitat for the Urban (2020), *Gender Inequalities in Cities*. p. 21.

⁴⁶ Center for International Climate and Environmental Research, Norwegian Ministry of the Environment, Norwegian Refugee Council (2011), *The Nansen Conference: Climate Change and Displacement in the 21st Century*, “The Nansen Principles” Principle X, p. 5.

⁴⁷ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2013) *Technical Paper: The risk of disaster-induced displacement. Central America and the Caribbean*. Geneva.

⁴⁸ Quazi Shahabuddin and Zulfiqar Ali (2006), *Natural Disasters, Risks, Vulnerability and Persistence of Poverty: An Analysis of Household Level Data*. Programme for Research on Chronic Poverty in Bangladesh (PRCPB) Working Paper No.15, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Poverty and inequality as drivers of disaster vulnerability*. PreventionWeb. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.preventionweb.net/understanding-disaster-risk/risk-drivers/poverty-inequality>.

⁵⁰ Stéphane Hallegatte, Adrien Vogt-Schilb, Julie Rozenberg, Mook Bangalore & Chloé Beaudet, (2020) *From Poverty to Disaster and Back: a Review of the Literature. Economics of Disasters and Climate Change* 4. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41885-020-00060-5>. p. 237.

⁵¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (2019), *Assessment of the Effects and Impacts of Hurricane Dorian in The Bahamas*. Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/45968-assessment-effects-and-impacts-hurricane-dorian-bahamas>.

⁵² Amelia Bleeker *et al*, *supra* note 13 at 25. See also, Dankelman, I. (2009), ‘Human Security, Climate Change and Women’ *UN Chronicle XLVI*, no. 3 and 4. Dunn, L. (2013), *Gender, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management*. UWI-FES Working Paper Series 7. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2014), *Handbook for Disaster Assessment (LC/L.3691)*.

⁵³ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) *et al* (2013), *Women and Natural Resources: Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential*. Nairobi and New York: UNEP, UN Women, United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, and UNDP. Available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/8373>.

Importantly, data reveals that female and male disaster mortality rates tend to be virtually proportionate where economic and social rights are more equally distributed.⁵⁴ Gender inequities are exposed in the asymmetrical access to healthcare experienced by women after disasters in comparison to men.⁵⁵ Furthermore, women’s access to aid and credit in disasters’ aftermath is considerably hindered, therefore women that have had to migrate are forced into a position of disadvantage in the framework of humanitarian strategies for post-disaster recovery.⁵⁶

2.2.2. Unequal access to social and natural resources

According to OXFAM, 58 million women in Latin America live in rural areas. Nevertheless only 30% of rural women own agricultural land and 5% have access to technical assistance. This reduces women’s climate adaptation skills and intensifies the vulnerability of rural women,⁵⁷ hence being disproportionately exposed to climate change impacts such as soil erosion or extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and salinisation. As women frequently have less access to resources that build human and infrastructural resilience to endure disasters, such as food and shelter, “they are particularly vulnerable when torrential rains, mudslides, heat waves and water crises beset cities”.⁵⁸

Men’s access to land resources facilitates international migration, yet “women are less likely to depart from environmentally marginal communities relative to other areas. These results reflect a significantly gendered migration system in which natural capital plays an important but unexpected role”.⁵⁹ This translates into women being forced to stay in environmentally-threatened areas, which consequently breaches their human rights, such as their right to life and the right to a healthy environment.

2.2.3. Gender-based violence

Research documents a rise in domestic violence, forced marriage, human trafficking, and forced prostitution triggered by disasters and environmental degradation.⁶⁰ For instance, the interrelation of climate change and domestic violence is illustrated by data from Honduras registering an increase in violence against women when 60% of corn and bean crops were lost in 2016.⁶¹ In the aftermath of disasters, “the slow resumption of basic

⁵⁴ Joan Brunkard, Gonza Namulanda, and Raoult Ratard (2008), ‘Hurricane Katrina deaths, Louisiana, 2005’ *Disaster Medicine Public Health Preparedness*. December 2008; 2(4): 215-23.

⁵⁵ Sobers-Grannum, Murphy, Nielsen, Guell, Alafia Samuels, Bishop, and Unwin (2015), Female Gender Is a Social Determinant of Diabetes in the Caribbean: A Systematic Review and Meta- Analysis, *PLoS ONE* 10(5): e0126799. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0126799>.

⁵⁶ ECODES, *supra* note 2 at 33.

⁵⁷ OXFAM (2019) “How Rural Women Are Adapting to Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean.” Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/how-rural-women-are-adapting-climate-change-latin-america-and-caribbean>.

⁵⁸ Adriana Erthal Abdenur. (2020). *Gender, Climate and Security in Latin America and the Caribbean: From Diagnostics to Solutions*. Climate Diplomacy. Retrieved from <https://climate-diplomacy.org/magazine/cooperation/gender-climate-and-security-latin-america-and-caribbean-diagnostics-solutions>.

⁵⁹ Gray, Clark L. “Gender, Natural Capital, and Migration in the Southern Ecuadorian Andes.” *Environment and planning*. A42, no. 3 (2010): p. 678.

⁶⁰ UN Environment (2019) *Women and the environment: a preliminary analysis of gaps and opportunities in Latin America and the Caribbean*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Christian Aid and InspirAction, *supra* note 28 at 61.

services, including electricity and clean water, would have had a disproportionate impact on women and girls given that they perform most of the care work in the aftermath of disasters and are most vulnerable to violence in poorly lit areas”.⁶² To illustrate, in the wake of the 2017 Hurricane Maria, which struck Puerto Rico particularly hard, women and girls in temporary shelters reported intensified vulnerability to gender-based violence as the design of these infrastructures did not acknowledge gender considerations or safety measures.

Data demonstrates how security of tenure bolsters women’s intra-household negotiation power, which in turn translates into less exposure to gender-based violence, due to a shift in male conduct or “to the fact that [women] can feel less vulnerable and more inclined to leave abusive relationships and domestic (or intimate partner) violence.”⁶³

2.2.4. Women’s weak participation in governance and decision-making

The factors and patriarchal structures increasing women’s disproportionate exposure to climate and environmental threats constitute hindrances to their active and free participation in decision-making to prevent and mitigate climate change and disasters.⁶⁴ Gender discrimination, unequal power structures, disparate resource allocation, poverty, coupled with the socio-cultural devaluing of women limit women’s equal and full participation in decision-making.⁶⁵ Women’s low participation in local, national and international political fora has ramifications for environmental governance and disaster preparedness, as research suggests that women express higher concern for environmental issues and higher representation of women in decision-making has been correlated with higher levels of ratification of multilateral environmental and climate agreements. (1) Countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more likely to set aside protected land areas; (2) Countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more likely to ratify international environmental treaties.⁶⁶ It is thus pivotal to foster inclusive and non-discriminatory participatory mechanisms in order for women to participate in decision-making processes actively and freely.

3. Ways forward: the value of communitarian leadership

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction upholds the value of women’s empowerment for disaster response, recovery and rehabilitation.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, women continue to be deemed as mere victims; this vision is profoundly deleterious as it further deepens the long-standing division of gender roles that compounds inequality.⁶⁸ The increase in the feminization of poverty and migration makes visible a reality that has been

⁶² Amelia Bleeker *et al*, *supra* note 13 at 55.

⁶³ Development Bank of Latin America, *supra* note 45 at 23; see also, Moser (2016). Gender transformation in a new global urban agenda: Challenges for Habitat III and beyond. *Environment and Urbanization*: pp. 222-236.

⁶⁴ Aguilar, Granat, and Owren. (2015), *Roots for the Future: The Landscape and Way Forward on Gender and Climate Change*. Washington, DC: International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Gender Office (GGO) under the auspices of the Global Gender and Climate Alliance (GGCA) joint programme. Available at: <http://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Roots-for-the-future-final-1.pdf>.

⁶⁵ UN-Habitat, 2015, *Gender Issue Guide: Gender Responsive Urban Legislation, Land and Governance*. Available at: <https://unhabitat.org/gender-responsive-urban-legislation-land-and-governance>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

⁶⁷ Sendai Framework, Guiding Principle 19 (d) Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted. In this context, special attention should be paid to the improvement of organized voluntary work of citizens; [...]

⁶⁸ Inspiracion (2017). *Aportes desde Inspiracion a la Ley de cambio climático y transición energética. Incorporación del enfoque de género*. Disponible en: www.inspiration.org/Ficheros/Documentos/2018-01-30ContribucionInspirActionLeyCC.pdf.

neutralized by political and legal frameworks and that continues to be forgotten: women and girls play key and vital roles for their communities, especially in terms of adaptation and climate resilience.⁶⁹ Women have embraced leadership and activist roles in responding to sudden and slow-onset environmental threats, as many of them are community leaders and have become the main source of income (main breadwinners) in their families.⁷⁰

The perspective of women as inherently vulnerable and as lacking strength to protect and reconstruct their communities *vis-à-vis* the environmental crisis is flawed. Women are capable of reducing human losses and diseases during disasters and their role is essential in adapting to climate change.⁷¹ Nevertheless, their voices are suppressed by global structures that perpetuate deep-rooted inequalities, misogyny and injustice. It is noteworthy to remember that being forced into silence does not mean that women have no voice or agency: albeit being the ones most burdened by climate change, women are also the ones spearheading initiatives to adapt to and mitigate its consequences.⁷² Women play a vital role in environmental management and development, therefore their full, active, unobstructed participation in all governmental, familial and societal spheres is essential to achieve sustainable development.⁷³ The report *Women of the Páramos*, by the International Union for Conservation (IUCN), for instance, highlights the successful climate change adaptation experiences in Colombia, Ecuador and Perú, all which were led by women, who are the cornerstone of effective environment conservation strategies.

As extreme weather events intensify, it is fundamental to develop sustainable solutions that elevate women into leadership positions, prioritising their views, knowledge and experiences, and guaranteeing their unconditional participation. Strategies will only be effective when “ensuring that any solutions build on the capabilities, knowledge and unique perspectives of women, [sharing] mutual benefits between genders, and [empowering] women to be active agents in mitigating climate change and pursuing adaptation responses”.⁷⁴

4. Preparing better responses: mapping and exchanging available data/information and local/regional practices

The gendered dimension and impacts of environmental displacement are not well documented, not only in the LAC region but globally, as there is a widespread lack of gender-disaggregated data. To illustrate: the UN Special Rapporteur on Human rights and the Environment pointed towards data estimating “that, by 2050, the effects of climate change could have caused the displacement of 150 million or more people due to extreme weather events, slowly evolving events such as sea level rise and desertification, relocation from high-risk areas (such as floodplains) and conflict over scarce resources”.⁷⁵ The document refers to the special vulnerability of

⁶⁹ ECODES, *supra* note 2 at 4.

⁷⁰ OXFAM, *supra* note 43 at 35.

⁷¹ Nellemann, Verma, and Hislop. (2012). *Women at the Frontline of Climate Change: Gender Risks and Hopes*. Norway and Nepal: UNEP. Available at: <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7985>.

⁷² Arantxa García. (November, 2017). La resistencia de las mujeres ante la crisis climática. *El Salto*. Available at: www.elsaltodiario.com/ecofeminismo/resistencia-mujeres-ante-crisis-climatica.

⁷³ See, to that effect, Principle 20 of the Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development”, A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), 1992.

⁷⁴ Amelia Bleeker *et al*, *supra* note 13 at 26.

⁷⁵ United Nations, *supra* note 25 at 7.

women to climate change and socio-environmental disasters, nevertheless, it makes no detailed reference to the proportion of women and men in a situation of forced displacement due to effects of climate change. In order to successfully tackle climate change and gender injustices, there is a need of mapping existing practices and experiences worldwide from a multi stakeholder - especially from the voices of women on the frontline - and multi agenda angle to fill the analytical/data/information gaps on the link between human mobility, climate change, disasters and gender inequities and to promote the creation of collaborative, inclusive and durable solutions.⁷⁶

5. Addressing the gender-migration-environment nexus: final considerations and recommendations

The link between the climate crisis, human mobility and gender injustice “should not be analysed in isolation from other environmental, economic, political, social, cultural factors, as climate can be considered a multiplier of threats, risks and vulnerabilities that affect scale, complexity and patterns of mobility. This multidimensionality highlights the need for a holistic view in identifying, determining and seeking solutions in different agendas”.⁷⁷

Considering the above, it is crucial to:

- Include migrant and displaced women as a critical area of concern;
- Generate awareness that environmental and climate migration/displacement is a reality (of the present, not for the future) that affects women worldwide and requires urgent action in all phases of the displacement cycle. *Women must lead the solutions that affect them and oversee its implementation;*
- Identify and tackle the root causes that increase the systemic gender inequalities that breach the rights of women on the move and then in the host state, as well in immobility/trapped situations in the context of climate change and disasters - *from the narratives and perceptions of affected/displaced women;*
- Recognise migration as a right that should be a safe strategy for women and not the only option to face and adapt the risks and impacts of environmental and climate change;
- Support regional and local projects and initiatives that aim to give attention to the needs and rights of women at risk and displaced in the context of disasters and climate change;
- Create a platform for south-south cooperation connecting women-led communities and local organizations/initiatives/projects related to climate change migration, disaster risk reduction and adaptation, promoting dialogue and exchange practices and experiences. It is crucial for decision and policymakers to learn from the perceptions and knowledge of displaced women and include their concerns in order to address their specific needs and rights;
- Finance strategies that reduce vulnerabilities, increase resilience and habitability in the territories and strengthen the capacities to maintenance livelihoods taking care that the responsibility for adaptation is not transferred to the communities itself;
- Enact inclusive, non-discriminatory, human-rights based policies and legislations to eradicate the barriers to women's equal representation in all governmental, institutional, societal spheres. Political,

⁷⁶ Diogo Andreola Serraglio *et al*, *supra* note 12 at 57.

⁷⁷ Erika Pires Ramos *et al*, *supra* note 16 at 56

legal, socio-economic structures that foster women's empowerment and participation in decision and policy-making should be developed and supported.

“Not about us, without us.”