

**TECHNICAL DOCUMENT<sup>1</sup>**  
**STRENGTHENING DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT GOVERNANCE IN THE BAHAMAS**  
**(BH-L1056)**  
**ALIGNMENT WITH THE CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE OF GENDER EQUALITY AND**  
**DIVERSITY**

**I. DIAGNOSIS OF GENDER, DISABILITY INCLUSION AND DISASTERS TRIGGERED BY NATURAL HAZARDS**

**A. Gender, Disability Inclusion, Disasters Triggered by Natural Hazards and Climate Change**

- 1.1 **Disproportionate impact.** Disasters triggered by natural hazards and climate change disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups, particularly women and people with disabilities in developing countries, who exhibit higher levels of vulnerability to these events (UNISDR, 2009; European Commission, 2021; World Bank, 2021). Evidence shows that women and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected by disasters in multiple dimensions, from a lower life expectancy (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007) and a greater probability of facing unemployment (Acevedo, 2014; Delaney & Shrader, 2000) to a higher probability of having a disability at the workplace (Caruso, 2017) along with lower consumption levels post-disaster (Christian et al., 2019).
- 1.2 In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the disproportionate impact of disasters and climate change on women and people with disabilities was evidenced in several of the catastrophic events that hit the region. Using data for 141 countries, including a number of LAC nations, between 1981 and 2002, Neumayer & Plümper (2007) find that the impact of disasters on life expectancy is greater in women. The authors also find the more severe the event, the greater the impact. Similarly, Acevedo (2014), using individual data from the labor market of the Caribbean region of Colombia, estimates that the probability of facing unemployment after a disaster is three percentage points higher among women than men. Delaney & Shrader (2000) show that after Hurricane Mitch in 1998, women in Honduras took longer to rejoin the labor market than men. These differences may be attributed to women taking on more household chores than men in the aftermath of a disaster (UNISDR, 2009). Similarly, following the 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami, the fatality rate for persons with disabilities was 4.3 times higher than that of the general population according to the Miyagi Prefectural authorities (Guernsey & Scherrer 2017) Recent CBM-Nossal Institute Partnership research involving 648 households affected by Tropical Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu confirmed that disasters disproportionately affected persons with disabilities in the Pacific region (Oxfam, VSPD, DPA, et al., 2017).
- 1.3 **Post-disaster gender violence.** Multiple studies show that the risk of violence against women and girls tends to increase after a disaster (World Bank, 2021). Past post-disaster experiences around the world indicate that in situations of displacement, apart from the

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temporary interruption of law-and-order mechanisms, women are more vulnerable and may end up facing situations of violence when there are no preventive measures containing a gender dimension during the response and recovery phases (IFRC, 2015). A 2010 Haiti earthquake study finds that women living in the most devastated areas of the country were more likely to be victims of violence up to two years after the event (Weitzman & Behrman, 2016).

- 1.4 **Pre-Existing Vulnerabilities.** The divergent impact of disasters for women and men is largely explained by existing gender gaps in exposure, vulnerability and resilience to natural hazards. For example, women's socioeconomic disadvantages may contribute to their higher disaster mortality rate (Neumayer & Plümer, 2007). The lack of access to early warning systems, as well as the lack of agency to make decisions within the household are also factors that contribute to the gender mortality rate gap (European Commission, 2021). Similarly, social norms, which have an effect on labor market participation and asset holding and accumulation, are likely determine how disasters end up impacting women. Likewise, societal discrimination and stigma contribute to systemic barriers to education, health care, employment, transportation and infrastructure, housing, political and public life, justice, and other aspects of life necessary for persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community.
- 1.5 **Gender and resilience.** In spite of the challenges discussed above, there is clear evidence that the role of women in disaster risk management is essential to increasing community resilience and preventing human losses in the face of growing climate threats (UNISDR, 2011; Buvinic et al., 1999). In this regard, the gender dimension must be incorporated into national disaster risk management policies, with women participating throughout the entire decision-making process, as well as exercising leadership roles in their communities so that prevention, adaptation, response and recovery from disasters be attained more effectively. In addition, the participation of women post-disaster can have positive effects on gender dynamics at the community level. A study conducted by Moreno & Shaw (2018) on the tsunami and earthquake in Chile in 2010 finds that the participation of women in post-disaster work helped strengthen female leadership, turning them into key stakeholders in their communities.

## **B. Gender, Disabilities and Disasters Triggered by Natural Hazards in The Bahamas**

- 1.6 **Gender and disaster risk management in The Bahamas.** Despite the disproportionate impact of disasters on women and girls, gender mainstreaming remains a challenge in the context of climate change and disaster risk management laws or policies in the Bahamas. The proposed National Equality Equity Policy Action Plan (NEEPAP) includes the goal of reviewing climate change and disaster response management documents and activities to promote a gender perspective and ensure adequate and suitable provisions for the differential needs of women and men, including appropriate infrastructure for shelters, but is has not been executed. The Disaster Preparedness and Response Act 2006 (amended in 2008) provides for effective organization of emergency and disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, but does not specifically mention women and girls or include gender considerations. Similarly, the National Policy for the Adaptation to Climate Change 2005 focuses on the vulnerability of the country to sea level rise, the lack of human and economic resources and the vulnerability of settlements, without special mention of the vulnerability of women and girls.

This also applies to the Bahamas' Nationally Determined Contribution and National Communications to the UNFCCC (Bleeker et al. 2021).

- 1.7 Some gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience building actions are worth highlighting. From 2014 to 2019, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) response team provided appropriate gender sensitivity training. A new effort undertaken by the Government of The Bahamas is the implementation of Gender and Family Sensitive Shelters for victims of natural disasters. During Hurricane Irma, the government conducted a massive evacuation of all southern islands in The Bahamas. In many of those islands, the majority of the population included older women. During the Evacuation, most of the women and their families were placed in safe shelters with full engagement and supervision by Defence Force Officers, Police Officers, Nurses, Social Workers, Red Cross and National Emergency Officers who provided protection, support and assurance of safety. Social Media, PSAs, town meetings and general public and school education campaigns are used to increase public awareness and preparations for hurricanes. All of the family (rural) islands and cays are equipped with satellite phones to ensure continuity of communication during and after hurricanes. In 2018, twenty-two (22) persons were trained in shelter management by NEMA, an intersectoral Committee comprising government, ministries, private sectors, Red Cross, BASRA, Arawak Development Port, Civil Society and Corporations. They meet monthly, yearlong for preparation and training. As part of the preparation, various agencies from the Family Islands were brought into the Capital City to receive Disaster Preparedness and Resilience Management for the process of rebuilding the settlement and communities following the hurricanes. The Department of Gender and Family Affairs is a part of the NEMA steering committee in order to ensure adequate representation for women's and gender issues when addressing national responses to natural disasters. Additionally, other women serve as equal partners on the NEMA response team (UNWomen 2019).
- 1.8 **Gender inequality and vulnerabilities in The Bahamas.** Gender inequality is a pervasive problem in the Bahamas, amplifying women and girls' risk and vulnerability to extreme weather events and climate change. In disaster situations, these groups experience the most challenges in the response to their recovery, reconstruction and livelihood needs. Unequal distribution of power, access to resources and economic opportunities affects women's ability to prepare for, cope with and recover from disasters. Bahamian women experience a gender pay gap with a thirty-three per cent income disparity between men and women (UNDP, 2019). Women comprise the majority of people living in poverty in the Bahamas (51.8 per cent), and the incidence of poverty among female-headed households is higher than among male-headed ones (Government of The Bahamas, 2016). Furthermore, the Family Islands have the highest poverty rates (17.2 per cent) in the country. Therefore, women living in the Family Islands are more likely to be poor and have access to fewer employment opportunities than their Grand Bahama and New Providence counterparts (CARE, 2019). As a result, women living in Abaco were among some of the least equipped to cope with and recover from Hurricane Dorian. Seventy per cent of working age women participate in the labor force, while the rate is eighty-two per cent for men (UNWomen, 2019). Only one in four women with less than a high school education participates in paid work (CARE, 2019). While girls typically outperform boys in education, women have a slightly higher unemployment rate, with 9.9 per cent of women and 9.2 per cent of men unemployed in May 2019 (Government of The Bahamas, 2019). The services sector provides the largest share of national employment and employs a third of the country's women (Government of The Bahamas, 2010). Meaningful and active participation of women in planning and decisions affecting their lives is essential for gender-responsive preparation for and recovery from disasters, notably because "gender

roles ascribed to men and women affect the way in which they relate to one another and their vulnerability to natural hazards” (Bleeker et al., 2021). However, entrenched gender stereotypes hinder women’s ability to participate in political and public life in the Bahamas. Participation of women in politics is generally low, with women holding only 12.8 per cent of the positions in the lower house in 2017 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018). However, there is room for some optimism as the number of women appointed to the Upper Chamber increased from four to seven in 2017 (representing 43.8 per cent of positions).

**1.9 The impacts of disasters in The Bahamas through the lens of gender and disability dimensions.**

Disaster-induced displacement affects women, men, girls and boys in specific ways on account of their gender owing to loss of livelihood, reduced access to education, health care and other social services, and a deterioration of living conditions. Other characteristics, such as age, disability, nationality, immigration status, and sexual orientation, also contributed to the vulnerabilities and opportunities of people of all genders following disasters. In the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian, there was a lack of resources available for displaced people of all genders, including those in emergency shelters and those that were able to secure private accommodations. Where the government lacked capacity and resources, the private sector attempted to address remaining recovery needs. A rapid gender analysis conducted after Hurricane Dorian found that 40,238 women and girls (51.4 per cent) and 38,047 men and boys were affected (Bleeker et al., 2021). Of the affected women and girls, it is estimated that at least 21,500 required support with dignity kits for menstruation (53.4 per cent), 3,200 woman and girls were pregnant (7.9 per cent) and 470 (1.2 per cent) faced life-threatening complications in pregnancy. Furthermore, all affected women and girls were at risk of gender-based violence with varying degrees of vulnerability based on their characteristics (Bleeker et al. 2021). Similarly, societal barriers experienced daily by persons with disabilities can be magnified and potentially life threatening in a disaster and have the potential to negatively affect people with different disabilities at all stages of disaster risk management. In a review of the barriers faced by persons with disabilities in The Bahamas, Krstanoski et al. (2019) discuss that physical (e.g., road accessibility for wheelchair users), informational (e.g., early warning systems for the hearing-impaired) and regulatory barriers (e.g., enforcement of accessibility requirements for public buildings) should be addressed and overcome at all stages of the disaster risk management process.

**1.10 Disaster risk mitigation measures with gender and disability approaches are essential to reduce the potential impact of disasters on women and people with disabilities.**

The inclusion of both gender and disability dimensions in the design and implementation of disaster risk management policies is still a pending challenge in the country. The Government of The Bahamas is making notable efforts to ensure that women, people with disabilities, and minorities are able to participate fully and equally in all aspects of Bahamian life (UNWomen, 2019). However, the identification, prioritization and implementation of concrete actions in disaster risk management has been difficult.

**1.11 Identifying opportunities to improve DRM governance through gender equality and diversity in The Bahamas.**

The Bahamas has a rather robust governance framework for disaster preparedness, at least in matters related to the coordination and articulation of the policy. Thus, the Disaster Preparedness and response Act of 2006 (reviewed in 2008) establishes, among others: (i) an inter-institutional committee that provides advice to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA); (ii) the formulation of a national disaster preparedness and response plan and of official protocols for emergencies; and (iii) the testing of such protocols through drills and simulations. However, an application of the Index of Governance and Public Policy for Disaster Risk Management conducted by the Inter-American

Development Bank, which identifies the existence of governance conditions that facilitate the implementation of effective public policies in disaster risk management, found that no legal mandate is currently established for: (i) the formulation of emergency plans by public bodies; (ii) the creation and operation of early warning systems; and (iii) the consideration of the needs of people who are vulnerable on account of their age, gender, disability, poverty or physical displacement in the disaster response provided by the government.

### **C. Strategic Alignment with the Cross-Cutting Issue of Gender Equality and Diversity**

- 1.12 This first step to overcome the abovementioned challenges is to acknowledge that the current legal and institutional arrangements for disaster risk management in The Bahamas are not optimal. As a result, the Government of The Bahamas, through the Cabinet, authorized in February 2022 the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, in collaboration with the Disaster Management Unit (DMU) and the Office of the Attorney-General and Ministry of Legal Affairs (OAG), to draft legislation aimed at enhancing the effective implementation of the disaster risk management policy. Following this decision by the Cabinet, the Office of the Prime Minister, through the DMU, requested the IDB's technical support to draft said legislation. One of the requirements of the new legislation is that it will ensure that the country formally adopts humanitarian standards that include gender and disability considerations.
- 1.13 In this regard, the Bank will support the preparation and approval of an "Act to establish that the needs of persons who are vulnerable on account of their age, gender, disability, poverty, lack of resources or physical displacement must be considered in the disaster response provided by the government". As a result, and in compliance with the IDB's Update to the Gender Action Plan for Operations 2020-2021, this operation is aligned with the cross-cutting issue of "Gender equality and Diversity".
- 1.14 Disaster Preparedness Output indicator #15 in the Results Matrix "Act to establish that the needs of persons who are vulnerable on account of their age, gender, disability, poverty, lack of resources or physical displacement must be considered in the disaster response provided by the government, approved" entails the need to take into account, as part of the government's disaster response, the needs of vulnerable groups, including women and people with disabilities. This indicator is specific and measurable, has a baseline, can be reached within the expected deadlines, is relevant, has a defined period, and includes a means of verification. This indicator is directly linked to the attainment of the iGOPP's DP-2-16 indicator (see Annex I below). It is also worth mentioning that the Program's Results Matrix's Specific Development Objective 4 "To support governance improvement relating to disaster preparedness" will achieve its target value of 45% only if the policy commitment of approving a DRM legislation that delivers Output indicator #15 is met.

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## Annex I. Description of the iGOPP's DP-2-16 indicator

Closed-ended question	
16. Do the regulations governing the disaster preparedness processes recognize and establish differential treatment for vulnerable populations?	
Indicator Overview	
<p>The indicator recognizes as a quality attribute of the applicable legal framework the disaster preparedness and response processes that are explicitly established to recognize differential treatment for vulnerable populations during emergency and disaster response activities.</p> <p>Considering the reality and context of each country, the regulations may identify different vulnerable populations, such as: persons with disabilities, pregnant and/or lactating women, children under 3 years of age, native peoples, migrant population, displaced population, etc., for which, due to their condition of vulnerability, it is expected that a differential treatment will be established in the response to the emergency.</p> <p>Vulnerability must be an intrinsic condition of the person or population referred to, and not because of their exposure to the risk of disaster or being affected by a particular emergency or disaster situation.</p>	
Steps to follow to obtain the required information	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Verify whether the DRM or the disaster preparedness regulations establish or define vulnerable populations or groups.</li> <li>2. Identify in actions already carried out for disaster preparedness whether differential treatment for vulnerable populations has been observed. If so, verify whether this practice has been legally mandated or simply due to good practice.</li> <li>3. If necessary, check with the lead institution for DRM or the disaster preparedness processes on compliance with this indicator.</li> </ol>	
Link to other indicators	
<b>GF-1A-1</b> <b>DP-1A-1</b>	The standard reviewed or used to verify these indicators could contain information on considerations about vulnerable populations.
Description of the minimum situation required to consider the indicator met	
<p>For this indicator to be met, the following conditions must be met:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That DRM or the disaster preparedness regulations explicitly recognize who the vulnerable populations are.</li> <li>2. That the disaster preparedness processes establish a differential treatment for vulnerable populations.</li> </ol> <p>The justification for the indicator must include both the vulnerable populations defined in the regulations identified, and the differential treatment considered for them.</p> <p>This indicator cannot be validated if the regulations identified define vulnerable populations as those living in risk areas or affected by a given emergency and disaster.</p>	