GOOD PRACTICES FOR GENDER IN EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

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INTEGRATING GENDER INTO EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS AND RESPONSE: CASE STUDY OF A GOOD PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

The GCRSP addressed gender in two ways. The first was to develop and deliver a five-day course which was entirely focused on the theme of integrating gender into early warning systems (EWS). The second was to integrate gender issues into all components of GCRSP’s End of Programme Exercise (EoPE), a crisis simulation exercise designed to strengthen the coordination of crisis response in complex emergencies among the four agencies responsible for diverse aspects of crises in the Caribbean.

This two-track approach to gender mainstreaming combined gender-specific approaches with gender-integrated project initiatives in keeping with both recognized international practice and the EU’s own gender mainstreaming policy. It is based on the premise that there is a need for both approaches to address gender issues effectively. Gender-specific activities are often a need to redress past gender inequality. For the GCRSP, this was done by providing sector-specific analysis and tools to assist EWS practitioners to address these inequalities in their work. This was complemented in other project components by providing the tools, processes and knowledge needed for non-gender specialists to be able to integrate key gender and diversity inputs into project activities that were not focused on gender.

In recognition of the complexity of gender equality issues the approach recommended by GCRSP’s Gender Expert, Dana Peebles, was for the project to look at gender from a diversity lens within the context of EWS and crises. This approach recognizes the inter-relationship between gender and other demographic variables such as age, ethnicity, geographic location (rural/urban), income, education, etc. The inter-relationship between these different variables and gender is particularly important to understand when addressing vulnerability issues related to early warning systems. The other key principle promoted as a part of the project’s approach to gender was that women and vulnerable groups should not be seen only as victims of emergencies but also as critical change agents who can and do make a significant contribution at each stage of any early warning system.
2. INTEGRATED APPROACH TO MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER ISSUES

2.1 INTO WHICH PROJECT COMPONENTS GENDER WAS INTEGRATED

Integrating gender issues into all project components is often more difficult to achieve technically than supporting gender-focused activities. This does not have to be a challenging process, however. As the GCRSP EoPE component demonstrated this can be done fairly readily.

The EoPE component included four (4) key activities:

1. A workshop on the joint coordination processes (JCPCP) required for the four regional agencies responsible for planning for and responding to crises in the Caribbean, namely: CARICOM IMPACS, CARPHA, CDEMA and RSS.

2. A workshop designed to help these agencies develop a common set of Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) related to EWS and crisis response.

3. A scripting exercise for an emergency simulation exercise designed to test out these SoPs and the capacity of the four regional agencies to coordinate their activities and roles in a complex crisis situation.

4. The implementation of the emergency simulation exercise, called Synergy 2017.

2.2 HOW GENDER WAS INTEGRATED INTO THESE ACTIVITIES

The EoPE project component was led by Roger Lane, a consultant specializing in leadership development and coaching. The steps taken to integrate gender into each EoPE activity included the following:

1. The Gender Expert was introduced to the EoPE team and briefed on the related processes planned.

2. To support the JCPCP and SoP workshops, the Gender Expert prepared a comprehensive tip sheet that explained the rationale for integrating gender into EWS and crisis response and outlined specific gender issues in the Caribbean the team needed to take into account. This tip sheet was shared with Roger Lane and his expert team and some of its elements used as a resource during the JCPCP and SoP workshops.
3. Prior to the JCPCP, SoP and Emergency Simulation workshops, the Gender Expert was asked to review related training/scripting materials to provide additional input on gender and diversity issues. The Roger Lane team had already addressed several of these so it was mainly a question of adding greater depth of analysis as well as raising process questions on how gender could be mainstreamed effectively into regional coordination mechanisms, SoP and the emergency simulation scripting exercise.

4. Following the JCPCP and SoP workshops, the Gender Expert also reviewed the joint coordination documents and SoPs produced by the workshop participants and provided technical comments on these from a gender integration perspective.

5. The Gender Expert also served as an on-site resource person during the Emergency Simulation Scripting Exercise and provided technical inputs on gender and diversity issues in response to any scenarios developed during the exercise.

6. The Gender Expert also provided recommendations on the suggested processes for coordinating inputs on gender and diversity issues in crisis response among the four regional agencies concerned.

2.3 RATIONALE FOR INTEGRATING GENDER INTO EWS AND CRISIS RESPONSE

The background tip sheet prepared to share with Roger Lane and workshop participants included a clear rationale for the individuals working in early warning systems and crisis response to take the time to integrate gender into these processes and allocate the resources needed to do so. This provided them with the core business case for doing so at the same time as increasing awareness of the related gender and diversity issues.

The primary reasons for integrating gender into early warning systems and crisis response include the following:

1. The majority of the countries of the four Caribbean regional agencies serve are signatories to the key international and regional commitments and conventions on gender equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (CONVENTION OF BELÉM DO PARÁ). This places onus on these regional organizations to help implement these conventions.

2. Natural disasters and other types of crises have a significantly different impact on women and men and boys and girls. These differences need to be taken into account in planning, monitoring, communication and response processes to reduce the number of deaths and injuries among both sexes, prevent trafficking for the purposes of sexual or labour exploitation and reduce the incidence of gender based violence.
that often peak during crises. Some examples of these differential impacts and related factors include:

a. *More women and children experience fatalities or injuries in or near the home in earthquakes and floods; while men tend to be more at risk in public spaces.* This is directly related to their different gender roles and activities. In the Caribbean, both sexes are at increased risk from drowning during floods or tsunamis as culturally neither sex is encouraged to learn to swim.

b. Due to their different gender roles *women and men often observe different things taking place in their communities.* Thus inputs are needed from both about early warning indicators of impending natural disasters such as drought or conflict. Children also observe other changes and their inputs can be invaluable in early warning monitoring processes.

c. *Women and men often have different preferences for and access to communications media during a crisis* (e.g., radio alert versus loudspeaker announcements by vehicles passing through the streets). To reach everyone during a crisis, particularly ones requiring evacuation of the population, crisis communication planning needs to take these gender differences/preferences into account.

d. *Women and children* tend to be viewed mostly as vulnerable, potential victims during crises. While they do have increased vulnerability in many crisis contexts, they also *can and do play an active role in crisis response* and related planning also needs to take their strengths and capacity into account, e.g., in the Caribbean women often take the lead in ensuring that the elderly and disabled are evacuated at the community level.

e. *Post crisis recovery processes and funding also needs to take gender differentials into account.* Often women cannot return to their income activities until their children and elderly family members have adequate care. If provision of this care is not given priority, it can delay and limit women’s recovery from a crisis or natural disaster far more than it does for men who generally do not have this prime responsibility. In addition, in the Caribbean more women than men operate home-based businesses that can be adversely affected by natural disasters. Since these are often informal, non-registered businesses that have relatively low value assets, restoration of these income-generating activities may not be given priority compared to larger-scale, more highly capitalized businesses in the recovery period. However, a large part of a community’s resilience depends upon restoring these smaller business operations as well.

All these are factors that can affect how effective early warning systems and crisis response
are. There are many other gender differences and issues that also need to be taken into account. **To do so adequately requires that location-specific gender analysis be conducted as a standard part of EWS and crisis response planning.** During the actual crisis itself, if this prior gender analysis has not been done, crisis response can readily either exacerbate existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities or the response process may miss out on valuable supports and inputs from women and children. In the Caribbean, youth, in particular, have a potentially strong role to play.

### 2.4 STANDARD ACTIONS TO TAKE TO MAKE EWS GENDER-RESPONSIVE

There are four main stages within an EWS system:

1. Risk knowledge
2. A monitoring and warning service
3. Dissemination of meaningful warnings to those at risk
4. Response Capability

To make EWS gender responsive, officials need to review each stage to determine where in the process gender and diversity inputs are needed and then build these into each one systematically. In other words, **this is a process for which there should be standard, technical requirements** as opposed to gender integration being left up to the individual sensitivity or interest of those working in the field. At a minimum, this means incorporating the following activities into each stage:

**Risk Knowledge:** risk assessments need to include core questions on what gender-related factors make specific groups of women, men, girls and boys at greater risk during different types of crises. Key variables that should be included relate to age, physical or mental disability, location, family status, ethnicity, income levels and education.

**Monitoring and Warning Service:** Assess which specific groups of women/men/boys/girls have access to which types of observational information and how each male/female group can be tapped for this information to help monitor for early warning signs of impending crises.

**Dissemination of Meaningful Warnings to Those at Risk:** Assess gender and age differences related to communication of warnings and develop a strategy that takes these into account, e.g., in the Caribbean, the people who operate ham radios are
generally older men; youth have also been recruited to use SMS to help disseminate warnings in some areas.

**Response Capability:** It is critical to regard women and children as potential change agents and not just as vulnerable groups. In the Caribbean it is generally women at the community level who respond to planning meetings related to crisis planning. Therefore crisis planning needs to take this factor into account and to also ask women at the community level what factors need to be addressed to ensure their priority needs are also taken care of during different types of crisis and in the post-crisis recovery period.

### 3. LESSONS LEARNED

The factors that made it possible for GCRSP to integrate gender and diversity issues so systematically in the EoPE component included the following:

1. Support and direction from GCRSP leadership that doing so was a project priority.

2. Openness and commitment to the importance of integrating gender and diversity issues in the EoPE process on the part of the Roger Lane Consulting team.

3. Involvement of the Gender Expert early on in the EoPE process. This made it possible to provide technical inputs while training materials were still being drafted. In other words, rather than being an afterthought and add-on, the inclusion of gender and diversity issues was considered as a technical factor from the beginning of the process. This approach also meant that in many cases the Roger Lane and the expert team had already started to integrate gender and diversity issues into their training materials. Consequently, there was just a need for the Gender Expert to review these to address any region-specific issues or other gaps.

4. The opportunity to review the JCPCP and SoP documents produced by the workshops made it possible to reinforce strategic gender entry points in the coordination and SoP processes and to further systematize the regional agency approach to gender integration.

5. The Gender Expert had considerable experience in the region and was able to help the team identify region-specific gender and diversity issues that had relevance to regional agency participants.

6. There is increasing awareness and acceptance among regional agency personnel of
why integrating gender and diversity issues is an important technical factor to take into consideration. This made the agency participants fairly receptive to the gender integration processes and issues discussed.