



Women's autonomy and gender equality at the centre of climate action in Latin America and the Caribbean

Regional consultation prior to the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women within the framework of the sixty-second meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

Lorena Aguilar Revelo



UNITED NATIONS



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Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean**

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This document was prepared by Lorena Aguilar Revelo, consultant with the Division for Gender Affairs of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), as a reference document for the special regional consultation prior to the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which was held in the framework of the sixty-second meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, on 26 and 27 January 2022. The consultation was organized by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and ECLAC as part of the activities of the ECLAC/UN-Women project "Joint programme to promote the implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean".

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Contents

Introduction	5
I. The structural challenges of gender inequality and climate change	9
II. Incorporation of the gender perspective in the international normative framework on climate change	13
III. Progress on gender and climate change at the regional level	19
IV. Priority areas for regional action from a gender perspective	27
V. Final remarks	39
Bibliography	41
 Table	
Table 1	Gender-related decisions in UNFCCC, by theme 15
 Boxes	
Box 1	Priority areas of the second gender action plan of UNFCCC 17
Box 2	Treatment of climate change in eight gender equality plans 24

Introduction

this document was prepared as part of the preparations for the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in March 2022 with the priority theme “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”.

Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region of the world in which, for over four decades, governments, the United Nations system, international bodies and civil society organizations, especially women's and feminist organizations, have gathered at the sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Out of this coordinated work has arisen a profound, ambitious and comprehensive Regional Gender Agenda, which is the road map for reaching sustainable development by 2030, closing gaps in the implementation of gender policies and progressing towards substantive equality and the full guarantee of women's rights.

The governments gathered under the aegis of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean recognized that gender inequality has historically been a structural feature in the region, which is at the root of the unsustainability of the prevailing development model. It is associated with decades of wealth concentration, environmental deterioration and increasingly precarious living conditions for women. Gender inequality in the region is manifested in four structural challenges: socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty in a framework of exclusionary growth; discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns; the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care; and the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere. These structural challenges exacerbate each other and generate complex socioeconomic, cultural and belief systems that hinder and reduce the scope of policies on gender equality and women's autonomy (ECLAC, 2017b).

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has hit at a time when human activity is intensifying environmental damage and accelerating climate-change. This activity is linked to an unsustainable development pattern, that disregards environmental costs and the value of care work. In this context, women have been doubly excluded: on the one hand, the heightened care demands amid the pandemic have fallen disproportionately on their shoulders; and on the other, the effects of climate change impact women in a differentiated manner owing to the sexual division of labour, as will be described later.

Given the need for transformative responses to address the multiple facets of the COVID-19 crisis—which have turned a spotlight on the pre-existing care crisis and the climate crisis—and taking up the contributions made by feminist economics and women's and feminist movements in the region, as well as by indigenous and Afro-Latin and Caribbean peoples, ECLAC has called for progress towards a care society that cares for people and for care-givers, that takes into account inter-care and self-care as well as care of the planet (2021f). Accordingly, the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, at their sixty-first meeting, adopted "The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality" as the central theme for discussion at the fifteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean of (ECLAC, 2021a).

However, approaches to people's relations with the environment, and to the issue of climate change in particular, have afforded scant consideration to the gender perspective, which has only relatively recently been incorporated into the various normative spheres, and into the design and implementation of responses.

In accordance with the international normative framework on human rights, States have the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction of ethnicity, sex, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national origin or social status, economic position, birth, disability or other condition. Human rights instruments, and specifically the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which all the States of Latin America and the Caribbean have ratified, establish obligations for States to ensure substantive equality and the exercise of women's rights, and obliges States to adopt measures to end all forms of discrimination against women. The obligations are binding for States parties and apply in all areas, including the environment.

The evolution of environmental policy from 1992 to the present includes recognition of the importance of human rights and gender equality in sustainable development frameworks. This is the outcome of the consensus reached within the United Nations and other multilateral arenas,¹ in addition to the efforts and contributions of women' and feminist organizations, national and regional human and environmental rights defenders, public officials, civil society and research institutions, who work to ensure that environmental policies address development challenges and promote human rights and equality.

Other factors that have influenced this evolution include the gender-differentiated impacts on communities around the world of a planetary imbalance and a changing climate; the interconnected global political, environmental and economic challenges of recent years, more recently exacerbated by the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic; the growing understanding that gender equality and human rights are essential for the sustainable development and well-being of all people in their diversity; and the mounting research—and increasing attention it is receiving—on problems of inequality, gender equality, rights, poverty, the economy and the environment.

At the regional level, within the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America

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