

**What are the challenges facing a transformative recovery with gender equality and environmental sustainability for young women in the Caribbean?**

The care society prioritizes the sustainability of life, linking care for people and for the planet. It can help to reverse social and gender inequalities in synergy with the environmental dimension and economic development. It helps to reduce the precariousness of care

**What do women and girls and the environment have in common- everything? Women and the natural environment sustain us. Women and girls, and the environment have been historically exploited in the name of economic development. Climate change, conflict and covid-19 have disproportionately impacted our women and continues to threaten our natural environment. And now added to the burden of care of that women provide to children and to men, is the weight of caring for an Earth that increasingly faces threat of more severe droughts, biodiversity loss and food insecurity. And who stands to be most adversely impacted? Women and girls! In light of these intersecting and overlapping threats- conflict, covid and climate change- we must acknowledge that there are significant challenges that hinder a transformative recovery young women in the Caribbean.**

**Pervasive gender inequality**

No country in Latin America and the Caribbean has yet achieved substantive equality between men and women, despite efforts to close structural inequality gaps. The Caribbean continues to experience gender inequality with significant disparities in political leadership, income levels and participation in the labour market. There are large gender gaps in the business world of Latin America and the Caribbean, where women hold only 15% of management positions and own only 14% of companies, according to a study by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Data on wages show that males earnings surpass those of females by between 14 and 27 percent of average females wages in Barbados, and between 8 and 17 percent of average females wages in Jamaica. The extent of the inequality is also evident in the continued prevalence of gender-based violence that primarily targets women. The UNDP Caribbean Human Development report indicates that 30.4% women in the Caribbean report high rates of fear of sexual assault in comparison to 11.1% of men. In Jamaica and Guyana high levels of abuse towards women are recorded annually. Recent data show that... Such The sustained inequality that impacts women's ability to optimize their functions in all facets of life. Young women in Jamaica, for example, despite having higher enrolment levels than males, earn less in their jobs. These realities silence and deprive young women of the freedom to access all their rights. It renders young women especially those from lower economic circumstances dependent on men and therefore subject to abuse and violence. Our societies will not achieve a transformative recovery if every step is not taken to eradicate, through an intersectional lens and using a human rights approach that seeks to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

**Gender blind 'recovery' policies**

In the aftermath of the pandemic governments in the region sought also to implement social policies and fiscal response measures to reduce the impacts on the poorest individuals and households.

Barbados- the minimum wage increase policy stands out as a progressive initiative with transformative potential, but it was not informed by research and evidence on women's economic realities. For example, it did not account for the effects of women's unpaid care work and their ability to engage in paid work during school closures, and the fact that they are heavily concentrated in the informal sector. Similarly, in Jamaica did not include a gendered approach to the development and implementation of cash transfer programmes. As a result, poorer women were rendered destitute as the measures set up to support them did not address their inability to read, access help and help their financial recovery.

## **Feminization of poverty**

The face of poverty is still largely that of women and female poverty has more far-reaching effects, in that they have primary responsibility for children and the elderly. The confluence of conflict, climate change and covid-19 is driving increasing number of women into poverty. To stem the continued impoverishment of women, the region needs an integrated policy approach that allows for more spending on social protection, investments in the green economy, better infrastructure and gender transformative education.

## **Stigmatization & 'othering' of vulnerable groups**

Climate change has led to decreased access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene disrupted livelihoods and increased levels of labour exploitation and abuse; an overload of care work, negatively impacting psychosocial, physical, and emotional health; interruptions of life-saving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, especially for refugees, indigenous populations and gender diverse groups. Policies that treat young women as a homogenous group, rather than acknowledge the diversity of young women in the region will inadvertently widen the inequality gap within and across the groups and fail to achieve a just and transformative recovery for all. We must not be afraid to advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, we must be a voice for the intentionally silenced persons on our societies, we must honor the traditions of indigenous people and we must challenge ourselves and create space for people who don't look like us, who don't share our beliefs and who experience life differently than we do. Unless we are able to accomplish this- we will NOT achieve a transformative recovery for ALL girls.

## **Burden of care**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, women spent on average between 22 and 42 hours per week on unpaid domestic work and caregiving tasks, however regional data showed that with schools being physically closed, they have had to spend considerably more time entertaining, feeding and supporting their children's online learning. According to the World Food Programme (WFP) and CARICOM, 54 per cent of women compared to 47 per cent of men experienced an increase in unpaid domestic work, while 46 per cent of women compared to 35 per cent of men [increased their childcare duties](#). The burden of care falls heavily on women while jobs traditionally held by women were hardest hit. This burden is unduly extended to young women in the households. In Jamaica, young women reported having to spend more time assisting younger siblings with schooling as online schooling meant many parents were unable to manage technological tools. In some instances young women were saddled with the responsibility to manage entire households to afford mothers the chance to work outside the home. In many instances, there was increased exposure to sexual abuse by male members of the household. A transformative recovery process must address and reduce the burden of care for women and support young women's free participation in the productive economy while giving them the freedom to choose how to participate in the reproductive sector.

## **Climate change & climate finance**

Young women and girls shoulder the bulk of care work. The global care crisis is being made worse by the climate crisis. Climate change intensifies the work involved in caring for people, animals, plants, and places. It reduces the availability and quality of public services in marginalized communities and directly compounds the unfair distribution of unpaid care work built around the gendered division of labour.

The biophysical impacts of Climate change on the region are well documented and there is increasing research to highlight the social implications of the crisis. Gender, education, age and other socio-demographic variables have emerged as strong determinants of climate vulnerability. Across the region, women, especially poor women and rural women are among the most adversely impacted by the

financial and social impacts of the crisis. This is evidenced by the loss of income, increased incidence of domestic abuse and reduced access to natural resources. Notwithstanding, young women continue to be the face of climate action in the region. The time and resource they invest in climate action comes at great sacrifice to other areas of their lives. At the opening of the COP27 negotiations now under way in Egypt, General Secretary to the UNFCCC, Simon Steill of Grenada, thanked young people for placing climate change at the top of the global political agenda. I would like to go further to say it was YOUNG WOMEN that placed climate change at the top of the global agenda. Yet, young women continue to be silenced and victimized for their opinions and advocacy on climate change. Our governments are developing ambitious plans for reducing emissions and phasing out use of fossil fuels. A **just transition** is seen as the key to transforming our societies towards greening our economies. This cannot be in name only. It must seek to ensure a gender-responsive **just transition** and decent jobs in sectors where women have a substantial share of employment, such as agriculture, tourism, and in the care sector. Any policy, plan or strategy to advance a transition of our economies must carefully consider the capacities and vulnerabilities of young women, girls, gender diverse peoples and indigenous communities. Failure to do so will lead to higher levels of inequality, increased poverty among young women, and exclusion of women and girls from the most viable economic sectors and industries. This is not a characteristic of a transformative recovery.

### **Pursual of flawed models of economic development- focus on extractive industries**

Persistent and structural gender inequality within the extractive industries continues to undermine women's rights and the development potential of the sector (Oxfam). As countries try to bounce back from the impacts of COVID-19 on already fledging economies, many governments are moving to expedite efforts to reactivate weakened economies and to kickstart economic development. Despite the fact that COVID highlighted the flaws of current capitalist economic models, Caribbean governments are rushing to revamp such models in the name of development. Some countries are pivoting to extractive industries. In Jamaica indigenous forests and protected areas have come under threat from mining by bauxite companies, despite the known risk to watersheds and water resources, the loss of plant and animal and plant biodiversity and the impacts on the health and social well-being of residents. In Guyana, oil extraction has brought the promise of wealth creation and fears of increased economic polarization, as well as environmental damage. Globally, deep sea mining is high on the agenda as a source of material to develop renewable technologies. These extractive industries have highly gender-specific effects, with economic impacts such as job creation interacting with gender norms (e.g., gender segregation in labor markets) to affect labor and marriage markets, fertility, and violence. If countries continue to pursue these models they will worsen the gender inequality and further marginalize young women and girls in our countries, while simultaneously destroying the natural environment.

### **Conclusion**

The systematic devaluation of care must end! As our governments work to address the climate crisis, policies and plans must consider the care economy and the ways in which women's contribution to care work are impacted by climate change, and how actions and decisions can promote more equitable distribution of care work.

There are world leaders who see the climate crisis as merely an opportunity to access climate finance. That is a problem! Focus on building resilient people and ensuring fair distribution and use of climate finance to make frontline communities more resilient and to make a JUST transition from fossil fuels a reality.

All actions must consider the extreme cases of exclusion and deprivations and not merely try to address the average circumstance as presented by the data. Our work and decision making should be grounded in both the qualitative and quantitative data to allow for the stark realities of those who are most impacted by the multiple crises to be remedied by our actions and policies. When we gather in these rooms, we must not forget the images of need and neglect that we observed as we journeyed here. And as we walk through the streets of Buenos Aires or anywhere else in the world, we must ask ourselves - How my actions as an activist, policymaker, technocrat, or leader lend to the problems our communities face- and more importantly how can my decisions support a transformation, an improvement in the lives of those who suffer most. I am an advocate for girls and young women- but I am a champion for equity and I know that when we make decisions that duly consider the needs of the most vulnerable and the most needy that **all** of humanity benefits.

We will not achieve a transformative recovery based on tokenism.

We will not achieve a transformative economy by doubling down on efforts to resuscitate predatory patriarchy through capitalism that is built on the backs of women through an undervalued care economy

We will not achieve a just recovery by excluding gender diverse individuals and doing only enough to check a box for inclusion of indigenous women, poor women, and minority ethnicities

We will only achieve equity when all of us acknowledge our privilege and ask ourselves

We will only achieve a just recovery when we are deliberate about justice, when we begin to see equity as an imperative for 'development' and when science and statistics are paired with kindness and empathy and the will to create a just world for current and future generations.

It's important that we don't just do this, but rather that we live this. It's critical that we acknowledge that women and girls, and the environment have been the subject of years of exploitation that have financed our economies and sustained our societies. The acknowledgment of this truth and the dismantling of this