



Climate risks for Jamaica and the Impact on Women

On 8 March, the world celebrated International Women's Day. The UN Women theme for this year's celebration was "[Gender equality for a sustainable tomorrow](#)", highlighting the contributions of women and girls worldwide who are leading the charge on climate change adaptation, mitigation, and response. Some of the most influential advocates of environmental sustainability are women, such as Greta Thunberg, Amina Mohammed and Christiana Figueres.

Unfortunately, women and girls run several specific risks in the case of disasters resulting from climate change. In acknowledging those risks, the initiative [EnGenDER](#) is a large-scale project funded by Global Affairs Canada and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and implemented by UNDP, UN Women, WFP and CDEMA. EnGenDER supports climate change, disaster risk reduction and environmental management interventions in nine Caribbean countries. It does this by leveraging sector-level entry points, including those identified through National Action Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs), supporting implementation and/or upscaling countries' priority actions. The project analyses and prioritizes the needs of those most vulnerable to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Actions are concentrated in some specific priority sectors looking to increase the resilience of livelihoods.

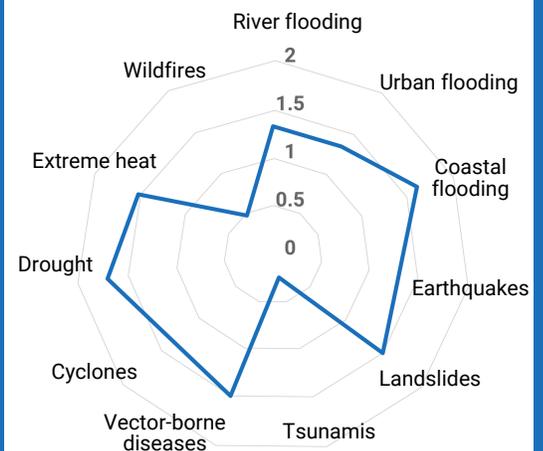
Hazard level in Jamaica

While the members of the Jamaican Economy Panel (JEP) are not all disaster experts, they were nevertheless asked about their assessment of risk for the case of Jamaica. Not all of the disasters are climate-related, but it should be noted that many of these have the potential to be exacerbated by climate change, as [noted](#) by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

According to the panellists, the greatest threats to Jamaica are drought, coastal flooding, and extreme heat. The threat level for these hydrometeorological hazards is considered ahead of the other potential threats. Tsunamis and wildfires are seen as the least likely disasters to strike Jamaica.

The hazard levels for Jamaica are a momentary observation. Nevertheless, the threat of climate change exacerbates some of these risks more than others. For that reason, the panellists each ranked the three hazards they saw as being most impacted by climate change. The results show that drought, urban flooding, and cyclones are the hazards that are expected to intensify the strongest due to climate change. However, it should be clear that some participants mentioned all hazards except those of earthquakes, tsunamis, and wildfires as being climate-sensitive.

Risk rating for different climate-related disasters



NOTE: Respondents rated hazards as low (0), medium (1) and high (2). The reported values reflect the averages across all respondents.

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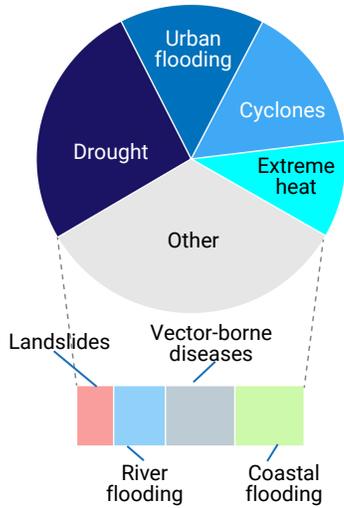
While there is still some uncertainty around the science, there are strong indications that cyclonic activity in the Caribbean basin is becoming more extreme. While Jamaica has been lucky in recent years, hurricane potential continues to be high. Extreme rainfall is more likely with climate change as higher temperatures allow the air to hold more moisture. This pattern will lead to increased flooding risks in urban and other communities

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DR. OLAF J. DE GROOT
Senior Economist, UNRCO

Hazards most affected by climate change



The Gender Dimension in Disasters

When asked about the vulnerability of women in the face of disasters, 85 per cent of respondents agreed that women in Jamaica are affected differently by disasters and climate change from men. The [EnGenDER project](#) provides some research insights into how men and women may be affected differently. One of the critical avenues through which the EnGenDER project sees higher levels of vulnerability is in the vulnerability of abuse during potential evacuations or shelter situations. However, the panellists focus on a broader range of issues of vulnerability. Many panellists focus on the women's economic vulnerabilities due to lower levels of income or their status as single parents.

“In many societies, particularly those with heterogeneity in socioeconomic power along gender lines and many single-parent families, women lack the support system necessary to be robust to the negative economic and socioeconomic effects of a disaster.”



DR. NADINE McCLOUD
Head of the Department of Economics, UWI Mona

This statement also goes towards another concern raised by several panellists. Women have greater domestic responsibilities and are thus more impacted by a lack of sanitation and clean water.

They are also seen as having more substantial community roles, which may burden their coping mechanisms.

“Research has shown that in the aftermath of Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, there were notable differences between genders as it relates to their biological and psychological needs. Accessing proper sanitation and clean water was particularly challenging for females while males found it quite difficult to cope with the extensive damages that Gilbert brought.”

WENDEL IVEY
Economist, Bank of Jamaica

It is also noted that women are more likely to work in sectors that may be strongly impacted by disasters, such as tourism and agriculture. On the issues of agriculture, one of the panellists observed the following:

“On one hand, many women in Jamaica are particularly vulnerable to anything affecting their family's livelihoods. On the other hand, many natural disasters in Jamaica disproportionately hit farmers and farming-related activities, which also includes many men.”

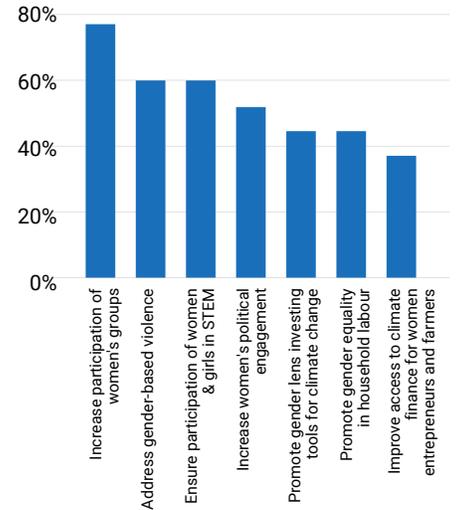
Of course, this leads to the question of what can be done to support the voices of women and girls in the discussions surrounding the climate change responses. The panellists were thus asked to look at some proposed strategies that may help make sure that women and girls are represented to the fullest. The foremost strategy is to ensure that women's groups are at the table when coping and adaptation strategies are discussed. It is imperative to stimulate the participation of civil society organizations that represent women's voices.

The second popular strategy is addressing gender-based violence, especially in the Jamaican context, as was addressed in [JEP Discussion 6](#). Another essential remedy is to promote the participation of women and girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

While educational outcomes, as shown by the [Jamaica Education Transformation Commission](#), educational outcomes tend to be much better for girls than boys, the gap is narrower when it comes to STEM areas. Nevertheless, as the report states, "Jamaica is the rare country where girls outperform boys in Math."

It will be essential to continue promoting the interest in STEM areas for girls and boys. Finally, increasing women's engagement in politics is also estimated to positively impact the representation of women's voices in disaster preparation. Since the 2020 elections, women's representation in the Lower House has increased to 28.5 per cent, and while it is slowly increasing, it is still very far from parity.

Strategies to increase women's participation in climate change response



Dr. Christine Clarke, Lecturer at the Department of Economics of UWI, Mona summarizes it succinctly:

“It makes the most sense to empower women and strengthen possible support to women.”

DR. CHRISTINE CLARKE
Lecturer, UWI Mona

Conclusion

There is little doubt that Jamaica is in a delicate situation concerning its disaster risk and preparation for climate change. The JEP respondents see exceptionally high hydrometeorological risks and see that these risks will likely increase over time.

Furthermore, many Jamaican women find themselves in entrenched positions such as single parents, heads of households, low-income jobs, or household and community responsibilities. Thus, there is no doubt in most respondents' minds that women and girls are affected differently by the risks of climate change from men and boys. To guarantee that women and girls are better included in developing strategies to reduce the impact of climate change, the most vital tool is to give them a seat at the table. It still happens too often that in-depth technical discussions are held without sufficient participation of women. The Global Affairs Canada and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office funded EnGenDER project, implemented by UNDP, UN Women, WFP and CDEMA, also attempts to address such inequalities and make sure that disaster response in Jamaica is approached with an appropriate gender lens.