



## Submission from the Mary Robison Foundation – Climate Justice 19<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for consideration in the preparation of a General Recommendation on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction and climate change.

The Mary Robison Foundation – Climate Justice welcomes the initiative taken by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to focus on, and advance States parties understandings of, the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change. The Foundation firmly believes that valuing local knowledge and facilitating genuine bottom up policy formation is central to effective, people-centred climate action and disaster risk reduction. One way to enable this is to include grassroots women in the design, planning and implementation of climate action at a local and national level.

**The Foundation suggests that the General Recommendation by the CEDAW Committee emerging from the February 29<sup>th</sup> General Discussion should emphasise to States parties the importance of facilitating the meaningful participation of grassroots women in the design, planning and implementation of climate action and DRR activities. This can be achieved by creating a platform for grassroots women to participate in policy making at a national level and providing the requisite training and capacity building to enhance their ability to participate effectively.** This would enhance gender sensitive national climate change and DRR strategies by ensuring that the voices of women living on the front lines of climate change are heard and acted upon.

Women’s voices must be heard and their priorities supported as part of securing climate justice. In many countries and cultures, women are at the forefront of living with the reality of the injustices caused by climate change. They can play a vital role as agents of change within their communities. The inclusion of grassroots women as participants in the design, planning and implementation of strategies at a national, as well as local, level would create the conditions for more effective policy formation that benefits from their knowledge of gender responsive climate actions in the fields of adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

The Foundation has positive experience of engaging grassroots women in policy discussions. In April 2013, the Foundation and the Government of Ireland co-hosted a conference, called Hunger-Nutrition-Climate Justice, which was designed to provide the opportunity for grassroots engagement. One third of conference participants were grassroots practitioners from climate vulnerable countries. The conference demonstrated that, by listening to the realities of people,

especially women, living on the front line and their experiences of both the problems and the solutions that work, policy makers and political leaders can garner critical evidence to make policy development more relevant, responsive and effective<sup>1</sup>.

The conference format also highlighted that preparing grassroots participants for their roles as presenters, policy champions or panellists is essential for them to participate meaningfully. A key recommendation emerging from the Foundation’s research into women’s participation is that, in order to fully realise meaningful participation, grassroots women need to be supported with training, networks and access to resources<sup>2</sup>. This is a particularly acute need for grassroots women.

Sustainable, people centred approaches to disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change are most effective when they take into account the experiences and capabilities of grassroots people living with and finding solutions to climate change. Enabling grassroots participation would advance States Parties progress towards the “leave no one behind” ambition of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and specifically Sustainable Development Goal 13b which states:

13.b  
Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

Recent research completed by the Foundation finds that grassroots women’s participation is not just the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do – the case studies presented in the research showcase the positive benefits for people and planet when women are enabled to participate<sup>3</sup>. The 5 recommendations emerging from the research are:

- Increase the participation of women in climate actions at all levels
- Understand the context in relation to women’s ability to participate
- Shift the emphasis from women’s representation to women’s meaningful participation in climate actions
- Invest in training and capacity building to enable meaningful participation
- Document the good work that is going on to enable women’s participation and share lessons learned

The story of Celia Reyes, one of the grassroots women whose experiences in climate action was captured in the research case studies, is summarised overleaf.

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<sup>1</sup> Shine & McCabe, (2014) - Listening and Learning: A case study on engaging active participation by grassroots practitioners at an international conference available at <http://bit.ly/1UdXlrF> (Accessed 16 February 2016)

<sup>2</sup> MRFCJ (2015) Women’s Participation: An Enabler of Climate Justice available at <http://bit.ly/1PaPTFO> (Accessed 16 February 2016)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

**Box 1: Women’s engagement in community based climate action in La Aguada, Chile<sup>3</sup>**

As a member of the local neighbourhood organisation Junta de Vecinos La Aguada, Celia Reyes has become involved in decision-making processes and the design and implementation of climate action in her community.

Since 2008, the O’Higgins region of Chile has experienced recurrent drought which has rendered many rural livelihoods impossible. This has caused several families from Cecilia’s small community to migrate to towns and villages. Celia is unwilling to leave the land where she was born and wishes to ensure a better quality of life for her two young daughters.

Celia was acutely aware of the needs of her community as her family have lived in the La Aguada region for generations and she has been an active member of her community for many years. Through her participation in her neighbourhood organisation, she was able contribute to the design of capacity building and adaptation initiatives while also building on her existing skills and knowledge by participating in training on solar energy and rainwater harvesting. This has enabled her to maximise benefits for her family.

The project was developed by the community of La Aguada in consultation with municipal authorities, a local institute for agricultural research and the United Nations Development Programme. Having lived with the realities of the injustices caused by climate change, Celia Reyes has worked with other members of her community to develop solutions that not only increase resilience but also enable access to the benefits of low carbon development. Involvement in her communities response to climate change empowered Celia, who has since engaged in national and international dialogues on climate action.

By encouraging States parties to enable the meaningful participation of grassroots women at all levels of the design, planning and implementation of climate action and disaster risk reduction, this General Recommendation can bring about effective and sustainable, people centred approaches to climate change and its impacts. By taking into account the experience and capabilities of grassroots women, State parties would be advancing gender equality and climate justice.