

# **Beijing Platform+25 Report**

## **British Virgin Islands**



**Office of Gender Affairs**

**Ministry of Health and Social Development**

**Government of the Virgin Islands**

**May 1, 2019**

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## Overview of the British Virgin Islands

### Geographical Setting

The Virgin Islands (British) are located in the Caribbean, a British Overseas Territory, between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean, east of Puerto Rico. Its geographic coordinates are 18°30'N 64°30'W. The Virgin Islands consists of the main islands of Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Anegada, and Jost Van Dyke, along with over 50 other smaller islands and cays with 15 of the islands being inhabited.

The capital, Road Town, is on Tortola, the largest island, which is about 20 km (12 mi) long and 5 km (3 mi) wide. The islands had a population of about 28,000 at the 2010 Census, of whom approximately 23,500 lived on Tortola. For the islands, the latest United Nations estimate (2016) is 30,661.

Its natural hazards consist of hurricanes and tropical storms from July to October. There is limited natural fresh water resources (except for a few seasonal streams and springs on Tortola, most of the islands' water supply comes from wells and rainwater catchments). It has strong ties to nearby US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

### Politics

The Territory operates as a parliamentary democracy but the ultimate executive authority in Virgin Islands is vested in the Queen, and is exercised on her behalf by the Governor of the British Virgin Islands. The governor is appointed by the Queen on the advice of the British government. Defence and most foreign affairs remain the responsibility of the United Kingdom.

The most recent constitution was adopted in 2007 and came into force when the Legislative Council was dissolved for the 2007 general election. The head of government under the constitution is the Premier (before the new constitution the office was referred to as Chief Minister), who is elected in a general election along with the other members of the ruling government as well as the members of the opposition. Elections are held roughly every four years.

A cabinet is nominated by the Premier and appointed and chaired by the Governor. The Legislature consists of the Queen (represented by the Governor) and a unicameral House of Assembly made up of 13 elected members plus the Speaker and the Attorney General. The current Governor is Augustus Jaspert (since 22 August 2017). The current Premier is Andrew Fahie (since 26 February 2019), who is leader of the ruling Virgin Islands Party.

## **The Economy**

As a tax haven with an opaque banking system, the Virgin Islands enjoys one of the more prosperous economies of the Caribbean region, with a per capita average income of around \$42,300 (2010 est.) The average monthly income earned by a worker in the Territory was US\$2,452 as at the time of the 2010 Census. 29% of the population fell into the "low income" category.

Although it is common to hear criticism in the Virgin Islands' press about income inequality, no serious attempt has been made by economists to calculate a Gini coefficient or similar measure of income equality for the Territory. A report from 2000 suggested that, despite the popular perception, income inequality was actually lower in the Virgin Islands than in any other OECS state, although in global terms income equality is higher in the Caribbean than in many other regions.

The "twin pillars" of the economy are tourism and financial services. Politically, tourism is the more important of the two, as it employs a greater number of people within the Territory, and a larger proportion of the businesses in the tourist industry are locally owned, as are a number of the highly tourism-dependent sole traders (for example, taxi drivers and street vendors). Economically however, financial services associated with the Territory's status as an offshore financial centre are by far the more important. 51.8% of the Government's revenue comes directly from licence fees for offshore companies, and considerable further sums are raised directly or indirectly from payroll taxes relating to salaries paid within the trust industry sector (which tend to be higher on average than those paid in the tourism sector).

## General

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is the authority responsible for safeguarding and promoting the health and social wellbeing of the people of the Virgin Islands (British).

The Office of Gender Affairs falls under the Minister for Health and Social Development who has constitutional responsibility as assigned under section 56 of the Virgin Islands Constitution Order, 2007. The Permanent Secretary has oversight responsibility for the management and coordination of the operations of the Ministry and its related departments. In an advisory capacity, the Chief Medical Officer provides technical guidance on local, regional and international public health matters.

The Ministry seeks to provide a caring and integrated system of health and social services that facilitates human development and improves the quality of life in the Virgin Islands (British) by:

- developing proactive policies, legislation, strategies, and programmes for the health and social service sectors;
- promoting gender equity, social justice, and the progressive realization of human rights;
- performing essential public health functions, including health promotion, public health surveillance, research, and control of risks to public health;
- mitigating the impact of natural and man-made disasters on the health of the population; and
- delivering a wide range of social protection programmes and services, including social safety net programmes targeting the most vulnerable members of the population.

All these activities are performed through close collaboration with other sectors, ensuring community participation, and promoting self-reliance by increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals and social groups to improve their standard of living.

## Executive Summary

This summary highlights the achievements and the challenges for the Virgin Islands in the process since the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action (BPFA).

The BPFA) seeks to comprehensively address women's rights to equality in all areas of their lives, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural. It provides a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women and requires States Parties to take all the necessary measures to eliminate such discrimination.

The BPFA is a consensus document reflecting, the concerns of women the world over, requesting Government to reaffirm and recommit themselves to numerous actions to support a common gender development agenda. It continues to serve as a framework for guiding, and reaffirming the commitment of world Governments to promoting equal rights and dignity for both men and women.

It was widely recognized that inequalities in gender undermine the effectiveness of development policies in fundamental ways, and research has shown that in all regions of the world gender gaps exist in access to and control of resources, in economic opportunities, in power and in political voice. Achieving, gender equality is therefore a central development issue, and must be a part of any development strategy that seeks to enable men and women alike to improve their standards of living and for enabling men and women to participate at all levels of their society.

This document seeks to show the Virgin Islands compliance with the implementation of the BPFA.

There is continuous dialogue with the Government, NGO's, and local and international agencies to ensure that the 12 critical areas that emerged from the Beijing conference, dubbed today as 'The Beijing plus 25' are realized. The Ministry of Health and Social Development through the Gender Affairs describes itself as the legal body through which women and men rights are protected.

What have been the most important achievements, challenges and set-backs in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women over the past 5 years?

### **Achievements**

- **National Action Plan/National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality**

The National Action Plan is comprehensive and provides guidance for execution of the National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality which has a life span of five years. In the last five years a number of policies and programmes have been implemented.

- **Education –**

Expanded Data Collection in Education - a workshop was held geared towards instructing Education Officers, Principals, and administrators on a system needed to collect sex disaggregated data to facilitate ongoing monitoring of entry, transition, dropout and other participation rates throughout the education system. The Education Statistical Digest was implemented in 2014.

Technical and Vocational Education’ – A technical and vocational institution was established to work with youths and human resource professionals to promote a gender sensitive, supportive training environment for a full range of occupational choices of non-traditional and multidisciplinary courses in the technical and vocational sciences to be consistent with the human capital and developmental needs of the BVI.

- **Establishment of the Legislation, Inheritance Rights**

In 2014 The Status of Children Act, 2014 was approved. This act discontinues the distinctions between illegitimate and legitimate children and the equal distribution of inheritance. Previously, VI succession rules in intestate estates distinguished between children born in and outside of wedlock, dismissing all inheritance rights of an ‘illegitimate’ child. The Status of Children Act, 2014 has abolished this archaic approach in line with the modern world by providing for equality between legitimate and illegitimate children in terms of their legal rights and legal status.

- **Child Maintenance and Access Act, 2018**

The Child Maintenance and Access Act provides for the maintenance and access to children and for connected matters in the Virgin Islands. This Legislation makes no distinction between

children born in marriage and those born out of wedlock. It further makes provisions where each parent of the child has an obligation to provide for the child or children.

### **Women in Health**

Mental Health became a component of Primary Health Care Provisioning - the new Mental Health Policy improves the ability of low-cost psychological counseling for both men and women in the VI.

- **Establishment of the National Domestic Violence Protocol**

On October 1, 2014, the National Domestic Violence Protocol was signed by the Minister of Health and Social Development, Director of Public Prosecutions and the Police Commissioner.

The specific objectives of the protocol are:

- To create awareness amongst stakeholders of the importance of adopting a more integrated systematic response to domestic violence.
- To serve as a guide for stakeholders in the prevention, reporting and management of domestic violence cases.
- To support a coordinated response to domestic violence that would better facilitate data collection on the nature and extent of domestic violence.
- To enhance the systemic responses to domestic violence to ensure more effective service delivery to victims of domestic violence.

Key stakeholders training has taken place annually to ensure each service delivery personnel know their role and responsibility. The key stakeholders are in the process of developing their own internal policies. The Royal Virgin Islands Police Force as completed same for the force.

- **Women in Leadership**

Women have advanced to prominent positions within government. Women account for four out of seven Permanent Secretary positions within the Government.

- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Health and Social Development
- Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture
- Permanent Secretary, Office of the Deputy Governor
- Permanent Secretary, Premier's Office

In 2016, the country's second female Deputy Governor was appointed.

Overall, women in both the public and private spheres are dominating the managerial positions and the Virgin Islands have already surpassed the 33% quota set by the BPPFA regarding women in politics life.

## **Challenges**

In order to respond to the larger agenda, and to coordinate efforts to assume the roles required by the government and other international obligations, the Gender Affairs Unit requires that the legal framework be strengthened to achieve equality and freedom from discrimination.

- The Virgin Islands current legal provisions and policies which govern discrimination are:

1. The Virgin Islands' Constitution
2. The Virgin Islands National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality
3. The Domestic Violence Act, 2011
4. The Criminal Code, 1997
5. The National Domestic Violence Protocol, 20146.

As the legislative framework of the Virgin Islands now stands, there is not full compliance with the Beijing Platform for Action. Presently, the legislations and policies, identified above, aimed at promoting the elimination of discrimination against women. However, they do not sufficiently protect women in the Virgin Islands from all forms of discrimination.

The Virgin Islands' Constitution affords protection to all women in the Territory from discrimination on the basis of sex/gender. However, this right is not afforded with the national legislation as they stand.

- **Political Support**

Strengthening political full support and will power to push the Gender Affairs agenda to ensure that the Unit achieves its stated goals and objectives is among the challenges facing the Unit. It must be noted, however, that although there is some miniscule support it is does not produce any

waves that will intensify the Unit's results. This lack of support trickles into the various communities and further diminishes and lessens the Unit's role and authority to influence change.

- **Women in Decision Making**

The last National Report on the Status of Women in the Virgin Islands was completed in 1994; almost twenty-five years have passed.

- **Data gaps**

There is a crucial need for data to be collected by key agencies, which include information that is disaggregated by sex, ethnic/racial population, socio-economic condition and other pertinent variables based on area being addressed such as health, education, criminal offences, etc. Once this information becomes available the office will be able to provide systematic evidenced based reports on gender inequalities in the various areas to plan the way forward to address the inequalities thereby ensuring sustainability. For example, in the area of health, using sex disaggregated data with other relevant variables will allow health care workers to improve generation analysis and use the data to reduce risk factors and gender-based inequities.

A well-functioning data collection system will allow the opportunity for health services and other entities to identify trends within a particular system and be able to recognize possible ways to address concerns. Before the information can be used, it must be collected from the right sources, which should include quantitative and qualitative information appropriately disaggregated. This information has to be collected in key areas and be shared across the sectors to thereby effect change. Data must be understandable and useable. The sharing of information and the correct collection of information is desperately needed for evidence-based planning to address gender inequalities and inequities. Without gender balance the society is at risk of becoming infested with negative social characteristics, such as high crime, strained health care system, male drop outs, filled prisons etc.

- **Natural Disasters**

In 2017 the VI was greatly impacted by a flood and two categories five (5) Hurricanes. The destructive winds and rains of Hurricane Irma and Maria caused widespread damage to the road

infrastructure, housing stock, ports, telecommunications, electrical and water infrastructure and as well as critical government facilities. This resulted with several persons being displaced from their living accommodations and place of employment.

- **Manpower**

At present, the Office of Gender Affairs is the main mechanism through which the vision and institutional capacities for gender equality in the country is being built. The actions for achieving these objectives listed above involve advancing women's issues, promoting the involvement of women, training and engaging with policy makers at all stages, and effectively coordinating activities relevant to gender equality and equity at various national levels. Therefore, the need for additional technical/trained staff to achieve these goals is an on-going challenge. The lack of funding and other vital resources are impacting the effective performance of the Unit to the point where programmes and other activities are extremely streamlined or are non-existing.

**Which of the following have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country over the past five years through laws, policies and/or programmes?**

- **Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice**

The VI have highlighted the following areas of policy intervention during the period as well as emphasize the reason why changes within society have to be made in an effort to become a gender just society.

The following areas were completed:

- Workshops/trainings for the stakeholders of the Domestic Violence Protocol;
- Sensitizing organizations on the Domestic Violence Act, 2011;
- Sensitizing organizations on the Status of Children Act, 2014;
- Recommendation for a Sexual Offence Bill;
- Working closely with the Department of Human Resources to continue the sensitization on the Sexual Harassment Policy;
- Working with government and non-government agencies to highlight Domestic Violence Awareness Month; and

- Promotion of the importance of Human Rights for the 16 Days of Activism.

- **Eliminating violence against women and girls**

Campaigns have been held over the last five years with various programmes to end violence against women and girls. This is also supported by the laws and legislations stated above.

The Partnership for Peace Programme which is a Violence Intervention Programme is also in place to assist with male perpetrators of violence. The Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) is a sixteen (16) week violence prevention, psycho-educational programme for men who are abusive towards women. In addition, the programme is connected with the court and receives most of its referrals from the court. Throughout 2014 to 2019, the office conducted seven (7) PfP cycles.

- **Gender-responsive Budgeting**

A Child and Gender Responsive Budgeting Workshop was held in 2015 as a joint venture between UKAID, OECS, UNICEF and UN Women. The session contained information to guide the way forward for child and gender responsive budgeting to become integrated into the current budgeting process. The main points taken from this exercise were:

- Child and Gender Responsive budgeting is not a separate budget but an integrated concept.
- The strategy for CGRB makes gender concerns (including those of children) an integral part of the design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes with the ultimate goal of achieving human rights.

The Macro-Financial Unit, Ministry of Finance conducts gender-budgeting sessions in collaboration with the Office of Gender Affairs in an effort to assist with the implementation of the SDGs among other developmental area for the country.

- **Changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes**

The office continues to embark on sensitization sessions across the Territory in schools, government offices, communities and churches. Sessions are often held in collaboration with

ZONTA, Family Support Network, the Royal Virgin Island Police Force and other partners. The Office is in the process of hosting a national workshop entitled Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction in collaboration with UNDP, UN Women, Department of Disaster Management and the Ministry of Finance.

- **Gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions)**

The Virgin Islands Social Protection Programme is aimed at providing economic assistance and social support to persons within our community to aid them in overcoming situations that adversely affect their quality of life. Area covered:

Social Housing is an important part of the BVI's social protection process. Social housing is provided through various mediums.

- *Safe Haven Transitional Centre*

The Safe Haven Transitional Centre was created in January 2015 to provide temporary accommodation and psycho-social support services to individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Services include: life skills training, employment assistance, education assistance, structured group sessions, counseling, housing assistance and vocational training.

Structured daily groups address issues such as addiction and recovery, symptom management and budgeting. Psychiatric counseling and other support services are provided to clients by the Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Unit of the BVI Health Services Authority, and other relevant agencies.

Safe Haven is equipped with a female and male dorms, to provide for privacy and proper care. There were no more than four females residents at any one time over the years.

- *The Housing Recovery Assistance Programme*

The Housing Recovery Assistance Programme (HRAP) is also a social housing arm.

The HRAP programme is designed to help homeowners rebuild in the wake of hurricanes in accordance with the provisions of the Virgin Islands Housing Recovery Policy. This came out of a need to provide housing solution for persons affected by the storms. Housing vulnerability indicators include disability, single parent household, pregnant and lactating mothers. 74 homes have been targeted for reconstruction. Phase 1 -22 homes have been identified for reconstruction and the remainder in another phase. Since 2017 one home has been constructed for an elderly female. Six are on-going, two of which are for elderly females.

### *The Low-Income Housing Programme*

The Low-Income Housing Programme was originally housed under the Premier's Office before being transitioned to the Ministry of Health and Social Development. This Programme provides housing for individuals or families with low annual household income. The subsidies are in the form of construction of homes on the individual owned land and low rate mortgages with government backing.

- *Social Insurance-National Health Insurance System*

The National Health Insurance programme is an initiative of the Government of the Virgin Islands aimed at providing lifetime health insurance coverage and improving access to health care services for all legal residents. The programme started its operations in January 2016. National Health Insurance (NHI) provides coverage for all legal residents in the Territory. Coverage is provided against the cost of a defined benefits package of health services to improve health, prevent illness and provide treatment. It is based on two fundamental principles:

1. All legal residents have equal access to healthcare benefits.
2. Contributions are shared based on ability to pay, regardless of health risks such as age, occupation or pre-existing health conditions.

**Over the past five years, have you taken specific measures to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of women and girls who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination?**

- **The Criminal Code**

Whilst there are numerous clauses, which protect women and men alike from, acts of violence, Section 187 of the Criminal Code, creates a specific clause that offers some form of protection specifically to females and children. It reads:

*“Any person who is guilty of an aggravated assault on any female, or on any male child whose age appears to the court not to exceed fourteen years, if the assault is not committed in circumstances for which a greater punishment is provided by this Code, is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or to a fine not exceeding five hundred dollars.*

- **Women living with disabilities**

The BVI government is committed to working with families of persons with disabilities to ensure that the persons with disabilities are valued, learn skills that will help them to live as independently as possible and have the opportunity to participate fully in community life. The following services are offered;

- Early Intervention Programme - Provides services for children between 0 - 8 years with a developmental delay or disability;
- Day Adult Support (BVI Services) - Provides services for adults with varying disabilities; and
- Autism Programme - Provides services for persons with Autism.

The government has launched a campaign for International Day of Persons with Disabilities in an effort to address the overall goal of promoting an understanding of disability issues and mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. Budget for the campaign is allotted annually. The impact is often measured through the Department of Social Development study to see if there are any increase in the awareness and understanding of the general population

towards the disability issues of disabled persons. It also aims to support disabled persons to get their self-respect, rights, welfare and security in the society. More information can be found on the government website [www.gov.vg](http://www.gov.vg).

World Down Syndrome Day is acknowledged in March each year in the Virgin Islands. Residents of the Virgin Islands are encouraged to 'Wear Lots of Socks' in observance of World Down Syndrome Day. Persons are encouraged to be creative with their socks to advocate for more services and policies to be put in place to improve the lives of persons with Down Syndrome. To evaluate the impact pictures can also be posted on social media using hashtag #lotsofsocksbvi. Further information can be found on the government website [www.gov.vg](http://www.gov.vg). A budget is allotted to the Department of Social Development annually for such activities.

- **Women Living with HIV**

Campaigns were also held to prevent discrimination of persons living with HIV. Women in particular were in the drive to eliminate mother to child transmission.

In 2016 the Virgin Islands declared being on the verge of claiming the eradication of mother to child transmission of HIV with no reported cases since 2012.

The elimination initiative aspires to have generations free of HIV and Syphilis and aims to reduce the incidence of transmission to 0.3 cases per 1000 live births, and the reduction of congenital syphilis to 0.5 cases per 1000 live births or less.”

The BVI continues to have a relatively low incidence of HIV with seven (7) cases identified in 2015 and three (3) this year.

Residents are encouraged to know their status, get tested and access treatment early in order to have a better quality of life. Persons are also urged to employ safe sexual practices which include having one partner, the consistent and correct use of condoms and abstaining from risky situations such as alcohol and drug use that impairs judgment.

Testing is conducted at the Family Health Unit and the HIV Foundation offices free of cost. The Family Health Unit is committed to the development of family health programmes in the Virgin Islands using the life cycle approach.

The Family Health Unit is a government unit and so receives complete funding from same to carry out its initiatives. The HIV foundation also receives an annual subvention from the Government. More information can be found on the government website [www.gov.vg](http://www.gov.vg).

**Challenge** - The Virgin Islands is still awaiting the implementation of the Human Rights Desk which will provide an avenue for women living with HIV/AIDS or disabilities to report any act of discrimination and thereby promote their rights. This Desk also speaks to any form of human rights violations affecting women, girls, boys and men.

### **Has the increasing number of humanitarian crises—caused by conflict, extreme weather or other events—affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country?**

Yes, the country has been affected by extreme weather events. Two category five (5) hurricanes (Irma and Maria) struck the Virgin Islands on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, causing massive destruction and widespread flooding. Initial information indicates that large proportions of the population had been directly affected by the crisis.

They required extensive assessment and support in the following months. Authorities had declared a state of emergency and report significant damage and even destruction of livelihoods, infrastructure, housing, communications and essential services. Water and food supplies were limited. Immediate needs identified include emergency relief supplies, water, food, shelter materials and other NFI, including dignity kits.

Furthermore, there was a breakdown in law and order, leading to violence and looting and giving rise to concerns over protection for women and girls at heightened risk of GBV. Curfews and limitations on movement were put in place by military and police to keep control of the situation.

Logistical and communication access to many of the main island and sister islands had been problematic, causing delays to assessment, analysis and development of response strategies. This has hampered the inclusion of gender in humanitarian action capacity into the needs identification process and in the formulation of the response.

Due to the destruction of homes, families had to stay in shelters, with neighbours and relatives. The level of security towards these children decreased due to parents having to leave their children to look for necessities such as food, clothes and money. Children were exposed to being molested, abandoned, lost, contraction of diseases and violence due to the lack of parental supervision.

To have this resolved the differing and specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, men and boys was identified and adequately addressed. Further, action was taken so the crucial voices, experience and leadership from all members of the crisis affected population – including women and girls - were consulted so that the most effective response can be formulated through the various Needs Assessment conducted across the Territory.

The country was in major distress and there was not enough specialized humanitarian assistance on the ground to assist with the crisis. Therefore, resources was used to get trained humanitarians and this caused a minor setback and focus on the implementation of the BPfA in the British Virgin Islands.

**Which of the following does your country consider to be the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country for the coming five years through laws, policies and programmes?**

The Virgin Islands will be reviewing its National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality Action Plan. The Gender Policy aims to promote gender equality, equity and social justice towards improving the quality of life for all citizens of the Virgin Islands. The Policy promotes the need for changing gender roles and responsibilities, in response to shifting social and economic conditions of society over time.

The original goals of the policy are:

- To ensure all policy and planning undertaken by government is informed by a gender perspective.

- To assist government's policy makers in understanding and tracking the gender implications of new and existing policies.
- To provide government with a dynamic framework to address ongoing issues of gender in the Virgin Islands' society.
- To inform Government on strategies in training and education to maximize the country's resources.
- To establish a system of gender mainstreaming in all sectors in the Territory.
- To educate and change attitudes of the public on key concepts such as gender equity, gender equality, social justice, gender roles and responsibilities towards having them accept the importance of a national policy on gender.
- To facilitate legislative change and public awareness of relevant legislation and their implications as they relate to gender differentials in the society.
- To review existing legislation towards removing measures that places one sex at a disadvantage in relation to the other.

*Attached is a copy of the Action Plan and Indicator Matrix of 32 Recommendations, 22 of which have been implemented.*

- **Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice**

The National Domestic Violence Protocol was signed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014. The Protocol is used by key agencies (health, police and prosecution) to help ensure that incidents of domestic violence are consistently handled and appropriately addressed.

The Protocol for the Prevention, Reporting, Investigation and Management of Child Abuse and Neglect ('Child Protection Protocol') was signed on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2014 by the Ministers of Health and Education, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Commissioner of Police.

- Training of all key stakeholders was conducted in February 2015 in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
- The Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) is fully functional.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is currently in the process of developing a National Policy on Persons with Disabilities. To better understand the specific individual support needs of both children and adults with disabilities, the Ministry conducted an assessment of adults and children with disabilities within the Territory from 23 February – 10 March 2017. The assessment will provide information to develop service plans and programmes to inform the national policy.

- **Eliminating violence against women and girls**

The drafting instructions for a proposed onsexual offences legislation ready for submission to the Cabinet. The proposed legislation will make provisions for marital rape, age of consent, and infanticide and trafficking of women. The Sexual Harassment Sensitization will be done across government Ministries, Departments and Agencies. This sensitization will target senior managers to junior staff. The Department of Human Resources, in collaboration with the Office of Gender Affairs, are fervent about educating public officers on the prevention of Workplace Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Violence and related topics, in accordance with Government's workplace policies. It is our intent for every public officer to be exposed to these fundamental policies and procedures, and especially for the management staff to be knowledgeable of the content and to be vigilant regarding compliance.

- **Poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security**

The country is in the process of completing its Enhanced Country Poverty Assessment (eCPA). The eCPA will be referred to in the Virgin Islands as the Country of Living Conditions (CALC). The preparations for this assessment begun in 2017 but was derailed by hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017. forward. In the aftermath of the extreme weather events of 2017 the CALC was postponed, but it became increasingly imperative in light of the storms' devastating and pervasive impacts on individuals and families with the least capacity to recover. The CALC was officially launched in September 2018. Considerable progress has been made and the Survey of

Living Conditions/Household Budgetary Survey (SLC/HBS), Participatory Poverty Assessment and the Institutional Assessment are well on the way.

The CALC is designed to identify the extent, severity, characteristics and causes of poverty; evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and programmes in terms of their impact on the poor and vulnerable groups of the population; and make recommendations for future policies and programmes to contribute to the reduction of poverty. A CPA was last conducted in the Virgin Islands in 2003, facilitated by a team of consultants appointed by the CDB. More current data is now required for effective social policy and institutional development, in order to achieve systematic reduction of poverty in the Virgin Islands through social and economic development.

- **Gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions)**

The Virgin Islands is in the process of developing its Social Protection Policy. This process has already begun with multiple consultations sessions. The Process is being led by the Social Development Department which has a core service social protection.

- **Access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights**

Access to affordable quality health care for women accelerates progress through treatment of disease, screening and prevention. Access to public health programs, are strategies to mitigate the incidence of disease and disease burden, the latter having economic implications. Furthermore, access to quality public health programs, is an opportunity to educate and promote sexual and reproductive health. This empowers the woman on taking responsibility of practices that impact physical, emotional and reproductive well-being, in addition to her reproductive ambitions.

### **What actions has your country taken in the last five years to advance gender equality in relation to women's role in paid work and employment?**

- **Strengthened/enforced laws and workplace policies and practices that prohibit discrimination in the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the public and private sectors, and equal pay legislation**

In fulfillment of the Virgin Islands National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality - effective implementation and enforcement of the Labour Code – The Labour Arbitration Tribunal was officially launched in 2014. This is a necessary component to the process of settling labour disputes, established in accordance with Section 29 of the Virgin Islands Labour Code, 2010.

The Government continues to undertake public awareness initiatives - Sessions for employers are conducted on a weekly basis to provide information on the provision of the Labour Code and their responsibilities as employers. This is done across government by the Department of Human Resources.

- **Taken measures to prevent sexual harassment, including in the workplace**

The Department of Human Resources, works with the Office of Gender Affairs, to fervently educate public officers on the prevention of Workplace Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Violence and related topics, in accordance with Government's workplace policies. This measure is to ensure that every public officer be exposed to these fundamental policies and procedures and especially for the management staff to be knowledgeable of the content and to be vigilant regarding compliance. The drive started in 2016 with eight (8) departments, comprising of approximately 165 officers, have received training on these policies. Formal training for senior managers is now being organized for presentation in early 2019.

The objectives for the training campaign are as follows:

- define Workplace Harassment/Sexual Harassment/Violence and its impact;
- identify behaviors that can be classified as Sexual Harassment;
- identify possible actions to address Sexual Harassment;
- understand how the impact of Workplace Harassment may lead to violence;
- introduce the grievance procedures affiliated with the policies; and
- identify the procedures for policy violation and for reporting false claims.

### **Has your country introduced austerity/fiscal consolidation measures, such as cuts in public expenditure or public sector downsizing, over the past five years?**

The Government has not paid increments for government workers since 2015. The complete effect as not been accessed.

The Government of the Virgin Islands supports numerous organisations that provide valuable assistance to persons residing in the BVI. Organisations such as the BVI Red Cross, Family Support Network, BVI Diabetes Association and BVI Cancer Society receive an annual subvention. . The services provided by these organizations are primarily gender and economic neutral notwithstanding that women utilized some of the services more than men.

Annual reports and audited financial statements are a requirement in order to receive the subvention. The submitted documents are laid in the House of Assembly. The data that is available is limited or not existing with specific reference to gender and economic status of the individuals and in particular to poor women or girls.

### **What actions has your country taken in the last five years to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?**

- **Introduced or strengthened social protection programmes for women and girls (e.g. cash transfers for women with children, public works/employment guarantee schemes for women of working-age, pensions for older women)**

The British Virgin Islands (BVI) Joint Delivery Platform (JCP) is an effective model for learning around collaboration, developed at the onset of the humanitarian response, to deliver a small-scale emergency and early recovery cash based response, in a context without previous cash response experience. The BVI JCP mission statement was “using an economy of scale, partners can reach more people, better, more efficiently in a coordinated manner.”

**Background:** In September 2017, hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the British Virgin Islands (BVI) and much of the Caribbean, causing significant damage to public infrastructure (transportation network, roads, ports, public buildings, telecommunication, etc.) and housing. The BVI economy was severely affected, supply chain pipelines were disrupted and high numbers of people lost their jobs and sources of income, in a context heavily reliant on a market economy and tourism.

**Roles and Responsibilities:** A light JCP structure with very little governance felt appropriate to the, context proportional to the number of actors and the small size of the programme. The JCP operational set-up and implementation was dynamic and interactive, requiring regular close communication and collaboration between actors at all stages of the implementation.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** A single streamlined approach was also used for JCP monitoring and reporting with a joint monthly report that included narrative and financial information, progress, challenges and lessons learned. Monthly reports also included bank statements with completed transaction and the post distribution monitoring analysis. A joint evaluation of the JCP was undertaken by British Red Cross and Caritas Antilles/Catholic Relief Services.

**Challenges and mitigation measures contextual factors:** Some of the main challenges of the VI JCP were linked to inefficiencies derived from contextual aspects affecting negatively the timeliness, efficiency and effectiveness of the cash response. These contextual factors include heavy damage to infrastructure, transportation links, telecommunication networks, population displacement, curfews and the diversity of affected population languages (Spanish, Creole) and

legal immigration status. This was the first time emergency cash response was implemented in the VI.

Timelines: The first cash transfer was completed in December four weeks later than planned. Delaying factors were banking inefficiencies and the need to secure the Government approval before any field-work could start which delayed the registration process.

Mitigation measures: Strong advocacy efforts by national and international partners to get cabinet's approval, use of single approaches and systems (electronic data collection, registration database, feedback hotlines, etc.) reduced the time required for data collection and feedback.

Successes of the BVI Joint Cash Platform approach high levels of satisfaction from the target populations supported: Based on post distribution monitoring (PDM) results, 98% of responders were very satisfied with cash support received, three in four (74%) indicated they were able to meet their household basic needs and over 44% mentioned that the cash transfer enabled them to recover faster. Most responders confirmed the bank account transfers as their preferred delivery mechanisms. Comparison between the registration baseline data and PDM result showed that the use of negative coping strategies and household debt were reduced as a result of the cash support. Responders reported high levels of satisfaction with the timeliness of the JCP MPGs delivery, despite the delays faced by some households, and they were well aware of the contextual constraints and difficulties faced.

Successful collaboration with Government from the start, ensuring a cash approach aligned with its broader response planning, positively influencing the uptake of multi-purpose cash grants: The JCP partners, supported by DFID and UNICEF, demonstrated effective advocacy and high levels of influence in promoting the uptake and acceptance of humanitarian and recovery cash responses and MPGs in a context without previous exposure to any type of humanitarian cash responses. Scaling up from 0 to \$3.2 Million USD delivered to affected households in the four months after Government approval. The BVI Government plans to use cash-based responses to meet shelter and livelihoods recovery outcomes.

- **Introduced/strengthened low-cost legal services for women living in poverty**

Women with low income or living in poverty may apply for legal aid services through the Social Development Department. Once approved by the Legal Aid Board, the Registrar assigns an Attorney to the case. After the matter has concluded the attorney receives his/her payment through the Social Development Department.

As it relates, most women apply for Legal Aid for divorce. This is visible in the 2017 stats collected for Legal Aid Table below. This is prompt from marital relationship with domestic violence.

<b>2017 Female Legal Aid</b>		
Female for Divorce	Female for Other Cases	Total Females Applied
9	4	13

## **What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve access to social protection for women and girls?**

- **Introduced or strengthened social protection for unemployed women (e.g. unemployment benefits, public works programmes, social assistance)**

Women who are unemployed may apply for social assistance through the Social Development Department. Social Assistance includes rent, food, medical, household supplies, day-care, and financial. Each application goes before the Public Assistance Committee who makes the decision to approve and decline. If approved the Public Assistance Clerk will notify the applicant on how much monies was granted and time period to which the grant extends.

A Child Maintenance and Access Bill was passed in the House of Assembly. This Act is based on the general principle that all parents take financial responsibility for providing adequate maintenance for their children; and seeks to ensure that both parents have access to their child in order to participate in the child's upbringing. It enshrines the 'best interest of the child' principle, introduces new collection and enforcement measures including attachment of income payable to the respondent, makes special provisions for children with special needs, and reflects gender neutrality.

- **Introduced or strengthened unconditional cash transfers**

Emergency Cash Transfer Programme - Cabinet approved the implementation of a Household Assistance Programme in 2017 to support the basic needs of the most vulnerable households affected by the recent hurricanes. Following Hurricane Irma, a Joint Cash Platform (JCP), financial assistance programme was established with the BVI Red Cross and Caritas Antilles (funded in large part by DFID, a global leader in using cash in emergencies and also by Catholic Relief Services) to provide financial assistance to 1,050 vulnerable households. The Adventist Disaster Relief Agency (ADRA) joined as a third member to provide a funding contribution in November 2017. The Social Development Department was responsible for registration, the BVI Red Cross was responsible for delivery of cash via First Caribbean Bank and Caritas was responsible for monitoring the project. Via the Platform, three monthly payments ranging from

\$800 - \$1,200 per month were made to selected households who met the eligibility criteria of being most vulnerable. The objectives of the programme were to:

- i. provide a three-month unconditional grant to vulnerable households to meet basic household monthly expenditures to allow for self-recovery and longer-term recovery planning; and
- ii. stimulate the economy, building confidence in the Territory and retaining the needed labour force.

The results from the household surveys and focus group discussions confirm that the financial assistance programme had met its intended objectives of reaching the most vulnerable households in the Territory. In addition, there was a significant impact of the assistance programme on vulnerable households where recipients were able to avoid using coping mechanisms such as incurring debt and selling of assets to make ends meet.

### **What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?**

- **Promoted women's access to health services through expansion of universal health coverage or public health services**

The Social Security (Amendment) Act, 2014, established a National Health Insurance System (NHI) as a division of the Social Security Board (SSB). The NHI is the financing and purchasing mechanism for facilitating equitable access to a stated schedule of benefits that will allow lifetime health insurance coverage for all beneficiaries. Although the NHI is a division of the SSB, it performs its functions with its own financing independent of the Social Security funds. The Ministry of Health and Social Development maintains ultimate responsibility for monitoring the standards of healthcare services throughout the Territory.

Implementation of National Health Insurance, has made health care more accessible to the entire population. This health financing system is designed to ensure that all legal residents of the Virgin Islands have equal access to all necessary health services.

National Health Insurance is a contributory health insurance plan that provides coverage for legal residents of the Territory, against the cost of a defined benefits package of health services. By reinvesting in the health care sector, this coverage is used for health promotion, prevention and treatment in times of illness or injury. All persons are required to contribute to the plan.

- **Expanded specific health services for women and girls, including sexual and reproductive health services, mental, maternal health and HIV services**

A team from the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) visited the BVI late in 2016 to verify whether the Territory has achieved the elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS. Preliminary findings indicate that the BVI has successfully eliminated mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS, subject to a few remedial measures to be taken prior to official validation.

There continues to be family planning services available throughout all the islands.

- **Undertaken gender-specific public awareness/health promotion campaigns**

The Office of Gender Affairs annually observes International Men's Health Week in June. Men's Health Week is geared towards encouraging men to take care of themselves and live holistically healthy lives. The office provides activities and services such as health fairs, workshops, community sensitizations, socials, family outings, health walks, sports and games to promote Men's Health. The activities are catered to foster the positive empowerment for men's spiritual, physical, family, sexual and mental health.

- **Provided gender-responsiveness training for health service providers**

Training is provided for health workers annually in the execution of the Domestic Violence Protocol. This assist with the handling of patients affected by Domestic Violence that comes to the Hospital.

## **What actions has your country taken in the last five years to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls?**

- **Taken measures to increase girls' access to, retention in and completion of education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and skills development programmes**

The Virgin Islands Education System has endeavoured to provide equal opportunities for both male and female students. We have always had an inclusive system where girls were not discriminated against. In fact, our statistics should that girls have been leading in academic performance at both the primary and secondary level. Girls have access to education from early childhood to tertiary and they have been taking advantage of these opportunities.

The Education Act, 2004, in the definitions indicate that “Compulsory School Age” “means from five years of age to 16 years of age” and the Education Amendments, 2015 raises the age to 17 years. Therefore, every child in the Virgin Islands is entitled to an education from age 5 to age 17. To withhold or rob girls of this would be in violation of the legal act that governs educational practices in the territory.

All measures are in place to increase girls' access to, retention in and completion of education. Over the years girls were afford to do technical programmes such as Woodwork, Auto mechanics, Metal Work, and Electronics at the secondary level as their course option. In fact, in 2013, the valedictorian and salutatorian of the graduation class of the main secondary school were from the Industrial Technology Programme and they were girls. Further information indicates that among the top 10 students of that same graduation class were girls out of the Industrial Technology Programme. The educational curricula are constantly under review and along with ensuring relevance, adaptability and skills and standards based, it aims to also eliminate bias at all levels of education.

Section 22 of Virgin Islands Constitution provides, “every child of the appropriate age, as provided by law, shall be entitled to receive primary education ...” In the Virgin Islands, the Education Act,

2004 makes education compulsory until a boy or girl has attained the age of 16 years as compulsory school age is defined as “five years of age to sixteen years of age.”

Section 30 of the Education Act 2014 makes clear that “a person who is eligible for admission to a public school or an assisted private school as a student shall not be refused admission on any discriminatory grounds including race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, creed, sex, mental or physical handicap.”

Taken at face value the Education Act, 2014 promotes and allows females to have equal access to education. A concern, however, that arose surrounded that pregnant females whereupon the norm or unsaid rule was that once a girl became pregnant she would discontinue her education and seek alternative education if any. Fortunately, however, the Education Act of the Virgin Islands does not preclude girls from continuing their education once pregnant.

On an annual basis, Education receives a substantial percentage of the Government’s budget. In 2019, it has the second highest allotment of 15% of the \$426 million dollars.

**In the last five years, which forms of violence against women and girls, and in which specific contexts or settings, have you prioritized for action?**

1. Intimate partner violence/domestic violence, including sexual violence and marital rape
2. Sexual harassment and violence in public places, educational settings and in employment
3. Femicide/Feminicide

The Domestic violence protocol which was developed in 2014 is been implemented along with the Domestic violence Act. Both documents are promoted through awareness campaigns ran annually. Domestic Violence Awareness Month is used to visit several institutions and communities to speak to the various aspects of intimate partner violence and domestic violence. The target audience is the general public.

The Royal Virgin Islands Police Force has developed their internal intimate violence and domestic violence policy.

Sexual Harassment policy is in place and sensitization sessions are held across government ministries, departments and agencies. Budgets are based on funding for sessions is built into the Office of Gender Affairs budget and Human Resource Department budget. The target audience is all government workers.

Femicides and Feminicides are tracked by the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force. It is treated as a serious and dangerous crime with a no tolerance level. The police are budgeted annually to fight crime from the national budget. The level is low for the country. This data can be seen in the released figures from the police.

### **What actions has your country prioritized in the last five years to address violence against women and girls?**

- **Introduced or strengthened violence against women laws, and their enforcement and implementation**

The National Domestic Violence Protocol was signed on 1st October 2014. The Protocol is used by key agencies (health, police and prosecution) to help ensure that incidents of domestic violence are consistently handled and appropriately addressed.

The Protocol for the Prevention, Reporting, Investigation and Management of Child Abuse and Neglect ('Child Protection Protocol') was signed on 1st October 2014 by the Ministers of Health and Education, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Commissioner of Police.

- Training of all key stakeholders was conducted in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).
- The Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) is fully functional.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development is currently in the process of developing a National Policy on Persons with Disabilities. To better understand the specific individual support needs of both children and adults with disabilities, the Ministry conducted an assessment of adults and children with disabilities within the Territory in 2017.

- **Introduced or strengthened measures to increase women's access to justice (e.g. establishment of specialist courts, training for the judiciary and police, protection orders, redress and reparations, including for femicide cases)**

The Domestic Violence Protocol allows women access to Protection Orders. The Protocol is intended to guide the work of four (4) major areas of service delivery: Medical Services, Law Enforcement, Social Services and Legal Services. The protocol addresses both the internal processes and procedures of each of these areas of service delivery, as well as the working relationship between them.

- **Introduced or strengthened services for survivors of violence (e.g. shelters, help lines, dedicated health services, legal, justice service, counselling, housing)**

The Family Support Network (FSN) provides short term accommodation to victims of domestic violence. This Non-Government Organization receives a grant of US\$ 40,000 annually. They also assist victims with applying for Protection Orders and getting legal representation for court.

In 2014 the Partnership for Peace Programme was expanded to include inmates at Her Majesty's Prison. This psychosocial violence intervention programme is geared towards helping participants maintain peace within their homes and communities.

**What strategies has your country used in the last five years to prevent violence against women and girls?**

- **Public awareness raising and changing of attitudes and behaviours**

The Fatherhood Campaign is used to promote responsible fatherhood by helping males and fathers of all ages to achieve greater self-esteem and better awareness of their responsibilities to their families and community.

This campaign has been running annually through various methods such as men posting pictures of activities with their children online and also by positive fathers across the society been selected to make posters that are posted virtually and hard copy to encourage better parenting skills. The programme is evaluated based on the post or recommendations sent in to our Facebook account or the Ministry of Health and Social Development webpage. Funds are allotted annually. Details can be found on the Office of Gender Affairs Facebook page.

- **Work in primary and secondary education, including comprehensive sexuality education**

Sessions are held in Primary and Secondary schools across the Territory annually to include the Healthy Relationship programme and Human Rights Day session. These sessions were budgeted at US\$5000 for the year. The target is students and educators from across the Territory. Sessions are evaluated with pre and post evaluations .

- **Working with men and boys**

Mentoring Anointed Leaders Everywhere (M.A.L.E) is an innovative programme that is generated to cater to the effective guiding of young boys along their journey to adulthood. The group was founded February 15 2014. M.A.L.E. was established for young men to cultivate, foster, renew and promote activities that will enrich the lives of its members and our community at large. M.A.L.E. offer the boys a safe environment where they can talk about their struggles in their everyday lives, where they are praised for their unique gifts, supported when they make mistakes and a community of mentors who listen and believe in their ability to become great men.

- **Perpetrator Programmes**

Partnership for Peace is a 16-week psycho-educational programme designed specifically for men, premised on women's rights and perpetrator accountability, which can represent a standardized approach to Batterer Intervention Programmes (BIPS) in the region.

The programme is court-connected and receives most of its referrals from both the criminal and civil jurisdiction of the court. In some cases, men have entered the programme by self-referrals. Realizing they want peaceful relationships for themselves and their family. To date the Virgin Islands has completed 14 cycles with 109 males completing the programme. . The programme is run at US\$ 10,000 per cycle. The target population is male batterers. The Programme is evaluated by the Programme Director, the Clinical Supervisor and Programme Coordinator at the beginning, middle and end.

**What actions has your country taken in the last five years to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls facilitated by technology (online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)?**

- **Worked with technology providers to set and adhere to good business practices**

The Virgin Islands National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality speaks specifically to Gender Ideologies: Religion, Media and Culture. In its Policy 28, it speaks of full use of media technologies to promote positive images of gender and gender issues through media and communications sector for the public service. To implement this policy there have been ongoing media campaigns which highlight the evolving role of men and women. The expected outcome is heightened public awareness of the place of gender in national development.

**What actions has your country taken in the last five years to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media?**

- **Enacted, strengthened and enforced legal reforms to combat discrimination and/or gender bias in the media**

The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) is a statutory body responsible for regulating the telecommunications sector of the British Virgin Islands. The Commission is also responsible for promoting the development of telecommunications throughout the Virgin Islands (UK). The Commission is governed by the Telecommunications Act, 2006 which was adopted June 2006 and published October 2006 and advises the Minister of Communications and Works on telecommunications policies internationally and regionally and protects the interests of users of telecommunications services.

The TRC also establishes and monitors the implementation of national telecommunications standards and ensures compliance, and is responsible for the regulation of licensees and authorization holders and for ensuring fair competition among licensees and all other operators of telecommunications networks or providers of telecommunications services. The TRC where appropriate, investigates within a reasonable period, complaints by users of their failure to obtain compensation from public suppliers or other licensees in respect of rates, billings and services provided, and to facilitate relief where necessary.

**Has your country taken any action in the last five years specifically tailored to address violence against specific groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination?**

The Office has worked with several groups to end discrimination. There has been a partnership with the Church to offer gender counseling and awareness on gender roles. A campaign is being conducted by the Office of Gender Affairs to sensitize churches on the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, in collaboration with the Social Development Department, Royal Virgin Islands Police Force, and the BVI Bar Association.

Civil Society Support - To promote the ongoing partnership between the public sector and civic society the Office of Gender Affairs has been partnering with Zonta International and recently with the Rotaract Club to sensitize residents of the Sister Islands on healthy relationships and early warning signs of domestic violence. There have been several collaborative efforts with civic organizations to sensitize the public on various gender issues. These efforts have been strengthened within the past three years and will likely continue to grow with heightened gender awareness.

### **What actions and measures has your country taken in the last five years to promote women's participation in public life and decision-making?**

- **Taken measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish violence against women in politics**

The Virgin Islands has in place a Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Candidates. The purpose of this Code is to promote conditions that are conducive to free and fair elections and a climate of tolerance in which campaigning activity may take place without fear or coercion, intimidation or reprisals.

It clearly states that, "No abusive attacks or innuendos may be directed to campaigners or their family members for reason of their political affiliation, race, social origins and background, education, gender, religion, or any other reason." Note: Section 74 of the Act outlines penalties for certain illegal practices at elections. It has been suggested that penalties be included for non-compliance to the Code.

### **Do you track the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting)?**

The Government National Machinery for Gender Equality monitoring is the Office of Gender Affairs (OGA). The OGA is in the Ministry of Health and Social Development. The Ministry is normally given the second highest portion of the National Budget. The Office is allotted 5% of the Ministry's budget to share with Administrative and Family and Child Support.

Presently however there are no formal mechanisms in place to track the exact proportion of the national budget invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

**As a donor country, does your country track the proportion of official development assistance (ODA) that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting)?**

The Virgin Islands as Centralized Government Systems so all funds coming into the country are sent to the Treasury. The Funds are then requested by the respective ministry. In the case of gender equality, this is across ministries. The Ministry that collects the funds is then responsible to monitor and evaluate the use of the funds. The exact proportion of investment is not known at this time.

**Does your country have a valid national strategy or action plan for gender equality?**

The Virgin Islands has its National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality. The National Gender Policy was passed by the House of Assembly on July 25, 2013. The vision behind the Policy is to bring the population to a point of acceptance of sexual differences while addressing issues to ensure gender equality and equity. The Office of Gender Affairs has the task to implement the Plan of Action, which clearly states the objectives for each recommended policy intervention. There are a total of thirty-two policies covering seven areas recommended for policy intervention.

The areas identified are:

- Legislation
- Education
- Family life, Sexual relations and Gender Based Violence
- Economic Activity, Employment/Unemployment and Labour Practices

- Health and Medicine-4 policies
- Gender Ideologies, Religion, Media and Culture-3 policies
- Gender, Political Participation and Political Decision-Making

The Policy covers a period of five years. The Action Plan has not been costed.

**Does your country have an action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women?**

The recommendations have not yet been received for report submitted in 2017.

Peaceful and inclusive societies

**What actions has your country taken in the last five years to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child?**

Implemented policies and programmes to eliminate violence against girls, including physical and sexual violence and harmful practices

- **The Child Maintenance and Access Act**

The Child Maintenance and Access Act, 2018 ensures that both parents have access to their children through appropriate arrangements. The Act addresses the concerns and challenges presented in the Magistrate's Code of Procedure (MCP), namely chapter 44 as it relates to the maintenance of children. The implementation of the legislation as strengthen the system of laws and policies that recognize children's right to special protection and care in the British Virgin Islands. The Act also provides for each parent and a person who has assumed responsibility for a child to be entitled to have access to that child. In addition, a provision is made for consideration to be given to what is in the best interest of the child, when making an order for access. Under the

current legislation, child maintenance is a regular, reliable financial support that helps towards a child's everyday living costs. The MCP provides the laws of the Virgin Islands that govern the jurisdiction of magistrates to hear and determine affiliation matters. Challenges exist under section 115 and 118 which provides the principal methods of enforcement.

The Act, makes no distinction between a child or children born in marriage and those born out of wedlock. It further makes provision where each parent of the child has an obligation to provide for the child or children. The Child Maintenance and Access Act, 2018 is paired with the Child Maintenance Orders Act, 2018 which provides the legal framework for mutuality among the United States Virgin Islands and other jurisdictions.

- **The Education Act 2014**

Family life education is now compulsory in schools within the Virgin Islands under the subject headings of Health and Family Life Skills. This programme was introduced into the secondary schools and is now being implemented within the primary schools. There however appears to be some resistance from parents with regards to sexual education being taught and at some private schools parents has to give permission for such education.

*Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation*

**What actions has your country taken in the last five years to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation?**

- Supported women's participation and leadership, including those affected by disasters, in disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation policies, programmes and projects;
- Strengthened the evidence base and raised awareness about the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to the impact of environmental degradation and disasters;

- Promoted access of women in situations of disaster to services such as relief payments, disaster insurance and compensation; and
- Introduced or strengthened and implemented gender-responsive laws and policies related to disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation (e.g. disaster laws addressing vulnerability of women in disaster.)

The integration of gender issues into disaster risk reduction policies and programmes is guided at the national level through the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Strategy and Programming Framework. Although these 5-year frameworks have been in place since 2009, the 2009-2013 iteration did not fully mainstream gender considerations, these shortcomings were addressed in the 2014-2018 and 2019-2024 iterations of these frameworks. The CDM Strategic Framework is linked to the Virgin Islands National Policy for Gender Equity and Equality. In the BVI, the CDM Strategy and Gender Policy priorities and guides how gender responsive disaster risk prevention, reduction and resilience sustainability by:

1. Building institutional and individual capacity and tools for mainstreaming gender into DRR by developing and hosting a Gender, Disaster Preparedness and Recovery Workshop that seeks to raise awareness of gender in development and recovery and provide concrete examples on how gender can be integrated in recovery projects;
2. Ensuring women and men have equal access to early warning systems by using a diversity of warning mechanism to provide notifications including those that are accessed more by women i.e social media and cell phones;
3. In collaboration with NGOs, involving women in mangrove restoration and management while helping them to recognise that the mangrove serve as natural buffers for coastal inundation;
4. Actively engaging women and men from the communities in local risk identification activities and the development of Community Disaster Profiles and Hazard Maps;
5. Collecting and analyzing gender-differentiated data for assessing acceptable levels of risk on women and girls;

6. Increasing awareness of the public and media on the gender sensitive vulnerabilities and capacities in disasters and gender specific needs and concerns in disaster risk reduction and management;
7. Prioritising female headed single-families for disaster relief payouts after impact of a hazard;
8. Effectively engaging women in disaster and climate risk management prevention, planning, decision-making and implementation efforts through the female chairmanship of 4 of the 7 National Disaster Management Committees Collecting and maintaining gender-disaggregated data to inform assessments, strategies, policies, programs and monitoring and evaluation; and
9. Conducting disaster risk reduction public awareness session targeted to women's groups.

The Government has in place a Environmental Health Unit which recruitment and selection of women for Environmental Health workforce. They also ensure that women participate actively in the development, planning and implementation of programs. The Environmental Unit as continuous training provided for women in Food safety, especially women in Food businesses and Restaurants. This is enhance by training in general sanitation for all schools and communities across the Territory.

**What actions has your country taken in the last five years to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and mitigation?**

The Ministry of Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration has co-chaired the Climate Change Committee, which is a cross-ministerial grouping of various ministries and departments responsible for policy formulation and implementation of Government's response to climate change. The leadership and management of the committee, whilst centred with the two ministries, is gender responsive as it is comprised of women with significant leadership roles in the formulation and implementation of programming. Principally, the last five years have seen the implementation of community based projects in the communities of Cane Garden Bay (coastal

defence/revetment project) and Brewer's Bay (improved drainage) under the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States/EU-Global Climate Change Alliance's regional project. Women were instrumental in the project management of the programme of activities, beneficiaries at the technical levels and at the community level, as recipients of the actions. The successfully completed projects increased technical and policy formulating capacity, empowered women and afforded ample opportunities for engagement and participation. Gender considerations, whilst not explicitly stated in the policy or the project outlines, sensitivity is placed to ensure that there is equitable representation on the implementation teams and equal access to benefits accrued by various actions to all.

### **What is your country's current national machinery for gender equality and the empowerment of women? Please name it and describe its location within Government.**

The Office of Gender Affairs (OGA) is the focal point for the Government in the implementation of the National Policy for Gender Equality and Equity. The OGA is situated within the Ministry of Health and Social Development.

The Office of Gender Affairs within the Ministry of Health and Social Development. Gender Affairs is charged with promoting gender equality and equity through the development of policies and programmes. This includes the integration of a gender perspective into the mainstream activities of government at the policy, programme and project levels.

The Office of Gender Affairs is structured:

- To comply with the United Nations Conventions that promotes gender equality and equity such as the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- Monitor the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- To raise awareness about gender equality and equity in the quest for a sustainable and equitable society.
- To ensure the full enjoyment by all citizens of their fundamental human rights through sensitization and public campaigns.
- To implement the National Gender Policy/while bringing awareness of the need for cultural change.
- Sensitize the public and private sectors on the laws, programmes and activities that promote gender balance.
- To formally review the implementation of the Domestic Violence Protocol.
- To highlight International Observances that bring awareness to both male and female issues (International Women's Day, Men's Health Week, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, 16 Days of Activism).

**Is the head of the national machinery a member of the institutional process for SDG implementation (e.g. inter-ministerial coordinating office, commission or committees)?**

The institutional process for the British Virgin Islands SDG implementation is led by the Premier Office and the Head of the OGA, Gender Affairs Coordinator sits on the committee. Since Gender is cross cutting issue for all the SDGs the Gender Affairs Coordinators was invited to each meeting to ensure that the gender indicators for each sector was not overlooked.

**Are there formal mechanisms in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

Yes, there is mechanism in place. A committee was put in place by the Premier Office to monitor 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development. From this committee the Specific indicator to the Virgin Islands were developed. This Committee comprised all the Ministries, Departments and Agencies within Government within Government.

Each Ministry have mechanisms in place to monitor civil society organizations, Private sectors and United Nation Systems. The Ministry of Health and Social Development host the Non Profit Organizations Board, which operates in the Virgin Islands.

**Which of the following stakeholders participate formally in national coordination mechanisms established to contribute to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

**Beijing Declaration and PfA**

**2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Civil society organizations</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Civil society organizations</b>   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Women’s rights organizations</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Women’s rights organizations</b>  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academia and think tanks             | <input type="checkbox"/> Academia and think tanks             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Faith-based organizations</b>     | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Faith-based organizations</b>     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parliaments/parliamentary committees | <input type="checkbox"/> Parliaments/parliamentary committees |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Private sector                       | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Private sector</b>                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>United Nations system</b>         | <input type="checkbox"/> <b>United Nations system</b>         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other actors, please specify.....    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other actors, please specify.....    |

**Is gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls included as a key priority in the national plan/strategy for SDG implementation?**

The implementation process for the SDGs is been led by the Premier Office and Ministry of Finance of the Virgin Islands. The process started with awareness training for all Ministries, departments and units to include the Office of Gender Affairs. This was done as gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are a key priority of the Virgin Islands National Plan and Strategy for the implementation of SDG. A further mapping exercise was held for each Ministry along with their Departments and Units for the SDG implementation. The Office of Gender Affairs was invited to attend all mapping meeting to ensure gender was integrated into all areas of the SDGs. Without proper Gender Analysis of data, it would not be possible to fully measure some indicators.

**What are the top three areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?**

- **Established an inter-agency coordination mechanism on gender statistics (e.g., technical working group, inter-agency committee)**

In consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals, we have established a working group lead by the Premier's Office and MOF to discuss the localization of the indicators. As such discussions would be held in regards to the gender specific indicators, including applicability and availability of the data to the BVI.

- **Re-processed existing data (e.g., censuses and surveys) to produce more disaggregated and/or new gender statistics)**

In 2017, UNICEF published a document "Budget Analysis for Investment in Children in Virgin Islands (UK). This process involved working with the Ministry of Health and Social Development, Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance to look at available data and the impact of budget expenditure on children; with disaggregation by gender.

- **Engaged in capacity building to strengthen the use of gender statistics (e.g., trainings, statistical appreciation seminars)**

As the Ministry of Finance moved towards results-based budgeting, training sessions was held with all ministries to discuss performance indicators. Within these sessions performance objectives were determined and necessary performance

**Out of the following which are your country's top three priorities for strengthening national gender statistics over the next five years?**

- Use more gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and implementation of programmes and projects
- Greater utilization and/or improvement of administrative-based or alternative data sources to address gender data gaps
- Statistical capacity building of users to increase statistical appreciation on and use of gender statistics (e.g., trainings, statistical appreciation seminars)

Top priority areas moving forward, would be

To further have the programmes and projects improve their strategies to address the SDGs. During the budget and policy formulation process, these MDAs would have to articulate to a greater degree the policy strategies to address the appropriate indicators.

Statistical support for the different agencies responsible in monitoring the data for reporting on the SDG's. There is varying degree of data output in terms of what is "being produced" vs what "could be produced" and "needs refinement"

Details of these plans have yet to be formalized as further information needs to be presented at a higher level for further endorsement of the initiative.

**Have you defined a national set of indicators for monitoring progress on the SDGs?**

About 150 indicators have been considered for a national set. This includes those indicators which we are able to produce as well as those would need more work (refinement) to be able to produce.

There are thirty-five indicators that are gender-specific.

## **Has data collection and compilation on SDG 5 indicators and on gender-specific indicators under other SDGs begun?**

The main challenges are that these indicators would need more refinement in terms of being able to produce the statistics. Issues include which institution would capture the data, and if the questionnaire in progress can satisfy the requirement.

**Which of the following disaggregations<sup>1</sup> is routinely provided by major surveys in your country?**

- sex
- Age
- Education
- Marital status
- Disability

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## Concluding Comments

The Government of the Virgin Islands continues to work through the National Machinery for Gender Equity and Equality and all government Ministries and Departments to ensure that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is implemented. Despite all the challenges and set backs such as the Natural Disasters of 2017 which continues to haunt the Territory. The Country stands by its National Policy for gender Equity and Equality to have gender completely infused in all areas of society.

The National Policy provides a comprehensive framework for gender equity and Equality in the BVI. In fact the virgin Islands has ample laws that are able to assist with the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. However, the legislative framework can be strengthened with systems for better data collection and gender analysis of the data.