

GUYANA NATIONAL REPORT
THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
AND ADOPTION OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION
AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION (1995)



Government of the Republic of Guyana

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INTRODUCTION

Since independence, Guyana has performed an aggressive normative reform effort in several areas to establish an adequate framework for development. The areas of focus have included governance, transparency, rule of law, local government, compliance with international agreements and treaty obligations, social protection, domestic violence and civil rights, among others, to promote equality, equity, and anti-discrimination for all persons irrespective of age, citizenship status, sexual orientation, race, class, gender, socioeconomic status, Indigenous status, religious affiliation and other identities.

The reforms were made through state institutional restructuring to provide appropriate means of governance and promote the representation of all groups of the population in the decision-making and consultation processes. These structural changes are intended to promote power sharing and better compliance with participation and democratic principles. The structure is currently working, although some consultation procedures among the regions do not take place as regularly as is desirable.

Guyana has ratified eleven (11) human rights treaties and incorporated their obligations into national legislation in the following areas: education, gender violence, medical termination of pregnancy, Indigenous People's rights, child protection, equal right to property, family and parenting rights, employment and social security, labour, the political participation of women to protect the human rights of vulnerable groups, and reversal of the marginalization and discrimination of all persons.

While not a binding international instrument, the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (1995), is of direct relevance to ensure the inclusion, fair treatment and protection of vulnerable groups in national policies, programs, and regulatory measures. Despite the laws, Constitution, and key international commitments that Guyana has undertaken to achieve social justice, gender equality, social inclusion and non-discrimination, gaps in the legal framework persist.

Since 2015, the government of Guyana has been working towards developing a framework that could provide the country with a path to guarantee equal Human Rights to all its citizens and protect their well-being. This effort, carried out by the Ministry of Social Protection, includes government institutions, social representatives and private sector

representatives. During the last decade, Guyana has been working to overcome poverty and has engaged in large public-sector investment programs that have helped the country move from a “least developed country to a low middle-income country implying a rise in standards of living”. Development efforts have benefitted sectors such as health, education, public infrastructure and social services. There is no doubt that Guyana has made significant progress in the status of women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).

This national review and appraisal report prepared by Guyana is in response to the resolution E/RES/2013/18, in which the United Nations Economic and Social Council called upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

This report provides a review and appraisal for the period 2014-2019 of the progress made in the implementation of the critical areas to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. It identifies achievements, challenges and opportunities for integrating the gender perspective in the Sustainable Development Goals. This report is submitted in the context of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 2020.

In Guyana, the review of progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action has been a participatory process involving related sector ministries with support from UN Women. In fostering inclusiveness, the government also engaged civil society and other key stakeholders on the compilation of the draft report. The dialogue was the Regional Gender Equality Strategy and BEIJING+25 Summit that was considered fruitful and productive. The views of participants are also included in this report.

GENERAL CONTEXT

Demographics

Geographically situated within South America, Guyana is geo-politically considered “the English-speaking door-way” to South America. The country shares contiguous borders with its neighbours, Venezuela (to the west), Suriname (to the east); Brazil lies to the south and is officially connected by a road network. Guyana is a member of the regional integration movement the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). Guyana is the third smallest country in South America, after Suriname and Uruguay, with a population of 723,181 inhabitants (2012), where females slightly outnumber males (50.2%)¹.

The population is moderately young, with 39.7% under 19 years of age. One of the most relevant social characteristics of Guyana is its ethnic diversity. Approximately 43% of the population are Indo-Guyanese, 30.2% Afro-Guyanese, 9.2% are indigenous Amerindian, 16.7% mixed, and 0.4% other. There is also a great religious diversity where the major religious groups are Christian (48.0%), Hindu (28.8%), and Muslim (7.3%).²

The country is divided into 10 administrative regions, with most of the population (89.1%) living in the coastal areas (Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6) with a high population density of more than 115 persons/km². Region 4, where the capital city Georgetown is located, accounts for 41.3% of the population. Only 10.9% of the population live in the rural interior, referred to as the Hinterland (Regions 1, 7, 8, and 9), which extends over 92.4% of the landmass.³

The sparsely populated Hinterland areas have very limited access to basic social services, and this poses enormous challenges for the delivery of essential services such as education, health, water and electricity. Most of Guyana's indigenous Amerindians live in the Hinterland. Another relevant trait is that Guyana is essentially a rural country, with

¹ file:///C:/Users/Gender%203/Downloads/Chapter1_National_Population_Trends.pdf

²http://www.paho.org/saludenlasamericas2012/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37%3Aguyana&catid=21%3Acountry-chapters&Itemid=169&lang=en

³ Situation of Children and Women in Guyana. UNICEF 2016

72.5% of the population living in rural areas. It is also notable that there are more women than men living in the cities (100 women for every 92 men)⁴.

Economy

The country is rich in natural resources: fertile agricultural lands, bauxite, gold, diamonds and extensive tropical forests, which cover more than 80% of the country. 90% of Guyana's forest remains intact, with the country having one of the lowest deforestation rates in the world. Most of the country's indigenous population (the Amerindians) live in the forests, on which they depend for their livelihood.

In recent years, Guyana's economic fortunes have reflected the path of global commodity prices. Between 2005 and 2013, the economy grew by 4.7% per year on average, ending alternating years of growth and contraction⁵. However, real GDP growth decreased to 3.8% in 2014 and to 3.0% in 2015, as commodity prices collapsed for Guyana's major exports. Guyana's per capita income in 2015 was US\$4,090. In 2015, agriculture, forestry, fishing and mining industries accounted for 28% of total GDP, and bauxite, sugar, rice, gold and timber made up 83% of exports⁶.

These sectors are also the largest providers of jobs in the country. In July 2016, Guyana was categorised by the World Bank as an upper middle-income country. Despite having rich reserves of bauxite, gold and timber, it has struggled to overcome poverty and attract investment to bolster its small economy.

According to the World Bank, the economy is expected to grow by around 4% in 2016–17. Most of this growth is expected to come from the continued rapid growth of gold production and rebounding performance in construction, as well as the wholesale and retail trade industries. Inflation is expected to remain relatively subdued. Nonetheless, volatile commodity prices represent a significant risk for the country's economy.

Political Setting

Guyana is just completing its first 50 years as an independent country. The Constitution provides for the separation of powers between Executive, Legislative and Judicial

⁴ Situation of Children and Women in Guyana. UNICEF 2016

⁵ Caribbean Economic Performance Report, 2016.

⁶ Ministry of Finance, 2016

branches. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the National Assembly of Guyana. For administrative purposes, Guyana is divided into 10 Regions, governed by Regional Democratic Councils (RDC). Local communities are administered by the Neighborhood Democratic Councils (NDC), democratically elected for the first time in 2015 since 1994. The Guyana constitution establishes a Supreme Court of Judicature consisting of a High Court and a Court of Appeal with the Chancellor of the Judiciary as the head of the Judiciary. The Judiciary comprises the higher judiciary (the Supreme Court of Judicature) and the lower judiciary (the Magistracy). Guyana severed ties with the Privy Council in 1970. In 2005, Guyana along with seven other CARICOM states assented to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as its final Court of Appeal.

Main Legal Gender Constraints

There is a wide perception that the legal system is a bottleneck⁷, is ineffective in protecting the rights of the population in general, and specifically in protecting women's and girls' rights against discrimination and violence. Enforcement appears to be weak, particularly in relation to discrimination and gender-based violence offences.⁸ The CEDAW Committee⁹ and other consulted sources noted that women's ability to exercise their rights and to bring cases before the courts is greatly limited by the absence of permanent magistrates' courts in all regions and the lack of knowledge and awareness of the anti-discrimination laws among the population at large and the women themselves, particularly in the rural and hinterland areas.

In many cases concerning women and gender related issues, officials tend to base their judgments on their own gender-biased beliefs and not on the existing legal provisions. Another great limitation, particularly for the poorest of the population, is the absence of free public legal assistance. So far, the less-resourced people, and particularly women, are limited to seeking legal advice from non-governmental organisations, such as The Guyana Legal Aid Clinic, which provides free or subsidised legal advice and representation to people who cannot afford to pay for an attorney¹⁰.

⁷ Situational Analysis of Children and Women in Guyana, UNICEF 2016.

⁸ (http://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/ERT-CEDAW_Guyana_2012.pdf)

⁹ Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in Guyana. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Fifty-second session. 9-27 July 2012.

¹⁰ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014. UNICEF.

Institutional Framework

The revised 2003 Constitution provides for the appointment of five Human Rights Commissions: Ethnic Relations, Women and Gender Equality, Rights of the Child, Indigenous Peoples, and Human Rights. These Commissions are founded on the protection and promotion of human rights and addressing the various forms of discrimination, as well as providing complaint mechanisms for redress by impartial bodies.

The Human Rights Commission has a constitutional mandate to “uphold human rights and investigate abuses, resolve disputes or rectify acts or omissions”. Government has announced that it will be put in place by the end of 2018¹¹. The Ethnic Relations, Women and Gender Equality, Rights of the Child and Indigenous Peoples Commissions are currently working.

¹¹ <http://guyanachronicle.com/2016/01/10/human-rights-commission-to-come-on-stream/>

SECTION ONE

OVERVIEW OF ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES SINCE 2014

Most Significant Achievements

Our major achievements in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action have been the development of a comprehensive legal framework, complemented by institutional mechanisms for implementation of key actions; a strong cadre of women in public life; special measures to empower women economically and the integration and advancement of the Amerindian population. Political will, vibrant advocacy in civil society on specific outcomes in favour of women and girls, and continued public investment have contributed to significant movement in these areas.

The Government, recognizing limitations and gaps in the implementation of the legal framework, and deficiencies in the timeliness and efficiency of the administration of justice and access to justice, has signaled its commitment to addressing these issues through further investment and partnerships with domestic civil society bodies and international development partners.

There is no doubt that Guyana has made significant progress in the status of women since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995).

List of most notable gains

- Increase in women's political participation, leadership and representation (2014 – 37%, 2011 – 33%)
- Reaching to Tier 1 Trafficking in Persons
- Domestic violence unit at the Guyana Police Force to address violence against women
- More women going to court to prosecute as it relates to sexual offences
- Women as entrepreneurs and involved in business

- Significant legislative and policy advances
 - Sexual Offences Act
 - Domestic Violence Act
- Reinforcement of the constitutional and legislative framework by way of support mechanisms, policies and infrastructure.
- Teenage mothers reintegrated into school systems
- Gender policy for judiciary; judicial requirements for all cases involving violence against women and girls in that they must go to the courts
- Increased advocacy and public awareness regarding gender equality and acts of violence against women
- Increase in single women as entrepreneurs
- Reinforcing the constitutional and legislative framework
 - National Sports Policy and actions of the Guyana Football Federation as they relate to sexual harassment
- Peer-to-Peer perpetrator accountability programmes targeting men
- Enhanced partnerships between state and non-state actors.

Gaps and Challenges in Achieving Gender Equality in Guyana

1. The challenges of **data availability**, quality and timeliness remain a major hurdle in programme targeting and policy formulation. Key among the data gaps is employment statistics which are crucial to the formulation of policy and the design and evaluation of programme effectiveness.
2. The **challenges faced by the public health sector** are many and varied: shortage of drugs and problems of procurement; continued strain on the National Referral Hospital; health infrastructure deficits; and disparities between the hinterland and coastland.
3. Findings from several focus group discussions and key informant interviews of Female Sex Workers (FSW) revealed that persons living with HIV face double **stigma**; FSW are reluctant to disclose their true occupation due to anticipated stigma; attitudes of staff or other patients can be intimidating for FSW; dress codes at health facilities

place hardship on the transgendered and FSW; denial and self-stigma are great challenges.

4. It should be noted that consistent efforts have been made to reverse and eliminate the persistence of **gender stereotyping, negative cultural attitudes** and other practices which discriminate against women. However, there are some cultural practices which are challenging to address due to the value system in some communities.
5. Even with progressive legislation one of the main challenges remains the **application of the Sexual Offenders Act** at the level of the police although more than 250 police officers have been exposed to training in the provisions of the legislation.
6. **Successful prosecution of perpetrators** has been less than desirable due to challenges with proper investigations of sexual offences cases and the Courts' access to forensic and DNA evidence.
7. **Corporal punishment** in our school system and at home stimulates a violent society and may lead to follow-on issues with violence and insecurity. Trauma from personal issues involving violence and violation of our physical space can create a lifetime of psychological issues for anyone on the gender spectrum and the prevalence of such issues has the potential to negatively impact societal development.
8. Despite equal access to education, at all levels females tend to be clustered in **traditional areas of study**, with males more likely to be studying subjects related to technology, science and engineering and females more likely to be studying arts subjects. This gender stereotyping in fields of study, combined with an absence of **gender sensitive career guidance programmes**, adversely affects women in both the short-term and the long-term; equal access to education does not necessarily translate into **equal quality of education or equal outcomes**. Training often confines women to low-income careers in low-income areas, thus reinforcing their disadvantaged position in society.
9. Prescribed **gender roles** may have discouraged women from pursuing careers in medium to large-scale farming, manufacturing or mining and this has resulted in **lower numbers of women in leadership roles in these sectors**. Oftentimes, men are seen as the chief producers and as such have been frequent beneficiaries of support initiatives.

10. **Access to capital for small business development** is not gender sensitive and responsive to the practical and strategic needs of different gender groups e.g. married women who are not the owners of property
11. **Women are still portrayed negatively in the media.** This has become an area of concern in more recent years. The country has experienced music artists writing derogatory songs about women, emphasizing abuse and objectifying the woman's body.

SECTION TWO

TOP PRIORITIES TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS SINCE 2014

Over the last five years, the Government of Guyana (GOG) has focused on the following top priorities to accelerate progress for women and girls:

Political Participation and Representation

The Government of Guyana, in order to ensure an equal right of women has revised the Local Government Act which requires/enables political parties to submit a list of candidates which must comprise of at least twenty-five women who are eligible for selection.

The Election Laws (Amendment) Act 15 of 2000 makes provision for a quota of one-third women on the lists of candidates for national and local elections. During the period 2011 to 2015 women representatives were more than 30 percent on a majority of Regional Democratic Councils. Overall, women's representation in this first tier of local government was 34 percent in 2011; it remained consistently over one-third for successive years but declined to 29 percent in 2015.

Women sit as elected members on the executive of all major political parties. During the period 2011-2015, women occupied 33 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and maintained the same proportion of seats in the current Parliament. The Chief Whips for the Government and Opposition in the 10th Parliament were women and the Deputy Speakers in the 8th, 9th and 10th Parliaments were also women members of the major opposition party. At the level of the Cabinet, women comprised 33 percent of all members from 2014 to 2019. The current Executive appointed ten women as Ministers; three women hold positions as Cabinet members, while the remaining seven women are junior ministers within Ministries. Chief whips on both sides of the National Assembly are women. Indigenous women also hold positions as Ministers and are active in public life.

Eliminating Violence against Women and girls

The Government continued its multi-sectoral approach to addressing the difficult issues of violence against women and girls. In 2013, the Sexual Offences Act 2010 Chapter 8:03 was subjected to proposed amendments and judicial review to address gaps that surfaced during its implementation in the courts. Ongoing review will ensure that the SOA is consistent with fundamental rights provision in Articles 144 (2) (d) and (e) of Guyana's Constitution and protect the rights of sexual violence survivors. In the same year the collective commitment of Parliament was demonstrated by the unanimous passage of Resolution No. 47 on Interpersonal Violence that condemned all forms of interpersonal violence and supported new and existing programmes to address the scourge by government and CSOs.

Another measure for addressing violence against women has been the boosting of the capacity of the Guyana Police Force to adequately prosecute perpetrators. Police stations/precincts are constantly being upgraded across the country to handle domestic violence interviews. The Guyana Police Force has taken measures to (i) establish Domestic Violence and Sexual Offence Units at Police Force Headquarters (ii) train Ranks and encourage more people-friendly precincts; (iii) remodel key precincts with designated private spaces to facilitate reporting such cases; and (iv) work with Non-Governmental Organisations and the Ministry of Social Protection.

A key feature of the comprehensive measures to prevent and address violence against women and girls has been the establishment of the National Task Force for the Prevention of Sexual Violence (NTFPSV) in 2010. The task force was recommissioned in 2016, and it developed a national plan of action for domestic violence and sexual offenses, and also approved the protocols for the Medical practitioners, Police Officers, the Judiciary and Prosecutors. The protocols aim to educate persons on the prevention, reporting and elimination of sexual and domestic violence and to be equipped to speak out in this regard.

The Government of Guyana continues to provide financial support to four shelters managed by NGOs that provide short-term accommodation, counselling, court advocacy and training for women and girls.

Another measure for addressing violence has been boosting the capacity of the Guyana Police Force to adequately prosecute perpetrators. Government has invested in improving physical infrastructure in a number of police stations. Eighteen police stations have been remodeled to fit special rooms for victims of gender-based violence to make their reports in a comfortable, confidential and user-friendly environment. However, women and girls still report that they encounter problems with the professionalism of frontline workers when reporting issues of violence.

Access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights

In accordance with the CEDAW and Beijing+20 commitments to remove regulatory and social barriers to reproductive health information and care for adolescents, the State Party has taken steps to ensure that health care providers do not restrict access of adolescents to reproductive health information and counselling. Through the Maternal Health Thematic Fund implemented by UNFPA, support was provided for the prevention and reduction of maternal deaths and adolescent pregnancy. Contraceptive methods (which include, intra uterine device placements, injections, pills, condoms (among others) have been promoted to women and men in isolated communities, through the Maternal Child Health (MCH) programme and at all the public health facilities across the four hinterland Regions. Additionally, other methods have been accessible through the Surgical Outreach Program and permanent methods have been provided to women. These services have been strengthened by capacity building of 30 health care workers in contraceptive counselling. UNFPA has also provided capacity building support to the Ministry of Health in the area of Family Planning methods.

In keeping with Article 146 of the Constitution, the GOG recognizes the impact that stigma and discrimination have on reducing access to prevention, care and treatment services. An anti-stigma and discrimination policy document was developed by the Ministry of Public Health in 2011 to support the creation of an enabling environment for access to health services by those most in need of them. The GOG is pleased to note that there has been a sustained thrust to educate the public on family planning and contraception by the MOPH and more specifically through the Regional Health Departments of all hinterland Regions.

Given the unacceptably high rate of teenage pregnancy, high risk pregnancy and maternity complications from Hinterland Regions, these interventions have commenced at the level of schools, village councils and community-based organizations. For women accessing pre-condition care and postnatal care, contraceptive services and education are accessible in the package of maternal and child health services. For instance, in 2014, a total of 24 doctors and nurses from all 10 administrative Regions benefitted from ‘contraception use’ training and returned to their regions with IUD kits. Another collaboration with UNICEF saw the development of the Youth Empowerment Initiative (YEI) designed for the underserved communities and isolated areas within the hinterland. Therefore, the government remains committed to creating an environment free from prejudice, regardless of the age, creed, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation of those seeking health services.

Quality education, training and lifelong learning for women and girls

The Constitution of Guyana guarantees the right of free education from Nursery school through Secondary school including non-formal schooling. In practice, the Government provides tuition-free education, which includes the provision of essential textbooks, from primary to secondary levels for public schools.

The Ministries of Social Protection (MOSP) and Education (MOE) through the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) and the Kuru-Kuru Training Centre (KKTC) respectively promoted both residential and non-residential technical and vocational training for young persons across all ten regions. These programs and second-chance opportunities are complementary measures to boost formal education, specialized skills training and promote entrepreneurship/income-generating opportunities for youth with non-academic talent. During 2014-2019 government sponsored programs were complemented by the USAID funded Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment (SKYE) project designed to expand employment, education and skill-building opportunities for at-risk youths.

The National Training Project for Youth Empowerment (NTPYE) executed by the BIT provides insight about girls’ enrolment into non-traditional areas of academia. This

programme makes no gender distinction in the selection of individuals for training programmes. Females have traditionally benefitted from training and often outnumbered their male counterparts, e.g. the percentage of females for the years 2011 to 2015 ranged as follows: 65 percent in 2011, 68 percent in 2012, 58 percent in 2013, 55 percent in 2014 and 54 percent in 2015.

A total of one thousand, one hundred and seventy (1170) public and private educational institutions are accessible throughout the country from nursery to tertiary levels. The University of Guyana with only two campuses --Turkeyen and Tain-- offers Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Post-graduate programmes. A majority of students access soft loans offered by the GoG to cover tuition costs. University enrolment has been higher among women resulting in approximately 70 percent of women completing university degrees and graduating from UG.

Access to education for Indigenous Peoples (IP) living in hinterland and riverine communities has improved through the construction of Nursery and Primary schools and the provision of 13 Secondary schools with dormitories for over 5500 students in hinterland Regions. Access to local and international scholarships for students living in the hinterland to pursue secondary and tertiary education in various disciplines has also enhanced girls' empowerment.

The MOE recognised the imperative of broadening the education curriculum to include sports and creative arts with an emphasis on culture-specific skills like weaving and basketry in hinterland communities. The expected result is that these new subjects will increase the appeal of school to young people, contribute to increased attendance and lower the dropout rate.

SECTION THREE

EMERGING PRIORITIES

For the next five years the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls will be in keeping with the National Gender Equality and social inclusion policy of Guyana. These priorities are as follows:

Equality and Discrimination

Equality and discrimination under the law and access to justice. This will include:

- Developing education programmes on legal matters to promote access to justice options for women and vulnerable groups including Hinterland communities.
- Developing gender and equality training for public service providers within the justice system.
- Collaborating with mandated agencies and contributing to the facilitation of processes that will ensure peace and security, particularly for women, girls, boys, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.
- Implementing emergency response actions to benefit women, girls, boys, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Education and Training

Quality education training and life-long learning for women and girls. This will include:

- Guarantee access of women, children and other vulnerable groups to an inclusive, non-discriminatory, non-oppressive, safe and quality primary and secondary education.
- Coordinate mechanisms to guarantee access to quality education that includes infrastructure and transportation.
- Incorporate out of school youths/youth drop outs (reintegration)

- Promote recognition of educational quality at the university level (scholarships and incentives for women and persons with disabilities), including professions in which women are under-represented.
- Establish technical training centers at the national level for the promotion of employment and livelihood.
- Develop technology hubs in the communities to promote educational programs in schools to provide access to technology for students and the community (including parents and the elderly).
- Promote access to specialized and technological education centres for vulnerable groups.
- Promote educational programmes through technological means that facilitate access to formal and non-formal education for vulnerable groups (women, the elderly and persons with disabilities).

It should be noted that government will:

- Promote ICT in schools through the effective utilization of various learning techniques including the use of visual presentations and programmes for the development of solutions and quick processing of data;
- Implement E-Library repository for licensed learning material in schools and other public learning institutions;
- Encourage investment especially call centres and business outsourcing which will create employment;
- Focus on developing e-commerce thereby creating a whole new niche market all in the flavour of economic growth and stability.
- Use the post offices and health centres as mobile units for ICT since they are the most frequented by citizens;

Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Eliminating Violence against women and girls. This will include:

- Increase social awareness and education regarding the rights of women, children, vulnerable groups and Hinterland communities.

- Create a framework for the protection of women that includes legal reforms, adequate judicial measures and victims' assistance to eradicate physical and psychological abuse and harassment as well as physical violence and mutilation.
- Reform legislation to eliminate discriminatory laws and regulations, and include new legislation to punish hate crimes.
- Eradicate discriminatory and prejudicial social patterns that violate girls' rights, particularly early age marriage practices.
- Eradicate discriminatory and prejudicial social practices that promote gender harassment in public spaces, schools and workplaces.

Women's Entrepreneurship and Women Empowerment

Women's Entrepreneurship and women empowerment, this will include:

- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and an efficient and obligatory national insurance scheme with employers, as well as the promotion of shared responsibility within the household for the family.
- Generation of formal employment with adequate conditions (for example, a National Insurance Plan), especially for vulnerable groups (domestic workers, persons with disabilities, persons living with HIV, Hinterland communities, etc.)
- The use of inclusion criteria to promote the equitable distribution of land ownership and land titling and the regulations of the extra land fees, taking into consideration ancestral land as well as rural and Hinterland regions.
- Strengthen the land ownership registration processes to ensure both men and women can be included.
- Promote the use of publicly owned land in productive projects and projects for vulnerable groups.
- Provide women and vulnerable groups with access to credit for new businesses, business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, and particularly for low income women, the promotion and strengthening of cooperatives in rural areas that facilitate access to credit for ventures of vulnerable groups with low-interest rates or reasonable guarantees.

- Promote formal businesses owned by women and other vulnerable groups, especially with cooperative work and facilitating the access to seed funds for new entrepreneurs.
- Training and technical assistance to entrepreneurs, especially considering educational gaps, including illiteracy.

Women's Participation Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Strengthening women's participation ensuring environmental sustainability. *This will include:*

- Promote gender and inclusion mainstreaming in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, including disaster risk management.
- Strengthen programmes for the allocation of community lands that prioritise conservation areas.
- Promote conservation programmes with indigenous communities for the development of productive activities (fishing, agriculture and mining) and climate change awareness.
- Raise awareness among the population about the effects of climate change on access to drinking water.
- Promote sustainable forest management, sustainable productive practices, forest conservation and recovery of degraded areas with small producers, especially women, specifically to recover mining and forest areas.
- Promote the use of renewable energies in agricultural projects and water treatment jointly with communities.

SECTION FOUR

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREAS OF THE PLATFORM FOR ACTION (2014-2019)

Women, Poverty and the Economy

Over the last five years, the Government has taken the following steps to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls:

Over the last five years the Government has worked and continues to work to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls by promoting and expanding programmes to facilitate women becoming economically independent and empowered. They include: the office of the First Lady of Guyana capacity building workshops where **over 900 persons, mainly female single parents, female young adults** have been trained in the areas of information communication technology, care for the elderly, first aid, childcare, early childhood development, self-reliance and success in business. Workshops have been held across all the ten administrative regions.

Small grants are offered by the Ministry of Social Protection to disadvantaged women for the startup of small businesses to sustain the livelihoods of themselves and family. The Women of Worth (WOW) Loan Programme and the People of Worth Entrepreneurial Resources (POWER) Loan Programme assisted with funding from the Ministry of Finance's Poverty Alleviation Programme and managed by the Guyana Bank for Trade and Industry (GBTI). Apart from the access to soft loans, women benefitted from training in such areas as basic entrepreneurial skills, networking, basic accounting, advertising and packaging.

With the change in Government in May 2015, the WOW programme was resuscitated in October 2015 and provided funding that is being used as a credit guarantee. The terms and conditions for the borrowers remain the same. Meanwhile, rural women play an important role in agriculture, which is integral to the development of the economy. Special programmes have been instituted to eradicate discrimination against women and as a result more women are now being recognized as Farmers in their own right. In addition, more women are partners with men on household farms and are the main

cultivators of kitchen gardens. Their involvement in domestic food production is particularly important, and they play a key role in contributing to food self-sufficiency.

The Government has taken the following steps to recognize unpaid care and domestic work and promote work-family conciliation

The Government has introduced the National Minimum Wage for regular Working Hours (For All Workers in Guyana) Order, made under Section 8 of the Labour Act, Chapter 98:01. The Government of Guyana approved a National Minimum Wage and a forty (40) hour work week for both Private and Public sector employees. The National Minimum Wage specifies that a minimum wage shall apply, but is not limited to workers employed in all the sectors, and shall be applicable to all workers in similar categories.

There are policies for the protection of all workers including domestic workers. These policies are implemented through programmes formulated through effective Tripartite Body comprising representatives from Government, Organised Labour, Private Sector, Civil Society and employers. The Tripartite Body acts as an advisory board to the government regarding amendments to current labour legislation, adoption and implementation of international conventions and policy modifications to improve working conditions for all.

However, effort will be made to place the issue of unpaid domestic and care work, on the national agenda so as to bring recognition to its economic value. In particular, with respect to 2014, data indicate an increase in the participation rate of women (from 34.6 to 43.6 percent) and a decrease in the participation rate of men (from 77.5 to 68.9 percent). The urban labour force represents the majority of the total actively engaged persons (69.6 percent of the total labour force).

The employment-to-population ratio of persons aged 15 and above is 49.2 percent, with the rate being substantially higher for men than for women (62.1 percent against 36.9 percent). There is a marked disadvantage for women in the labour market that is confirmed by the indicator regarding the proportion of women in managerial positions (SDG Indicator 5.5.2) which in the third quarter of 2017 was recorded at 37.8 percent.

As the Ministry of Social Protection's Gender Affairs Bureau conducted its outreaches throughout the country during the period under review, it incorporated the aspect of bringing awareness to and encouraging the participation of men and boys in unpaid care and domestic work. This was done in schools and community outreaches as well as in sessions conducted in various workplaces. Over 15,000 men and boys would have been sensitised as this aspect was incorporated simultaneously with the other outreaches.

It must be noted that the Equal Rights Act and the Prevention of Discrimination Act (1997) provide protection, regardless of gender, race and ethnicity, in relation to access to the labour market and employment opportunities as well as sexual harassment in the workplace.

Over the last five years, the Government has taken the following steps to improve access to social protection for women and girls:

Over the last five years the Government would have taken several initiatives to improve access to social protection for women and girls. Temporary Special Measures have been implemented to address discrimination against women as well as to accelerate the achievement of de facto equality of women and men with new or expanded programmes. In the areas of education, health and housing the social safety nets such as the Single Parent Assistance Programme (SPAP), the Public Assistance Programme (PAP), the Special Circumstances Programme (SCP), school uniform vouchers for all nursery and primary school children attending public educational institutions were expanded during the period under review. In the case of the SPAP and PAP, single mothers are assisted to participate in training programs designed for women entrepreneurs. Funding for this programme totalled GYD25 million each year between 2011 and 2014. Other initiatives like the SCP and the school uniform and school feeding programmes directly benefit children. Consequently, these temporary measures significantly assist women and vulnerable families.

Additionally, the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) 2003-2015 implemented by the Ministry of Education identified its main goal as universal quality completion of education. In each primary school within the community, the aim has been to enhance school attendance for every child in low-income families. Another temporary

special measure to accelerate girls' education has been the main sub-initiative, the School Feeding Programme (SFP) under the Strengthened School Community Partnership component. The SFP established a community supported and managed hot meal feeding programme operated by women daily and supplied with local subsistence products.

In July 2015, the Government introduced a new special temporary measure project, the 5 B's – Boats, Buses, Bicycles, Books and Breakfasts - as a measure designed to accelerate school attendance and development of disadvantaged communities in rural and hinterland areas.

Women and Health

Over the last five years, the Government has taken the following steps to improve health outcomes for women and girls:

Government of Guyana has several initiatives in keeping with universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights - a national priority in keeping with SDG 3 which include:

1. **National Health Sector Strategy – the Health Vision 2020** which guides investments and interventions in the sector has an ultimate aim of achieving universal coverage of health care inclusive of sexual and reproductive health services.
2. In 2018, GUY\$33.3 billion, has been budgeted which is 7 percent more than 2017, which is **12.5 percent of the National Budget 2018** and 4.2 percent of the Gross Domestic Product, to modernise and transform the health sector.
3. Through the **Maternal Health Thematic Fund** implemented by UNFPA, support was provided for the prevention and reduction of maternal deaths and adolescent pregnancy
4. Contraceptive methods (which include, intra uterine device placements, injections, pills, condoms among others) have been promoted to women and men in isolated communities, through the **Maternal Child Health (MCH) programme** and at all public health facilities across the hinterland Regions

5. A review of the **practices and attitudes of staff** at Sexual and Reproductive Health facilities in Guyana was conducted to determine the barriers to access of Sexual and Reproductive Health services.
6. **Gay men and Female Sex workers (FSW)** were trained and empowered to be part of the sensitization team targeting health care providers.
7. The Ministry of Public Health has completed a draft **Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy** which will seek to address all issues regarding the access to information on sexual and reproductive health inclusive of sexual orientation.
8. **Training at health centres** has been undertaken in relation to how health workers deal with women who are potentially victims of violence. It was a policy approved by Guyana and funded by PAHO.

Violence against Women

Over the last five years, the Government has taken the following steps to address violence against women and girls including human trafficking

Efforts made by the Government of Guyana to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers have been steady and improving during the period under review. The Government recognised the need to provide comprehensive services and is committed to providing special units in hospitals/health centres or, where no hospitals or health centres are available, other appropriate venues, where services are centralized and victim-centered, with nurses trained in the gathering of forensic evidence and treatment of rape and sexual violence survivors, trained counsellors to address the psychological and physical trauma, and trained police officers to take statements in a humane and professional manner. Both the MOSP and NGOs have been providing counselling and court advocates to attend to needs of women survivors and their families throughout the court process.

In regard to public education on the criminal nature of domestic violence, there were various awareness campaigns and sensitisation sessions to de-stigmatize victims and encourage women to report incidents of domestic and sexual violence. It is also noteworthy that in 2012, the GOG facilitated a national conversation on domestic violence

under the theme, “It’s Our Problem, Let’s Solve” aimed at generating broad-based citizen consultation on the national response to this challenge. These conversations built on the momentum of the previous “Stamp It Out” campaign had been broadly-cast and resulted in SOA.

During 2015, eight women living at the night shelter benefited from training courses that could improve their employment opportunities namely, care for the elderly, cosmetology and catering. Additionally, to address the challenge of limited shelters, the State, in collaboration with community-based organisations launched the “White Zones” project that increased the number of safe spaces for women and children fleeing abusive homes. White Zone facilities offered 24-hour temporary lodging and daily services that included meals, counselling, child-friendly environments and other forms of assistance.

The Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Social Protection has several Programmes/Departments which are aimed at addressing the root causes of human trafficking and prostitution, particularly as it relates to poverty. These departments within the Ministry of Social Protection provide the following services:

- Provision of counselling services.
- Provision of Public Assistance to assist in alleviating poverty.
- Provision of necessary psychosocial support according to the **COMBATING OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ACT 2005** to identified alleged victims and survivors of human trafficking so as to reduce their vulnerability to being re-victimized.
- Provision of vocational training to the public to reduce their vulnerabilities.
- Provision of grants and loans to at-risk families.
- Enforcement of the Labour Laws of Guyana and protection of workers’ rights.
- Enforcement of all Laws of Guyana relating to protection of all children.
- Conducting workshops, awareness campaigns, educational materials etc. to heighten awareness and sensitize the public on the phenomena.

Additionally, the Government of Guyana has established a National Task Force on Trafficking in Persons which is in keeping with the rudiments identified in the **COMBATING OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ACT 2005**. This Task Force was established in 2005 and has as its members, personnel from a vast spectrum of both Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies. The Task Force is chaired by the Minister of Public Security as is regulated by the Act. The Task Force constitutionally has the overarching responsibility for identifying, recovering and pursuing the social reintegration of all victims. In an effort to efficiently execute its mandate the Task Force has established Sub-Committees. These Sub-committees are:

- The Training Sub-Committee – chaired by the Ministry of Public Security
- The Awareness Sub- Committee – chaired by the Ministry of Social Protection
- The Protection and Reintegration Sub-Committee – chaired by the Ministry of Social Protection
- The Investigation, Prosecution and Legal Issues Sub-Committee – chaired by the Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecution
- The Research and Information Gathering Sub-Committee – chaired by the Ministry of Public Security
- The Action Sub-Committee – chaired by the Guyana Police Force.

The Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Social Protection provides the medical and psychological services and other forms of assistance based on the **COMBATING OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ACT 2005**, Section 18, to ensure that all persons suspected of being victims of trafficking in persons receive the necessary psychosocial support in forms inclusive of:

- Medical Services
- Counselling Services
- Legal Services
- Food, clothing and shelter

- Training Opportunities
- Academic Opportunities
- Job placements

These services are provided on a voluntary basis to adult alleged victims, while child victims are referred to the Child Care and Protection Agency, in keeping with constitutional regulations. These services are not restricted to the alleged victims only but also to close family members e.g. children and other dependents.

For the reporting period, there has been no report of official complicity in the crime of Trafficking in Persons. However, a Police Officer was convicted of the crime in 2014 after being charged in 2013. Officials found to be complicit are subject to the legislative provisions of the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act No. 2 of 2005 in equal measure to any other individual.

The Ministry of Social Protection conducted various training and awareness programmes across the ten administrative regions of Guyana. During the period 2014 to current, training and awareness sessions were done with Toshaos and other village leaders.

Capacity building in the form of training led or contributed to by the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons began in the last quarter of 2016 with the Major Crimes Investigations Unit of the Guyana Police Force and Frontline Officials from multiple regions being trained.

In 2017, Focal Points selected from eight (8) Indigenous communities and schools across eight administrative regions were also exposed to various kinds of training by the Ministry of Social Protection. In addition, staff of the Counter-Trafficking in Persons Unit received training in general investigative skills and report writing.

Media Officials, Police Prosecutors, Police Officers and other stakeholders in Region 1, Immigration Officers, Village Councillors and Toshaos were trained, whilst the International Organization for Migration, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Protection, also conducted a Training of Trainers Course for multiple stakeholders

including Task Force Members, and also conducted another course for Medical Practitioners.

2018 saw training courses for Mines Officers and the Corps of Wardens, Diplomats/Foreign Service Officials, Interpreters, Community Policing Groups, Immigration and Citizenship and Police Intelligence Officers conducted by the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons. From 2016-2018, three (3) Police Investigators, two (2) Immigration Officers and three (3) Police Prosecutors also underwent a series of Trafficking in Persons regional training courses conducted by INTERPOL.

In 2019, the Ministry of Social Protection held a Training Course for Labour Officials and Occupational Health and Safety Officers. All training courses included persons from various administrative regions, including those from Guyana's remote areas, being trained in victim identification and referral amongst other key aspects of Trafficking in Persons. Training courses were also conducted with medical practitioners, teachers and civil society members in Essequibo, Region No.2.

The Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Social Protection made significant strides with regard to care facility services in establishing one (1) safe house located in Georgetown and two (2) transitional facilities located outside the capital, whilst providing progressively increasing subventions for the Non-Governmental Organizations tasked with the management of all shelters. Victims of Trafficking in Persons are provided with healthcare, psychosocial and other support services by the Ministry of Social Protection. The Ministry of Social Protection also conducted a Training Course for Shelter Managers in 2019 since the Ministry saw the importance of training and equipping service providers with the necessary skills needed to help persons who pose various challenges while being in protective care.

The Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons and other stakeholders including the Ministry of Social Protection, have been addressing this issue through the Training Courses for Frontline Officials mentioned above who are heavily engaged in the mining sector, including Police, Mines Officers and the Corps of Wardens. There have also been a number of awareness exercises conducted by anti-TIP stakeholders, including the Task Force and the Ministry of Social Protection, with community leaders and members.

Awareness exercises were also conducted in various schools. The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission has also established a Trafficking in Persons Unit, further exemplifying the commitment to stamping out the crime of trafficking in persons in the mining sector.

Over the past five years the GOG has prioritized for action the following strategies that were used to prevent violence against women and girls

The MOSP and other agencies have undertaken a number of awareness and training programmes. These include the distribution of media kits, documentaries, and guidelines for interviewing victims and a guide to the underlying principles in working with victims. Training programmes were also provided for police officers of the Criminal Investigation Department, Guyana Police Force, on the following: trafficking, victim identification and case investigation. During the period under review, these agencies collaborated with UNICEF, UNFPA, the United States of America Department of Justice and Department of State, the Canadian High Commission, UNDP and the IOM to undertake extensive training and awareness sessions with stakeholders from all ten administrative regions of the country.

A number of training sessions were held with members of the Regional Women's Affairs Committees (RWCA) and Gender Affairs Bureau (GAB) in all Administrative Regions except regions 1, 3 and 8. In this regard, they benefitted from specialised training. Following these sessions, approximately two hundred and ninety-six (296) persons including representatives of the communities have been equipped to network with other agencies. One main achievement of their newly acquired skills and networking has been the delivery of counselling services to beneficiaries in selected communities in Region 6.

In an effort to reach working-class women and men, the WAB/GAB expanded its collaboration with the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GUYSUCO), Guyana Agricultural Workers Union (GAWU) and the Geology and Mines Commission to conduct workshops on gender equality, gender-based violence, suicide prevention, conflict management and other related issues. The results of the collaboration from 2013 to 2015 has been: seventy (70) female sugar workers from Rose-Hall, Enmore, Wales, Uitvlugt, Skeldon and Albion estates benefitted from a one-day gender awareness workshop; twenty-five (25) females

and males from Rose Hall sugar estate benefitted from a one-day session; and thirty-five (35) staffers, twenty-eight (28) males and seven (7) females drawn from various departments of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) participated in gender, gender-based violence and conflict management sensitisation workshops.

Some Concrete Actions include:

- The National Action Plan was developed in 2013- 2018. Its aim was to provide elements from an educative stand point, the most effective method in reinforcing, particularly in relation to those who are the frontline persons for the Sexual Offences Act and Domestic Violence Act’s effective implementation. It must also be noted that meaningful engagement of the media would undoubtedly lend critical support in the Plan's implementation.
- In 2016, UNICEF published “A Review of the Implementation of the Sexual Offences Act in Guyana”. The purpose of this study was to document positive facilitating factors of the SOA, and the challenges in its operationalisation. In this document, specific and detailed recommendations were provided to highlight what was needed for the SOA's better implementation.
- The Ministry of Social Protection, in 2017, did host several training and education and awareness sessions but not as a formal implementation of the draft plan.
- Several publications to support implementation of the SOA have over the years been produced. These include draft protocols for prosecutors, medical practitioners, social workers and police. Help & Shelter Inc. has produced a “Handbook on the Sexual Offences Act”. Additionally, the Rights of the Child Commission has published and widely circulated Guides for the general public and social workers/practitioners on the Sexual Offences Act.
- Workshops have been held for Judges, Magistrates and the Director of Public Prosecutions and staff. One workshop was in relation to Model Guidelines for Sexual Offence Cases in the Caribbean Region.

In relation to the Sexual Offences Court, please find below the information in relation to the Sexual Offences Court:

- **Its territorial and subject matter Jurisdiction:** It is one of the Courts in the High Court in the County of Demerara that deals with cases from all the Magisterial

Districts in Demerara. The Magisterial Districts in Demerara are all densely populated and therefore there are a lot of matters listed in this court to be heard.

- The number and nature of the cases processed: The Sexual Offences Court was opened during the October 2017 Assizes. The cases that are dealt with in the Sexual Offences Court are the indictable charges under the Sexual Offences Act Chapter 8:03. In 2017, a total of twenty-two (22) sexual offence cases were prosecuted and some of these were done in the Sexual Offences Court. In the year 2018, a total of thirty-eight (38) sexual offence cases were prosecuted in the Sexual Offences Court. During the months of January to March, 2019, ten (10) sexual offence cases were prosecuted. At present there are one hundred fifty-three (153) sexual offence cases listed for April 2019 Assizes in the Sexual Offences Court in Demerara.
- The number of convictions and the penalties imposed: For sexual offences convictions there were six (6) guilty verdicts for 2017, twenty-one (21) for 2018 and two (2) for January 2019. Penalties for the convictions ranged from 20 years to life imprisonment.
- Its backlog of pending cases: More than half of the one hundred fifty three (153) cases listed for the April 2019 Assizes were on previous lists but were not heard and so have been placed on the new list. Due to the large backlog of cases there is a need for a second Sexual Offences Court to deal with the various Magisterial Districts in the densely populated County of Demerara.
- Human, financial and technical resources allocated: Three State Counsels are presently prosecuting cases in the Sexual Offences Court. Further, a multidisciplinary team has been created so that court support for complainants is provided by different NGOs and the Ministry of Social Protection who provide counseling for complainants before and after the trial. The court makes provision to reimburse the complainant for travelling expenses.
- How it will contribute to effective prosecution of cases of gender-based violence against women: The only gender-based violence cases in the Sexual Offences Court are the sexual violence cases.

During the period under review the Ministry of Social Protection's Gender Affairs Bureau in collaboration with other organisations conducted outreach sessions

targeting men and boys that addressed topics such as Gender Based Violence, Substance Abuse, Anger Management, Conflict Resolution etc. Some of the institutions focused on were the New Opportunity Corp (120 boys), outreach in various communities that reached the grass roots men and boys would have reached approximately 15,000 men and boys. Some of the organisations the Ministry would have collaborated with were: The Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, The Guyana Prison Service, The Ministry of the Presidency, Department of Social Cohesion, Culture Youth and Sport, The Salvation Army Men's Social Centre, The Guyana Business Coalition on Health Awareness, The Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association, The National Community Policing Executive, etc.

The Government has taken the following steps to address violence against women and girls facilitated by technology

Over the last five years in order to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, which is being facilitated by technology, the government passed the Cyber Crime Act in July 2018.

The act addressed several important issues inclusive of cyber bullying, child pornography, sexual grooming and luring children into sexual actions, revenge pornography and cyber blackmail and copyright infringement using all computer systems. The Act makes activities such as posting and showing videos of minors engaging in sex, photos and videos of adults engaged in sex without their consent, or of former partners in compromising positions, criminal offences. It is important to note that all infringements in the Act involve a prison term which, with only three exceptions, is at least three years in prison.

Women in Power and Decision-making

The Government has taken the following actions to promote women's participation in public life and decision making

Over the last five years the Government has taken a number of initiatives to promote and ensure women's participation in public life and decision making as pointed out earlier in the report.

Guyana's (Amendment) Act¹⁵ makes provision for a quota of one-third women on the lists of candidates for national and local elections. During the period 2014 to 2019 women representatives were more than 30 percent on the majority of Regional Democratic Councils. Overall, women's representation in this first tier of local government was 34 percent in 2011, remained consistently over one-third for successive years but declined to 29 percent in 2015.

The Government of Guyana's commitment to ensure that women are given the necessary wherewithal to take on leadership roles has manifested itself mainly through the training programmes of the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute (GWLI) and the Gender Affairs Bureau. Over the last three years, four hundred eighty (480) women participated in these programmes.

The programmes cater for Women leaders involved in community work throughout the country with participants enhancing their leadership skills and preparing themselves for participation in the Local and Region Government System. Most of the participants are already serving members of both Regional and Neighborhood Democratic Councils.

The programmes comprised courses in

- Leadership
- Organizational skills for development
- Laws of Local Government
- Gender and Local Government
- Local Government promoting Gender Equality
- Local Development through women's eyes
- Understanding Gender
- Gender Mainstreaming, planning and budgeting
- Team Building for success

Additionally, each class benefitted from courses in Office Procedures and entrepreneurial skills.

Women and the Media and ICT

The Government has taken the following step to increase women's access to information and communication technologies (ICT) in Guyana

The Ministry of Public Telecommunications (MoPT) is responsible for the development of the ICT sector in Guyana. MoPT has so far commissioned its ICT Hubs project that has seen the establishment of 24 community-based public access ICT sites across Guyana (12 Hinterland & 12 Coastland), in the initial instance. The project involves building community relations and ownership of the spaces through the physical installation of the connectivity infrastructure, the provision of laptops, and training for community members. Another two hundred (200) Community ICT hubs will be set up and as a result residents of remote, hinterland and far rural communities will now be able to access, close to home, the worldwide web, social media and government services.

Girls from several schools from across the country are given the opportunity to explore the various fields related to Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is done by the MoPT in collaboration with the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) as part of the MoPT's mandate to bolster ICT learning in Guyana. This is done through initiatives such as Girls Coding Camps and the Guyanese Girls in ICT programmes.

The other programme is the development of ICT Tech labs. This programme was developed by Geotech Vision, and sees fifty-five (55) girls from eleven (11) schools and the University of Guyana engaged in web development activities. In addition, the SheLeadsIt organisation and the NDMA are working to empower women in Guyana through training and education. The organisation has reached over 800 girls in Guyana and across the Caribbean.

The MoPT is also in the process of reaching out to high schools to generate enthusiasm for careers in the Information Communications Technology (ICT) sector. The initiative is being executed with the aim of empowering the nation's youth by awarding ten ICT scholarships to willing and deserving students. They will be trained by a reputable leading local ICT business.

The Ministry of Education also introduced ROBOTICS Programmes which are now mainstreamed in school and allow or enable girls to code using technology. Guyana participated internationally with the STEM ROBOTIC Competition in 2017 and 2018 and will continue to participate in 2019.

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

The Gender Affairs Bureau

The name of the National Machinery for gender equality and the empowerment of women in Guyana is the Gender Affairs Bureau. The Gender Affairs Bureau that is within the Ministry of Social Protection seeks to promote and advance gender issues to assist women and men in releasing their potential as citizens of Guyana through the attainment of gender equality, equity and identity.

The Gender Affairs Bureau is the national body within the Ministry of Social Protection with responsibility for the formation, implementation and monitoring of policies to promote gender equality and social inclusion. It also serves in an Advisory capacity on gender affairs on established bodies such as the Women and Gender Equality Commission. The **key objectives** of the Bureau are:

1. To contribute to the formulation of gender based policies for nation building,
2. To initiate gender-based research and provide data which can inform policies shift,
3. To reflect on the shift in approaches to development from a Women and Men in Development to a focus on Gender and Development,
4. To facilitate the integration of gender and development into all areas of national development, plans and policies that women and men can benefit equally,
5. To co-ordinate the participation in gender awareness on gender issues, utilizing existing laws,
6. To facilitate Gender mainstreaming, so that gender equality and equity and social inclusion are core values of state agencies,
7. To partner with communities to identify and satisfy needs through provision of gender programmes thereby improving a cohesive society,

8. To advocate for community building - the roles of gender and attitudes and stereotypes,
9. To coordinate activities which will prevent sex trade, human trafficking and provide protection for victims.

National Strategy for Gender Equality

Guyana has a valid national strategy or action plan for gender equality that is called the National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy (NGESIP) that covers 2018 to 2023.

To strengthen its ability to adequately address exclusion, gender inequality, and to acknowledge the unique conditions and barriers that limit or deny vulnerable persons and communities access to services, resources or benefits, the Ministry of Social Protection, in collaboration with Cuso International, has developed the National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy (NGESIP) for Guyana. The NGESIP will be used as a framework to guide the implementation of appropriate mechanisms, policies and protocols to address issues of gender inequality and social exclusion.

In keeping with intersectionality methodology, Guyana's Constitution, National legislation and international commitments premised on inclusion and gender equality such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Sustainable Development Goals 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment) and 10 (reduced inequalities), the NGESIP is guided by the following policy objectives:

- Objective 1: Eradicate discrimination
- Objective 2: Eliminate all forms of violence
- Objective 3: Women's and Vulnerable Groups' Right to Safe Public Spaces
- Objective 4: Promotion of Economic Development and Inclusion
- Objective 5: Governance and the Law
- Objective 6: Health, Wellness and Healthcare
- Objective 7: Agriculture and Climate Change
- Objective 8: Education, Training and Skills Development

- Objective 9: Security, Human Rights and Justice (Peace and Conflict)
- Objective 10: Media and Information.

The **main Objective** of the Policy is to promote Guyana's development by improving the capacities and opportunities for diverse groups of women, men, girls, boys and other vulnerable groups based on a framework that will foster the dignity of these groups.

The policy is basically the sustainable development pathways that will provide an opportunity to address inequalities and reshape policies to empower women and girls in all their diversity, so that they can become catalytic agents of change and equal partners with men in the quest to promote growth that is inclusive, just, equitable and sustainable.

It must be noted that the policy has not been costed and the government is currently seeking funding for its full implementation.

National Human Rights Institution

The Constitution of Guyana provides for the Human Rights Commission which provides for all rights, but it is the mandate of the Women and Gender Equality Commission (W&GEC) to promote women's rights as Human Rights, and the participation of women in National decision making.

The W&GEC is one of the five (5) constitutional rights commissions provided for under the revised 2003 Constitution. It replaced the National Commission on Women created in 1990 which was the Presidential Advisory body.

This Commission, appointed in 2010 and fully operational, is guided by its constitutional mandate. It addresses gender issues, promotes the advancement of women in society and investigates and makes recommendations on gender equality to the Parliament. The Commission receives complaints, reports on issues affecting both women and men in regards to gender inequality and decimation. The commission also examines policies and programmes which affect the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The Commission aims to promote national recognition and acceptance that women's rights are human rights, respect for gender equality and protection, development and attainment of equality.

The Commission has conducted a number of activities in accordance with its sixteen constitutional mandates. The W&GEC held several workshops to empower women and girls through advocacy and several NGOs and Governmental Agencies participated. The Commission implemented suggestion boxes and bill boards in strategic areas across the ten (10) Administrative Regions in an effort to reduce sexual and gender-based violence (GBV); to bring an awareness to GBV; and to support victims of GBV with access to available services. The results achieved under the W&GEC's Access to Justice programmes in all ten (10) Administrative Regions of Guyana are making measurable differences in removing barriers to women in leadership. A notable number of female Indigenous leaders were elected to offices. Further, several females were elected to leadership positions in the Local Government Elections, nineteen (19) Chairpersons and twenty-four (24) Vice-chairpersons, representing 27.1% and 34.8% respectively.

The W&GEC in collaboration with the Institute of Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) of the University of Guyana (UG) jointly collaborated and undertook the implementation of mutually beneficial activities in the realm of women's studies and gender equality in accord with the mandates of both organizations. The W&GEC also contracted an International Human Rights Lawyer to evaluate Women's rights under National and International Laws in order to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls."

Women and the Environment

Over the last five years the GOG has integrated gender prospective policies into all of its environment/climate change projects, which were as follows:

1. Project:

Japan –Caribbean Climate Change Partnership Project (J-CCCP) (current)

Gender Considerations:

Gender is being included as a cross-cutting issue in National Adaptation Plan.

2. Project;

Strengthening of the national Institutional Mechanism for Climate Change Adaptation in Guyana (current)

Gender Considerations:

Gender is/will be included as a cross-cutting issue in the three output documents. Additional requirements of the project include:

- Sex disaggregated data included in the background analysis, and/or baselines and indicators, or collection of sex-disaggregated data required in TOR.
- Socioeconomic/Sector/Institutional analysis considers gender disparities, or TOR requires the identification of socio-economic, sectoral and institutional gender issues.
- TA interventions are designed, or will be identified as part of the project, to address gender disparities or enhance gender capacities.

3. Project;

Readiness Support for the Agriculture Sector (current)

Gender Considerations;

- Conduct an inclusive gender-sensitive consultation process related to the Climate Resilience Strategy and Action Plan (CRSAP) priority areas in the agricultural sector
- Conduct gender assessment and promote gender responsive implementation through an action-oriented gender plan.

Deliverable 1: Assessment report with agreed gender criteria and indicators

Deliverable 2: Gender responsive model action plan developed for typical agricultural sector

4. Project;

UNDP Project strengthening Disaster Management Capacity of Women in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Commonwealth of Dominica (current)

Gender Considerations;

-Activity 1.2: Gender-responsive capacity building in hazard-prone communities to apply climate and early warning information to reduce vulnerability of loss of agricultural livelihoods.

-Sub-Activity 2.1.1: Develop and implement a gender-responsive tool to support gender equality analysis for DRM in agriculture, having reviewed the approach used in Guyana.

-Sub-Activity 2.2.2: Develop and implement a gender-responsive micro-finance mechanism for agricultural enterprises to facilitate the adoption of risk-informed investments in sustainable and risk mitigation approaches, e.g. climate-smart agriculture (CSA), and DRR/CCA good agricultural practices.

-Sub-Activity 2.2.3: capacity building for farmers (and their groups/cooperatives as appropriate), especially of women and indigenous people, in accessing and managing micro-finance.

-Activity 3.1: Facilitate learning and application through South-South exchange, especially among women's groups.

Conclusion

The Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana is committed to the principles of human rights, social and gender equity and equality, inclusive growth, sustainable development, and social justice as a means to transform unequal power relations that perpetuate violence and discrimination; reinforce unequal development and socioeconomic disparities; and disempower diverse groups of women, men, boys and girls from participating in and benefiting equally from Guyana's development initiatives.

Guyana has developed and continues working on programmes to promote employment, improve the standard of living, reduce poverty and grant access to health and education through major sectoral strategies that include competitiveness, education, health, housing, and national development. Nevertheless, obstacles to the protection of civil liberties and rule of law are blocking the path towards equality and non-discrimination. Although most of the government initiatives work under principles of accountability, inclusion and equality, exclusion and discrimination arise in the everyday life of many Guyanese. Therefore, the government took steps to integrate new forms of action to eradicate violence and discrimination, and to connect current strategies to promote equality and non-discrimination principles in the current government action plans.