

INTRODUCTION

St. Kitts and Nevis, a small island developing nation, with a population of forty eight thousand (48,000) people, has made significant progress in the area of women's development and their equality with men since the Mexico Consensus of 2004. Despite the progress and, and despite the human development rank of St. Kitts and Nevis (49th in the world), (2nd in CARICOM), and (1st in the OECS Sub Region), there are still key areas, pockets of resistance, that must be constantly worked upon, if women's equality with men is to be secured and maintained.

The government of St. Kitts and Nevis has since 1985 established a State Department, Ministerial portfolio, to address gender issues and the advancement of women. The Ministry of Gender Affairs is involved with public policy development within St. Kitts and Nevis, and has played an integral role in strategic plans that have been developed by key governmental agencies.

Women in St. Kitts and Nevis have made significant progress in various areas of national life and enjoy access to the same goods and services as men. However, the area of political decision making continues to elude women, since over the past fifty five (55) years of universal suffrage, only three (3) women have been elected to political office.

This report will address the achievements in key areas of the Mexico Consensus, and also identify the shortcomings, which will hopefully be remedied by the next reporting period.

POVERTY REDUCTION

St. Kitts and Nevis' Poverty Assessment Survey of 2001, identified women as representing 59.3% of the poor. Another poverty assessment survey has been recently concluded and the findings will be disclosed later this year. The State has with the assistance of the United Nation's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Caribbean Development Bank, facilitated the development of the National Human Development Agenda. The State through the Poverty Assessment Survey was able to identify the vulnerable groups within the society and implement programmes to address the inequity.

St. Kitts and Nevis has undertaken several programmatic and policy development decisions in order to reduce poverty amongst women. The Women's training Centre provides income generating, life skills and entrepreneurship training for low income women, especially those who work in the light manufacturing sector. In addition, rural income generating skills programmes have been provided to low

income, and unemployed women in the areas identified by the Poverty Assessment Survey, as most vulnerable.

The closure of the over three hundred year old sugar industry in 2005, making one thousand five hundred (1,500) workers redundant, three hundred (300) of whom were women, created another challenge in the area of poverty reduction. Skills training in the areas of clothing design, craft making and housekeeping for the hospitality sector has been done. Two particular projects have been particularly effective, one group of women in the area of clothing design, has been able to produce school uniforms for sale to the State's Social Assistance Programme, while another group of craft makers is producing craft of a high quality for the local market. Funding in part for these activities was provided by the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

Yet another group of women ex-sugar workers has formed themselves into an agri-producing ,processing cooperative. These women use local produce to make drinks, preserves, and condiments. The State and IICA have collaborated to provide technical support, and land for agriculture, while the Canada Gender Equality Programme, provided a grant for equipment.

Currently, recruitment is being done for thirty women ex-sugar cane workers to participate in a non-traditional skills training programme in the areas of tiling, plumbing, and upholstery in order to prepare them for absorption into the job market, or to become entrepreneurs in the area of training, if they so desire. Funding for the training and starting of micro-enterprise is being provided by the Organization of American States and the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Perhaps in no area of national endeavour has the state made a more gallant effort at poverty reduction, than in the reiteration of the right of teenage mothers to education in the mainstream. The Policy decision of 1997 was followed by support mechanisms, which ensured that teenage mothers were provided with the necessary support to balance their roles as mothers and students, and complete their education successfully. The programme has realized a large measure of success as in ten years approximately one hundred and fifty girls have returned to school and completed their education. Today several of these young women have completed both secondary and tertiary level education; several have done professional training. One of the former teen mothers is a Cuban trained medical doctor and a vocal advocate for the right of teen mothers to an education.

In a country where fifty one (51%) percent of the families are headed by women, the education of women is a critical factor in the reduction of poverty and the well being of families and society. St. Kitts Nevis celebrates the 10th anniversary of the teen mother support programme during the month of September 2007, with a number of public awareness activities.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

St. Kitts and Nevis has had universal access to secondary education for the past forty years. Enrollment at the primary levels is almost equal for boys and girls, but begins to show higher participation levels for girls by the secondary school stage. At the tertiary level, it becomes more pronounced as the number of females in attendance almost doubles the number of males. During the 2006-2007 school year the tertiary level institution, the Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College had an enrollment of four hundred and fifteen females, (415) and two hundred and seventeen (217) males.

Although women outnumber men in the tertiary level institution, the gendered nature of the areas of concentration is quite notable. More women are in the fields of education, nursing, and hospitality, while more males are in the technical and vocational areas.

Despite women's academic achievements, they are still positioned at the lower end of the labour market in large numbers, and realize an average annual wage of almost two thousand (\$2000) less than men.

HIV/AIDS AND GENDER

The Department of Gender Affairs is integrally involved with the work of the National AIDS Secretariat, and enjoys a good working relationship, especially since it was initially in a ministerial cluster with the Ministry of Health. Gender Affairs has a focal point for HIV/AIDS and the Department ensures that there is a gender perspective in all of the programmes of the National HIV/AIDS Secretariat.

Currently, the Secretariat is preparing for a new strategic plan, and the Department of Gender Affairs is working closely with the Secretariat to ensure that gender issues are taken into consideration at every stage of the development.

As a part of its public awareness efforts, the Department of Gender Affairs includes a component of HIV/AIDS in all of its training and outreach programmes. Whether the focus is on life skills for adolescents, income generating skills for women, relationship skills for men, or mentoring for teen mothers, HIV/AIDS is always a part of the training.

The economic empowerment of women has been one of the main ways in which the Department of Gender Affairs works to lower the incidence of HIV/AIDS,

since the ability to negotiate safer sex on the part of women, could be significantly enhanced through economic and emotional empowerment.

ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

St. Kitts and Nevis amended its Domestic Violence Act 2000, in 2005. The amendments made it possible for Domestic Violence matters to be heard in the high court, the magistrate court and the Family court when it is established. It also included financial abuse as a form of abuse; made allowance for electronic harassment to be included as a form of harassment, and gave the magistrate the option of awarding the use of household effects to the person in whom the tenancy or occupancy of a property was vested.

The Domestic Violence Legislation, supported by the Legal Aid Clinic which was opened in 2005, has made it possible for the women to access the court for orders, without retaining counsel. The retention of counsel in the past was often a deterrent to many women's access to the court. Public awareness of the legislation has also included, Domestic Violence Fora, distribution of the legislation, and media presentations.

The annual sixteen day campaign is used to keep the public awareness of the issue of violence against women, on the public agenda. The campaign of 2006 included visits to the graves of women who had died as a result of gender based violence, laying of wreaths on their graves, and visiting with and presenting memorial plaques to family members. The media awareness of the activity helped the public to see the cumulative impact of gender based violence, and encouraged the support for violence free life styles for men and women.

During the Month of the Woman, March 2007, the Department of Gender Affairs with the support of the Peace Corp, launched a Silent Witness Campaign with silhouettes of all of the women who have been killed in intimate partner violence over the past fifteen years. The purple coloured silhouettes, which are shaped like women and contain the year of birth and death of each woman, and the way in which she died, are put in strategic locations, on the main street, at national festivals, outside government headquarters, to remind the public of the cost of intimate partner violence, and to galvanize support for non-violent conflict resolution.

The response to this initiative has been overwhelming, as persons on talk shows comment on them, and members of the public are visibly moved as they view the exhibits. One beauty pageant contestant, used the silhouettes in her presentation on the issue of domestic violence, and the men of the country have asked that men killed in intimate partner violence be included. Four additional silhouettes have

been made to represent these men. Domestic violence is not a women's issue, but a national issue that needs a national response.

The National Men's Association, a group that supports the work of the Department of Gender Affairs has been actively advocating for greater balance in relationships, and encouraging men to choose non violent life styles. They coordinate training activities for men in relationship skills, and produce a weekly radio programme, The Y Factor, which addresses male issues; one of which is violence against women.

ENHANCED CAPACITY OF NATIONAL MACHINERY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

During the period under review, State allocations to the Department of Gender Affairs have increased annually, despite the economic challenges that the State faces. In addition, the cabinet has approved the employment of a suitably qualified male to coordinate the activities for men, and to be the focal point for men's issues within the country.

A skeletal department, the Department of Gender Affairs, has survived because of the ability to multi-task; since over the past few years all of the members of staff have received training both locally and overseas to better equip them for more effective service to the department and the nation. Recently two officers were trained in research and documentation, in order to better provide statistical support for the policies of the Department of Gender Affairs, and to spearhead the preparation for and the development of the National Gender and Development Policy of St. Kitts and Nevis.

The government of St. Kitts and Nevis has also through the Department of Gender Affairs; provided subventions for the National Council of women, an umbrella organization of women's non governmental organizations. The main focus between 2004 and 2007 has been capacity building, and democracy and governance.

Support is also provided to the National Men's Association, an umbrella organization of men's non governmental organization. This organization, since 2003, has been providing support for the work of the Women's Machinery, in spreading the message that **equality benefits all**. The National Men's

Association has proven to be an effective out reach mechanism to men, since their message of equality for men and women is received by men with less resistance.

ACCESS TO POWER AND DECISION MAKING

St. Kitts and Nevis, a medium- high human development country has the anomaly of having zero representation of women in the Parliament, although the Speaker of the Parliament is a woman; and of having only three women elected to political office in the fifty five (55) years in which the State has enjoyed universal suffrage. There are several barriers that prevent women from coming to political office in large numbers, and the State has committed itself to removing the barriers to women's access to political decision-making.

In the area of public sector management, women enjoyed a representation of 58% percent of Permanent Secretaries in 2005, and currently are forty three (62%) percent of the Permanent Secretaries. The portfolios in which women are Permanent Secretaries do show a significant shift over time, since women now hold the portfolio's of Finance, Sustainable Development, National Security, International Trade and Foreign Affairs, Legal Affairs, Industry and Commerce, and Human Resource. Interestingly, the portfolios of Education, Health and Social and Community Development are being carried by male Permanent Secretaries.

Since 2002, St. Kitts and Nevis has been engaged in a series of activities to enhance women's knowledge in the area of Democracy and Governance. The first series of training was sponsored by the Organization of American States and was jointly implemented with Antigua and Barbuda and Guyana. More recently, training has been sponsored by the Australian Direct Aid Programme. Although these efforts have not immediately resulted in women's presence at the highest decision making levels, it has heightened the awareness of women's entitlement to decision making positions on equal terms with men. In the elections of 2004 four of the eleven constituencies were contested by women; however none of these women was successful.

An important aspect of the Training in Democracy and Governance activities was the formation of two support groups whose objectives are the awareness of women's issues, in particular their right to power and decision making positions, and the support of potential women candidates. The groups Voices of Women (VOW) on Nevis, and the other group Promoting Equality in Politics (PEP) on St. Kitts, have been actively keeping the issue of women's need for equality with men and their right to being involved in decision making at every level.

The next political election which is constitutionally due in 2009, but which could be called earlier at the discretion of the Prime Minister, should see a larger

number of women as candidates. St. Kitts and Nevis is now under going a process of electoral reform and one of the areas which was raised by many citizens, both men and women, was the issue of the under representation of women and the need for the State to adhere to its commitments to address this issue. The outcome of the process, will demonstrate the extent to which the suggestions of the citizens will have been taken into consideration.

WOMEN'S UNWAGED WORK

St. Kitts and Nevis has not been able to date, to quantify the contribution of women to the economy, through unwaged work, neither has there been a time use study conducted in recent times. Discussions have begun between the State's Department of Gender Affairs and the Government Statistical Unit to remedy this situation. The Statistical unit will need increased capacity to under go the work necessary to determine women's contributions through unwaged work.

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

St. Kitts and Nevis has had a fairly good history of ratification of instruments that address the advancement of women. One of the few nations in the Caribbean region to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of the Discrimination against Women, the nation has demonstrated the will to ensure that women enjoy the equity that will ultimately realize the goal of equality.

In addition, there is a law review being undertaken by the Ministry of Legal Affairs through its Drafting Department to ensure that the laws are relevant and meet the needs of a changing society. The Ministry of Social Development, will be shortly assigning an officer with a law degree to review the laws that address the social life and policies of the country to ensure that they are in keeping with the international agreements and instruments to which the state is a signatory.

CONCLUSION

St. Kitts and Nevis realizes the importance of engendering its development in order to ensure its sustainability. This report helps to identify the areas in which the nation has made significant progress and those in which it has lagged behind what was expected. As a small island developing nation, St. Kitts and Nevis is fully cognizant of the role that a well trained, highly qualified citizenry could play in its sustained development, therefore the equality of men and women must be pursued as a critical developmental issue. When men and women are fully

equipped to participate on equal terms in national development, then society like the proverbial bird can fly with both of its wings fully functional.