

SAINT LUCIA'S

REPORT

TO

THE 11TH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

IN

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

June 2010

Division of Gender Relations

Ministry of Health, Wellness,
Human Services, National Mobilization,
Family Affairs and Gender Relations

St. Lucia's National Report

11th Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Division of Gender Relations is the agency charged with the responsibility of achieving gender parity in St. Lucia. Guided by the Beijing Platform for Action, and St Lucia's commitment to international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Division has identified key areas to address the issues which prevent women from fully enjoying their basic and fundamental rights, and achieving full participation in the development process. It has used a multi-faceted and multi-sectoral approach to managing these issues mainly through awareness raising, empowerment seminars, education and training. The following are some of the core areas which the Division identified as needing to be addressed to ensure that women's concerns are effectively and efficiently redressed:

- Women and Poverty
- Women's Economic Empowerment
- Women's Rights and Violence against Women
- Women in Power and Decision Making Positions
- Women and the Law
- Women's Health and in particular Women and HIV/AIDS
- Human Trafficking

WOMEN AND POVERTY

The last Poverty Assessment (2005/6) carried out in St. Lucia indicated that 28.8% of the population was classified as poor, and 1.6% was considered indigent. Four (4) of St. Lucia's six (6) districts were described as the "most indigent communities". The rate of unemployment for women at the end of 2007 was 18.6%. The general rate of unemployment peaked at 20% in the year under consideration. Just over 50% of unemployed women fall between the ages of 15 – 34. Most of these women only have a primary school education and few marketable skills which seriously hampers any

attempts to enjoy a reasonable standard of living and ultimately deprives them of enjoying their basic human rights.

Government Initiatives to Address Poverty Among Women:

Women's Economic Empowerment and Social Protection Programmes

Recognizing the importance of responding to the needs of the greater part of the population - just over 50% of the population is female - various government agencies have implemented a number of social protection programmes. Some of these programmes provide the skills training and micro financing necessary for women to create their own employment opportunities as well as to enter the nontraditional areas in the labour market.

National Skills Development Centre

The National Skills Development Programme exists to equip persons with the skills that will make them more marketable and confident in the workplace. To date this programme has been filled by more females than males. This initiative performs an important function as these women are better able to fit into the workplace and command a better rate of pay thus improving their standard of living.

The National Skills Development Centre and Basic Needs Trust Fund have also sought to address the problem of unemployment of women in communities along the west coast where three of the 'most indigent' communities were identified. At least 120 women received training to take advantage of the then expanding construction industry. The programme sought to 'increase the level of self-esteem among women living along the west coast,' and 'to sensitize major stakeholders and the rest of society on the issues of female labour in the nontraditional areas of employment' through a Gender Awareness Workshop. The women received training in 1) Painting and Tiling, 2) Carpentry and Roofing, 3) Masonry and Steel Bending, 4) Electrical Installation, 5) Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Repair, and 6) Plumbing. Up to 31 August 2008, 61

women had been attached to various companies with 28 of them securing permanent employment.

The James Belgrave Micro Enterprise Development Fund Inc. (BELFund)

The James Belgrave Micro Enterprise Development Fund Inc. (BELFund) was established 'to promote sustainable development through self-help (micro enterprise) projects for individuals, families and groups among the less privileged sectors through the provision of low cost loans, enterprise training, technical assistance and other support services'. The fund provides assistance for persons who are unsuccessful in securing credit from other traditional lending facilities. Between 2003 and 2008, 47% of the beneficiaries were female. In 2008, 63% of the beneficiaries were female. In 2009 however, there was a decline in the number of women accessing funds from this agency; almost 50% more males accessed this service. This may have reflected the impact of the decline in the local economy as well as the impact of the global economic crisis.

The St Lucia Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF)

The St Lucia Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) is a small social investment fund established to redress poverty in the small communities around the island. It is funded by the World Bank and the European Union through the European Union Special Framework of Assistance (SFA) in order to mitigate the negative impact of the liberalization of the European market. This is especially important in the rural areas where several small scale farmers were established and most of whom would be affected by the liberalization of the market. Thus far the PRF has financed over 100 projects concentrating on social development. The PRF gives directly to communities by coordinating projects that will introduce essential services and develop physical infrastructure where needed thereby improving the quality of life for the persons in that community. The project is community driven creating employment for persons within the community and thus alleviating some of the problems associated with poverty within the communities.

Other Initiatives

In 2009 **The James Belgrave Micro Enterprise Development Fund (BELFund)** and the **Basic Needs Trust Fund** were amalgamated under the **Saint Lucia Social Development Fund (SSDF)** in order to eliminate duplication of efforts and promote the more efficient and effective utilization of resources, to reduce poverty and vulnerability of the most marginalized persons and attain social and economic advancement of the Saint Lucian society. This new entity falls under the management of the Ministry of Social Transformation, which espouses core values such as gender equity and sustainability which augurs well for women.

'Koudemain Ste. Lecie'

The programme, an adaptation of the 'La Puente programme initiated in Chile, is a five year initiative undertaken by the Government of St. Lucia with support from the European Union. It takes into account St. Lucia's specific social and cultural issues, and is a family oriented project aimed at reducing the poverty among indigent families. The number of indigent households stood at approximately 600 in the last Country Poverty Assessment. The implementing agency will utilize the services of social workers to help those indigent persons identify their own resources and those which are available within their communities to improve their standard of living.

Small Business Development Enterprise

The Small Enterprise Development Unit (SEDU) provides training in various aspects of the management of business and helps clients to develop a business plan which gives them a better opportunity to access funds and become self employed. The organization also provides guidance and technical assistance to existing and prospective entrepreneurs so that they can use their skills, become gainfully employed, and manage a successful business.

Holistic Opportunities for Human Empowerment (HOPE)

HOPE is a short term employment programme designed to absorb surplus labour and protect the indigent, poor and vulnerable. The labour market has been affected by the

contraction of the economy from 2007 to 2008 as well by the global financial crisis of 2009. Other contributing factors include the large base of the island's pyramidal population structure which results in a large number of students leaving school each year and seeking employment.

HOPE is a major component of the Social Safety Net Initiative implemented by the government of St Lucia. 5724 unemployed persons were registered under the HOPE programme in 2009.

The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YELDF)

The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YELDF) offers 30 hours of training in Personal Development, and 3 weeks training in Small Business Management. The attendance at all previously held similar exercises has been more than 50% female. This programme allows more young women to develop their personal skills and the business acumen necessary to manage successful businesses and ultimately to gain more control over their lives. This project is funded by the Government of St Lucia and the Commonwealth Youth Programme Caribbean Centre.

School Feeding Programme

Recognizing the importance of education in breaking the cycle of poverty the Government has tried to create conditions conducive to learning in schools. The School Feeding Programme provides a hot meal to underprivileged students allowing them to attend school and improve their life chances. This is a critical service,(especially for households that are classified as poor, 42.5 % of these households are headed by women), as many parents tend to keep their children at home if they do not have anything to give the children to eat while they are at school. In 2009, 7298 students from 76 primary schools around the island benefitted from this programme.

The Book Rental Programme and the Education Allowance Programme

These programmes supported 1539 households and 4617 students in 2009, allowing students to access the necessary texts, and school supplies, for the school year at minimal cost to the parents again improving their life chances.

Transport Subsidy Programme

Some 2465 students benefitted from the Transport Subsidy Programme allowing them to attend school at a considerably lower cost to their parents.

Housing Development Assistance

Recognizing the need to provide one of the most basic needs – housing - the Government has sought funding from the European Union (EU) to assist needy and indigent persons who live in ‘deplorable housing conditions’. Special consideration is given to the elderly, persons with disabilities, households with young children, as well as households affected by natural disasters and fires.

Squatting is widely practiced in St. Lucia. The Government recognizes the urgency of the need for housing for those persons who fall into the lower income bracket and the poor. To accommodate those persons who have squatted on Crown Lands and to provide them with an opportunity to own land they occupy, the Government introduced a Programme for the Rationalization of Unplanned Development (PROUD). The ownership of this property addresses a major problem experienced by women in particular, that is, the inability to secure loans because of the lack of collateral.

The St Lucia Rural Women’s Network

The St. Lucia Network of Rural Women Producers was formed in 2003 with support from the Inter-American institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). The group was established in response to the need to equip women with technical, administrative and entrepreneurial skills as a means to improving their socio-economic status and create employment in the rural areas in which they live.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Division of Gender Relations is the agency responsible for monitoring and implementing measures to mitigate violence against women. Mindful of the Conventions which St. Lucia has ratified to this end the Division has and will continue to use a variety

of strategies to redress this social ill. Given the decline in the local and international economy the Division has intensified its efforts fully aware of the positive correlation between violence against women and unemployment and poverty.

The Division has created several and varied opportunities for women to empower themselves and take advantage of existing opportunities to improve the quality of their lives, and avoid situations that may lead to violence.

Of critical importance are the empowerment seminars, the dissemination of information through the media, and at events hosted or attended by the Division, its deliberate efforts to meet and collaborate with affiliated agencies to provide an enabling environment so the affected are more likely to use the services offered. It continues to provide opportunities for training of the personnel who manage the Women's Support Center which houses victims of domestic violence and their dependent children.

In an effort to break the cycle of violence the Division has deliberately targeted youth through panel discussions, talks, competitions and the dissemination of information and other awareness building material.

THE DIVISION OF GENDER RELATIONS' INITIATIVES

Cognizant of the negative impact of unemployment and poverty on the women of St. Lucia, the Division has over the years held several empowerment programmes with the view to encouraging women to take advantage of the opportunities that exist, and create their own opportunities to improve their circumstances. The last such seminar marked International Women's Day 2009. The theme of the seminar was, 'Managing your Finances in the Current Global Economic Crisis'. The seminar was very successful and discussions based on micro management of finances and investment portfolios motivated attendants to strive to increase their capacity to generate income and save towards future investments.

The Division also hosted a **luncheon lecture** targeting professional women. The theme for the lecture was, 'Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities – Progress for All,' and was

presented by the female Speaker of the House of Assembly. She impressed upon the participants the need to use their influence to redress some of the imbalances which exist in the workplace, and other spheres and to ‘...strive towards a more equitable distribution of human services’ and the ‘...provision of equal opportunities’.

Mindful of the relationship between poverty and gender-based violence, the Division has undertaken several initiatives to raise awareness of the negative impact of this scourge on the victim, family and the wider community. It has also trained community volunteers to form groups of gender-based violence **Community Response Team (CRTs)** in communities around the island, to provide referral assistance and support to victims of gender-based violence at the community level. The Division also conducts domestic violence sensitization training for all police recruits during their initial training.

In November 2007 the Division held a one-day **consultation** as part of the annual activities in observance of International Day of Protest Against Violence Against Women. The consultation sought to review the institutional arrangements for the effective application of the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, and make recommendations to address any obstacles or challenges that may hinder the successful implementation of the Act. Key stakeholders such as the Vulnerable Persons Unit and the Writ Department of the Royal St. Lucia Police Force, the Department of Human Services and Family Affairs, The Family Court, The Women’s Support Centre, the Gender-based Violence Community Response Teams and the St. Lucia Crisis Centre were in attendance. The consultation reemphasized the need for public education on the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act. Another key recommendation coming out of the consultation was the need for the State to provide Legal Aid Service since ‘a significant number of the individuals requiring legal services are unable to pay for these services’.

The Division with assistance and funding from UNIFEM developed a standardized domestic violence **Data Collection Tool**. This tool is now in use by the Northern and Southern Divisions of the Royal St. Lucia Police Force. The intention is that the tool be used by the various related agencies to eliminate duplication of data and to track reported cases of domestic violence. The data collected will increase the efficiency of

programmes designed in response to domestic violence and provide the much needed disaggregated data to inform policy development.

The Women's Support Centre (WSC), which is a support facility for female victims of domestic violence falls under the management of the Division. The Centre has a 24 hour toll free hotline number – 202 - through which victims can seek assistance. The WSC provides temporary housing to female victims of domestic violence and their dependent children within a safe and supportive environment. Clients are provided individual as well as group counseling and protection planning to equip them with the necessary coping skills to improve their quality of life and secure their safety. The Centre also assists children who have witnessed domestic violence and provides counseling as needed in an effort to ensure that these survivors can continue to live a life that is free of violence. The WSC staff helps clients to acquire the necessary coping skills and also try to find employment for those victims needing to gain independence through this avenue. The WSC has seen the need to extend and complete the programme of family care to the provision of texts and other school supplies for children of clients.

The Division has taken the issue of violence against women into the **schools**, in an effort to raise awareness and provide coping skills to those persons who are affected by it. As part of the observance of International Day of Protest against Violence against Women in 2008, the Division held two panel discussions for students of secondary schools around the island – one in the North and the other in the South in order to reach a wide cross section of that population. The discussion sensitized students to the dynamics of gender-based violence and allowed them to air their views and address issues which are pertinent to them. **Counseling** was available to those who request it. The students were also provided with the domestic violence hotline number so they could seek advice if the need arose.

The Division continued its campaign to raise awareness of gender-based violence through its **Open House** in 2009 and 2010 during the observance of International Women's Day. This event also highlighted the achievements of women in their various fields of endeavour, with an exhibition focusing on the participation of women in the

development of the country. It also exposed the students who visited to a host of possibilities which they can pursue as future careers.

During the Open House groups of students were engaged in discussions on domestic violence. Students were also provided with pamphlets which they could take back to the schools and home. They were also encouraged to take up discussions on the issue at home as well as among their peers at school. The last Open House deliberately focused on the accomplishments of young women. The Division took the opportunity to distribute trendy and user friendly paraphernalia such as pens, pencils, posters and bookmarks produced to the teachers and students in an effort to facilitate continued discussions on the topic.

At the last Open House the Division also provided the opportunity for the public to **'Meet the Professions'**. Doctors and lawyers were on hand to provide free consultation. This afforded the less privileged the opportunity to obtain otherwise costly services. Personnel from the Diabetes and Hypertensive Association were also available to offer free testing.

The Division also partnered with the St. Lucia Rural Women's Network during this year's Open House, giving exposure to groups of rural women who depend on agriculture and agro processing for survival. It also gave visitors the opportunity to see what can be produced locally and brought to light the possibility of import substitution given adequate financial support.

A **Poster Competition** which culminated in November of 2008 saw several students designing posters with messages to bring an end to gender-based violence. The competition, which was funded by UNFPA, raised discussion among the youth within the schools and by extension their homes. The posters encouraged much discussion on the topic at the schools and encouraged students, boys and girls, to speak out against violence against women and to find alternative ways of managing disputes. The winning posters were compiled into a calendar which was then distributed among the schools, other institutions and business places around the island.

More recently, the Division in collaboration with TOCO (They Often Cry Outreach) a U.S. based not for profit organization, The St. Lucia Crisis Centre, and the media house of Helen Television Systems and Radio 100, held an event dubbed the **Clothesline Project**. The Clothesline Project was developed to educate, break the silence and bear witness to the issue of violence against women. It involved using shirts hanging on a clothesline as the vehicle for raising awareness on violence against women. It lets each women tell her story in her own unique way, using words and or artwork to decorate her shirt, which she hangs on a clothesline. This action serves many purposes, it acts as an educational tool for those who come to view the Clothesline, it is a healing tool for the one who wrote or decorated the shirt, by hanging the shirt on the line, survivors, friends and family can literally turn their backs on some of that pain of their experience and walk away. Additionally it allows those who are still suffering in silence to understand that they are not alone.

The Division, in an attempt to raise awareness of the link between disability and violence, held an **exhibition** to showcase the accomplishments of persons with disabilities, and to sensitize the public to their needs.

Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The Division has undertaken a series of activities to ascertain the extent of the problem of sexual harassment in St. Lucia. Thus far it has carried out **surveys**, produced a **brochure** on the topic which will be distributed to Organizations throughout the country, and prepared a policy on *Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* which organizations can adopt or adapt for their use.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUITY

Legal Aid Legislation

In August 2007 legislation (The Legal Aid Act) to facilitate the establishment of an authority to provide legal aid was passed in St Lucia's Parliament. However, the actual establishment of the Legal Aid unit is still in the pipeline. While a few lawyers offer this type of service they are limited in their ability to meet the needs of the large number of persons requiring this service.

Gender role stereotyping in Education

Over the years the terminology used in the texts produced locally by the Curriculum and Materials Development Unit (CAMDU) for use within the schools has changed to reflect a greater degree of gender sensitivity. Roles of the characters in the texts have also been changed to reverse sex role stereotyping. This is particularly useful at the primary school level as this provides an opportunity for the students to be introduced to roles that break gender stereotypes and combat discrimination against women and girls from an early age.

Women in Political Power and Decision-making Structures

There are two main political parties in St Lucia. Both have structures that allow women's issues to be articulated at the highest level within the political parties. While there are no policies which specify the inclusion of females into these political structures, each party has a women's group as an auxiliary branch of the organization.

Equality of Opportunity and Treatment in Employment

The Equality of Opportunity and Treatment in Employment and Occupation Act of 2000 provides legal protection against discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of race, sex, religion, colour, ethnic origin, family responsibilities, pregnancy, marital status, or age. The Act makes provision for equal remuneration for men and women performing work of equal value. The Act also makes provisions for the offence of sexual harassment in the workplace.

The OECS Family Law Bill (2007)

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), of which St Lucia is a member has produced a Domestic Violence Bill as part of the OECS Family Law Reform Project. The aim of the project is to develop harmonized Family Law and Domestic Violence Legislation for Member States and bring existing legislation in compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC). The proposed Bills cover the following areas:

- Child Justice
- Children Adoption
- Status of Children
- Status of Children Parenting Testing Procedures
- Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence Bill responds to the lack of any existing civil and criminal remedies for cases of domestic violence, it also broadens the definition of domestic violence and extends the relationships to which it can be applied. It is expected that the Bill will be enacted shortly.

ECLAC Observatory for Gender Equality

St Lucia was selected as one of the pilot countries for implementing activities to facilitate the establishment of an Observatory for Gender equality. The Observatory is a tool to support governments in analyzing regional realities, monitoring gender policies, and assisting with implementing international agreements pertaining to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. An important function of the observatory is to provide gender indicators and analytical tools necessary for policy-making, as such it will provide St Lucia with a useful mechanism through which many of the country's goals towards the improvement of gender equality can be realized.

WOMEN'S HEALTH AND HIV/AIDS

National Health Care Policy

The Government of St. Lucia is in the process of reviewing its health care programmes to better meet the growing needs of its population. Under this policy 'Services shall be affordable and accessible to all people, regardless of their geographical location, economic status, gender, race, social condition, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, religion, HIV/AIDS and health status'. It will ensure people centered access to quality health care while providing efficient, adequate and friendly service. St. Lucia will in the future be positioned as a world class tourism health and wellness destination. This will be driven by a cadre of well trained and motivated health staff.

The upgrading of the Health Centers and the increase in the number of public health facilities around the island has meant an improvement of the provision of and access to this essential service and in the quality of life of its population. Access to Universal Health Care, which to date, has concentrated its delivery on health issues such as Diabetes and Hypertension has resulted in greater access to care especially for those persons from the lower socio-economic bracket.

HIV/AIDS continues to be a priority on the government's agenda. The National AIDS Programme Secretariat (NAPS) is responsible for the management of HIV/AIDS. It embarked on a series of campaigns and sensitization initiatives over the last two years. The NAPS has intensified its awareness campaign through information dissemination and constant communication of its activities and the services which are available, both through the public sector and the private sector. It has carried out training programmes for health care providers, one of the results being an improved data collection system. This is critical as it can inform the strategies to manage the problem of HIV/AIDS on the island. The Division will continue to liaise with NAPS as they establish a National Policy on HIV/AIDS to ensure that a gender analysis is undertaken and used to inform the policy.

There is also a Government funded programme that provides assistance to parents and children living with HIV/AIDS. These individuals can obtain financial support and a school book assistance programme, which affords at risk children an education.

The Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) is a major concern and every effort is made to ensure that both the mother and the child receive adequate health care and follow-up services. These services are made available to everyone seeking them free of charge.

The National AIDS Programme Secretariat addresses commercial sex workers through civil society organizations who obtain funds through the Secretariat to provide the necessary services and HIV/AIDS prevention education.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Although human trafficking has not been identified as a major problem in St Lucia, given the country's vulnerabilities as it relates to issues of high unemployment and the porous nature of its borders, efforts have been made to raise awareness on the problem of human trafficking. A series of awareness building workshops have been conducted by the Division of Gender Relations for social service providers, police and immigration officers, community leaders and educators.

St Lucia continues to work with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to address the issue of trafficking in persons, and how to prevent and combat the problem. The 'Caribbean Anti-Trafficking in Persons Seminar' held here in February 2008 informed the strategies the country adopts to promote awareness and prevention of the problem and strengthen allegiances with other nations with similar objectives.

Counter Trafficking Legislation

In February 2010 St Lucia enacted Counter Trafficking Legislation thus providing the legislative framework needed to effectively address the problem of human trafficking. Additionally the Division will soon be commissioning a hotline for Human Trafficking.

THE ST LUCIAM ECONOMY

St. Lucia, like most of the countries in the rest of the region has a small open economy which is heavily dependent on regional and international markets. Any shocks in the economies on which the country depends has serious repercussions on the quantity and quality of the services the government can provide to its people.

The inherent lack of natural resources causes the country to rely heavily on foreign direct investment to fuel growth and development. The problems associated with this dependence became all too obvious with the global economic, food and fuel crises between 2007 and 2009.

Mindful of the existing economic dualism the government embarked upon a series of initiatives which would foster decentralization, thus better meeting the needs of its population. Efforts to add value to the country's products and thus increase its GDP are underway. This is evidenced in current initiatives to encourage agro-processing and the sourcing of new markets for these products.

Limited resources however have not allowed the country to make the kinds of provisions necessary through affirmative action to ensure equity. This is slowly changing, especially in more recent times where deliberate steps have been taken to secure a more equitable outcome for women through the efforts of the Division of Gender Relations. Women's needs are increasingly being noted and specifically addressed in an effort to ensure that gender equity and equality are more likely to be realized.

TYPES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY NEEDED TO ACHIEVE EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

St. Lucia has been a democratic country since it gained independence in 1979. The government has been charged with the responsibility of anticipating and meeting the

needs of all of its citizens. Women account for more than 50% of St. Lucia's population thus the need for their increased representation and participation at all decision making levels especially where the issues concern them, and will impact their lives.

While legislation to ensure equality of opportunity and treatment in employment exists, it is often not actioned and the violation of women's rights within the workplace, given surplus labour, persists, especially among those from the lower socioeconomic bracket. All existing legislation promoting equality between women and men must be supported by constant campaigning to raise awareness of the existence of such legislation. Another major issue which hinders access to justice is the associated costs, in this regard, there is the urgent need to establish Legal Aid Services in St Lucia.

Changes must take place in the mindset of men and women who still think that the care of the household is largely the responsibility the woman. This shift in attitude can only be brought about by constant awareness raising and dialogue with and between men and women. Also, in an effort to foster equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women in the household the granting of paternity leave must be legislated.

There is the urgent need, given the recent economic crisis, to rationalize existing social safety net programmes, to increase access for those most in need of such support. Social safety net programmes, in particular social insurance, should also be extended to include workers in the informal sector, of which the majority are women.

In St. Lucia where functional democracy obtains, the emphasis is on inclusion of all groups of persons in the development process, working on the basis of optimal popular consent and participation, legitimacy and accountability of those who govern, and responding to the actual needs and interests of the public. This augurs well for the achievement of a more egalitarian society, one in which the rights of women and men will become the focal point in the deliberation of policies and programmes and ultimately the development of the nation.