

St Vincent and the Grenadines

Report

to

**The 12th SESSION OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN IN LATIN
AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

Prepared by

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Introduction:

This report provides an overview of initiatives undertaken by the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines in fulfillment of the Brazilia Consensus and reaffirming its strong commitment to the continued relevance of the Quito Consensus and other instruments adopted at previous sessions in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Gender Affairs Division which is the national machinery responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment continues to work towards the eradication of persistent and prevailing gender inequalities in all forms, through targeted interventions in key human rights and social justice areas. The Division has advanced as the focal agency for gender issues in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and has succeeded in securing support from local, regional and international partners including the UN Agencies, to assist with its efforts and has adopted an integrated, multi-agency approach linking judicial, health and social services to achieving all development goals.

In reviewing the implementation of the Brazilia Consensus the promotion and adoption of programmes to promoting and defending women's rights, has resulted, among many other achievements: gender equality policies, plans and programmes, institutional reforms sensitive to gender equality and the empowerment of women. In the interest of the report attention will be given to initiatives relating to addressing all forms of violence against women and women's access to new technologies and practices by the media

Achievements: St Vincent and the Grenadines received through the Gender Affairs Division support from a number of agencies including United Nations Population Fund and UNWOMEN to strengthened state accountability and community action to end gender based violence particularly domestic violence. This took the form of a multisectorial and community based approaches within national debates and other planned activities. Out of the support spawned an expansive education and awareness programme, training other state agencies including the corporate sector and community members and groups in prevention and response to violence against women. This support has assisted in building the capacity of various agencies, whilst sharing knowledge and information with the general public.

In this regard, the government continues to take actions against domestic violence as reaffirming its strong commitment to the Brazilia consensus by the establishment of a Crisis center in 2012. A location for victims of domestic violence which provides a 24-hour Crisis Hotline, in-house counselling and support to clientele, telephone referrals, court advocacy services, accompaniment and assistance through each stage of the judicial process. This Center was established to enable police, counselors, advocates, health care professionals, prosecutors, courts and specialist services to work together to identify and track domestic abuse, support victims and bring more offenders to justice. Training for frontline staff became a priority, and the Police, nurses, counsellors, social workers and advocates received training under various programmes and activities. As a result, we learnt from best practices and supported the establishment of the center infrastructure to protect and support victims.

The Crisis Center requires logistical support including institutional and human resource capacity building. This center, however, is often not the first responders to incidents of gender based violence. Operations must be strengthened and standardized as to ensure that the responses of out-stationed officers is consistent with the services offered by the center which focuses on the victims health, physical, psychosocial and other needs. The Division continues to direct its primary efforts to realizing the full eradication of gender based violence and provide survivors with the necessary care, treatment and support services.

In support of this initiative and lack of data, under its Social Empowerment through Management Capacity Building programmes the Gender Affairs Division in collaboration with the Police developed a Template for the collection of Crime Statistics. The technical deficiencies of the existing data do not permit an adequate analysis of the access to justice by victims of sexual violence and domestic abuse. Having regard to the police and court statistics, the data may be available but need to be collated and published in a form that will facilitate such analysis and inform policy and programme development. There is also a need to harmonise the data from all sources to ensure reliability. Greater collaboration between the institutions which guide policy such as the Gender Affairs Division, those that produce the data and those responsible for consolidation and publication of the data is needed to ensure adequacy of data collection. This template was distributed to all police stations and is scheduled to have its first analysis of disaggregated data in operation by 30th September 2013.

Linked to addressing all forms of violence against women, Caribbean countries have been working diligently to address the crime of human trafficking. United States Department placed every country of a Tier 2 Watch list. St Vincent and the Grenadines was also marked as not complying with minimum standards on human trafficking and was therefore placed on the Tier 2 Watch List. The government of St Vincent and the Grenadines is cognizant of the fact that trafficking in persons is another underlining principle of the Brazilia Consensus and that effective measures should be taken to prevent and eliminate all forms of trafficking and smuggling of women, adolescents and girls for sexual exploitation or any other purpose must be taken on board. The government went to parliament and passed the Laws on human Trafficking called Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act 2011 and a National Tasks Force was established. A special unit called the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Unit (ATIPU) within the police force was put in place and every quarter a report is submitted to the Task Force.

St Vincent and the Grenadines has developed strong relationship with International Organization on Migration (IOM) to raise public awareness and training for the prevention and elimination of human trafficking of women and girls. As a result, IOM convened the third of three meetings that aim to improve national and regional coordination for better victim assistance and criminal justice in St Vincent July 17 -18, 2013.

In addition to efforts made in ending violence against women, the government is mindful that there are still many countries where gender inequality persists and women and girls continue to face discrimination in accessing education and job opportunities which often and in many cases may lead to violence. It is of paramount importance to note that access to and the use of ICTs can change the thinking behind gender related issues and help to empower citizens. When persons are empowered, then adequate skills in ICTs will be developed and the services that are delivered through ICTs can have a greater impact on all. This will contribute to the realization of the information society and subsection five of the Brazilia Consensus. Therefore in an effort to facilitate women's access to new technologies and promote egalitarian, democratic and nondiscriminatory practices by the media, the government ensured that proper social and economic policies are developed and enforced. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has already taken several initiatives to address the minimal level of gender inequality that exists in the ICT

sector and also to empower women and girls. Such initiatives include the one laptop per child and Girls in ICT Day, among others. For the past two years, almost five hundred girls from almost all the secondary schools in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have been going to both public and private sector organisations so that they can be empowered to pursue careers in ICTs. This initiative has been very successful so far and is monitored by Telecommunications Department in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. Worthy of note, St Vincent and the Grenadines was host to the preparatory meeting convened by the ECLAC Sub regional Headquarters for the Caribbean under the theme: *Women in the digital economy; Overcoming the threshold of inequality* on 9 August, 2013 in Kingstown. This meeting was in preparation to the twelfth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, which will take place from 15-18 October, 2013 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

Challenges:

Amidst the progress that has been identified there are still many serious challenges to overcome as a government and by extension social planners. Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups has remained high priority through social programmes which provide relief and utilities for those who demonstrate needs. In addition, and despite the tremendous efforts of the government to have women at all levels of the decision making process this slow increase in political participation and representation of women from the local level to party executives offers a challenge in getting the gender agenda beyond just having a political will. Therefore there is a greater need for the recognition of and the marginalization of women absent from the upper echelons of political power and that work must be done on strengthening support for women aspiring for leadership and build their capacity to contribute to the political development of the country. Future actions to advance the implementation of the Brazilia Consensus: At the national level research will form a key part of the strategies to include law reform to address gender issues and to guide the Gender Affairs Division in its thrust towards equity, equality and gender mainstreaming. At the regional level there will be active participation in fora to ensure that policies and programmes geared at advancing the status of women are promoted in regional initiatives. There will also be the promotion of collaborative efforts to attain the principal priorities and policies of various conventions aimed at gender equality.