

The Tenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean met the Caribbean at a crucial juncture in social and economical development. St Vincent and the Grenadines like other CARICOM states is experiencing the full effects of the global economic crisis. The growing cost of living makes subsistence increasingly precarious for many vulnerable members of our nation. St Vincent like many other Caribbean countries has been forced to make some very difficult decisions in the management of their resources. Successfully making our ways out of an economic down turn will surely come at a cost. However, that expense cannot be a failure to meet the needs of women and girls, men and boys, in working towards the full realization of gender equality and equity in our nation.

The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines made a commitment to carry out its obligations in adopting and promoting the implementation of the Quito Consensus outline at the Tenth Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, and thus continues to strengthen our institutions, programmes and partnerships as catalysis to economic turnaround and social progress. This report is a summary of key activities for gender equality and empowerment of women in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

A general policy of prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex is embodied in Article 13 of the Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Further, it can be said that the protection of the Courts for the infringement of any Constitutional Rights is guaranteed under Section 16 of the Constitution. This section guarantees the right of access to the courts in order to assert a claim arising from infringement of fundamental rights of all persons. No case has been brought to date by any woman in St. Vincent and the Grenadines alleging discrimination under the Constitution.

Legislation has been passed which seeks to provide relief for women in specific situations where discrimination is perceived to be taking place. The main example of this is Maternity Leave.

Public authorities and institutions in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are guided by the terms and conditions of the legislative enactments, which are laid down by parliament. Members of the public are generally treated similarly irrespective of gender. In some cases due to the stereotyping of women as weaker and requiring of protection, women are treated with more

courtesy and respect than men conversely, due to cultural values supportive of male dominance, it has been recorded that women are sometimes discriminated against by members of the Police Force in cases where the police are required to pursue investigations into acts of domestic violence.

In these situations, women are sometimes actively discouraged from pursuing their complaints under the Domestic Violence (summary proceedings) Act or may even be treated with contempt and hostility by members of the police.

Measures taken by the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in partnership with civil society organizations and the supported by UNIFEM was able to embark on an activity in seeking to strengthen state accountability and community action for ending gender based violence.

Whilst the constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex, measures taken to implement this in practice include the provision of support services for women who feel they have been victims of discrimination. During the review period the Gender Affairs Division continues to provide information and training to women and to the general public on issues related to gender.

Measures to address these issues are done through the Family Court Act, 1992. The Family Court continues to provide a non-combative setting where the punishment is not emphasized and where the role of the social support services is stressed. Notwithstanding, within the Family Court, women can directly pursue remedies in the protection of their own legal rights in areas where they have been discriminated against within the context of particular legislation.

Throughout 2007-2009, the Gender Affairs Divisions instituted a series of interventions aimed at; reducing gender based violence, poverty, addressing HIV/AIDS, sexual and reproductive health, strengthening legislative reform and gender responsive social policies. These areas will remain key targets of our work plan for 2010-2011.

Gender based violence continues to be one of the greatest challenges faced by the Division. The multifaceted and complex nature of this problem made it necessary for us to put in place programmes focuses on direct and indirect interventions for survivors, perpetrators and responding state agencies.

With the support of UNIFEM, UNFPA and the Caribbean HIV/AIDS Alliance, our Division strengthened its capacity to address GBV in a number of ways. We were able to respond in appropriate ways through referrals and home visits. The government has also addressed the need for a Crisis center in collaboration with the Childs Rights Committee (CRC), Family Affairs Division and the National Council of Women (NCW).

This coalition will be working towards collecting data, improving policies and procedures, social welfare, education, health and psycho-social support through the Crisis Center and collaborative efforts with other national, regional and international partners.

The Government has place a high premium on the security of all citizens. Accordingly, the work of the Gender Affairs Division addresses abuse committed against women and girls and its causes. Violence and crimes committed against women and girls remain a priority concern of the administration.

Domestic violence is currently being given greater attention. A draft Action Plan on Domestic Violence has been implemented. Discussion on the issue of violence and conflict management at the school level are held with Parent Teachers' Associations.

Violence against women is one of the challenges that the government faces. The multifaceted and complex nature of this problem makes it necessary for us to put in place a comprehensive programme of action, with the support of agencies such as UNIFEM. The simplification and distribution of the Convention of Belem Do Par continues to form a major part of the Gender Affairs Division educational outreach programmes.

The Government is looking out, too for pregnant women and mothers who receive nutritional support currently through the Ministry of Health. In the 2008 estimates there is a provision for a 25% increase. Similarly, the school feeding program has its budgetary allocation for 2008 increasing by 25%.

A second major health challenge was to ensure that health is prioritize in the overall development policies. This means that we must address the broad determinants of ill health, which among other things, includes, low levels of education, poverty, unequal gender relations, high-risk behavior and an

unhealthy environment. We are mindful of the cross sectoral nature of health determinants, and the fact that they must be addressed within a broad economic and political framework. We recognize that good health is a measure of well being and also a driver for growth

Recognizing that equality in decision- making is essential to the empowerment of women, the government of St.Vincent and the Grenadines seeks to promote the full and active participation of women in all spheres of public life and believes this is best achieved through educative approaches in partnership with civil society.

The evidence of the unwavering commitment of the government of St.Vincent and the Grenadines in demonstrative actions since the 10<sup>th</sup> Regional Meeting of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean came when more women have been appointed to the government positions at the national level.

Since March 2001, an unprecedented number of women have been appointed to ministerial posts. Twenty-four percent of government parliamentarians are women, one of whom is the attorney General, one of the Deputy Speaker and one a senior Minister.

Fifty percent of our magistrates are women, including one in the most senior position. The Family Court which addresses many gender-issues is headed by a woman and one of our two High Court Judges is female. The Registrar of High Court, the Senior Crown Council and Deputy Governor- General are also females, thus creating a level of gender sensitive administration and leadership in senior public life. These women are influencing agendas and helping to change the culture of women in politics and leadership.

The Government has also moved with support at the national and inter-regional levels the establishing of a virtual institute of women in politics known as the Caribbean Institute of Women in Leadership.

Meeting of Cabinet which is responsible for financing the nation's programmes including those directly and indirectly impacting on women are comprised of twenty –five percent of women. Cabinet holds that education and poverty elimination are its top development priorities.

The transitions from a state dependent workforce to economic empowerment continue to drive the efforts of the gender Affairs Division's training programmes which focus on providing gainful and sustainable life skills development for youths, unemployed or underemployed adult women and men. The Division looks forward to expanding training areas to include non-traditional employment spheres for young women and men, while working to secure resources to upgrade to improving training.

St Vincent has also made significant strides in keeping in line with regional and international commitments and obligations in respect to gender equality. Our approach to these commitments has been through responding to questionnaires sent to the Division.

With the challenges faced by boys in schools and teen pregnancy emerging as an area of concern regionally, the Division continues to work to ensure that girls who became pregnant while in school received continued, non-discriminatory access to education. The Government finances the return of teenage-mothers to school through the payment of fees, purchase of books, provision of transportation, and the provision of day-care services for babies. The success of this programme has become a regional best practice of UNFPA. In the meantime, planning is extended to provide support services to young fathers, better preparing them for the role of fatherhood.

Working with men's groups and organizations has become integral to the work of the Gender Affairs Division, and has contributed to the sensitization of both women and men on the importance of working together to make a difference. Days of activism campaigns are now principally organized around men's involvement, reaching previously unmet communities and audiences.

Financing for Gender- Equality and Women's Empowerment has also become a priority issue. In 2005, history was created in SVG when, for the first time, universal access to secondary education was established. The educational budget since then has received annual sizeable increases, which include support for lower-income families. Student loans for university education as well as scholarships have been substantially increased. Of note is a special programme for economically disadvantaged students under which the government provides loans to students lacking the family-resources of securing those loans. About seventy-five percent of our university students are females.

Government has also used gender mainstreaming in education. Teachers and students at the tertiary level have been exposed to training and continue to do so with several workshops conducted across the country in male underachievement.

Business-Financing and Economic Empowerment for business enterprises are available from a variety of sources. Of note, is the Micro and Small Enterprise Loan Programme, under which loans of \$15,000.00 are allowed without security. Women comprise fifty six percent of recipients.

Evidently, a gender equality perspective is both effective and efficient as a development approach and a fundamental tool necessary for the attainment of the MDG's and other global summit goals and outcomes. As a result, the government espouses a rights-based approach to health, particularly with respect to reproductive health. In the fight against HIV/AIDS, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has move towards adopting a mutli-faceted approach which includes education, health information, services and treatment. In recognition of the importance of the MDG's for the advancement of gender equality, a national taskforce has been established.

The National Insurance Scheme expanded its service in 2007 to include voluntary contributors, self-employed coverage and employment injury. It has also made contributions in the field of education and health, constructed two centres for the elderly and instituted a Non-Contributory Assistance Age Pension.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines face serious structural limitations to its social and economic development. Critical among these are its open economy, adverse terms of trade, and vulnerability to natural disasters.

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has launched specific initiatives that generates employment opportunities for poor and vulnerable persons in Tourism, Agriculture and the small and Micro-Enterprise sector.

Investment in human capital through education and training, instituted an educational strategy aimed at providing secondary school education to all primary school leavers.

On the other hand, there is clearly a positive trend towards economic growth, strengthening of governance and political will to address frontally the critical challenge of poverty faced by a large segment of the population.

REPORT OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

TO

THE ELEVENTH SESSION OF THE REGIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON WOMEN IN LATIN AMERICA  
AND THE CARIBBEAN

Brazilia

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