

Antigua & Barbuda Country Report to the Subregional Expert Meeting on the Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the ICPD.

Antigua & Barbuda and ICPD

Since ICPD+10, Antigua and Barbuda has made significant gains in addressing the issues of population and development, reproductive health and rights, educational advancement and gender equality, equity and empowerment.

In the period under review the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has made considerable effort to reduce poverty, inequality and promote sustainable development. Several interventions have been initiated. These include, but are not limited to the payment of utility bills, payment of a stipend to qualifying persons, the provision of school uniforms and school meals. Such assistance is given to the vulnerable sectors of society including children, the elderly, the physically and mentally challenged, destitute and discharged lepers. The government has also made an effort to decentralise some of its services (most notably health care), so that both urban and rural residents benefit.

Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health

Advancements in the health sector have resulted in improved sexual and reproductive health services and better pre-natal and post-natal care for mothers and children. The opening of the Mount St. John Medical Centre and additional health clinics, and improvements to existing community clinics has resulted in higher standards and greater access to care.

In 2006, married women were finally allowed to have a tubal ligation procedure done without the consent of their spouse. This was made possible through collaborative efforts between the Directorate of Gender Affairs and ASPIRE (Advocates for Safe Parenting Improving Reproductive Equity) Antigua.

The medical benefits scheme provides assistance that answers the epistemological shift in health concerns and conditions affecting the region. Where we have succeeded in addressing targets related to maternal and child mortality, health services are now working to address non-communicable diseases, such as cancer and diabetes.

The strengthening of the National AIDS Programme to provide medicine for HIV-positive persons living in Antigua & Barbuda at little to no cost, and the development of community-based support networks, has ensured that persons living with HIV and their families have access to much needed care, treatment and support. The introduction of rapid-result testing and pre and post HIV test counselling by the National HIV Programme and community partners such as the Caribbean HIV AIDS Alliance is working to empower the citizens and residents of Antigua & Barbuda to know their status and receive the support necessary to ensure health living.

Women and men have increased access to resources for family planning, contraception and the treatment of sexually transmitted illnesses, including the provision of post-exposure prophylactics (PEP) free of charge for survivors of rape and sexual abuse

Legislative reform has resulted in greater attention paid to the needs of children and young people through the introduction of the Child Maintenance Act 2008. This act places further emphasis on partnership for the development of children, reinforcing the shared roles of mothers and fathers in meeting the needs of the child, through reconstituting notions of maintenance and care.

The development of a Youth Policy and programme of action for Antigua & Barbuda has meant that strategic interventions to meet the needs of our young people are being developed, including skills training and national forums on youth crime and violence.

Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups including the disabled and elderly has remained high priority through social programmes which provide relief in utilities and amenities for those who demonstrate need.

Education and Gender

Antigua & Barbuda is working to achieve universal access not only to primary education, but also in secondary education, and is in the process of reviewing possible social and institutional barriers to meeting this goal.

Plans are in place for the establishment of the University of Antigua & Barbuda, in partnership with the University of the West Indies. The University of Antigua & Barbuda will provide advanced educational opportunities for Antiguans and Barbudans and citizens of the region, building human capital and raising the skill level of our workers.

As the National Gender Machinery, the Directorate of Gender Affairs has been working to address social, economic and political barriers to gender equality, equity and empowerment: critical areas of concern for the ICPD Programme of Action. As a result, the Directorate has developed a comprehensive Violence Against Women programme, which provides interventions from prevention and assessment, to response and support. This programme includes a Crisis Centre and Hotline, Counselling services, Court Advocacy, Police mediation and Sensitisation and Training for government divisions, community based organisations, and local partners.

The High Level Task Force on Sexual Violence, coordinated by the Directorate of Gender Affairs, is in the process of reviewing state responses to sexual violence, though case management structures in place in the justice and health sectors. With the assistance of United Nations Population Fund, the lead agency in implementing the ICPT Programme of Action, a review of

health sector responses to rape and sexual violence was conducted in 2008 and 2009, which proposed the amalgamation and adoption of a number of regional and international case management models to better assist state services in preventing and responding to these offences.

Through the assistance of United Nations Population Fund, the national Gender machinery has implemented various activities in sexual and reproductive health, including behavioural change activities, and the provision of sexual and reproductive health security commodities free of charge, such as female condoms.

Another programme, worthy of note is the project to Strengthen State Accountability and Community Action for ending Gender based Violence. This is supported by the United Nations Funds for Women (UNIFEM). This project aims to end gender based violence through strengthened and responsive state and civil society actions.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs, with the assistance of the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWIL), assembled a consortium of women's groups and organisations to further address the social and economic barriers to gender equality. The result was the Women's Manifesto of Antigua & Barbuda, the first ever document of its kind in the nation to detail a series of demands for the full participation of women in social and economic development, including equal representation in politics, leadership and decision-making, and social and economic development.

The division's internationally-acclaimed Work & Life Skills programme provides training for young mothers and out-of-school youth, to equip them with the tools to be successful parents, employees and citizens, through partnerships with the private sector and community-based organisations.

To conclude, let me say that while much has been done, there is still work to be done. Antigua and Barbuda need to emphasize on data gathering and collection, implement its youth policy, legislate for and regulate for safe abortion services and formulate a policy regarding teenage pregnancy in keeping with a human rights construct.

Thank you