

**BARBADOS' REPORT TO THE PRESIDING OFFICERS OF
THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN
AND THE CARIBBEAN
SANTIAGO, 29 – 30 NOVEMBER, 2011**

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Gender Affairs is Government's key focal point for the implementation of policies and programmes pertaining to gender and development. It has been mandated to integrate a gender perspective in all government development plans and policies in order to bring about gender equity and equality between men and women.

This report highlights activities undertaken by the Bureau during the period December 2010 and October 2011. It also highlights activities that are scheduled to take place between November 2011 and the next meeting of the Presiding Officers in 2012. These activities are presented under the following thematic areas of the Brasilia Consensus.

1. Attain Greater Economic Autonomy and Equality in the Workplace

The pursuit of better conditions of employment for women in general in Barbados, has been a major concern of the Government of Barbados. This being the case, the Bureau of Gender Affairs has supported a proposal from the United Equity for Greater Empowerment of Women to the Barbados Government, to ratify the ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers. The ratification of Convention 189 will undoubtedly benefit urban women, as well as rural women. It will provide a framework for the ongoing review of laws, policies, and practices, through which labour standards can be updated.

Another significant development in the area of women and employment has been the visit of a team from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to Barbados. The purpose of this visit was to conduct of a gender audit within the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. As part of this process, the team held a series of meetings with some government and non-governmental agencies.

During the month of October, the Bureau of Gender affairs met with the team from the International Labour Organisation (ILO). At this meeting, the Bureau was able to raise areas of concern as they relate to females and employment in Barbados. In addition, the Bureau suggested a number of other issues which the team might want to explore during their visits to other agencies.

The initiatives of the Bureau of Gender Affairs have been geared towards both rural and urban women. However, rural women have benefited specifically from initiatives undertaken by the Rural Development Commission in Barbados. Between the months of December 2010 and November 2011, 27 women received loans from that agency to assist in the development of their businesses. Some of the areas of business were manufacturing, food preparation, cosmetology, livestock production and retail.

In terms of training, the Rural Development Commission offered a training course in food technology. The course was free of cost to the participants; some 109 women were registered and subsequently graduated from the course.

Notwithstanding these positive efforts, the Government of Barbados is very cognizant of areas of poverty within the society and the need to address the challenges of eradicating this scourge. With this in mind, the Bureau of Gender Affairs believes that one of the best strategies for empowering women, urban and rural, lie in the creation of opportunities for entrepreneurship. The Bureau has therefore been actively involved in collaboration with the Advisor on Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals in the attempt to revive the Women's Entrepreneurs of Barbados (WEB), an umbrella organisation for micro women entrepreneurs in Barbados. To date, an interim committee has been put in place to manage the operations of that organisation.

Prior to that, the Bureau of Gender Affairs, in collaboration with the Advisor on Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development goals and the Women Entrepreneurs of Barbados (WEB) staged an Exhibition and Entrepreneurship Fair in March 2011, to mark International Women's Day. Plans are already at an advance stage for a week of activities to relaunch the organisation and for the hosting of a similar activity for women entrepreneurs in December, 2011. Several of the applicants who have to date registered for the event are from rural areas of Barbados.

2. Enhance the Citizenship of Women

The Government of Barbados has adopted gender mainstreaming as its prime strategy for the incorporation of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes. In accordance with this strategy, the Bureau of Gender Affairs has continued to stage a number of Gender Awareness and Gender Analysis workshops aimed at creating an awareness of gender among the participants, and more importantly, providing them with the necessary skills to conduct gender analysis. The most recent workshop held from October 10 – 13, 2011 was very well received. As a result, there has already been a demand for places at the next workshop which is slated for early November. As a result of this training, it is expected that there will be a cadre of public servants who will form a gender management system to facilitate the realisation of Government's prime strategy.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs views the development of a gender policy as critical to the goal of improving the status of rural as well as urban women. After much discussion on the subject, the task of developing such a gender policy was put to tender in 2010. The Bureau received responses from interested parties and these were subsequently forwarded to the Cabinet for the selection to be made.

3. Broaden the Participation of Women in Decision-making and the exercise of power

The Government views the participation of women in the areas of decision-making and the exercise of power as important components of the development of the country.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs held a workshop in February 2011, in celebration of the Day of Women of the Americas for Leaders. This workshop sought to increase the awareness of gender and to highlight how gender issues impact differently on women and men in leadership and decision-making positions.

The launch of a regional activity by the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWIL) in July 2011, in Barbados, has been a positive development for women in the area of leadership. This organisation was established to monitor and strengthen the work of women's political participation in the region. The Bureau of Gender Affairs intends to work with the organisation in the future, to develop leadership skills among young future leaders.

To this end, the Bureau of Gender Affairs will be hosting a workshop which will target young females and will address the issue of leadership. This workshop is expected to take place in March 2012, to coincide with United Nations Women's Day.

4. Address all Forms of Violence against Women

The Government of Barbados remains committed to the eradication of all forms of violence against all women. In pursuit of this goal, the Bureau of Gender Affairs has continued to promote initiatives aimed at creating awareness and sensitizing the public to the scourge of domestic violence.

The area of legislation on domestic violence has remained a concern for the Bureau of Gender Affairs, since initiatives must be complemented by supportive legislation. This concern has resulted in the plans for hosting a Consultation on Domestic Violence in the month of December, 2011. This workshop will focus primarily on reviewing the legislation surrounding domestic violence in Barbados and will be geared towards members of the legal fraternity. It is expected that gaps will be identified and recommendations made and forwarded to the relevant agency to redress the differences.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs has also recognised the role of men and boys in the fight to end gender based and domestic violence. As a result, the Bureau has planned a workshop for young males in December 2011, which will look at various forms of violence and which is expected to provide some direction for the Bureau in terms of developing strategies to mitigate their occurrences.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs continues to promote and lend its wholehearted support to the White Ribbon Campaign, one of the core activities within the 16 Days of Activism Campaign. An initiative of the Men's Health Group and the Business and Professional Women's Club (BPW), the campaign promotes the wearing of a white ribbon as a pledge not to commit, condone or remain silent on the issue of gender based violence. Last year the campaign took place in December and was held in two Polyclinics where ribbons were pinned on clients by men from the health group. This year, the campaign is expected to be done in four (4) Polyclinics.

In terms of helping the perpetrators of domestic violence, there has been some positive development in this area. The Ministry of Family, Culture, Sports and Youth in association with UN Women will be implementing the "Project for Peace Programme", a Violence Intervention Strategy which will target men who are abusive to women. The pilot phase of this project is slated to begin in January 2012.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs has also taken the fight against Human Trafficking to some of the rural parishes in Barbados. In collaboration with the Constituency Councils, the Bureau of Gender Affairs has held a number of workshops to create a greater awareness of Human Trafficking among the population in those areas.

5. Promote the Conditions for Integral Health of Women and for their Sexual and Reproductive Rights.

The Government of Barbados views the issue of women's health as one of paramount importance and welcomes the development of initiatives aimed at promoting conditions for the health of women and for their sexual and reproductive rights.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs has continued to promote a number of workshops which have addressed the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS. These workshops have been designed to create an awareness and understanding of HIV/AIDS. They have also sought to provide an understanding of the difference between sex and gender. Very importantly, through these workshops, the Bureau has attempted to highlight how women are more vulnerable to contracting the disease, and how the notions of femininity and masculinity contribute to their vulnerability.

During the months of July, August, and September this year, the Bureau staged a number of these workshops. These were held with the military, young people through the summer camps, faith based organisations, and with some of the constituency councils.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs also held its first workshop, of planned series, with a group of antenatal mothers within the Polyclinic in June 2010. This work will continue in 2012.

In the effort to encourage safe sex practices, the distribution of condoms, both female and male, have formed an integral part of all of the Bureau's HIV/AIDS workshops.

6. Promote International and Regional Cooperation for Gender Equality

The Government of Barbados supports the international and regional corporation for gender equality and has signed a number of international treaties and conventions which allow for this.

The Bureau of Gender Affairs has therefore sought to collaborate with other agencies whenever the opportunity arises. In May 2011, the Bureau partnered with the US Embassy to Barbados, and the Eastern Caribbean to host a consultation on Domestic Violence and the Caribbean. Further collaboration with this agency is anticipated.

CONCLUSION

This report has presented the activities and initiatives developed by the Bureau of Gender Affairs, under six (6) thematic areas of the Brasilia Consensus. While the focus of the Conference is that of rural women, the activities of the Bureau have been in general, adopted for all women, urban and rural. These activities have been adopted with a view to ultimately achieving the goals of gender equality and gender equity.

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