

**Progress & Challenges in the implementation of the Montevideo Strategy in synergy with the Beijing +25; Guyana's work on ending Domestic Violence against women and girls (including trafficking) and the indigenous population**



**Presenter: Mrs. Abike Benjamin-Samuels  
Deputy Director of Social Services**

## **National Frameworks & Efforts related to Gender-Based Violence & Trafficking in Persons Prevention and Responses in Guyana**

The Government continues its multi-sectoral approach to addressing violence against women and girls and numerous initiatives continue to be undertaken and implemented.

The promotion and enforcement of the Sexual Offences Act (SOA) 2010 with amendments in 2013, the 1996 Domestic Violence Act and its regulations (2015).

The National Domestic Violence Policy forms the framework for the reduction of all forms of violence and abuse against women and children, and provides protection for the victims.

In 2016, a specialized unit to address violence, particularly against women and children in Guyana, was established within the Ministry of Social Protection. It has a mandate that seeks to protect, promote and preserve the rights, dignity and worth of all Guyanese, by advocating the provision of quality, comprehensive and responsive services to victims of sexual, domestic and gender-based violence and their dependents.

## National Frameworks & Efforts related to Gender-Based Violence & Trafficking in Persons

### Prevention and Responses in Guyana Cont'd

➤ Development of a National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy and Implementation Plan in 2018, which speaks to *Eliminating Violence against women and girls and includes:*

- 1) Increasing social awareness and education regarding the rights of women, children, vulnerable groups and Hinterland communities.
- 2) Creating a framework for the protection of women that includes legal reforms, adequate judicial measures and victims' assistance to eradicate physical and psychological abuse and harassment as well as physical violence and mutilation.
- 3) Reforming legislation to eliminate discriminatory laws and regulations, and include new legislation to punish hate crimes.
- 4) Eradicating discriminatory and prejudicial social patterns that violate girls' rights, particularly early age marriage practices.
- 5) Eradicating discriminatory and prejudicial social practices that promote gender harassment in public spaces, schools and workplaces.

## **National Frameworks & Efforts related to Gender-Based Violence & Trafficking in Persons**

### **Prevention and Responses in Guyana Cont'd**

- **Passage of the Cyber Crime Act** in July 2018 to address several important issues inclusive of cyber bullying, child pornography, sexual grooming and luring of children into sexual actions, revenge pornography and cyber blackmail. The Act makes the following criminal offences: activities such as posting and showing videos of minors engaging in sex, photos and videos of adults engaged in sex without their consent, or of former partners in compromising positions.
- **Child Advocacy Centers** (one stop) are established to provide counselling and court support for survivors of child abuse - Professionals from child protective services, law enforcement, medical and victim support advocates, and others work in partnership to make decisions about the investigation, treatment, management and prosecution of the cases.
- **Temporary Assistance Programme for Domestic Violence Survivors** - designed to offset housing related payments when there is, or has been a domestic violence situation. Includes relocation costs (including moving costs and other travel costs); replacement of personal or basic household items (clothing, hygiene items, essential furniture items).



## **National Frameworks & Efforts related to Gender-Based Violence & Trafficking in Persons**

### **Prevention and Response in Guyana Cont'd**

- **Subvention is provided to two (2) shelters managed by NGOs that provides accommodation, counselling, court advocacy and training for women and girls totaling \$191,630 US annually. The gov't also has 2 shelters and a transitional space for victims of DV & VOT.**
- **There is provision for job aid/capacity building skills training and financial assistance under the MOSP for victims of DV and VOT.**
- **Provision of Legal Aid Services and support for victims' rights are preserved and protected via protection, occupancy and tenancy orders.**
- **A Sexual Offences Court (High Court) and Victim Support Unit was established in November 2017.**

## **National Frameworks & Efforts related to Gender-Based Violence & Trafficking in Persons**

### **Prevention and Response in Guyana Cont'd**

- **Ongoing psycho-social support is available to survivors of violence and VOT - pre-trial, during trial and post-trial.**
- **Search and Rescue operations for VOT, in collaboration with the Guyana Police Force, especially in our hinterland regions.**
- **Repatriation of VOT in collaboration with IOM.**
- **Ongoing inter-agency collaboration in the area of continuing education, entrepreneurship and victims' advocacy support.**
- **Continued implementation of a series of edutainment activities, training and capacity building for front line workers aimed at influencing attitudinal and behavioral change about all forms of GBV. There were various awareness campaigns and sensitisation sessions to de-stigmatize victims and encourage women to report incidents of violence.**
- **Continued capacity building of the officers of the Guyana Police Force to adequately prosecute perpetrators.**
- **Police stations/ precincts are constantly being upgraded across the country to handle domestic violence interviews. Eighteen (18) police stations have been remodeled with special rooms so victims of gender-based violence can make their reports in a comfortable, confidential and user-friendly environment.**

## National Frameworks & Efforts related to Gender-Based Violence & Trafficking in Persons

### Prevention and Response in Guyana Cont'd

- The establishment of the National Task Force for the Prevention of Sexual Violence (NTFPSV) in 2010 (resuscitated in 2016).
- Development of a national plan of action for domestic violence and sexual offences.
- Protocols were developed for Medical Practitioners, Police Officers, the Judiciary, and Prosecutors, aimed at educating persons on the prevention, reporting and elimination of sexual and domestic violence.
- Establishment of the National Task Force on Trafficking in Persons which is in keeping with the rudiments identified in the **COMBATING OF TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS ACT 2005**.
- National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Response to Trafficking in Persons, for the period 2019-2020 was just launched (June 2019), using the 4P paradigm (pattern) of Trafficking in persons (TIP), which are Prevention, Protection and Reintegration, Prosecution and Partnership. Implementation has already begun.

# KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy & Implementation Plan.**
- **Reaching Tier 1 in Trafficking in Persons - the country now fully meets the minimum standards for combating trafficking in person for a second year.**
- **Legal experts & Social Workers were trained in a special training in Forensic Psychology and Sexual Offences at the University of Guyana in collaboration with UNICEF- aimed at applying more natural science techniques in securing convictions for sexual offences and violence against children.**
- **Establishment of a Domestic Violence unit at the Guyana Police Force to address violence against women.**
- **Increase in women going to court to prosecute as it relates to sexual offences & TIPs. Efforts made by the Government of Guyana to investigate, prosecute, and convict traffickers have been steady and improving.**



# ACHIEVEMENTS Cont'd

- Significant legislative and policy advances
  - Sexual Offences Act
  - Domestic Violence Act
- Teenage mothers reintegrated into school systems in a safe environment and the recommended establishment of a database to track their progress .
- Increased advocacy and public awareness regarding gender equality and acts of violence against women.
- Reinforcing the constitutional and legislative framework
  - National Sports Policy and actions of the Guyana Football Federation as they relate to sexual harassment
- Peer-to-Peer perpetrator accountability programmes targeting men
- Enhanced partnerships between state and non-state actors.

# Challenges

- There is a wide perception that the legal system is minimally effective in protecting the rights of the population in general, and specifically in protecting women's and girls' rights against discrimination and violence.
- Women and girls still report that they encounter problems with the professionalism of frontline workers when reporting issues of violence.
- Even with progressive legislation one of the main challenges remains the **application of the Sexual Offenders Act** at the level of the police although more than 250 police officers have been exposed to training in the provisions of the legislation.



# Challenges Cont'd

- ▶ **Successful prosecution of perpetrators** has been less than desirable due to challenges with proper investigations of sexual offences cases and the Courts' access to forensic and DNA evidence.
- ▶ **Women are still portrayed negatively in the media.** This has become an area of concern in more recent years. The country has experienced music artistes writing derogatory songs about women, emphasizing abuse and objectifying the woman's body.
- ▶ In many cases concerning women and gender related issues, officials tend to base their judgments on their own gender-biased beliefs and not on the existing legal provisions.
- ▶ The challenges of data availability, quality and timeliness remain a major hurdle in programme targeting and policy formulation.
- ▶ Gaps between indigenous population in rural areas in comparison to those on the coastlands (access to services).

## Measures that aim to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against indigenous individuals Cont'd

There has been much inter-agency collaboration between the Welfare Department of the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs and the Ministry of Social Protection to host sensitization workshops.

These workshops seek to educate, provide awareness and clarification to the Village Councils in the hinterland, and by extension, the villages of their rights and responsibilities under the Sexual Offences Act, the Domestic Violence Act, the Labour Act and labour related issues, and the Combating Trafficking in Persons Act 2005.

- Community leaders are sensitized on these issues and thus empowered.
- Other community members are sensitized about their rights and responsibilities regarding social issues that may occur in their communities, and are able to identify and/or address and report to the relevant authorities any deviation from the law as it relates to any social issue.





## **Measures that aim to eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against indigenous individuals Cont'd**

- **Women in rural areas are receiving access to training from various organizations for agro-processing groups to encourage women to be more involved in business ventures. The income derived from the sale of products are shared among the women who are better able to contribute economically to the subsistence of their families.**
- **There has been a greater move to train women to establish and manage entrepreneurial enterprises including financial management and business start-ups.**
- **A number of seminars and workshops are held throughout the year to address the negative customs and traditional practices in rural and hinterland areas. These seminars and workshops are conducted by the Gender Affairs Bureau, Child Care and Protection Agency and other NGO's.**



# Conclusion

Guyana continues to take steps to integrate new forms of action to eradicate GBV & TIP.

Addressing GBV & TIP requires a multiplicity of approaches at the individual, family & community levels. There is need to challenge societal norms that enforce negative stereotypes which make one gender superior or more entitled to the other.

We are confident that our vision to promote an inclusive society, where women and girls are respected, equipped and empowered and supported to live violence-free lives can be realized; with greater commitment, esteemed leadership we will continue to demonstrate, coordinated collaboration and consistent strategic actions of all stakeholders.



**THANK YOU!!**