

Introductory Statement from the Delegation of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Madam Chairperson, Members of the CEDAW Committee, Madam Rapporteur for this session, our Delegation comprising myself, Zoila Ellis Browne and my colleague , Merrissa Finch- Burke are very pleased to present the combined 4th-8th Periodic Report and participate in this 61st Session of the Committee on behalf of the State of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

This Report was prepared with full appreciation of the seriousness and importance of the Obligations which our country is required to fulfill under the terms of the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and reflects the significance which our country places on ensuring that women and girls attain their fullest level of development and achievement within the context of our national resources.

This report utilized the guidelines established by the CEDAW Committee for preparation of periodic reports and includes such information which would enable the committee to gain a greater appreciation of the substantial efforts being undertaken by our Government in partnership with the private sector and civil society of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in ensuring that the quality of life of our communities are enhanced by the implementation of relevant policies and programmes . This is our second Report since St. Vincent and the Grenadines became a signatory to the CEDAW Convention in 1981. Our Combined Initial First, Second and Third Report was presented in 1997 We have perused the Concluding statements made by the Committee subsequent to that report and have sought to address the concerns and recommendations contained therein as far as possible in the current report.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is an archipelagic State in the southern Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean region, comprising a main island, St. Vincent, as well as the Grenadines - a chain of thirty-two islands, islets and cayes , of which only seven are inhabited – Bequia, Mustique, Canouan, Mayreau, Union Island, Palm Island and Petit St. Vincent. The implications of this geography cannot be overstated since it presents specific challenges in terms of the delivery of services and the participation of all of our population in programmes which are designed to be delivered to the benefit of women and girls in the context of our obligations under this Convention. Notwithstanding there have been many improvements in transportation, communication and outreach of basic services such as Health, Education, Social Services among others since the post 2010 period which have enabled the Grenadine islands to improve their living conditions vis-a vis , St. Vincent, which is the administrative center and the hub of commercial and other economic activity. These improvements have laid the platform for even greater involvement of these islands in our National life and will no doubt reap significant benefits for women and girls in the Grenadines in the immediate future.

The country occupies a land area of approximately 389 sq. kms or 150 sq. mls however St. Vincent, which is the largest inhabited island has a total land area of 344 sq. km. or 34,462 Ha. Of this total land area , the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the major land holder owning in excess of 60% of the total land area. However 30% of this land owned by the state is above the 1000 foot contour line, thus making it highly unsuitable for agriculture.

Preliminary data results for the 2012 Population and Housing Census showed a minimal increase in the population from just over 106,000 in 2001 to 108,570 with an almost even sex distribution, with males accounting for 50.5% (50,983) and females for 49.5% (50,033). The population is still predominantly rural (It was found that 39.2 % of the population was urban and 60.8% was rural) with 30% being persons under the age of 15years. The youthfulness of the population is an important demographic when considering programmes to be implemented in pursuance of the country's developmental goals.

The period post 2010 has been marked by the continued impact of the severe external shocks which created major challenges for SVG and other small island economies. These external shocks included the global recession in 2008 and beyond which led to a dramatic downturn in the economies of Europe, the USA and Japan- SVG'S major export markets; the impact of Natural disasters affecting SVG such as Hurricanes Ivan, Hurricane Tomas (2010) and Tropical Storm Lili (2009) which caused in excess of EC\$160 million dollars damage to roads, crops and infrastructure. The global recession also affected and continues to affect the economic recovery as it has impacted severely on tourist arrivals to SVG from Europe and the USA.

These adverse factors have, notwithstanding, highlighted the creativity and boldness on the part of the policymakers and decisionmakers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines as our country continues to design and implement programmes in the pursuance of poverty reduction as its overarching developmental objective. The positive impact of these pro-poor policies have continued to be reflected in the Country Poverty Assessments conducted by Social Development Professionals from external agencies.

The 2007/2008 Country Poverty Assessment (CPA) found that there was a drastic reduction in the level of abject poverty in St. Vincent and the Grenadines vis –a – vis what was found in the 1996 Country Poverty Assessment. According to the Report , the Indigence level moved from 25.7 percent in 1996 to 2.9 percent in 2008. Further to that, the UNDP 2013 Human Development Report determined that “St. Vincent and the Grenadines’ High Development Index (HDI) for 2012 was 0.733 – in the high human development category- positioning the country at 83 out of 187 countries. Between 2010 and 2012 St. Vincent and the Grenadines HDI value increased from 0.731 to 0.733”.

In 2013 , St. Vincent and the Grenadines launched its National Economic and Social Development Plan 2013 – 2025 (NESDP) , a comprehensive strategy document which outlines as one of its principal strategic Goals, the Enabling of Increased Human and Social Development. It should be noted however, that the 2007/2008 CPA identified rural farming populations , large families and single parent female headed households as being at high risk and needing greater poverty reduction strategies. Poverty in St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to be gendered. While both men and women have been adversely affected by the consequences of the economic downturn, 53% of the unemployed are young females . Women also continue to have disproportionate responsibility for caring work such as care of the household, the elderly, children and the sick. This results in women having less time for pursuing paid employment and this further contributes to poverty. These are some of the challenges which the NESDP recognizes and is in the process of implementing programmes to address same.

The factors outlined above represent key elements of the overarching geographic, economic and social context of the present Report. In addition, St. Vincent and the Grenadines recently completed the National Review of the progress made in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly otherwise known as the Beijing Platform for Action + 20 Review. The preparation of this report allowed a significant opportunity for stocktaking and reenergizing in preparation for the ongoing work of strengthening programmes for women. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has also made strides in achieving many of the Millenium Development Goals in particular that of Goal #1 the Eradication of Hunger and Poverty , Goal #2 Achieving Universal Primary Education, and Goal #5 the Improvement in Maternal Health.

It is recognized that much remains to be done in the achievement of Goal #3 the promotion of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of women. Gender based violence continues to be of great concern as evidence of persistent attitudes of tolerance of such violence exists . Notwithstanding, there are programs already in place which have, post 2010, been bearing positive results including an aggressive educational campaign against Domestic Violence, the passage of a new Domestic Violence Act through Parliament in 2015 and the establishment of more targeted data collection and policy coordination at the levels of the Health, Education and social Development Government departments, the judicial system and the police . There have also been, post 2010, increased community based training and education programmes carried out by the Gender Affairs Division and other Government Departments and civil society organizations geared towards strengthening initiatives to build attitudinal change at the community level.

Going forward, we wish to highlight two strategic priorities of Government that further the objectives of the Convention. Firstly, Gender based violence will be more strongly targeted. Secondly , the Government Poverty reduction will continue to be a major priority and will have an increased impact on the employment possibilities of women.

GENDER AND VIOLENCE:

In relation to Gender and Violence, we have compartmentalized the following thematic Areas and distinguish between those programmes which have already been implemented between 2010 – 2014 as well as those which are currently envisioned for future action:

- Improving the Legislative and Regulatory Framework
- Improving access and quality to women in education and health
- Improving the support to women due to Gender-based Violence (GBV)
- Improving support for women as leaders in the Public and Private Sector

Improving the Legislative and Regulatory Framework:

Post 2010 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Sensitization of the Domestic Violence OECS Model Bill
- Adoption of compliment child laws to protect children through the OECS Model Child Care and Adoption Bill and the Status of Children Bill
- Development of a National Gender Action Plan on ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Post 2014 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Adoption, Implementation and Sensitization of the Domestic Violence Act
- Implementation of a National Gender Action Plan on ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
- Implementation of the Child Care and Adoption Act
- Development of Social Protection Policy to support women and children from vulnerable groups

Improving access and quality to women in education and health:

Post 2010 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Improving access to primary health care for women and children through the provision of central and decentralized services
- Improving quality of universal access to education for children and adult education access to women that are poor and vulnerable

Post 2014 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Strengthening efforts in gender mainstreaming to increase access to women in male-centered fields of study and employment

Improving the support to women due to Gender-based Violence (GBV):

Post 2010 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Development of a National Crisis Centre Women Shelter for women faced with domestic violence
- Development of a strategy to improve institutional structures and training to strengthen agencies capacity to support women and children faced with domestic violence
- Increase public awareness on ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Post 2014 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Development of Victims Support Centres for women faced with domestic violence
- Implementation of Training Programme to agencies in the delivery of services to women and children faced with violence and abuse
- Development of comprehensive Social Protection measures to support women and children in vulnerable environments
- Implementation of strategy to improve institutional response to ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Improving support for women as leaders in the Public and Private Sector:

Post 2010 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Sensitization on gender mainstreaming in education and employment

Post 2014 Agenda Strategic Priorities:

- Development of a Gender mainstreaming strategy to increase equal access in education and employment for women in marginalized areas

At its 2012 National Conference The **National Council of Women** , the main NGO representing women in SVG called on the Government to (a) Develop of a legislative agenda for the development and implementation of laws for the protection of women, and the prevention of domestic violence; (b) Ensure that cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse are investigated and prosecuted by the State when incidents are reported by concerned citizens or victims, and provide safe houses for the victims; (c) Facilitate public education and provide training on domestic violence intervention/prevention methods and on conflict resolution in general; (d) Provide a secure, humane and rehabilitative facility for female prisoners and ensure that their children, wards or dependents

are not neglected or disadvantaged as a result of their incarceration; (e) Establish or strengthen accountable, supervisory and monitoring systems to ensure that women and girls within the custody of the criminal system are not subjected to sexual assaults and exploitation. Some of these issues are being addressed and the Government continues to dialogue with and provide some economic support to the work of the NCW.

GENDER AND POVERTY:

In continuing to target the issue of poverty and in particularly engendered poverty, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines focuses on training and job creation. Women and girls have been taking more advantage of increased access to education and training at the secondary and tertiary levels. The 2001 Population and Housing Census showed a reduction of women in Agricultural employment by 6.1% and their increased involvement in the areas of Hotels and Restaurants, private households with employed persons, Education and Wholesale trade which accounted for 54% of women. This remains the situation post 2010. The initiatives in response to the economic challenges are wide ranging, however we must highlight the major impact which will shortly occur in St. Vincent and the Grenadines as a result of the completion of the Argyle International Airport . The contribution of this major development project to the strengthening of the Agriculture and Tourism sectors will undoubtedly provide increased employment for women.

In the NESDP 2013-2025 the GOVSVG commits to continued expansion of social infrastructure. This includes providing housing and subsidised land for low income families ; the development and maintenance of a transfer budget to be used in targeting the poorest and address cohort and gender specific vulnerability, providing social protection. This social protection will add to what is already in place for families as under its current programme, funds are available to provide school uniforms for children, payment for rent for destitute families and other types of support including a direct cash transfer programme called Public Assistance which benefits a limited number of elderly women.

An important role in the reduction of poverty of female headed households continues to be the work of the Family Court in SVG. Through this Court, women are able to apply for and secure maintenance Orders from the fathers of their children who are able to make a financial contribution to their care. The enforcement of these Orders still remains a challenge however there is still a lot being done. In 2012 the Family Court recorded 576 Maintenance Orders the second highest in all the OECs countries. Notwithstanding, there remains the need for more advocacy programmes to inform women of their right to seek Maintenance from the fathers of their children and to support them in the process.

In addition to the above there still remains the need to conduct an indepth Gender analysis of Poverty in SVG and to sensitise the population of the impact of this phenomena on future generations.

CONCLUSION

In closing , we wish to thank the Committee for allowing us this opportunity to present our combined Periodic Reports. We also wish to express our appreciation to the International Development Agencies such as UNWomen and UNDP which have supported the important work of promoting the issues of Gender and development in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to be focused on promoting the interests of women and girls and to

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provide opportunities for improving the fulfillment of its obligations under this Convention. We look forward to the ensuing dialogue today which we are sure will be mutually beneficial and productive.
