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NATIONAL REPORT: SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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ST VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
REPORT
ON
IMPLEMENTATION OF INTER-AMERICAN PROGRAMME
ON
THE PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS
AND
GENDER EQUITY AND EQUALITY
AND
STRATEGIC PLAN OF ACTION OF THE CIM

AUGUST 31, 2010

GENDER AFFAIRS DIVISION
Ministry of National Mobilization,
Social Development , Youth and Sports

1. Introductory Summary

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines made a commitment to carry out its obligations in its implementation of programmes to promote women's human rights, gender equity and equality in keeping with the Inter-American Programme and Strategic Plans of the CIM and other similar conventions. This is evident through the implementation of gender perspective seen in the strengthening of legislation, policy, advocacy, public awareness, education and training as well as targeted intervention and other support services to victims and perpetrators of violence.

Historically, women in St Vincent and the Grenadines have always been an integral part of national development.. They continue to play an integral role in national development and have been very instrumental in the socioeconomic life of the people of St Vincent and the Grenadines. As such there are no legal barriers to women achieving equal status with men. The legal system in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is equally available to women where they are of the view that they have been discriminated against. Over the years, women have benefitted from significant improvement in the area of education, health and with significant progress in decision-making positions.

A general policy of prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex by promoting equality of men and women is embodied in Article 13 of the Constitution of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

11. Programme on the Promotion of Human Rights and Gender Equity and Equality

After the General Elections of 2001, the name of the Department was changed from Women's Affairs Department to the Gender Affairs Division and it became part of the portfolio of the Ministry of National Mobilization, Social Development, Cooperatives, Family, Gender, Youth and Sports. This Division is charged with the responsibility for promoting gender equity. This is a demonstration of the Government's commitment to ensure gender equity and the empowerment of women remain a vital part of the development agenda.

Although no major changes relevant to domestic violence legislation have taken place, efforts have yielded success for reform around social issues such as child abuse and protection, sexual harassment where on August 30, 2010 the Child Care and Adoption Bill was passed and is now an Act.

Efforts through the aid of UNIFEM , in collaboration with the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police, is implementing a project on "Strengthening State Accountability and Community Action for Ending Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean". The project focuses specifically on reducing violence against women, through the strategies of increasing state actor competencies and strengthening accountability. The stated developmental objective of the project is to end gender-based violence through strengthened and responsive state and civil society actions. One of the specific objectives is the building of technical competencies of the justice and security sectors based on an understanding of the causes and consequences of the current deficits.

The present study is one component of the wider project. The specific purpose of the study is to understand the reasons for low conviction rates in respect of sexual assault in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and to consider what legislative, policy, policing and prosecutorial changes might be considered to make it more likely that offenders will be punished and to minimize the trauma of the prosecution process for sexual assault victims.

Key international and regional human rights treaties have clarified the obligations of governments to eradicate violence against women and girls. St Vincent and the Grenadines has ratified the core treaties which deal specifically with violence against women and children and thereby committing itself to adopting

legal , administrative or other measures to eradicate all forms of violence against women. . The country's ratification status and reporting obligations as regards these key treaties and Optional Protocols, where relevant, are described below.

These include the Programme of Action of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and the Platform and Programme for Action of the 1995 World Conference

| CONVENTION | YEAR OF RATIFICATION |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) | 1984 |
| Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) | |
| Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women – 'Convention of Belem do Para' | 1996 |
| Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Prostitution and Child Pornography. | 2005 |

The Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines has ensured that it has the proper framework in which to deal with all forms of violence (physical, sexual, emotional and verbal), by the ratification of the Convention of Belem do Para; which is the OAS Protocol related to violence against women. The Protection against Domestic Violence Act of 1995. With regards to the integration of a gender perspective in public policies, the Government of St Vincent and the Grenadines

Approaches to integrating gender into macroeconomic planning

The Eastern Caribbean Economic Management Programme (ECEMP) has partnered with the Ministry of Finance in a Gender Mainstreaming Initiative in which the ECEMP sought to define strategies to engage in gender analysis in the Ministry of Finance operations, including budget planning and other economic policy formulation. The specific activities included the collection of available sex-disaggregated labour, work and other economic data; the review of legislation governing the relationship between the GAD, the Ministry of Finance and other government agencies; and training in concrete tools for the formulation of a gender-sensitive national budget.

Institutional Framework

The GoSVG has established a number of bodies with responsibility for the economy:

- The National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDEC) a broad-based institution of civil society and public officials.
- The Tripartite Committee on the Economy (TCE) which consists of representatives of the Government, labour and business and which focuses on wages and salaries, prices employment, investment and productivity.
- The Cabinet Committee on the Economy (CCE), which meets once per month to review government finances, the macro-economy and the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), and provides directions to ensure improved performance.

The NESDEC has created an intersectoral Poverty Reduction Task Force for the purpose of implementing the 2001 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. This body has become highly visible and important in the taking of overarching economic decisions.

The importance of donor coordination rests in the fact that many donor organizations with portfolios in the

region, including regional organizations, do not prioritize gender as a criterion in the approval and *implementation* of projects. This constrains the level of gender-awareness of country programmes in a context of ever-decreasing official development assistance.

The MoF prepares a three-year rolling budget. The budget preparation process in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is initiated in the MoF with the preparation of the Strategic Outlook for the next year. This document forecasts GDP growth and inflation rate in order to estimate government revenue over the forecast period. This information, along with the policy agenda as represented in the Medium Term Economic Strategy Paper (MTESP), is compiled into a Budget Circular and disseminated to government Ministries and Departments.

The approach of the GoSVG to the budget process is an increasingly participatory methodology. The budget proposal itself is open to community consultation before it is passed in the House, and in attendance at these meetings is the Prime Minister and planning board.

The national women's machinery in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Gender Affairs Division, is situated within the Ministry of National Mobilization, Youth and Sports .

The Division sits on several intersectoral committee and task forces, including committees on trade, health and poverty alleviation

Gender focal points have been organized into a Committee which provides a link between the Ministry and the Gender Affairs Division.

The civil society movement in St. Vincent and the Grenadines contributes significantly to the provision of social services ordinarily undertaken by government. The Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA), an NGO which promotes the interests of farmers in securing sustainable livelihoods, has drafted a proposal for gender budget training of farmers in rural communities for the purposes of monitoring government policies. It has also commissioned a study examining the impact of trade policy on vegetable farmers.

CSOs enjoy reasonable access to some aspects of decision-making, and although needing to be strengthened institutionally, are well-placed to offer support to government in gender-aware planning. The NWM however is seen as a welfare department and does not have the respect of other agencies as a policy coordinating department. It would need greater contact with the budget process and MoF officials to have any impact on gender mainstreaming in economic policy formulation.

The Central Statistical Department (CSD) of the MoFP carries out a population census every ten years, in which the data collected are disaggregated by sex. There are also additional sources of data collected by the Ministries of Labour, Agriculture and Health; and other state and private enterprises. Moreover, the CSD is part of CARICOM'S Social and Gender Indicators Millenium Development Goals initiative. The ECEMP has carried out a comprehensive data needs assessment of gender-disaggregated data sources in the country, but there remains a stark need for a more conscientious collection of such data.

The Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) presents a set of policy directions, targets and strategies intended to guide educational development in St. Vincent and the Grenadines .

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is intended to be the blue print for developing policies and programmes to address key elements of Poverty Reduction in the short, medium, and long term. It is a product of the National Economic Social and Development Council (NESDC), consisting of representatives from a wide range of private sector, civil society organisations and senior public servants, and is based on consultations with key stakeholders in the private, civic and public sectors.

A Poverty Reduction Taskforce (PRTF) was established by NESDC to develop the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The PRTF, comprising of public, private and non-government organizations (NGOs), facilitated

by the Central Planning Division, was the technical working group for the process.

The process included two community consultations: The consultations sought (i) to examine the communities' perceptions of poverty; (ii) to identify stakeholder priorities; and (iii) to determine how stakeholders can contribute to the process. A third Consultation was held with the private sector and micro-enterprise agents under the theme "Entrepreneurial Development and its role in poverty reduction". The Poverty Reduction Task Force also reviewed Sector plans developed for the year 2002 and 2003 by the various ministries in order to identify the policies and activities relating specifically to poverty alleviation.

The strengthening of the Department of Women's Affairs enabled it to more effectively carry out its functions as the promoter of women's interests in the country. This included the reorganizing of the Department and its continued evolution into the **Gender Affairs Division**. This reflects a reorientation of the Department towards a more targeted approach in the areas of Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Policy Development and implementation etc.

Support is also provided by the **National Council of Women** which is a Non-Governmental umbrella body representing various women's organizations. Collaboration continues between the Government and the National Council of Women in several key areas including the hosting of events to mark International Women's Day, among others. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines provides a yearly grant to the National Council of Women which the organization utilizes to carry out its work of advocacy on women's issues.

Special measures adopted to accelerate equality are the continued maintenance of Maternity Leave provisions as described in the **Initial, Second and Third Report** under **Article 11**. These include benefits provided under **The National Insurance Scheme** Legislation, the **Wages Regulation** as well as under individual collective agreements negotiated by various Trade Unions. There is still no comprehensive Maternity Leave Legislation.

Other services provided are ,Issuing of free Anti-retroviral drugs to combat mother to child transmission of HIV infection ;

The development by the Gender Affairs Department in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of a programme for continuing education for Teenage mothers.

Provision of training to Police Officers in the areas of management of Domestic Violence cases to enable them to deal more sensitively with women in these matters.

The promotion of National HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns which provide information to girls and women about the importance of self-education on issues relating to their sexual health and promoting the principles of women's responsibility for choices made in relation to sexual habits.

Measures put in place to address discrimination against women in unions other than marriage include the attempt by Government to provide basic health and social services to all women on an equal basis. All educational opportunities and opportunities for advancement within the public and private sector are open to all women. All women regardless of marital status have access to the courts, except where particular laws have only give married women the rights to redress.

In this regard, it was very important for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to have participated the **OECS Domestic Violence and Family Law Reform Project**, a project which was initiated by the OECS Supreme Court during the review period. This very comprehensive research project analysed in depth for the first time, many critical aspects of Family Law with a view to critiquing their implementation within the OECS countries. It also analysed some of the causes of domestic violence in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and other OECS countries and evaluated the impact and effectiveness of existing legislation as

well as the social services available to meet the needs of women who have been affected by domestic violence.

The recommendations of the Reports arising from this project were utilized as the basis of National Consultations in each OECS country, including Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and served to generate serious discussion in the public on the issues pertinent to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as a member of the OECS, fully endorsed and supported the project. The staff of the Ministry of Social Development were involved in the process of National Consultations.

Government has accorded high priority to the reduction of domestic violence and violence against women in general. In this regard the work of the Family Court is strongly promoted within the society and women are encouraged to seek redress in circumstances of abuse. The passage of the **Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act** is an important measure in this regard.

In cases of violent crime against women, the police are diligent in their search for the perpetrators, particularly in cases of rape or murder. Government has continued to provide police and prosecutors with training and equipment to more effectively prosecute cases of violent crime.

The Family Planning Unit conducts education programmes targeting both boys and girls. These programmes include information on parental and sexual responsibilities. In the present context, where there is an increasing incidence of HIV, there is a bombardment of education campaigns aimed at addressing responsible sexual behaviour and promoting responsible parenting.

Government has sought to focus on education as a means of providing young people with access to a wider level of ideas and information to combat the stereotyping in the society. Girls are encouraged to seek and pursue training opportunities in non-traditional areas and to generally educate themselves in order to be financially independent. The fact that more girls than boys are accessing secondary and tertiary education is a tribute to this approach.

Measures to ensure the highest functioning of women in public life include the participation of female parliamentarians in training activities conducted locally, regionally and at the international level.

Women in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continue to have equal access to diplomatic and international posts with men once they possess the required qualifications however data on the gender composition of the Foreign Service Officers reveals the extent of male dominance at this level. The post of Ambassador of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations is held by a woman. The other six international diplomatic missions are headed by men.

The implementation of the provisions of the **Equal Pay Act**, 1994 ensured that women were no longer discriminated against in terms of wages received for comparable work. This Act also states that favourable treatment received by an employee in connection with the birth or expected birth of a child is not to be considered as discrimination between females and males. Women were able to seek redress within the court system for wrongs which occurred at the workplace.

Government continues to provide other forms of Social Security Benefits under the National Insurance Scheme.

Government has continued to encourage the formation of trade unions and these have flourished in the State with an active and growing number of women members.

The Government continued to institute measures to enable women and men equally to have access to support under the Public Assistance Programme. Such assistance was provided in the form of cash or in

kind contributions and was usually of a temporary nature to enable persons who were in some way suffering from a social crisis to meet some of their basic necessities. Many elderly women were beneficiaries of this programme and received a monthly stipend.

The Government has instituted various measures to address the disproportionate impact of the situation on women. It has provided a micro-credit scheme which has enabled persons to access loans at minimal interest for the commencement of micro enterprises. Many rural women who have had to become self-employed have commenced trafficking or the exportation of produce to neighbouring islands. The programme of micro credit will enable them to finance their businesses.

With the closure of the sugar industry in 2005, which made approximately three hundred (300) women redundant, the Department of Gender Affairs, in collaboration with the Departments of Social Development, the National Skills programme and the Ministry of Agriculture, was able to provide skills to women, and assist in the establishment of cooperatives in the area of craft making, and agro-processing.

In terms of future Actions relevant to the Inter-American programme on the promotion of Women's Rights, St Vincent remains committed to ensuring that the principles of Belem Do Para are adhered to at the local level and where ever possible at the regional level. At the local level: by strengthening efforts already highlighted in earlier sections of this report and the acceleration of activities toward the realization of a National Policy on Gender Equity and Equality Action Plan. St Vincent and the Grenadines wishes to commend CIM on the afore mentioned activities and welcomes CIM assistance in future programme.