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**Responses to UNSG’s Report on Women’s Economic Empowerment  
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The Department of Gender Affairs has major responsibilities for raising awareness; monitoring and improving the status of women and girls in the country through the implementation of a number of International Conventions and declarations; as well as the Constitution of Saint Christopher and Nevis which speaks to equality between men and women.

The Department’s priority areas include the formation of a National Gender Policy, the empowerment of women and girls, the reduction of all forms of gender-based violence, poverty elimination, governance and democracy, and programmes for men and boys.

**1. What measures have been taken to strengthen normative, legal and policy frameworks for the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?**

The Department of Gender Affairs functions under a policy framework, which is guided by international and regional commitments including the Sustainable Development Goals, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Gender Equality Observatory, (CSW) Commission on the Status of Women in St. Kitts & Nevis and the Belém do Pará Convention. It has responsibility to fulfil periodic international, regional and national reporting obligations.

Within the last year St. Kitts and Nevis completed and submitted the Beijing +25 Report, ECLAC Montevideo Report, MESECVI (Belém do Pará) Evaluation; and Gender Equality Observatory reporting. The CEDAW report for obtained Cabinet approval and is awaiting a call from the UN for formal submission. In addition, the Department contributes data to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF) with regard to human rights reporting.

Domestic Violence is among the most common and dangerous forms of gender-based violence which predominantly affects women. Nationally, the protection of victims has been strengthened by the Domestic Violence Act, 2014, which provides the various forms

of Domestic Violence. The Act also provides greater protection for Victims of Domestic Violence including, provision for the granting of Protection Orders. The Domestic Violence Act, 2014 was formally brought into force in 2019.

In addition to the aforementioned legislative developments, the Domestic and Sexual Violence Complaints and Response Protocol, which was developed in consultation with stakeholders from the private and public sectors and civil society, was launched in November 2018. The protocol aims to improve domestic violence programmes and enhance support for them by identifying and promoting best practice. It is a resource for agencies who deal with domestic and sexual violence matters, and sets out the roles and responsibilities of the key agencies involved in such matters. Training in the use of the Protocol was conducted with key stakeholders in 2019. Domestic Violence workshops are also conducted as part of this platform.

Limited systems exist to facilitate information capture and reporting on the domestic violence prevalence rates, including victim and offender profiles. The development of an Intentional Injuries Surveillance System will allow for uniform information-capture and reporting. In 2019, the Ministry conducted an assessment of the current capacities and systems for data collection. Based on the recommendations resulting from the assessment, a framework was designed for the development of the Intentional Injuries Surveillance System that addresses the gaps and capitalizes on the existing systems. Work will continue on this project to allow for data collection, analyses, interpretation, dissemination and use regarding intentional injuries.

The Department of Gender Affairs joins participates annually in activism designed to end violence against women, men and children. The Sixteen Day Campaign runs from November 25<sup>th</sup> to December 10<sup>th</sup> (International Human Rights Day). Activities are conducted to sensitize the general public, and raise awareness of gender-based violence as a human rights issue. The Department works towards promoting innovation and strategic awareness to reduce crime, in addition to advocating on behalf of victims of gender-based violence.

In November 2018, the St. Kitts and Nevis National Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan (GEPAP) was launched. The GEPAP will provide the institutional framework to assist the Government in facilitating gender equality and empowerment through gender sensitive initiatives that incorporate a rights-based approach to human development. The GEPAP is a two year project; phase 1 was completed in 2019 and comprised much of the groundwork. The Department is preparing to commence phase 2 to finalise the project.

As a referral, advocacy and awareness raising department, the services offered include but are not limited to mediation, counselling, social assistance, and legal aid.

**2. What actions and investments have been made for financing gender equality and the empowerment of women?**

The Department of Gender Affairs seeks to serve the most vulnerable through advocacy, education, empowerment and enhancement of individuals by utilising programmes that promote equality, growth and development. In this regard, focus is given to vulnerable groups such as teen mothers, low income women, women in prison; and victims of gender-based violence. For, example, one programme that can be accessed by vulnerable groups is the Government's Poverty Alleviation Programme which was launched in December 2018 and provides financial support to households with a total gross income below EC\$3,000.00 (three thousand dollars). Disadvantaged households who qualify are assisted to meet some of the essential living expenses and receive an EC\$500.00 (five hundred dollar) monthly stipend.

The Department of Gender Affairs works in partnership with international and regional agencies, including the private sector to facilitate its programmes. One example is the Project Viola Teen Mothers Programme which gives teen mothers the opportunity to complete their secondary education and comprises an annual Capacity Building Workshop equips participants with personal and career development skills, skills training and work experience through job attachment. Assistance is provided to remove financial barriers to education, e.g. cost of day care for babies, books and uniforms. A scholarship programme is also available to assist participants wishing to pursue tertiary education, including tuition costs (where applicable). Project Viola is recognised by UNICEF as a best practice model in the Caribbean region.

Incarcerated women is a group that face multiple forms of discrimination. Women are often the primary caregivers of children who are impacted by parental detention and imprisonment. The stigma associated imprisonment means incarcerated women often experience challenges in securing employment after release from prison. The development of microbusinesses is used to resolve this problem. The Prison Programme for Women is part of the women's empowerment platform and delivers short term skills training for female inmates of Her Majesty's Prison. The weekly training sessions aim to improve personal and career development, and focuses on leadership, life and technical skills to empower women to enable them to participate fully in the economic activities of the country that will assist in alleviating the feminization of poverty. Where appropriate, the Department of Gender Affairs also provides advocacy services on behalf of inmates, e.g. referrals to the Labour Department and social assistance.

### **3. What steps have been taken to bolster women's leadership and women's full and equal participation in decision-making in all areas of sustainable development?**

The Department of Gender affairs aims to increase the participation of women and girls in decision-making at all level of development in public and private sectors, through the training of women and girls in leadership, governance and democracy.

International Women's Day is an occasion where women from all backgrounds are recognized for their achievement through the coordination of various activities during the month of March that include raising awareness of the contribution of local women.

This month is also used to promote women, who have made similar impactful contributions and have been identified as possessing leadership potential.

**4. What macroeconomic, labour and social policies have been put in place that promote full and productive employment and decent work for women, in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's employment and economic rights and independence?**

Women's economic enhancement is assisted by the government-run, island-wide network of Early Childhood Development Centres. Originally established to assist low income women, they have evolved and now cater to middle income residents and enable women to enter the workforce. Serving children from birth to five years old; the centres operate between the hours of 8am to 5:30pm and provide high quality early childhood care and education and prepare children for school. Within the Federation, there are 19 public centres and 95 private centres, with over 100 practitioners licenced to run such facilities. These services assist women to balance work, caregiving responsibilities, and participate in public life. Under the Education Sector Plan 2017-2021 the number of early childhood spaces have been increased.

It is recognised that many frontline essential workers are women. During the periods when the curfew was lifted partially to permit shopping for essential items, workers required to work on those days were given priority in public and private sector establishments to perform activities that relate to the purchasing of good and services.

The Government Stimulus Package included a boost to agriculture production for farmers and backyard gardeners. This involved a waiver for water payments for 6 months (April-September 2020), the provision of free seeds, and assistance with land clearance. In addition, a reduction of corporate income tax from 33% to 25% (April-June 2020) applied to businesses that retained at least 75% of their workers.

Employment opportunities are segregated traditionally by gender, e.g. women are concentrated in the light manufacturing and service industries. During the COVID-19 pandemic response API Harowe Servo St. Kitts Limited, one of the oldest manufacturing operations in the Federation, was responsible for producing a key component needed in the production of ventilators that are used globally. More than 75% of the products manufactured at Harowe Servo are exported to the USA, China and the European markets.

The Federation participated in the UN Women MCO initiative to promote economic empowerment through the procurement of services for the production of cloth masks.

**5. What response and recovery measures to the COVID-19 pandemic have been taken to improve and expand social protection for women (e.g., healthcare coverage, unemployment benefits, paid sick leave, paid parental leave, maternity benefits, pensions, income support such as cash transfers)?**

A national \$120 million stimulus package was announced to protect and support the most vulnerable in our society, including persons laid off due the pandemic. This included, additional support to the existing Poverty Alleviation Programme. The Government stimulus package was extended for a further 3 months in July 2020, with a further announcement September 2020, for a further extension of income support measures.

Partnership with the private sector was formed to mobilise resources for a COVID-19 food relief drive for vulnerable families, for example teen mothers, single women headed houses.

The Department of Labour and the St. Christopher and Nevis Social Security Board facilitated the payment of income support relief for employees and self-employed persons affected by COVID-19. The tourism sector was particularly affected. The Social Security Board, through the Emergency Wage Relief Fund proposed to assist insured persons who are laid off or unemployed for a period of 3 months in the first instance. These persons would also receive their contribution credits to ensure that they are not disadvantaged with respect to future benefit entitlements. It was recognised that consideration should be given to informal workers not within national insurance schemes.

The Ministry of Community Development, Gender Affairs and Social Services social protection measures included the identification of families in vulnerable situations, and provision of care packages and meal support. Contact was made with vulnerable client groups such as teen victims of domestic violence and teen mothers to ascertain their needs during this time.

In addition, the dissemination of additional psychosocial support, including health and well-being was provided via key messaging utilising television and radio broadcasts, and social media platforms. Staff training on psychosocial support and GBV responses in the context of COVID-19 was provided to frontline workers.

In order to ensure quality education, the Ministry of Education provided digital devices and internet connection to eligible households to enable school children to continue their education online. During the school closure period the School Meal Programme put in place arrangements to allow parents to collect a school meal for their child(ren).

The Federation realised an increase in domestic violence matters during periods of lockdown associated with lack of money and food. Referrals to psychosocial support, Special Victims Unit of the Royal St. Christopher and Nevis Police Force, and social assistance were made, as appropriate.

**6. What actions have been taken to expand the availability and affordability of care services to address the increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., care subsidies, paid leave)?**

In order to help facilitate the participation of teen mothers in the Capacity Building Workshop (with focus on COVID-19), financial assistance was given to secure appropriate childcare provision for the children of participants.

**7. What action has been taken to increase resources and support for women's and civil society organizations as they cope with the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The Government benefited from the information campaigns and training materials pertaining to dealing with COVID19 produced by regional agencies, such as CARICOM and OECS. The digital resources were shared with women's groups and civil society organisations.

The national media agencies disseminated key messaging to the general public, e.g. psychosocial support and government daily briefing reports. The National Emergency Operating Centre (NEOC) provided information and support to the general public via daily briefing reports carried on national television and radio, including information on psychosocial support, child protection, social services etc. The NEOC dedicated 311 Hotline also was available to provide information, in addition to summoning emergency assistance.

An on-call cell phone was operated by the Department of Gender Affairs. Victims of domestic violence are able to call the number to receive help in summoning police assistance, follow up, and referral to appropriate agencies as necessary e.g. Special Victims Unit of the police force, counselling and social assistance.

Partnership with the private sector and Chamber of Industry and Commerce to commence a COVID-19 food relief drive to assist vulnerable families of clients participating in programmes. Beneficiaries include victims of domestic violence and single female headed households.

**8. What steps have been taken to improve gender-responsive data collection in the context of follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to track and monitor the gender-specific impacts and response measures to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Participation in mapping activities with international and regional agencies in order to identify resources and needs.

The monitoring of reported cases of gender-based violence continues.