

CSW66 - Member States Submission of Information on the implementation of the agreed conclusions on 'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work'

Responses - St. Kitts and Nevis (29 September 2021)

Responses should specifically address the following questions relating to the key areas of focus of the agreed conclusions since adoption by the Commission in March 2017. Please provide concrete examples of measures taken and their impacts or results, including for the COVID-19 response and recovery, identify good practices and key lessons, gaps and challenges, and highlight successful inclusive collaboration with stakeholders in the implementation of the agreed conclusions.

The Government of St. Kitts and Nevis will shortly have in place a National Gender Equality Policy and Action Plan (GEPAP). The GEPAP is an institutional framework that will assist the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis in facilitating gender equality and empowerment. It is a blueprint that shows the priorities for the country to achieve gender equality, including the obligations that the government has undertaken, and the international conventions and treaties to which it is party. As such, the policy embraces a human-rights based approach, and the principle of 'leave no-one behind', and places equality and non-discrimination at its centre to secure gender equality at all levels of society.

The GEPAP is being finalized and will shortly be submitted to Cabinet for approval in the last quarter of 2021. Under the ten (10) policy domains 'Decent Work and Inclusive Economic Growth for All' considers labour market participation and social protection. Its strategic goal is to foster the equitable participation of, and benefits for men and women in the labour force, to ensure social protections, labour rights, and human rights in compliance with national laws and international treaties, including the integration of a regime of protections to value the contribution of unwaged reproductive work to national development.

1. Strengthening normative and legal frameworks (paragraphs 40 (a) to (j))

- What specific actions have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and regulatory frameworks that ensure gender equality and prohibit discrimination against women in the world of work?

The Ministry of Labour in St. Kitts and Nevis worked closely with Canadian officials and other stakeholders to ensure that the benefits of the Canada/Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme (CCSAWP) were extended to female nationals. The Canadian Farm Workers

Programme is now subscribing to women and St. Kitts and Nevis is encouraging women to register.

- What specific actions have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and regulations that uphold the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value in both the public and private sectors?

Generally, equal salaries are paid to men and women doing comparable work. The Equal Pay Act, 2012 makes provision for the removal and prevention of discrimination based on the sex of the employee in paid employment. Employers who commit an offence are liable to a fine and employers convicted of such offence may be ordered to pay arrears of remuneration to the employee discriminated against.

The Gender Equality Action Plan seeks to promote and monitor equal employment and equal pay for equal opportunities to the social security services adequate to the rights and needs of all workers, particularly women, to eliminate any employer or abuse that may have a long term financial impact. In this regard the Action Plan recommends that a mechanism is established to monitor and enforce gender based violations with regard to equal pay for work of equal value.

- What measures have been taken to enact, strengthen and enforce laws and policies to eliminate all forms of violence and harassment against women in the world of work and provide means of effective redress in cases of noncompliance?

Part of the programme of activities conducted by the Department of Gender Affairs to mark the 16 Day Campaign of Activism Against Gender Based Violence in 2020 included the live streamlining of a mock parliament conducted by the St. Kitts National Youth Parliament to debate the regional Draft Sexual Harassment Bill.

With regard to the abuse of power in the workplace, there is no legislation specific to sexual harassment but complaints may fall under the Protection of Employment Act, 1986. Work is ongoing with the government to draft sexual harassment legislation. Within the Public Sector, standing order number 19 of 2012 clearly defines sexual harassment in the workplace and provides for reporting, resolution and punishment of such actions.

The Gender Equality Action Plan seeks to apply greater legislative and operational safeguards and public accountability and recommends a review of the law and practices to eliminate gender-

related violations. In addition, the application of a gender perspective in tourism policies is recommended to emphasize salary gaps, employment conditions, workplace sexual harassment and violence and other issues to which the industry is prone.

Launched in 2014, and repeated in 2018, the Gender Issues in the Workplace programme addresses men and women's knowledge of their rights and benefits in the workplace, and concerns of discrimination, gender inequity and sexual harassment in the workplace. The program is an ongoing initiative, to be held bi-annually and is targeted at private and public sector workers aged 18 to 60 years.

2. Strengthening education, training, and skills development (paragraphs 40 (k) to (n))

- What measures have been taken to mainstream a gender perspective into education and training programmes in order to facilitate the effective transition from education or unemployment to work?

The Government is restructuring the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) project in collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank. Enhanced support systems to help reduce gender disparities will include gender-responsive career counselling in secondary schools to support skill selection and the retention and completion of programmes. National stakeholder consultations on the St. Kitts and Nevis TVET and Gender Policy commenced in 2018. Work is ongoing in collaboration with the CARICOM Education for Employment Programme to create strategies to mainstream gender in workforce training and development.

The Advanced Vocational Education Centre (AVEC) offers skills training targeted at women. Women are invited to attain skills in building construction, motor vehicle repairs, welding, plumbing, electrical electronics and AC and refrigeration.

3. Implementing economic and social policies for women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (o) to (mm))

- What steps have been taken to promote decent paid care and domestic work in the public and private sectors?

The Gender Equality Action Plan recommends a review of legal and other reforms to establish a statutory right to paternity leave for all workers in the public and private sectors, consistent with recommended good practice.

- What actions and investments have been made to support gender-responsive social protection and care infrastructure and services?

Former incarcerated women often face challenges in securing gainful employment. To address this issue the Department of Gender Affairs' programme for incarcerated women rate in the prison facilitates entrepreneurial training. The focus on micro-business skills seeks to provide women with a means of support upon their release from prison.

Similarly, programmes provide teen mothers with a supportive environment in which to complete their secondary education. Participants receive life skills training and work placement opportunities. The programme removes barriers to education through the provision of assistance for childcare needs, digital devices, educational materials, and support for participants wishing to pursue tertiary education.

The Government COVID-19 stimulus package includes a focus on battered women and disability (including children).

- What specific measures have been implemented to promote women's entry, reentry and advancement in the labour market?

Through programmes for incarcerated women and teen mothers (see above). The Department of Gender Affairs also provides advocacy services on behalf of clients, in collaboration with the Labour Department.

Programmes for training in non-traditional skills seeks to improve opportunities for women in non-traditional occupations, and to create an enabling environment for women to feel more comfortable with breaking cultural barriers in the job market. Training is delivered on the job or through training seminars. Areas open for training include, painting, tiling, upholstery, construction, small engine maintenance, and driving of heavy equipment.

4. Addressing the growing informality of work and mobility of women workers (paragraphs 40 (nn) to (qq))

- What measures have been implemented to promote the transition from informal to formal paid employment for women?

In order to remove any barriers that prevent women from entering the formal workforce the government is in the process of conducting a series of entrepreneurship training and making assistance available for childcare.

5. Managing technological and digital change for women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (rr) to (ss))

- What specific actions have been taken to support women's access to skills development and decent work in emerging fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics?

Design of a communication strategy to promote gender awareness.

The Gender Equality Action Plan's strategic goal with regard to digital technologies seeks to enable all to have equal access to the Internet for education, work and business; improved access to markets and wealth creation, wider networks, and supports and well-being. Recommendations include the promotion of women and girls' advanced technical skills and digital literacy, including dedicated scholarship opportunities; removal of exclusionary practices inhibit women's ability to participate; design of gender-aware promotions; and promotion of knowledge building on gender equality and inclusion of females' participation in the digital revolution.

6. Strengthening women's collective voice, leadership, and decision-making (paragraphs 40 (tt) to (aaa))

- What specific efforts have been implemented to support women's participation and leadership in trade unions, workers' organizations and employers' organizations?

Equality of treatment for women and men in the labour market is being addressed through the National Tripartite Committee with a focus on the Labour Code. The language has also been made gender-neutral and gender-inclusive.

Business and Professional Women, St. Kitts promotes gender equality, and its mission is to empower women and girls to attain overall gender equality. Activities includes training for women on boards, interview skills, empowerment, emotional intelligence, financial inclusion and leadership seminars.

7. Strengthening the role of the private sector in women's economic empowerment (paragraphs 40 (bbb) to (eee))

- What efforts have been undertaken to encourage private firms and institutions to mainstream gender equality considerations in policies and practices?
- What action has been taken to increase investment and support for women entrepreneurs?

Entrepreneurs are given help with start-up, growth and development. The Small Business Development Centre (SBDC) serves the needs of micro, small, and medium-size businesses with access to training, funding and loans through the Fresh Start Programme. Training opportunities and technical assistance for female entrepreneurs are promoted via the unit.

In 2019, the Ministry of Finance in the Nevis Island Administration (NIA), officially launched an Entrepreneurship Fund aimed at encouraging more women and youth participation. Recognising the challenges faced in accessing loans through the usual lending mechanisms, Government and Taiwanese-assisted funds provides loans at a nominal interest rate, to small businesses and start-ups owned, or operated by women and youth aged thirty-five and under.

In August 2021, the Government of Taiwan in collaboration with the Ministry of social development in St. Kitts and Nevis commenced the roll out of a project to provide technical assistance and financial inclusion for women's employment and entrepreneurship. In an effort to boost the economy following the pandemic, the maintaining of social stability through strengthening women's economic empowerment, the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (Taiwan ICDF) through:

- (a) Provision of financial assistance
- (b) Support for micro enterprises and women,
- (c) Combining credit guarantee mechanism, and capacity building of employment; and
- (d) Entrepreneurship to improve financing opportunities for enterprises.

The main components of the project are:

- (1) Institutional function enhancement;
- (2) Vocational skills training for women;
- (3) Counseling for women's entrepreneurship and development;
- (4) Counseling for MSMEs. The programme will conclude in December 2022.