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## **REPORT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

In recent years, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has made major strides in the protection of human rights, particularly among women, children and persons with disabilities. This portfolio now has new management, and lies in the remit of the Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy, Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs). By merging the Gender Affairs Division and the Child Development Unit under one Office, this country is now better able to prioritise the rights all persons, taking into account their race, age, educational background, geographical location and mobility. This paper will outline two (2) initiatives expected to effect meaningful change in gender equality on a national scale, and two (2) challenges which are slowing the pace towards achievement of this goal.

The first noteworthy initiative is the Central Registry on Domestic Violence. This is a Domestic Violence Information System designed to collect and integrate information relating to any person who is a victim or perpetrator of a domestic violence offense. Since operationalization in April 2016, the system has been fed by the National Domestic Violence Hotline (800-SAVE), and seven (7) shelters and counselling organisations, and soon, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (including Victims and Witness Support Unit), National Family Services and the Ministry of Health will also begin making inputs into the system. Data analysis will begin soon, and emerging patterns and trends will be used to classify, assess and predict individuals at high risk for becoming victims or perpetrators of domestic violence.

This information system has numerous strengths, chief among them is facilitating the standardisation of data collection on domestic violence, while promoting institutional strengthening among NGOs. This will facilitate a better understanding of the incidence of domestic violence; enhance the monitoring of violence intervention activities; and promote evidence-based programme development and policy design on these issues. At a time of scarce economic resources, this Office has partnered with civil society organisations in project planning and implementation. This approach optimises resources by combining government funding and expertise with civil society reach and manpower. The Central Registry is expected to revolutionise the treatment of domestic violence by measuring and evaluating the phenomenon; and strengthening capacity and collaboration among responding agencies. With this in place, the State expects to see marked improvement in effectiveness of its violence prevention and intervention initiatives, and a reduction in the incidence of domestic violence.

The second initiative to be highlighted is Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). GRB is a comprehensive mechanism which mainstreams gender equality throughout the public service by making budgetary allocations gender responsive for all government programmes, projects and policies. It requires government officials to identify inherent gender inequalities within the substantive areas of their respective Ministries; determine what is needed to bridge those gaps and incorporate the cost of adopting those changes into their annual budget proposals. This project has progressed to an advanced stage, with the completion of the Toolkit for Gender Responsive Budgeting for Institutionalizing Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming Practices in Government Ministries in Trinidad and Tobago. The next stage of the project involves training Ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in two areas: accurate preparation of a gender-responsive budget proposal, and analysis of gender-responsive budget submissions.

Implementation of GRB will signify the boldest step forward to gender mainstreaming adopted by this country, yielding considerable returns in two (2) areas: fostering a mentality of gender awareness throughout all government Ministries; and upscaling the pursuit of gender equality in their substantive areas which is more effective than having the Gender and Child Affairs office bear the sole responsibility of influencing country-wide change in this regard. This approach decentralises the resources and power to implement gender-responsive action, and will be supported by the work of gender focal points appointed within each Ministry.

It is noteworthy to mention the formulation of a Draft National Policy on Gender and Development. This Draft National Policy addresses issues such as violence against women, education, issues facing rural women, and climate change, articulating a clear philosophy for the Government's approach to securing the women's rights agenda. The final version of this policy is currently before Cabinet.

Despite these and other novel approaches, the unavailability of data on social issues has proven to be a persistent challenge to evidence-based programme design and evaluation thus far. Formerly, programme development evolved from political will at the ministerial level, based on anecdotal evidence and public outcry. Consequently, programmes were implemented to address urgent needs for vocational or social skills training, which did not always include a monitoring and evaluation component, and were not necessarily coherent with the ideological framework of

the Office. Furthermore, there was seldom systematic follow-up to determine if the training provided made a meaningful impact in the lives of the trainees; particularly in poor or rural communities. As a result, these programmes are now being assessed to measure their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender and equity. The outcome of the evaluations will determine the extension, modification or cancellation of these programmes. Further research is also required to determine the critical needs of the groups being served by the Office, in order to ensure the programmes developed are responsive to the needs of the target groups.

Another challenge to the work of this Office is the lack of a formal coordination mechanism to guide collaboration and information exchange among Ministries whose work impacts on gender equality. Once available the information is provided in a timely manner, however it is often the case that the information needed such as certain indicators of education, health or justice may not be captured by the data services of those Ministries. It is therefore more difficult to establish baselines and measure progress on gender equality in these areas. In order to address this issue, liaisons are being created in the international affairs and research units of relevant Ministries, with ongoing information exchange partnerships. This will enable a more informed and balanced assessment of gender equality and determine which services need to be enhanced to achieve these objectives.

The Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs) remains committed to partnering with other Ministries and civil society organisations to leverage the talents and resources of each stakeholder, with a view to attaining gender equality. Trinidad and Tobago is proud of its achievements thus far, and optimistic that the Gender Responsive Budgeting and the Central Registry on Domestic Violence will intensify efforts to promote equality in power relations among men and women, and significantly reduce the incidence of domestic violence. This Office is instituting monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, as well as information exchange protocols, while seeking innovative ways to achieve its mandate on limited resources. This country reaffirms its commitment to partnering with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean to develop effective strategies for providing the best opportunities to the various groups of women in Trinidad and Tobago.

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