

SEVENTH ANNUAL REPORT OF WOMEN & GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION



**PRESENTED TO THE SPEAKER
OF
THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OCTOBER 2018**

2017 - 2018

CONTENTS

Acronyms	3
Declaration	4
Membership of the Commission	4
Vision, Mission and Mandates	7
Executive Summary	8
Recommendations	9
Appendices	10

ACRONYMS

CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CISOCA	Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPAP	Country Planning Action Plan
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GO	Governmental Organisations
GECOM	Guyana Elections Commission
GPF	Guyana Police Force
HFLE	Health and Family Life Education
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
IGDS	Institute for Gender and Development Studies
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
IWD	International Women's Day
IDPVAW	International Day for the Prevention of Violence Against Women
MPs	Members of Parliament
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoPS	Ministry of Public Security
MoSP	Ministry of Social Protection
NDS	National Development Strategy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIS	National Insurance Scheme
PAHO	Pan American Health Organisation
PTA	Parent Teacher's Association
HRC	Human Rights Commission
SASOD	Society Against Sexual and Other Discrimination
UNAIDS	United Nations AIDS
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
W&GEC	Women & Gender Equality Commission

DECLARATION

This is the Seventh Periodic Report to the National Assembly on the status of the work of the Women and Gender Equality Commission, pursuant to the requirements of Resolution No. 86 which was passed in the National Assembly on Thursday, 21st May, 2009.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION

Members of the Commission consist of sixteen (16) persons who were sworn in on 27th August, 2009 by H.E. President Bharrat Jagdeo.



Chairperson
Indranie Chandarpal
Women's Progressive Organisation



Deputy Chairperson
Cheryl Sampson
National Congress of Women

WOMEN IN VOLUNTARY WORK



Magda Pollard



Vanda Radzik



Shalimar Ali-Hack

WOMEN IN TRADE UNIONISM



Karen Vanslytman Corbin
TUC - Women Advisory Council



Gillian Burton
Labour Union



Gaietrie Baron
Labour Union

REGIONAL WOMEN'S AFFAIRS COMMITTEES



Ernestine Barker Logan
Regions 3, 4 & 10



Nandranie Coonjah
Regions 2, 5 & 6



Bebbi Haliema Khan
Regions 1, 7, 8 & 9



Debra Ann Henry
Professional



Nicole Cole
Culture/Ethnic



Peter Persaud
Culture/Ethnic



Hymawattie Lagan
Women's Affairs Bureau



Renata Chuck-A-Sang
Private Sector

REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER RIGHTS' COMMISSIONS



Sandra Hooper
Rights of the Child Commission



Patricia Singh
Indigenous Peoples Commission

The Chief Executive Officer and Administrative Assistant assumed duty on 15th October and 1st November, 2010, respectively.

FULL TIME STAFF



Diana Swan-Lawrence
Chief Executive Officer



Maria Raghubir
Administrative Assistant

BACKGROUND, MANDATE, AND STRUCTURE OF THE WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION

The Women and Gender Equality Commission is one of the Four Commissions for the Promotion and Enhancement of Fundamental Rights and the Rule of Law that was established under section 212G of the Constitution. Members were appointed under Resolution No. 86 which was passed in the National Assembly on Thursday, 21st May 2009.

The Women and Gender Equality Commission shall promote national recognition and acceptance that women's rights are human rights, respect for gender equality and the protection, development, and attainment of gender equality.

The Women and Gender Equality Commission shall consist of persons from each of the categories referred to in subparagraph (a), (b), and (c), appointed by the President as follows - not less than five nor more than fifteen members, with expertise in women and gender equality issues, nominated by entities, by a consensual mechanism determined by the National Assembly, after the entities which shall include the Women's Advisory Committee of the Trade Union Congress, are determined by the votes of not less than two-thirds of all the elected Members of the National Assembly;

The Administrator of the Women's Affairs Bureau, by whatever name that office is designated; and a member who shall be a nominee, without the right to vote from the Human Rights Commission, Ethnic Relations Commission, Indigenous Peoples' Commission and Rights of the Child Commission.

VISION

An environment where the rights of women are recognized as human rights and gender equality is upheld.

MISSION

1. Promote gender mainstreaming in all policies and programs.
2. Educate women and men on the benefits of gender equality and ending gender-based violence.
3. Recommend, with the use of evidence-based data, timely policy, and legislative initiatives to uphold women's rights and gender equality.
4. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming within the society.

MANDATES

Constitutionally, the Women and Gender Equality Commission has the following functions:

1. Promote the issues related to the enhancement of the status of women, girls and gender issues.
2. Promote the integration of women's needs and interests and mainstreaming of gender issues;
3. Promote the empowerment of women;
4. Promote women's rights as human rights;
5. Raise the awareness of the contribution of women and problems faced by women including the recognition and value of unwaged work;
6. Promote women's needs, interests, and concerns in the wider spectrum of economic and social development and address both the practical and strategic needs of women.
7. Educate and monitor employees and the public on desirable employment
8. Monitor compliance and make recommendations for the compliance with international instruments to which the Government
9. Evaluate any system of personal family law, customs and practices or any law likely to affect gender equality or the status of women and make recommendations to the National Assembly;
10. Recommend and promote the implementation of legislation and the formulation of policies and measures so as to enhance and protect the status of women;
11. Promote, initiate or cause to be carried out research and the creation of databases on women and gender related issues including those health, especially reproductive health, violence against women and the family, and their socio-economic and political status, as the Commission may deem relevant or as may be referred to it by the National Assembly;
12. Promote consultation and cooperation with women's organisations in relation to decision making that affects the lives of women;
13. Recommend training and technical assistance to support initiatives by and for women and girls; and
14. Promote the participation of women in national decision-making.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report covers the period October 2017 to October, 2018. The W&GEC's total budget for 2018 is GYD 43,135,000.00.

In keeping with the Mission and Vision the Commission has successfully completed more than 90% of the programmes planned for 2018. The W&GEC and the Institute of Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) of the University of Guyana (UG) jointly collaborated and undertook the implementation of mutually beneficial activities in the realm of women's studies and gender equality; in accord with the mandates of both organizations.



Diana Swan-Lawrence
Chief Executive Officer

The W&GEC contracted International Human Rights Lawyer Ms. Melinda Janki to evaluate Women's Rights under National and

International Law in order to "Achieve gender equality and and empower all women and girls." She made several recommendations which are in the body of this Report.

In concurrence with our sixteen constitutional mandates, the W&GEC joined forces with several organisations to support the needs of women and girls through advocacy. The W&GEC implemented *suggestion boxes* and *bill board* in strategic areas across the ten (10) Administrative Regions in an effort to reduce sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), to bring awareness to GBV and to support victims of GBV to access available services.

The results achieved under the W&GEC's Access to Justice programmes in all ten Administrative Regions of Guyana are making measurable differences in removing barriers to women in leadership. A notable number of female Tosahos in indigenous villages were elected to office and several female candidates are vying for leadership in the upcoming Local Government Elections.

The Commission is still constrained by the non functioning of the Human Rights Commission which has a number of specific mandates as is outlined under Article 212G of the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The prompt establishment of the Human Rights Commission with the appointment of the Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer.
2. Produce a Harmonised Code of Law on Women's Rights: this should be one book that contains all laws protecting women but set out as a code, not separate laws. The code should be harmonised with international law obligations and with other national laws to ensure that there are no gaps in the protection afforded to women. The code should be written in simple accessible language as far as is possible.
3. Guyana should submit its report to the Committee established to monitor compliance under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The report was due on 1 July 2016.
4. Guyana should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women allowing individual petitions.
5. Repeal Article 149(6) which allows discrimination against women (and others) in the exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms.
6. Repeal Article 152 (Savings clause) which protects colonial legislation from challenge under the fundamental rights provisions of the Constitution.
7. Repeal Article 154(6) which allows Guyana to divest itself or limit its obligations under the international covenants incorporated into the Constitution.
8. A Sexual Harassment Policy should be instituted at all places of work and educational institutions as recommended by the WGEC in 2017. An immediate action would be to write to all employers asking them to publish the following statement, "Sexual harassment at the work place is forbidden. Employees who engage in sexual harassment are liable to disciplinary action, including dismissal."
9. Guyana should introduce and enforce legislation to identify and punish those who engage in sexual harassment.
10. Guyana should improve access to justice for rural women by having mobile courts as suggested by Madame Justice Roxane George in 2015.
11. Guyana should provide on-going specialised training on the Sexual Offences Act and the Domestic Violence Act for judges, magistrates, police officers, and others involved in the criminal justice system.
12. Guyana should investigate and report on conditions for women prisoners and evaluate conditions against the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules).
13. Review the penalties for criminal offences – raise the level of fines; add a wider range of penalties including compensation to victims, apologies/ admission of wrongdoing and other possibilities for non-coercive restorative justice
14. Carry out an analysis of the employment sector and identify what jobs are women in and how does their pay compare to men.
15. Introduce paternity leave in law; include paternity leave in contracts of employment and in collective bargaining agreements. Provide facilities for child care at places of employment.
16. Provide legal aid services throughout Guyana with priority being given to matters that affect women such as Gender Based Violence and other forms of discrimination.
17. Conduct training workshops and provide women with information on their legal remedies including redress for criminal offences and remedies against discrimination.
18. There should be a compulsory training course on women's rights for all MPs before they take up their seats.
19. Increase the 'Child Support' cost so that single parents can effectively support their children.

APPENDICES

Title	Page
The W&GEC Celebrates International Women's Day 2018	11
W&GEC's Regional Workshops Regions 1, 5 & 6	13
The W&GEC's Outreach to Mahdia, Region 8	14
The W&GEC's Outreach to Moruka, Region 1	15
W&GEC's Gender Based Violence Workshop	16
WGEC Holds 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence	16
The W&GEC Celebrates the International Day of the Girl Child November 2017	17
The W&GEC Celebrates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women – 2017	18
W&GEC's Meeting with IGDS/UG	19
W&GEC's meeting with the Ministry of Health	20
Meeting with Members of the Women's Progressive Organisation (WPO)	21
Meeting with the Caribbean Development Bank	22
W&GEC's Meeting with Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO)	23
Social Activist and Musician	24
Training for Public Health Nurses in Gender and Development	24
Meeting with General Secretary, GAWU	25
W&GEC's Meeting with Representatives from Bonaire	25
NGOs express major concern over elections in Guyana at UN meeting	26
The W&GEC's Media Monitoring Committee's Report	27
Celebrating Magda our Matriarch	28
Press Releases	29-30

THE W&GEC CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The First Lady of Guyana, Mrs. Sandra Granger joined the Women and Gender Equality Commission to observe International Women's Day 2018. In attendance were several diplomats, Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for International Engagement, UG, Human Rights Attorney Melinda Janki, and former Attorney General Anil Nandall, among others.

In her remarks H.E Mrs. Granger noted that women must command respect, establish control, and take responsibility. She noted that the patriarchal norms to which Guyanese society has become accustomed may "perpetuate discrimination against women."

The First Lady referenced the preliminary findings which indicated that "Reported incidents of domestic violence by an intimate partner in Guyana rose from 74.8 percent in 2011 to 89 percent in 2017, with females accounting for upward of 80 percent of the victims. The highest number of these crimes occurs in Region Three - Essequibo Coast and Islands, Region Four- Demerara/Mahaica and Region Six- East Berbice/Corentyne, which account for roughly three-quarters of the reported incidents of gender-based violence." She urged the audience to not ignore these statistics and to follow the recommendations made by Ms. Janki which will help us to move closer to gender equality at level of our families, communities, regions and country

Melinda Janki summarised the report on Women's Right Under National and International Law presented at IWD 2018 as follows:

Obligation under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women to obtain such data, report on it and use it to influence State policy and action.

The laws of Guyana provide widespread formal protection for women and formal equality in many areas of law. Nevertheless there are still provisions in law which devalue women. These include provisions in the Constitution e.g. Article 149 allows discrimination against women in the exercise of their fundamental rights and freedoms and Article 152 saves all colonial era legislation no matter how much it may adversely affect women. There is no prohibition against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

National law also contains provisions which devalue women e.g. A man is not guilty of rape if he reasonably believed that the woman gave her consent - the fact that the woman did not consent is legally irrelevant. (Sexual Offences Act)

There is a blanket exemption for sexual discrimination on grounds of

religion. (Prevention of Discrimination Act S20)

There is inadequate enforcement of laws to protect women. This is attributable to chauvinistic attitudes within the criminal justice system as well as a lack of knowledge of women's rights. For example it is a criminal offence for A to do violence to B. The police will normally arrest and charge A. However if A does the same violence to C who is a woman in the home, the situation has usually been treated as less serious. In response to this tolerance of violence against women, Guyana brought in the Domestic Violence Act 1996. Violence against women is still a serious problem in Guyana.

There is wholly inadequate provision for safe spaces for victims of domestic abuse, for counselling, for medical help and legal aid.

Women are also unable to obtain access to justice as a result of structural obstacles. There are not enough judges and the Judges and magistrates are not necessarily fully aware of international jurisprudence to enhance the status of women and entrench the principle of



equality for women. While the Family Court is very welcome the fact remains that there are not enough courts. This is especially a problem for women in rural or hinterland areas. Courts are unwelcoming places in which women often feel uncomfortable or intimidated.

The law observes a public/private divide. Matters in the public arena are regulated by law. Matters in the private arena are unregulated. The treatment of women has traditionally been put in the private arena where power is held by men and used without restraint. The law is only slowing bringing harm to women into the public arena where it can be prohibited. For example marital rape was not prohibited in Guyana until 2010.

The current culture of Guyana routinely devalues women. Obvious examples are dancehall music which belittles women and advocates violence, the advertising sector and the media which portray women as sexual objects. More pressure is needed on Government to use existing laws to put a stop to activities that are disrespectful of women. Women can also take direct action such as boycotting companies and media outlets, writing to them and asking the Women and Equality Commission to take up these issues.

The central role of women in creating and maintaining a peaceful and just society needs to be recognised and respected in Guyana. The Maputo Protocol (to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights) recognises, “the crucial role of women in the preservation of African values based on the principles of equality, peace, freedom, dignity, justice, solidarity and democracy” and may be a useful model.

A significant issue that remains to be examined is the psychological harm



done to women as a result of the current chauvinistic and violent culture e.g. the belief among some women that it is acceptable for a man to hit a woman.

The Chairperson, stated that according to the consultant’s findings on page 3 of the Preliminary draft, “Guyana has shown significant leadership by introducing laws that protect women. But there is little point in having a progressive legal framework if magistrates, judges, police officers and other public officials lack the resources to identify, arrest, try, convict and punish offenders. It

is also self-defeating to rely on public officials who do not understand women’s rights or continue to hold patriarchal attitudes. There appears to be something close to a culture of immunity for discrimination against women, including Gender Based Violence. The criminal justice system, especially the enforcement of laws that exist to protect women, needs a thorough overhaul”

This conclusion represents similar findings to that undertaken by the Commission’s ‘Access to Justice Programme’.



W&GEC'S REGIONAL WORKSHOPS REGIONS 1, 5 AND 6



THE W&GEC'S OUTREACH TO MAHDIA, REGION 8

by Bibi Khan

In a recent visit to Mahdia, Commissioner Khan met with Regional Educational Officer, Mr. Carl Parker, teachers and school children.

The Mahdia community shared some of their concerns:

- Most men are the “bosses” in the community. What they say goes, whether right or wrong, it matters not.
- They need more information and assistance to get out from their present status.
- There were many unreported rapes.
- Many students lack parental support – emotionally and financially.
- There is a dire need for recreational/sporting facilities.

The W&GEC advocated for the HFLE program to be done in all the classes throughout the county with trained teachers facilitating these sessions.

There needs to be an intervention from Indigenous Organizations to avoid the crisis of women being raped when intoxicated.

There is a need for emotional/mental health intervention.

Commissioner Khan also distributed posters to Mahdia's Police Station, Secondary School, Regional Democratic Council and businesses in the community.



THE W&GEC'S OUTREACH TO MORUKA, REGION 1

Commissioners Khan and Persaud met with Regional Officials, teachers, school children, Police Officers and residents of Quebana, Region 1 in a W&GEC Domestic Violence outreach.

by Commissioners Haliema Khan and Peter Persaud

The residents shared some of their concerns:

- There is a high rate of alcohol consumption and use of illegal drugs by the youths.
- There is a high rate of teenage pregnancy. Teenage girls are openly in cohabitating relationships with adult men.
- Children are using their knowledge of their rights to be indisciplined. Teachers are having a great challenge to discipline the students.
- Little or no job opportunities in the community.
- There is a need for a female police presence in the community.



W&GEC's GENDER BASED VIOLENCE WORKSHOP

by Ernestine Logan

Commissioner Ernestine Logan organised a workshop on Gender Based Violence which included the showing of a film 'The Unbelieving Mom' and a roundtable Question & Answer segment.

Facilitators included Bonny Alves & Charmaine Blackman, Probation Officer Ruebena Marshall and Police Officer Keaisha Erskine. The workshop was conducted in Wismar, Linden, Region 10 at Miracle Times Worship Center.

After the films were shown, the facilitator Ms. Marshall explained to the participants that women who might be financially dependent on male partners may be reluctant to

accept the fact that he is a child molester. Additionally, some women fear the possibility of physical abuse



or being without a male partner, because of financial and emotional dependence.

Officer Erskine assured participants that counseling was provided by the police and other trained organisations.

If the victim is under aged then a NGO would be involved. They can be enrolled into the policing scout group/ youth group.

At the end on the event the participants were encouraged to take abuse in the family seriously for it has far reaching consequences such as violent behavior patterns, death, failed relationships/marriages.



W&GEC Holds 16 Days of Activism to Prevent Gender Based Violence

The Commissioners of the Women and Gender Equality Commission (W&GEC) in 2017 held Conferences for 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence across Guyana. The conferences commenced in November 2017 and finished in December 2017 was held in Region 1: Mabaruma, Region 2: Anna Regina, Region 4: Sophia, Region 5, Region 6: New Amsterdam and Albion, Corentyne and Region 8: Madhia.

In addition to having conversations about violence

and sexual harassment the main purpose of the conference was to present stakeholders with

the forty-two recommendations presented to Parliament.



THE W&GEC CELEBRATES THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

NOVEMBER 2017



The W&GEC Celebrates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women - 2017



W&GEC Collaborates with IGDS/UG

W&GEC and UG are interested in cooperating with each other for the purposes of encouraging, enabling and improving the level of studies and research on various aspects of the status of women, gender equality and gender and development; Under these assumptions, the PARTNERS agree to work together within the framework and conditions stated under the Objectives of Cooperation as follows:

The overall objective of this MOU is to jointly collaborate and undertake the implementation of mutually beneficial activities in the realm of women's studies and gender equality. And to do so in accord with the mandates of both organizations; Specifically - the Partners agree to:

- Support the Institute of Gender Studies



- Develop and deliver courses and programmes on gender and development to address diverse
- Learning needs of UG's students, as well as government, civil society and business sectors.
- Support advocacy efforts to promote gender equality, as well as women's rights with appropriate
- attention to issues affecting girls, and engaging men and boys.
- Contribution to and support the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of information and data on Gender issues.



W&GEC's meeting with the Ministry of Health

Dr. Oneka Scott stated that Guyana was rated the 2nd highest in the Latin American countries for a high prevalence of teenage pregnancy. She added it was therefore critical that organisations such as the Ministry of Health and the Women and Gender Equality Commission collaborate to ensure that young people get information on reproductive health and rights from knowledgeable persons in leadership such as the W&GEC.

She added that offering services to adolescents who needed most was the priority for the Ministry of Health. She stated that the rights based policies that Guyana embraces were instrumental in ensuring that adolescents were getting the necessary services. She informed the Commission that the age group most affected by HIV was the 15 to 19 years group.

She stated that there were thirty two (32) sites across Guyana where adolescents could access sexual and reproductive health services. She

detailed the diverse range of services offered in Georgetown and Regions 9, Region 8 and Region 1.

She stated that women's sexual and reproductive health is related to multiple human rights, including



the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education, and the prohibition of discrimination.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have both clearly indicated that women's right to health includes their sexual and reproductive

health. This means that Guyana has an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill rights related to women's sexual and reproductive health.

She told the Commission that the Ministry of Health

was insistent that the Sexual and Reproductive Health Bill be debated in Parliament since only Jamaica and Guyana have produced such Bills,

Dr. Scott stated that data showed that there were many teenage pregnancies in low income areas such as Grove and Sophia; which made it necessary to make the services available so that the teenagers in the low socio economic groups

were not discriminated against.

She expressed concern that there needed to be better community relations since health care workers could not ignore the many daily occurrence of parents asking for Cytotec for their school age children. She stated that the Ministry of Health in collaboration with other relevant organisations must be supported to effectively address these issues. She added that the objective of the MoH is to prevent recurring pregnancies and support the females' reintegration into the schools.

Dr. Scott stated that sadly Guyanese have deviated from the community spirit. She was appalled with the cycle of violence with the older men recruiting the boys as sexual partners and the girls were also suffering.

Dr. Scott concluded that the Bill would protect the rights of the adolescents by giving them contraceptives in circumstances such as abuse by parents and step parents.

MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE WOMEN'S PROGRESSIVE ORGANISATION (WPO)

The General Secretary of the WPO encouraged the Commission to implement training programmes through the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute (GWLI) to train women in alternative skills. She recommended that the Commission advocate for women to be trained in leadership for the local government elections, while reminding the Commission that the GWLI was geared to train the women councilors in local government leadership. She

suggested that the Commission should start advocating for women to have a 50% leadership in Parliament.

It was suggested that conversations can start with the media as well as in other forums. Ms. Veersammy commended the Commission on the "Access to Justice" programmes where the feedback was very good and recommended follow up programmes.



Meeting with Caribbean Development Bank

The Chief Executive Officer Ms. Diana Swan-Lawrence met with Ms. Roberta Clarke, consultant with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) on 10th July, 2018. Ms. Clarke conducted an evaluation of the CDB Gender Equality Policy and Operational Strategy.

Ms. Clarke was interested in how the Commission conducted its Performance Measurement; the practice area that develops, implements, and ensures the relevance of meaningful, timely and

actionable information so that organizational leaders and members can continually manage for improved results. Ms. Clarke stated that Technical Assistance and training is delivered to support project design, work planning, the development of performance indicators and measurement strategies for internal monitoring and reporting.



Chief Executive Officer, Diana Swan-Lawrence meeting with Ms. Roberta Clarke, President of the Coalition against Domestic Violence, 2012-2016 Regional Director UN Women's Regional Office for Asia and Pacific.



Meeting with Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Deputy Chairperson, Commissioner Corbin and Chief Executive Officer.



Meeting with Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)

W&GEC's MEETING WITH PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANISATION (PAHO)

The Chairperson, Ms. Indranie Chandarpal, Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Diana Swan-Lawrence and Commissioner Debra Henry of the Women and Gender Equality Commission met with Dr. Ana Cristina Gonzalez Velez, Consultant on 26th September, 2018.

The discussion centered on interventions currently being implemented in the area of Gender and Gender Equality in Health. The Consultant's objective was to gather in-country data for a case study - Advancing



toward Gender Equality in Health.

The objectives of the case study are: To analyse the

mechanisms, strategies and organizational structure of the health sector that made it possible to advance towards gender equality within a framework of rights and intersectionality; To deepen the knowledge of the experiences and lessons learned from three countries in the Regions of the Americas; To identify key factors that made it possible to advance in this matter, as

well as the barriers and challenges that impeded acceleration towards gender equality in health and finally to examine whether the gender mainstreaming methodology is the most appropriate one, if there are other options to accompany mainstreaming (i.e. specific programs) or if it is otherwise the only way to advance towards gender equality



Social Activist and Musician

Faith Nolan is a musician who empowers others to sing for justice, healing and fun. Ms Nolan's visit to Guyana was at the invitation of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), University of Guyana (UG). This visit was made possible with the funding from the Women and Gender Equality Commission (W&GEC) following the MOU between the W&GEC and IGDS-UG for Extra-Mural Community Outreach programme that will support design and delivery of relevant courses and workshops to increase the scope and reach of the IGDS/UG as an important link with the rural communities.

Faith Nolan is known world-wide for her musical workshops with women in prison, in schools with both teachers and students and in indigenous communities. Through her music and work, Nolan the blues activist, challenged us to reflect on and critically analyse these issues in relation to Guyana's diverse realities. Nolan visited the prisons as well as the juvenile centres to interact with inmates



The self-taught musician interfaced with students and other invitees at the University of Guyana and Women and Gender Equality Commission on 24th and 26th September respectively in a rather deep discussion, telling of how indigenous people were ill-treated by the authority after their loved ones, young girls go missing and their search for them in Canada.

Training for Public Health Nurses in Gender and Development

The Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Diana Swan-Lawrence facilitated a training for public health nurses in gender and development.

The Topics that were discussed included:

- Strengthening the mental health capacity of community health leaders and supporting victims of Gender Based Violence;
- Strengthening health responses to Gender Based Violence;
- Disparities in Women's Health Care;
- Understanding traditional and community structures and their implications for care and health decisions;
- Strategies for leadership development so that participants are able to use the tool SALT (S: Stimulate conversations between community members, A: Appeal to imperfect, inherent Human values, L: Learn from each other and T: Transfer our Learning), as a transformational leadership tool to cultivate 'A different Way of Thinking and Influencing a different 'Way of Working' to impact Societal Health.
- The Objectives of the Training were to ensure that Public Health Students:

1. Gain a deeper understanding of transformational leadership and its link to goal-setting and delivering on the organisation's mandate;
2. Examine some of the main approaches to building team capacity in order to increase its ability to achieve results and perform at its best;
3. Gain greater insight into the principles of collaboration and how it can be used as an effective tool for influencing and achieving organization results; and
4. Leading with compassion and empathy for clients and patients.



Chief Executive Officer with Public Health Nurses

W&GEC's Meeting with General Secretary, GAWU

Mr. Seepaul Narine, General Secretary of Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU) in a meeting with the WGEC reported that with the B.E.V. Processors Inc. closure, more than 390 persons lost their job, mainly female workers. He said that 7,500 persons lost their jobs at Skeldon, Wales and Enmore sugar estates.

He said that a Special Purpose Unit was set up by National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL), which was supposed to look at the estates and prepare them for sale. He added that Enmore is up for sale and Demerara Distillers

Limited (DDL) was interested in purchasing that estate. Mr. Narine encouraged the Unions to invest in Guyana Sugar Corporation

(GuySuCo) and asked the Commission to consider the future of the persons, who depend on the sugar industry for their livelihood.



Meeting with General Secretary of GAWU.

WGEC's Meeting with Representatives from Bonaire

by Indranie Chandarpal, Chairperson

The representatives related that there was a policy whereby the sick from Bonaire were sent to Curacao, where it is closer and cheaper in order to receive medical treatment. Since the law was changed in October 2010 giving Holland increased control over policy decisions, a new policy was implemented. This policy sent them on a three-hour trip to Colombia which is costlier for them. The planes and hospitals are owned by the Dutch and this led them to the belief that the policy was created to provide business

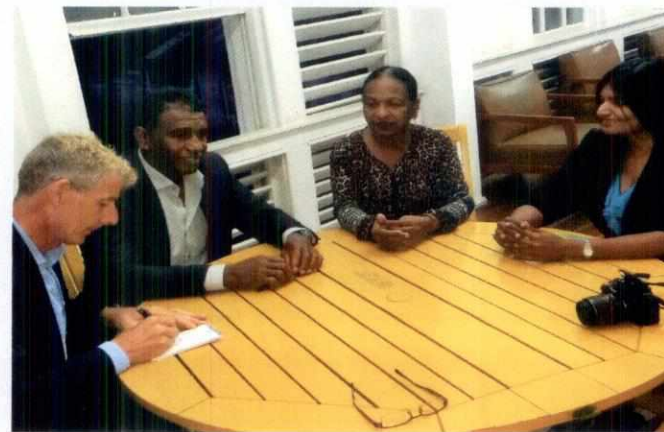
to Dutch Companies. It is also assumed that the policy is a strategy used to make the sick see death as their only alternative. It is alleged that people with minor injuries return as dead people with most of them dying in the ambulances. It is also further alleged that they (the Dutch) want to eliminate Bonaireans and replace them with European Dutch.

When the new government took over immigration was at 40%. After a 90-day period immigrants from Holland can now vote in elections.

This increased their argument that there is indeed an attempt to reduce the Bonaireans population and then replace them by European Dutch.

Euthanasia Law was

imposed on the people without any consultation being held by the Dutch Government. Considering that most of the population is Catholic they informed that the imposition



Chairperson's Meeting with UN

by Indranie Chandarpal

The United Nations (UN) and some Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) held a meeting to discuss a number of issues as it relates to future elections in Guyana. The representatives of the NGOs raised their concerns about a number of issues and made some recommendations to improve the elections process in Guyana. Also proceeding out of the meeting was the UN's promise to support the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) in certain areas.

An issue raised at the meeting was the need for a Media Code of Conduct to be signed and the establishment of a Code for Politicians. Using Kenya as a blueprint; Election Petition was proposed to be 3 years. Suggestions were made for measures to be put in place to deal with elections violence and delays in the counting process.

Among the other concerns were the need to reform and consolidate electoral laws and major concern surrounded Clause 18 of the Cyber Crime on Sedition, which is

currently being debated.

Some recommendations as it relates to GECOM it was recommended that meetings are opened to observers,



Chairperson
Indranie Chandarpal
Women's Progressive Organisation

professionalism and independence of the Commission be strengthened as well as the strengthening of the process of tabulating results and finally the clear marking of vehicles for transportation.

The United Nations offered to support GECOM by making an assessment of the said commission; speaking to Political Parties and look at the possible opportunities and challenges; hear from civil society and to provide continual UN Support.

Attendees included: Correta Mc Donald, Guyana Trades Union Congress (TUC); Indranie Chandarpal, Women and Gender Equality Commission (WGEC); Mr. Jerry Gouveia, Mr. John Smith and Mr. Norman Mc Lean, Representatives from Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC); University of Guyana Student Society; Alliance for Change (AFC) Youth Section; Representatives of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Guyana; Representative from PSC; Representatives of RISE Guyana; Representative from Progressive Youth Organisation (PYO); Representative from Indian Action Committee (IAC); Representative from Guyana Youth and Student Movement (GYSM); and Representatives from the Press Association.

THE W&GEC'S MEDIA MONITORING COMMITTEE'S REPORT

by Nicole Cole

Globally, women constitute 50% of all persons living with HIV. Gender inequalities are a key driver of women's vulnerabilities to HIV.

This report looks at how these structural factors shape specific behaviours and outcomes related to the sexual and reproductive health of women living with HIV.

Discussion:

There are several pathways by which gender inequalities shape the sexual and re-productive health and well being of women living with HIV.

First, gender norms that privilege men's control over women and violence against women inhibit women's ability to practice safer sex, make reproductive decisions based on their own fertility preferences and disclose their HIV status.

Second, women's lack of property and inheritance rights and limited access to formal employment makes them disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity and its consequences. This includes compromising their adherence



to antiretroviral therapy and increasing their vulnerability to transactional sex.

Third, with respect to stigma and discrimination, women are more likely to be blamed for bringing HIV into the family, as they are often tested before men. In several settings, healthcare providers violate the reproductive rights of women living with HIV in relation to family planning and in denying them care.

Lastly, a number of countries have laws that criminalize HIV transmission, which specifically impact women living with HIV who may be reluctant to disclose because of fears of violence and other negative consequences.

Conclusions:

Addressing gender inequalities is central to improving the sexual and reproductive health outcomes and more broadly the wellbeing of women living with HIV. Programmes that go beyond a narrow biomedical/clinical approach and address the social and structural context of women's lives can also maximize the benefits of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

Celebrating Magda our Matriarch

Magda Louis Muriel Pollard is recognised both nationally and internationally for her firm commitment to women's rights and the rights of the girl child. She was awarded the Fourth CARICOM Triennial Award for Contribution to the Caribbean Women's Movement in 1993 and the Special Award from the Caribbean Association of Home Economists in 1995. In 1996, a National Guyana Honour - the Arrow of Achievement (AA) was conferred on her.



Magda was born 29 March 1931 to Fitzgerald and Muriel Pollard in the village of Buxton on the East Coast of Demerara. She was educated at Smith Church Congregational School and Bishops' High School for Girls. A qualified Home Economist, she was awarded the Academic Post Graduate Certificate with distinction in Home Economics related to Community Development from Queen Elizabeth College, University of London (1957). Prior to this, she had enrolled in a three-year Teacher's Diploma Course at Queen's College, Glasgow in Scotland where she received prizes for Best Child Teacher and Needlework. In 1962, she was awarded a nine month Fellowship to several Teachers' Colleges and Universities in the USA.

In the sphere of Home Economics, Ms Pollard has held many posts including Principal of Carnegie School of Home Economics (1962-1978); Lecturer at the University of Guyana (1975-77); Member and consultant

for the Caribbean Home Economics Association- and Chairperson for the CXC Home Economics Panel (1975-1985). Publications include "Teaching Home Economics in the Caribbean" (1983) and "What's Cooking in Guyana".

Between 1980 and up to the present time, she has played a significant role in the sphere of Women and Development - as an administrator, advocate, consultant and advisor. She was the first Women's Affairs Officer appointed to the CARICOM Secretariat; served on the National - Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995); provided expertise in the preparation of a Commonwealth Plan of Action for Women; was a key Advisor in Guyana for the Canada-Caribbean

She is a strong advocate of the Human Rights Charter of the United Nations and the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) both of which Guyana has signed and enshrined. She therefore urges our Parliamentarians- to investigate, educate and support vulnerable groups and to legislate accordingly. Since the- CEDAW is the key instrument from which the Women & Gender Equality Commission draws its mandates. Ms Pollard reminds Parliament that the Commission is required to address current status of women in Guyana and to play a role in reporting on CEDAW country compliance.



Gender Equality Programme and Chairperson of the National Women's Commission and headed the drafting committee for the- chapter Women in the National Development Strategy; and also helped prepare CEDAW country reports. She is currently a Commissioner on the Women- and- Gender Equality Commission.

An active member of several Civil Society organisations, she has also served as President of the Guyana Girl Guides Association and on the Boards of Republic Bank, Archer Home, National Bureau of Standards and the National Insurance Tribunal. Ms Pollard is a long standing member of the Woodside Choir and she enjoys classical music in her leisure time.

W&GEC's Press Release on International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women -November 23, 2017

The United Nations' (UN) International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is an occasion for governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to raise public awareness of violence against women. It has been observed on November 25 each year since 2000.

While there has been some significant milestones at the policy and legislative levels and some excellent service providers and community-based advocacy at national and community levels by NGOs, the bare fact is that violence against women specifically and gender-based violence, generally is at epidemic levels in Guyana. The associative factors of gender-based violence, murder and suicide reach alarming proportions for a country with such a small population.

The situation in the interior is a negative one as shown by the WGEC "Access to Justice" outreach in all 10 regions of Guyana and reported to Parliament with our recommendations. A welcome push forward for Georgetown has come with the recent Courts set up to address Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence with Guidelines in place – and with the National Task Force finally activated as the oversight body. The question remains, however, as to what impact these progressive forward moves will have in the deep rural and hinterland areas – and how they will be effectively implemented there – with the currently inadequate court systems in place and virtually no effective support services, shelters and very limited counselling available?

At one of the WGEC-sponsored Parliamentary seminars held in 2015, the then Puisine Judge, Justice Roxane George promoted the idea, via a video recording, of mobile courts set up using buses and boats to deliver court services to remote communities. There are working precedents for this in other parts of the world, she reported. WGEC calls on the relevant authorities to have an honest review of its level of access to justice and related services for victims/survivors of domestic and gender violence and to take on board our recommendations tabled in order to better avail Guyanese everywhere of their rights to Gender Justice.

The Commission has recommended to Parliament the implementation of a Sexual Harassment Policy at all places of work and educational institutions. This has been accompanied by public advocacy by the WGEC at workshops and conferences and through Bill Boards and the wide dissemination of information and posters in the various regions. Sexual Harassment is rife in Guyana – but without conviction in courts. WGEC is of the view that the current "catch-all" law under which sexual harassment may be

prosecuted is inadequate. We have therefore been advocating for specific Legislation on Sexual Harassment with a view towards greater understanding of these rights and violations and attendant services and court support to better prosecute and protect. Sexual Harassment affects all genders and ages and we need to stop sweeping it under the rug where it remains festering in our society.

In observance of 25 November 2017, the Women and Gender Equality Commission held discussions and handed out posters at all the secondary schools around Georgetown. The objective is to reach all the secondary across Guyana. WGEC has also advocated for and recommended the establishment of Community Counselling Centres and "friendship benches" across the 10 administrative regions. The recommendations from the schools outreach and these regional conferences would be made public at a Round Table to be held at the Rights Commission Boardroom on 12th December, 2017.

Since 1996, Guyana ratified the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, known as the Convention of Belém do Pará which defines violence against women, establishes that women have the right to live a life free of violence and that violence against women constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This was the same year that the Domestic Violence Act was legislated in Guyana – as part of Guyana's commitments to the Beijing Platform of Action.

The Commission has taken note of all related issues of gender based violence in Guyana and is especially concerned with what is happening in the schools. We welcome the chorus of voices calling for an end to the violence that affects an estimated one in three women.

In support of what the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said in his 2014 speech "...we commend all those leaders who are helping to enact and enforce laws and change mindsets. We also pay tribute to all those heroes around the world who help victims to heal and to become agents of change."

We still have a hard and rocky road ahead to change those norms in our society that accept violence against women, children and all forms of gender-based violence. Attitudes, practices, beliefs are difficult to change. But change is also inevitable. Let 2018 see benign and positive winds of change flow through all Guyana powered by us all to make Guyana & Guyanese stop violence against women and children in all its forms and embrace gender equality, gender justice for all. The WGEC stands in solidarity with all such efforts.

W&GEC's Press Statement

The Women and Gender Equality Commission (W&GEC) notes with concern the allegations of sexual harassment by officials of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, (GGMC). The allegations were made public through letters by the victims and this signals a red letter day for women who have endured abuse but stayed quiet because of the dire consequences. The Commission would like to commend these women for their courage in coming forward to report these acts of sexual harassment.

The Commission is cognizant of the problems of sexual harassment and initiated a number of activities that were intended to encourage victims to come forward and report these cases. Unfortunately, victims were afraid to come forward and even when they were bold enough to start the process they chose to walk away rather than pursue to the end. Recent initiatives such as the Me Too movement (or "#MeToo") which is an international movement against sexual harassment and assault that was launched in October 2017 created a fillip for those who were victims and who felt that they had to endure this harassment. The fact that dozens of women have come forward and are speaking out against powerful men signals a new paradigm in dealing with this demeaning phenomenon.

The W&GEC in keeping with its mandate to recommend and promote the implementation of legislation and the formulation of policies to enhance and protect the status of women; has completed a review of the Gender Legislations which recommends that Guyana needs to put in place a Sexual Harassment Legislation. While we note the Discrimination Act of 1997 has sections dealing with Sexual Harassment we feel that there needs to be a stand-alone legislation. This is one of

the many proposals which we are recommending to Parliament for implementation. In fulfilling its constitutional mandate to promote women's concerns in the wider spectrum of economic and social development and address the needs of women as being different from those of men; the Commission has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Guyana to support the institutionalization of a Sexual Harassment Policy. We have also collaborated with the Social Sector Committee of the Parliament of Guyana to promote training and awareness among Legislators in order to signal at the highest level that sexual harassment will not be condoned.

The Commission on the occasion of International Women's Day initiated a campaign in 2015 where posters were printed and distributed to places of work and schools in an effort to remind the public about this violation. We also established suggestion boxes at prominent sites such as the University of Guyana, Turkeyen and Tain Campuses, the Guyana Post Office Corporation, the National Library, the Guyana Post Office Corporation, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and outside of the Women and Gender Equality Commission, Peter Rose and Anira Streets as well as in all the Regions of Guyana.

We see these two letters as being the catalyst for more victims to come forward and expose the harassment which we know is taking place. The women of Guyana like the women in other parts of the world are no longer prepared to accept these violations sitting down. Let us all take a stand against sexual harassment and no one should be afraid to speak up against this abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS 2010-2017



Handing over of the 5th and 6th Annual Report to Parliament 2017.

1. The need to expand the modality of the National Insurance Scheme's (NIS) Benefits for
 - Maternity
 - Dentures
 - Spectacles
2. Improved facilities/services for women who use speed boats as a mode of transportation.
3. CARICOM Model Legislation on Sexual Harassment in the Work Place.
4. The establishing of a few pilots of the Community Counselling Centres to combat the high incidences of gender based violence.
5. Women and Gender Equality Commission to be a part of government's delegation to meetings of CEDAW
6. Review the selection process of jurors with a view to widening the pool of eligible person
7. More sensitization programmes to be implemented for TIP and Sexual Offences
8. The creation of a policy on Sexual Harassment at the Place of Work
9. Increase in the fines for Protection Orders.
10. The building code to be reviewed to include provision of access to persons with disabilities.
11. Gender mainstreaming should be incorporated into the school curriculum.
12. Domestic violence should be included in HFLE curriculum
13. Advocate for all persons getting married to have marriage counseling.
14. Guidance and Counseling should be available in schools.
15. All cases of TIP should be dealt with by relevantly /specially trained magistrates.
16. All cases of gender based violence and sexual offences be dealt with by relevantly/specially trained Magistrate.
17. Need provision for written protocols for TIP
18. Noise nuisance offence should be determined by decibel level instead of affected private citizens.
19. Domestic Violence victims who do not wish to pursue prosecution against the perpetrator should be both placed on a one year bond and undergo mandatory counseling from a certified provider.
20. Resuscitate the Gender Desk at Caricom to ensure that all member states access the technical assistance needed to fully implement CEDAW and the other treaties our Governments have sign on to.
21. Gender and Development Training should be mandatory for all judicial, protective services, health and social services personnel especially those who interact with the public as part of their job.
22. Ensure there are active Gender Focal

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Points in each Government Ministry and organization.
23. The Ministry of Public Service to ensure that Gender and Development Training are made available to Public Service Employees.
 24. Gender Training to be included in the Health and Family Life Education Curriculum.
 25. Government to consider the Establishment of a national Gender Advisory Committee.
 26. Government to consider the provision for Paternity leave to assist women where there has been an addition to the family by birth or adoption.
 27. The State and National Institutions need to ensure that the Prevention of Discrimination Act and the Constitutional provisions on non-discrimination and equality are enforced. There is an urgent need for a Sexual Harassment Act.
 28. Resuscitation of the Gender and Development Centre at the University of Guyana.
 29. There is a need for a Work Place Policy on Flexible Working Hours for women who are the caregivers.
 30. Enactment of Legislation and Policy on Sexual Harassment in the Work Place.
 31. The delivery of Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive age appropriate Health and Rights Education in schools.
 32. Promote Parenting Skills Training in pre and post natal clinics in all health centres.
 33. Encourage more male friendly health centres such as the pilot project in Region 5.
 34. Gender and Development Training should be mandatory for all judicial, protective services, health and social services personnel especially those who interact with the public as part of their job.
 35. Strengthen Gender Focal Points in the Public Service.
 36. All programmes and policies should reflect gender mainstreaming for all government employees.
 37. Establishment of a National Gender Advisory Committee.
 38. Full Enactment of the Domestic Violence Act and enforcement of the Breach of Protection Order.
 39. Work Place Policy on Flexible Working Hours for all caregivers.
 40. Gender parity in Parliament and local government bodies in keeping with Guyana's commitment to Sustainability Development Goal.
 41. All Public Buildings should be accessible to persons with disabilities.
 42. All documents should be clearly comprehensible to persons with disabilities, e.g. braille.
 43. Equal NIS provisions for widowers and widows.
 44. Provision of adequate public sanitary facilities accompanied by public awareness campaigns for proper use and maintenance.
 45. Implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting.
 46. Encourage Government to sign-on to the Optional Protocol of Women.
 47. Speedy Enactment of the Juvenile Justice Bill

2017 - 2018

