

NATIONAL POLICY PAPER ON WOMEN

**WOMEN'S AFFAIRS BUREAU
GEORGETOWN, GUYANA**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Women in Guyana represent 50.8% of the population (Table 1) and approximately 24.4% of household heads (UNDP Human Development Report, 1995: p.64).

Table 1
Population of Guyana 1980 - 1992

	Male	Female	Total	Female as % of Male
1980	375,841	382,778	758,619	60.45
1987	372,317	383,755	756,072	50.75
1992	352,966	364,492	717,458	50.80

Sources: Population Census 1980 Guyana report - 1987;

HIES 1992

They make up 58.8% of the public service (Table 2), a majority in the informal economy and are major producers and distributors of food. Like women in other parts of the world, they manage multiple roles: employees, parents, community organisers, etc.

Within the last two decades great progress has been made towards establishing the legal framework of gender equity in Guyana. The steps taken include:

- the 1976 State Paper on Equality for Women;
- the 1980 Constitution of Guyana which enshrined the principle of equality between the sexes under Article 29(1)
- the 1980 signing and 1981 ratification of the Convention on all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- the 1985 adoption of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 (FLS);
- the 1990 signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with its emphasis on the status of the girlchild and on the need to promote a favourable interaction between the welfare and the rights of women and children;
- the 1990 enactment of the Equal Rights Act, the Family and Dependants Provision Act and the Married Persons Property (Amendment) Act;
- the 1995 signing of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women;
- the 1995 enactment of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act; and

**the 1995 adoption of the Beijing Platform
for Action for the Advancement of Women to
the Year 2000.**

Table 3.1
University of Guyana Enrolment by Faculty and Sex
1980, 1985, 1992

FACULTY	1980/81		1985/86		1992/93	
	M(%)	F(%)	M(%)	F(%)	M(%)	F(%)
Agriculture	4.3	0.7	4.8	3.8	3.4	1.5
Arts	14.0	23.0	4.9	12.7	5.6	11.2
Education	10.4	17.7	13.3	20.6	7.8	14.3
Forestry Unit			0.3		1.3	0.2
Health Sciences			9.5	11.6	9.5	9.5
Natural Sciences	14.5	11.6	8.8	6.2	7.1	5.5
Social Sciences	29.2	29.2	35.4	42.0	41.0	55.2
Technology	22.3	2.2	21.9	2.6	24.0	1.5
Special Students	5.3	10.6	1.1	0.5	0.2	0.5
TOTAL (N=100%)	1151	540	1175	845	1386	1586

Source: University of Guyana

Table 3.2
Technical Graduation: By Institution and Sex
1980, 1985, 1992

INSTITUTION		1980	1985	1992
University of Guyana (Technology)	MALE	96.5	95.6	97.7
	FEMALE	3.5	4.4	2.3
Technical Institutes	MALE	79.9	80.9	79.1
	FEMALE	20.1	19.1	20.9
Guyana Industrial Training Centre	MALE	83.0	86.6	89.5
	FEMALE	17.0	13.4	10.5

Source: Summary of Table 3.2.6 (1)

Table .4

Income Distribution within the Public Service by Sex
1993

SALARY SCALE	MALE		FEMALE		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	
17	161	4.3	74	1.5	235
16	46	1.2	19	0.4	65
15	47	1.2	9	0.2	56
14	56	1.5	48	1.0	104
13	66	1.8	43	0.9	109
12	93	2.5	82	1.7	175
11	56	1.5	18	0.4	74
10	133	3.5	137	2.8	270
9	152	4.3	154	3.1	306
8	229	6.1	350	7.1	579
7	111	2.9	138	2.8	249
6	319	8.4	540	10.9	859
5	95	2.5	95	1.9	190
4	159	4.0	174	3.5	333
3	243	6.4	568	11.4	811
2	521	13.8	940	18.8	1461
1	1289	34.1	1576	31.6	2865
TOTAL	3776		4965		8741
Not Ascertained	75				

Source: Compiled from records at Public Service Management

The economic crisis which began in the mid-1970s led to an enormous growth in the number of women working outside the home and to a flowering of the confidence and creativity of women. At the same time, the decline, which was accompanied by a dramatic deterioration of the social and physical infrastructure and large scale migration, increased the burden on women.

Also, notwithstanding Guyana's progress towards the near equality of women and men in law, the daily lives of women are shaped by the continued stereotyping of gender roles in the home, (where women are expected to carry most of the responsibility for housework) in schools and other places of education, (where girls and women continue to cluster into traditional areas of study (Table 3.1 and 3.2); and in workplaces, (where the majority of girls and women are still found in areas and at levels of work which are lower-paid (Table 4)).

Furthermore, women have inadequate access to credit (Table 5.1 and 5.2), land ownership (Table 6) and thus business ownership (Table 7). Women also remain a small minority in decision-making institutions in both the public and private sectors (Table 8).

Table 5.1

**Loan Applications Received and Approved by Type and Sex
1985, 1986**

		1985				1986			
		Male	Female	Joint	Total	Male	Female	Joint	Total
Applications Received	I	60.7	11.4	19.9	100.0	69.4	12.3	18.3	100.0
	II	1754	290	508	2552	1225	216	323	1764
Applications Approved	I	66.6	9.1	24.3	100.0	77.8	6.2	16.0	100.0
	II	1446	197	527	2170	1287	103	265	1655

Source: Caricom 1988:52-53

Table 5.2
Loans Approved by IPED

	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986
Total Loans Approved	458	303	165	102	29
Loans for Agro-industry	34	26	4		
Classification of Recipients: Men	343	199	87	73	
Women	28	20	9	17	
Joint: (Men & Women)	87	84	69	12	

Source: Country Report: Sam 1991

Table : 6

to
 Title of Property by Type of Ownership and Location of Property
 1986, 1992, 1993

AREA	1986			1992			1993		
	M (%)	F (%)	T (N=1000)	M (%)	F (%)	T (N=1000)	M (%)	F (%)	T (N=1000)
Rural	64.4	35.6	1046	66.2	33.8	612	76.3	23.7	996
Urban	58.0	42.0	433	59.3	40.7	339	63.6	36.4	522
Total	62.5	37.5	1479	63.7	36.3	951	71.6	28.4	1518

Source: Compiled from records at the Deeds Registry

Table 7

**Industrial Grouping of Self-employed Population By Sex
1992**

Industry	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	
All socio-Economic Group					
Agriculture, Hunting & Forestry	24861	39.3	9523	28.1	34384
Fishing	3274	5.3	600	1.6	3874
Mining & Quarrying	2288	3.6	253	0.7	2541
Manufacturing	5004	7.9	3341	9.9	8345
Electricity, Gas & Water Supply	94	0.1	-	-	94
Construction	2600	4.1	138	0.4	2738
Wholesale & Retail Trade	15615	24.7	15316	45.3	30931
Hotels & Restaurants	372	0.6	527	1.6	899
Transport, Storage & Communication	3567	5.5	205	0.6	3772
Financial Intermediation	31	0.1	22	0.1	53
Real Estate, Rent & Business Activities	738	1.2	218	0.6	956
Public Administration & Defence, etc	311	0.5	87	0.3	398
Education	75	0.1	139	0.4	214
Health & Social Work	141	0.2	80	0.2	221
Other Community, Social & Personal Service	1690	2.7	891	2.6	2581
Private Households with Employed Persons	174	0.3	430	1.3	604
Extra Territorial Organisations & bodies					
No Industry	2416	3.6	2064	6.1	4480
Total (N=100%)	63251		33834		97085

Source: HIES, 1992

TABLE 8
WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING INSTITUTIONS

	<u>LOCAL</u>		<u>PARLIAMENTARY</u>		<u>EXECUTIVE</u>
Female Council Members	Female Mayors	Seats held by Women	Shares of Seats held by Women	Shares of Women at Ministerial Level	
(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	
1990-94	1990-94	(as of 30/6/94)	(as of 30/6/94)	(as of 31/5/94)	
22	17	13	20	11	
<hr/>					
Female Permanent Secretaries		Female Judges		Female Magistrates	
(%)		(%)		(%)	13
1993		1993		1993	
33.3		20		21	
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Ambassadors/Head of Mission		Females on Boards of Financial Institutions		Female in Private Sector Executive Management	
(%)		(%)		(%)	
1993		1993		1993	
0		10		12.4	

Source:- UNDP, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1995: p. 61: Changes in the Situation of Women in Guyana - 1980-1993, Women's Affairs Bureau pp 12; 14; 15; 17; 36

Therefore, while Guyanese women are active in most sectors of the nation's economic, political, social and cultural life, gender stereotyping remains a barrier to the expression of their full potential as agents and beneficiaries of development.

At the root of this is the society's failure to accept childbearing and childrearing as social responsibilities in which men, women, and their communities play a part. It is no accident that many of the weaknesses that persist in the legal framework of gender equity relate to maternity laws. Guyanese society, like many others, have not yet recognised the work women do in the home, without a wage, is basic to development.

The growing sexual violence against girls and women both inside and outside the home is another telling indicator of the continuing imbalance of power between male and female citizens (Table 9).

TABLE 9

OFFENCES AGAINST WOMEN - 1992, 1993, 1994.

OFFENCES	REPORTS			CHARGES			CONVICTIONS		
	1992	1993	1994	1992	1993	1994	1992	1993	1994
RAPE	111	174	123	79	83	40	6	2	1
INCEST	3	13	2	2	7	-	1	-	-
INDECENT ASSAULT	19	78	31	16	8	13	3	5	1

Source: Guyana Police Force

For decades, women have attempted to organise themselves to change their conditions, but racial/political divisiveness has proved an obstacle to unity. Yet as shown above, the objective bases for unity are clear. Guyana's struggle for sustainable development can only be successful if it is based on certain fundamental principles, among which is gender equity.

This National Policy Paper on Women reflects Government's commitment to:

- improving its institutional capacity to develop, implement and evaluate programmes and projects from the vantage point of their impact on women;
- to network with non-governmental organisations which focus on women's issues;
- foster the inclusion of women in all areas of decision-making at both the national and local levels, including the communities;
- educate and inform the public and all its institutions about the central importance of taking gender issues into account in all areas of national life.

The national implementing mechanism is the Women's Affairs Bureau.

2. PRINCIPLES

All policies of the Government will be based upon the following broad principles:

- (1) That women's rights are human rights and they include equitable access in the economic, social, cultural and political spheres;
- (2) That women need to be able to live and grow as full and equal human beings who have value both as persons in themselves and as mothers, workers, organisers and community managers.
- (3) That equality between women and men must begin in the home, and that household democracy and the sharing of parenting and domestic responsibilities must therefore be promoted.
- (4) That children are not solely a family but also a social and community responsibility.
- (5) That all forms of violence against women are unacceptable.
- (6) That women's capacity to fully contribute to and benefit from economic, social, political and cultural development requires the equal and complementary partnership of women and men in all areas of personal and national life.
- (7) That there is urgent and continuing need to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women from the society.

3. GOALS

Through its Ministries and agencies, Government will develop policies and programmes to promote the following goals:

- (1) Equality of women in law, in keeping with Government's undertakings as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and other relevant instruments.
- (2) The transformation of cultural attitudes, customs and practices that discriminate against women.
- (3) Broad societal acceptance of child rearing and the other unwaged care of family and dependants as responsibilities to be equitably shared by men and women, with the active support of the State.
- (4) The availability throughout Guyana of water, sanitation, health, public safety, transportation and other basic services to support women in their multiple roles.
- (5) Equitable access by women to productive resources and economic opportunity; and equal pay for work of equal value.
- (6) The recognition and valuing of women's unwaged work in the household and community, in subsistence agriculture and family businesses, and in preserving the environment.

- (7) Women's access to reproductive health, which requires not simply the provision of facilities but the building of healthy male/female relations.
- (8) Equality of educational opportunity across class, race, culture, region, abilities/disabilities and gender, with particular attention to the needs of girls whose education is interrupted by pregnancy or for any other reason.
Attention will also be given to both girls and boys having equal opportunity for training in non-traditional areas of study.
- (9) The elimination of all forms of violence against women, in keeping with Government's obligations as a signatory to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women.
- (10) Equitable participation by women in the structures of decision-making in all spheres at both the local and national levels.
- (11) Women's realisation of self-worth.

4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

(1) WOMEN'S AFFAIRS BUREAU

The Women's Affairs Bureau will have specific responsibility for the formulation of 5 year plan of action, based upon this National Policy but with due attention to national development priorities,

regional initiative and the United Nations Platform for Action.

The plans of action will reflect adherence to the strategy of mainstreaming women's issues, as well as meaningful networking with non-governmental women's organisations.

Government will take immediate steps to strengthen the institutional capability of the Bureau to deal effectively and efficiently with its responsibilities which include the following:

- (i) the formulation, preparation and up-dating of policies, programmes and plans of action to improve the status of women in Guyana;**
- (ii) the monitoring and evaluation of all official policies and programmes with a view to promoting women's equitable participation in development;**
- (iii) the establishment and maintenance of effective links with non-governmental organisations to enhance all aspects of programme activities relating to women;**
- (iv) the promotion and support of measures to strengthen the capacity of non-governmental women's organisations;**
- (v) the promotion of public awareness of and sensitivity to gender issues;**
- (vi) the obtaining of technical and funding assistance for governmental and non-**

governmental programmes which impact positively upon women;

- (vii) the coordination and facilitation of the work of the Inter-Ministry Committee (see 4.2); and
- (ix) The provision of technical support to the National Commission on Women (see 4.3).

(2) INTER-MINISTRY COMMITTEE

Permanent Secretaries in all Ministries will be responsible to Cabinet through their respective Ministers for the implementation of policies and programmes as they relate to their own Ministries.

In addition, Government will establish an Inter-Ministry Committee comprising a high-level technical officer from each Ministry and the head of the Women's Affairs Bureau, who shall be the chairperson. Committee members will be responsible for the implementation of the goals and in particular for:

- (i) giving technical advice to the Women's Affairs Bureau in the formulation of policies and programmes; and
- (ii) the submission of half-yearly reports and recommendations to Cabinet.

(3) NATIONAL COMMISSION ON WOMEN

Government will establish a National Commission on Women composed of experienced persons and representatives of women organisations. The Commission of not more than ten (10) persons which will be broad based and national in character will have the task of promoting gender issues and shall be adviser to the government on women issues.

The Commission will:

- (i) keep all relevant legislation under review and submit proposals for amendment to the Minister;
- (ii) make recommendations to the Minister, the Women's Affairs Bureau and the Inter-Ministry Committee regarding policy and programme directions;
- (iii) conduct formal investigations for any purpose connected with the carrying out of its functions either on its own initiative or at the request of the Minister, the Women's Affairs Bureau or the Inter-Ministry Committee;
- (iv) undertake or assist the undertaking by others of any appropriate research and educational activities;
- (v) lobby in support of national issues related to the advancement of women through formal and informal means; and

- (vi) stimulate broad national debate and action on the issues of gender equity.

5. CONCLUSION

Government recognises the cultural influences of an ethnic and religiously diverse society and the particular situation of women in especially difficult circumstances, e.g women with disabilities and women of the hinterland.

Government also recognises that an ongoing monitoring and evaluation system will be required to ensure that this policy is effectively pursued. As such, Government undertakes to conduct periodic reviews of this policy with the aim of introducing appropriate and timely amendments.

This policy is aimed at achieving an improved status for women which will result in an improved quality of life for the entire society.