



**Remarks delivered to the Launch of the Joint SDG Fund Programme:
Modernization of the Social Protection Systems in Jamaica,
Towards an Adaptive, Shock Responsive, Inclusive System**

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Across the globe, whether in small island developing states (SIDs) or larger countries, one of the greatest challenges of our time is how to sustainably facilitate comprehensive development. We are all connected, yet social, economic and institutional barriers and poverty put people in society, in particular women behind.

Not too long ago at the beginning of this month, we celebrated International Women's Day. This year, the theme is 'Gender Equality for a Sustainable Tomorrow' This reiterated the reality that "[Gender equality is not just a standalone](#) Sustainable Development Goal, it is not just a nice thing to do, equality of opportunity of all people regardless of class, race, gender is a catalyst to achieving all 17 goals of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Take for example, the impacts of COVID-19 and Climate change. The theme of CSW66 which ended on 25 March was "*Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes*". The Commission in the outcome statement of CSW 66 stresses the urgency of

eliminating persistent historical and structural inequalities, eradicating poverty and disadvantages in access to resources, social protection systems and public services, ...and stressed the need to recognize and adopt measures to reduce, redistribute and value unpaid care and domestic work ... by prioritizing, inter alia, sustainable infrastructure, social protection policies and accessible, affordable and quality social services, including care services, childcare and maternity, paternity or parental leave.

UN Women's [latest data](#) on the global impact of COVID-19 estimates that the pandemic will force an additional 47 million women and girls into extreme poverty, that is increasing the total number of women and girls living in extreme poverty to 435 million. We have many studies specific to Jamaica identifying the risks for Jamaica re climate change thanks to the Global Affairs Canada and UKFCDO funded EnGenDER project.

In terms of climate change, “with Jamaica’s high risks of experiencing not only hurricanes but also flooding, earthquakes, droughts, tsunamis, heat waves and health hazards (as seen presently with the COVID-19 pandemic), [there is an urgent need for action plans to embed both gender and age considerations across all sectors](#)”. The Global Affairs Canada UKFCDO EnGenDER project Gender and Climate Risk Report for Jamaica led by UN Women outlines this in detail.

For UN Women, it is essential that both in theory and in practice, we encourage all partners and stakeholders to **‘leave no one behind’** and with this recognize the increased vulnerability of women is rooted in the reality that gender inequality is cross cutting and a part of all social issues and all existing systems. The arc of any country’s true sustainable development involves full and free participation of every woman, man, girl or boy in every aspect of society. Shock,

and gender responsive social protection is an essential way to effectively and tangibly support equality in opportunity.

Through the UN SDG Fund, and under the leadership of The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Women in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP), UN Women is pleased today to participate in the launch of the Joint Programme: **'Modernizing the Social Protection System in Jamaica'**, which will work to modernize existing social protection systems in Jamaica, and 'build forward equal' towards a more adapted, shock responsive and inclusive system.

Through this Project, UN Women will support the modernizing of Jamaica's Social Protection System through a multi-dimensional approach, providing technical support in the form of gender analysis of beneficiary assessments, (of both the legal and policy frameworks on social protection and the PATH cash transfer programme respectively). The aim is that the programme will be more responsive and designed to match the needs of men and women, thereby narrowing the inequalities between them and the inequalities they face generally. This builds on extensive experience UN Women has in the region with supporting the development and implementation of gender-responsive social protection. This includes technical support for social protection reform; undertaking institutional assessments of social assistance programmes from a gender-responsive perspective – that is how are they benefitting or don't benefit women and men's and children's needs. We have already supported innovative pilots with UNICEF and WFP, such as in St. Lucia, where women beneficiaries of public assistance in that country have benefited from being linked up to child care services which has in turn, allowed them time to more

meaningfully pursue technical and vocational education training, productively enhancement training, and psychosocial support. There are times when a hand up is all people need. This is how we support graduation.

We will continue to advocate for national social protection systems to be both universal (accessible to all who need them) and responsive, whether from the lens of addressing the gender-specific needs or conditions that demand social protection throughout our life cycle (including maternity; women's disproportionate responsibility for domestic and care work) or their increased vulnerability to unemployment and limited participation in entrepreneurship. We also must factor in Gender-based violence, (GBV) including sexual harassment which inherently limits opportunities for decent work; and even gender poverty risks in retirement, older men who find themselves without the support of their families having not provided for them and older women having no or too small a pension which is also linked to women's higher unemployment during their working age period. Through this joint programme, we will clearly demonstrate our dedication to being responsive and effective in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable of women, with special consideration to those who should have prioritized access to social services and benefits, including single parents— the majority of whom are women, teenage mothers, widows, and overall, recipients of public assistance.

Congratulations to the Government of Jamaica. UN Women acknowledges and supports the vision and dedication of the Government to realize a Jamaica where: *"Jamaicans are Empowered to Achieve their fullest Potential (National Goal 1)"*¹. We are pleased, therefore, that through this joint the Joint

¹ SDG Fund Document, Jamaica. Page 5.

Programme: **‘Modernizing the Social Protection System in Jamaica’**, we can continue our support of the Jamaican government and its people, in its present and future efforts to build a more sustainable, inclusive, and equal society for each and every citizen in Jamaica, especially addressing the barriers that are based on gender inequality. Thank you.