



Event: Open session, BBE Stakeholder Meeting

Remarks delivered by: Ms. Tonni Brodber, Representative

- UN Women MCO Caribbean, Co-chair – BBE RPSC

Date & venue: 5th June 2023 – Intercontinental Hotel, Dominica (Hybrid event)

Protocol

- The Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit, Prime Minister of Dominica and Minister for Investment and Governance
- The Honourable Dr Cassandra Williams, Minister of State in the Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services, with special responsibility for Seniors Security, Children at Risk, Gender Affairs and the Differently Abled, Dominica
- The Honourable Orando Brewster - Minister of National Mobilisation, Social Development, The Family, Gender Affairs, Youth, Housing and Informal Settlement in St. Vincent
- Senator The Honourable Gloria A Thomas - Minister of State with Responsibility for Social Development and Gender Affairs for the Government in Grenada
- Ms. Veronica Charles, Permanent Secretary (ag.) with responsibility for Social Development and Gender Affairs, Ministry of Social and Community Development, Housing and Gender Affairs in Grenada

- Ms. Sheila Imbert, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Public Service, Home Affairs, Labour and Gender Affairs from St. Lucia
- Chairperson: Ms Melissa Morgan, Director – Bureau of Gender Affairs, Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services, Dominica
- Ms. Janey Joseph, Director of Gender Relations in St. Lucia
- Ms. Jemima George, Head of Gender Affairs in St. Vincent and the Grenadines
- Mr David-Éric Simard, First Secretary (Development) High Commission of Canada in Barbados
- Ms Jenny Karlsen, Deputy Director, Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- Other Senior government officials
- Other UN Partner Agency Representatives
- Representatives of Civil Society Organisations
- Representatives of private sector institutions
- Members of the Media
- Other distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen

Good Afternoon!

The morning before my flight here, my husband decided to engage me in deep talk - the children were watching their morning cartoons, and I have a real challenge that whenever a TV is on I cannot help but watch it...I am working on it. My husband knew at least one clear way he would get my attention was with the following statement 'maybe we should do away with the word gender, I

mean it is only leading to confusion- why don't you just say what you mean because isn't gender a fancy way to describe sex, what you mean is'... I got in my feelings and I explained to him... I pontificated about the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and why gender was used and added while right now the conversation seems unable to grasp beyond sexual orientation and gender identity, we mean how inequality has been intertwined into our institutions, opportunities or lack thereof, because of what is perceived that women and/or men can or should do.

On the plane ride over I was thinking over this project, and I returned to one of the OG, Original Greats - Arthur Lewis and the Theory of Economic Growth and I think I have a winning argument.

Now we have embarked on the goal of achieving sustainable development and Prime Minister and Ministers I am going to claim that Dominica will be the world's First Climate Resilient Country. We have to speak it into being. If we are thinking fundamentally about development, it is about time and choice. The time to make decisions and the choice to make decisions that best serve humanity. Choice because you have the resources, finances and skillsets, to make informed decisions. Now Sir Arthur Lewis all those years ago was talking about economic development but it seemed to me, the more I read that he was talking about sustainable development. He identified economic activity, increasing knowledge and increasing capital as critical to being able to achieve economic development, and that would increase choice. He also noted that there is no way this could be achieved "without accepting the challenge of nature". He also stated that we must all "be willing to experiment to seek out opportunities".

So where do we find time in choice in our economic activity? Who is engaged in economic activity?

Let us start with who is engaged in economic activity. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines we know that the High unemployment rate is experienced mostly by women and youth, which is surprising given what we know about our tertiary education rates. Grenada reported in its Voluntary National Review (VNR) that it too is challenged by a relatively high youth unemployment rate, also a high rate among women. This too was the case for Dominica.

In a UN Women study on **Labour Force participation** we had six countries across the Caribbean that noted that even though women were better educated than men, the economy was still not taking full advantage of the available human resources because women were not reaping the full potential benefit of their education. In St Lucia (2017) that meant that only 53% of working-age women were employed.

A key area of vulnerability noted in the VNR by Dominica is that the pandemic in particular exploits weaknesses that already exist and while our informality is an incredible source of our innovation and creativity, it becomes a challenge when we have natural hazards, whether they be a COVID-19 pandemic or a tropical storm or a hurricane.

Is it choice and/or lack of opportunity, lack of space? Why are our countries missing out on the 'hidden figures' of these educated women and these uneducated youth who are talented in many ways, but the outputs of their talent may not be the way in which we would like it to be manifested in our community.

Social protection programmes are one way in which countries have been trying to address this and in Dominica you have over 40 safety net programmes. Public spending on social assistance was about 2.2 percent of GDP in 2016, of which 64 percent is spent on cash transfers. Now in Saint Lucia we have an example of how much more successful these programmes can be when you explore who is on the programme and why are they not graduating. We recognised most of the people on the programme were single women who had many children and because they did not have funding for childcare, they were not able to strengthen their skillset to graduate. Through the Build Back Equal project we will not only be able to continue the work in Saint Lucia but also to expand to Dominica, Grenada and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Let us return to the time issue and why our countries are not reaping the benefits of these high education rates among women. Also, what work are women doing that we are not accurately reflecting? Work perhaps that is not considered 'economic activity?' Work like cleaning the house, taking care of the elderly and getting children to school on time. That unpaid care that really during the pandemic demonstrated to us, that work is being done but it is not necessarily reflected in our economy.

The Grenada Labour Force Survey (LFS) was used to generate data for the indicator SDG 5.4.1 'Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work.'

Dominica noted in its 2022 VNR that this was one of the few goals not yet on track to be achieved in the SDGs [to "Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate"]. The good news is that the

Build Back Equal project - will assist you in not only getting the data, but the programming that will address this gap.

Increasing knowledge for informed choices.

In the Dominica VNR you note that the focus on development is equal, and I think Dominica is unique in the Caribbean because no other country gained Independence – through a process led by a woman, Dame Eugenia Charles, who was later elected in 1980 as our first female Prime Minister, and who also was the Caribbean’s first female Prime Minister. With 44 years of Independence behind you, taking stock of what this means in terms of opportunity for women across your society, going beyond the fact that the majority of people in this room are women, that the majority of people in our tertiary institutions are women and understanding why the investment is not giving the return that the country deserves, is critical.

As Alwin Bully said: *The calm blue sea does not divide, but rather connects us – expansion.*

That is what this Project does. While our stories are unique and nuanced, we are connected in many ways and through this project we will continue to grow and learn from one another.

In the Caribbean, women-owned businesses - 8% of those persons in the formal economy who own businesses are women, of that 8%, 1% has over 5 employees. So, what you are looking at is that the majority of people are really managing themselves. In the case of a natural hazard where is the sustainability? For many of our young people, they too are not getting the business skills they need to be

able to thrive. This project will be able to support that and not only that, increased capital. We need to thank the Government of Canada for an investment of 10 million Canadian dollars to do this work, but the private sector is also on board, and soon we will be launching in each of the countries, a new private sector entity that will be giving loans to gender-responsive businesses and these businesses do not need to be businesses owned by women. They need to be businesses that have products that serve equality, that have employees who serve equality. So we are excited, because we know that private sector are key to increasing capital and we also know that they are key to having more capital in our region.

I humbly propose to Sir Arthur Lewis that ***Dignity*** is one of the last aspects of this work. There are too many fantastic Dominican women who are not getting a chance to live out their potential because of a conflict in a relationship that is not effectively solved and they lose their lives. This project allows for support before that happens. Referral pathways, that work. That's what we need to be able to do. So, essentially this dignity as well is rooted in the fact that in spite of Tropical Storm Erika, in spite of Hurricane Maria, [which unfortunately the last two times I came to Dominica was to support in the response] I see in Dominican peoples' eyes -resilience, when I ask how it has been; there is still a bit of sadness. But there is that resilience because you have survived and hopefully will continue to thrive. I know our Grenadian sisters and brothers knew that after Ivan and we know La Soufriere in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines caused the same.

So essentially this project is about partnership and collaboration, between governments across governments, CSOs, the private sector and development partners, we are here for you.

Some of you may have noticed I used the word gender once and I had to use it, and I will have to tell my husband, because there is a moment when we are talking not about biology but about the expectations around that biology that inform our policies and decision making. So gender is an important word. Gender analysis is critical. And this project we know will seek to serve Dominica; it's people and the people of Eastern Caribbean, Better! Thank you.