

Presentation to the 8th Commonwealth Women Parliamentary
Conference

by

Minister of Social Protection – Honorable Volda Lawrence M.P

**Changing the World Through Our Participation: Overview of
Sustainable Development Goals**

07/25/2015

A pleasant good afternoon to all.

Esteemed Chairperson, Moderator Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, Executive Members of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, Fellow Parliamentarians, Special Invitees, I am delighted to be with you at the 8th Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians Conference and to participate in the discussions pertaining to the key issues of Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women at the National and Regional levels in the Caribbean. I would like to congratulate you for your efforts over the last eight years to ensure Women's involvement and participation at all levels. Heartiest Congratulations and I hope at this meeting that your deliberations would be purposeful and meaningful and that a Comprehensive Action Plan would be designed to effectively promote and achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. It is therefore with that sense of anticipation and excitement which the presenters brought today that I look forward to our continued discussions and I would like to express a hearty thank you to the organizers and UN Women for affording me this opportunity to be present and to share in this significant event.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the outcome of our participatory collaboration in June was centered on the proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be tabled. A Group inclusive of Technocrats then reviewed the SDGs and today I am tasked with presenting to you the results and action plan drafted so that you will have the data around which our discussions was crafted. In perusing the list of the proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals I would like you to focus on Goal NO.5 which reads: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Our group, in recalling Caricom's commitment to Strategic Development Priorities and the Caribbean Joint Statement on Gender Equality, highlighted that SDG no 5 should be prioritized regionally.

As you are all aware, achieving gender equality and empowering the girls and women of the Caribbean are crucial to the development of our national and regional economies. It is critical that we remove the bias, which stigmatizes girls and women leading them to the belief that they lack the requisite skills as their menfolk and are incapable of performing with the same levels of efficiency. The time is opportune for us to affirm our girls and women and awaken their consciousness to the fact that they not only are gifted proportionately with skills but that they can execute tasks too with an appreciable high level of performance. To this end, a 3-point plan of action was proposed namely that the relevant ministers would be reached, that an effort would be made to raise the level of awareness at the Community level, and that Priority statements would be developed for Ministers to present to their various cabinets.

Further, the Group envisaged as follow-ups, that Outcomes Statement would be shared with participants, that UN women agencies would develop key messages on Gender Equality and the SDGs, that all

Parliamentarians would develop advocacy tools re GE and SGDGs, and that Ministers, Parliamentarians, the Government of Antigua & Barbuda would share Outcomes Statement at the different fora, that is, during Cabinet Meetings, to all political parties and to Regional Ministers respectively, hence our presence here today. The Group is convinced that engaging all in this constructive process should result in positive action whereby girls and women from the region are motivated to improve their lives by choosing to be involved in career paths and entrepreneurial practices that could improve the wellbeing of themselves and their family and where they can make a significant contribution to the society as a whole.

Another strategic issue, which the Group considered of paramount importance, was that Caricom should take steps to fill the Gender Desk at the Secretariat ASAP with a regional expert. There is no doubt that this would pave the way for the effective dissemination of information re Goal No 5 of the SDGs across the Region. The establishment of such a Desk and the presence of a Resource person will definitely facilitate the process by allowing initiatives and strategies implemented in each region to be communicated and channeled effectively. For this purpose, the action plan seeks to lobby Caricom and Member States and to follow this initiative by communicating officially to the Secretariat on the Status of the Desk. It is perceived that advocating at the National levels to the relevant Ministries can help in speeding up the process of identifying an individual knowledgeable in this field, who, once he/she assumes office can monitor and provide the relevant feedback to Member States.

The third outcome of our deliberations focused on the pivotal role that Caricom could play in furthering the cause of Gender Equality and the

Sustainable Development Goals regionally. There was an urgent call for Caricom to coordinate and lead the discussions on the SDGs, since, as the governing authority entity for the Caribbean, it was in a position to actively promote and encourage urgent action that would guarantee the sustainability of the Region. With regard to the action plan, it was proposed that there should be strategic participation in the ECLAC meeting in Trinidad and Tobago, to use this forum to sensitize participants of the proposed SDGs and to rally support for their implementation. Agencies such as UN women, UNFPA, CDB, and the Foreign Affairs Ministers were targeted and encouraged to look for entry points for experts present to be engaged in the mechanisms and dialogue moving forward. In short, in order to keep the momentum, the group was recommending that, with the identification of the proposed SDGs, Caricom should not allow too much time to elapse but try to involve all stakeholders ASAP to recognize the need for concerted efforts to address the issues inherent in each goal and devise strategies to effectively deal with them.

Fellow participants, you know quite well, that any project has to have embedded in its vision a monitoring factor whereby tracking of the project can be done and evaluations executed every step of the way to ensure that the finished product conforms to the initial specifications. The proposed SDGs are in effect similar to a project and also require close monitoring nationally and regionally. Therefore the fourth outcome stressed the need for coordinated efforts to develop and implement an inclusive M&E framework for the SDGs. In other words, to track the progress of the strategies initiated for each goal, it was agreed upon that Parliamentarians should advocate for a Regional M&E framework and by extension the same should be done at the national

level to the relevant ministries so that the national and regional strategies could be monitored, evaluated and synchronized. It is evident that with an effective monitoring system in place and feedback readily available that national and regional governments can piggy back exchanging ideas, communicating success, piloting joint projects; in fact that M&E framework would allow for close and inclusive collaboration.

The next strategic issue that arose was the question of finance. We are all aware that funding is a crucial factor for any project no matter its dimension. Without available funds, it would be nigh impossible to get any project off the ground. You can therefore appreciate with the proposed 17 SDGs the magnitude of our undertaking and the funds that need to be generated not only for the implementation but the sustainability of each input. Hence issue no. 5 called for adequate and targeted financial and human resources for the gender responsive implementation of the SDGs. The action plan calls for Parliamentarians to advocate for these resources; together with the CPDC and Members, they need to involve Finance Ministers re GE&SDGs. You know that our Finance Ministers control the coffers so they have to be targeted at the inception.

Further, the scope of the advocacy has to be widened, and a series of steps was outlined namely that Outcomes Statement be presented to Cabinets; that Parliamentarians and Ministers advocate at the Community level and use parliamentary processes to ensure that GE and SDGs are included in national budgeting processes; that interest groups, NGOs and Private Sector be mobilized to advocate for GE and the SDGs; part 2 of this venture calls for intensifying the drive, that is, that Parliamentarians position GE and SDGs in all financial processes; that they share available Country Strategy Papers (CSP) and Country

Gender Assessments (CGA) and use International and Regional financial Institutions Country Strategy Papers to solidify their intervention.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this issue of funding is vital to the implementation of the SDGs, so all and I stress ALL have to be proactive in this drive to generate substantial funding.

This brings me to the last but certainly not the least strategic issue that was raised namely that we build on existing partnerships to engage Governments, civil society and the Private sector in gender responsive implementation of the SDGs. The SDGs concern all of us, they deal with each aspect of our existence be it social, environmental, political, financial, human. It is the cornerstone for our development and for our sustainability hence the responsibility of all to advocate on their importance. While the UN Women, UNFPA, CPDC agencies are tasked with creating targeted advocacy tools on GE and SDGs, today we are sharing with you the results and action Plan. It is envisaged that we Parliamentarians can sensitize at every level and underscore the importance for the implementation of the SDGs and Gender Equality.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is in a nutshell, the strategic issues that were raised and the action steps that were outlined. To recap very quickly, there were 6 target areas namely (1) Prioritization of goal no. 5 of the Proposed 17 SDGs, (2) Filling the Gender Desk with a Regional Expert, (3) Recommendation that Caricom coordinate and lead the discussions on GE & SDGs regionally, (4) Call for the Implementation and development of an inclusive M&E framework for GE & SDGs, (5) Advocacy for adequate and targeted financial and human resources for gender responsive implementation of the SDGs and (6) Building on existing partnerships to ensure implementation and monitoring of the SDGs. We all recognize that youth empowerment is vital to the process

of promoting the SDGs and to this end; we recommended that at least two youth fora should be organized on GE and SDGs. As I mentioned at the outset, we are all involved and need to be conscious of the pivotal role we have to play if we are not to lose the momentum of forging ahead with promoting and achieving Gender Equality and The SDGs.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you my thoughts on the Proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the Caribbean. During my presentation, I alluded to the fact that each of these goals dealt with a social, political, environmental, human and economic issue. The Caribbean presents a diversity of peoples, geography and dimension, but the common thread is that each country faces issues inherent in the list of goals in varying degrees. Nonetheless, as a region, concerted efforts have to be made to address these issues; discussions must be ongoing and a unified approach must be solicited. Clearly, countries will have to prioritize goals, will have to shape their response to goals in accordance with their economies, but the underlying and essential factor is that consultations must be ongoing so that ideas could be exchanged, resource personnel could be shared, joint projects could be undertaken. We should learn from our experiences with the MDGS, that a unified rather than an individual approach is the way forward. It is of paramount importance that as a region, the Governments work together to ensure viability and sustainability. The Caribbean needs to be resilient and take urgent action to solidify its social, political, environmental, human and financial infrastructure if it is to survive as a competitive regional entity and ensure the wellbeing of its people. The Caribbean must embrace these SDGs and work relentlessly to the fulfillment of these goals. That

is the task that we have to pledge to and the ACTION in which we have to be involved.

A UNIFIED APPROACH MUST BE SOLICITED