

Antigua and Barbuda
Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
Report

2020-2024

Beijing Platform for Action Acknowledgements

The Directorate of Gender Affairs, under the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation & the Environment, prepared this national review on the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda would also like to express gratitude to all of its stakeholders within the various ministries, civil society organizations and persons who would have been of assistance or offered support in some way throughout the drafting of this report.

Antigua and Barbuda's National Review of the Beijing Platform for Action would not have been possible without the support, partnership and contribution of our respective stakeholders, thank you.

Introduction

Antigua and Barbuda is a twin small island developing state located in the Eastern Caribbean. According to the Statistics Department, Antigua and Barbuda has an approximate population of 96,453 people. Antigua covers a land mass of 108 square miles, with Barbuda occupying 62 square miles.

In 1995, Antigua and Barbuda joined with countries from around the world in Beijing to discuss and address the issues and challenges facing women, at the Fourth World Conference on Women. It was at this conference that Antigua and Barbuda signed on to and adopted the Beijing Platform for Action – a global agenda for women’s empowerment. This signalled the country’s commitment to prioritize gender equality, women’s empowerment and strengthening efforts and action to address the challenges faced by women and girls. The BPFA sets strategic objectives for the achievement of gender equality in twelve critical areas of concern:

1. Women and poverty
2. Education and training of women
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women and armed conflict
6. Women and the economy
7. Women in power and decision making
8. Institutional mechanism for the advancement of women
9. Human rights of women
10. Women and the media
11. Women and the environment
12. The girl-child

In the year 2000, at the twenty third special session of the UN General Assembly, the progress being made towards the BPFA was reviewed. The UN Economic and Social Council requested that all states that have adopted the BPFA undertake and submit comprehensive national level reviews of the achievements made and challenges encountered in implementing the BPFA.

Due to its empowering and long-term impact on women’s rights, the Platform for Action is reviewed and appraised every five years to continue to implement its commitments. The year 2025 will mark the 30th anniversary of the Declaration and Platform for Action. Countries are preparing by having national consultations and engaging stakeholders, Antigua and Barbuda is no exception.

During the review period, various consultations, and stakeholder engagement sessions were held with government officials, civil society organizations, and vulnerable groups to ensure that the review would be comprehensive, holistic and provide a true representative of various groups and the country in general.

The review of Antigua and Barbuda’s progress in creating an equal and equitable society where gender equality is present is divided into 4 sections. **Section one** provides a synthesis highlighting the core elements of the country-level review process, main achievements, challenges and setbacks over the past five years, and a maximum of two promising practices that may be relevant for other countries, preferably with a focus on measures with a transformative potential; **Section two** provides macro analysis of priorities, achievements,

challenges and setbacks, with a focus on the past five years, as well as new and emerging priorities for the future.; Section three provides a more detailed analysis of measures taken to advance gender equality across the twelve critical areas of concern of the BPfA and the relevant SDGs with a focus on the last five years while; **Section four** covers national processes and mechanisms, linking those related to the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with those related to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; **Section five** highlights the progress on the availability of data disaggregated by sex and gender statistics, linking the monitoring of implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with gender- responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while; **Section 6** present forward-looking reflections on future challenges and priority actions that are needed to accelerate the implementation of the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda, notably as part of the Decade of Action for sustainable development.

ACRONYMS

A&B	Antigua & Barbuda
ABAPD	Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities
ABEF	The Antigua and Barbuda Employers Federation
ABIIT	Antigua Barbuda International Institute of Technology
ABS	Antigua Broadcast Station
ABSSB	Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Board
ABSTEP	Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment
AMCP	Antigua Marine Conservation Programme
APPA	Antigua Planned Parenthood Association
APUA	Antigua Public Utilities Authority
ASC	Antigua State College
BFW	Blended Financing Window
BHI	Basic Health International
BPfA	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
CAPE	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CariMAN	The Caribbean Male Action Network
CAT	Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CC	Climate Change
CCEDM	Caricom-Canada Expert-Deployment Mechanism
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CDEMA	The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
CIWiL	Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSEC	The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DOE	Department of Environment
DoGA	The Directorate of Gender Affairs
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAG	Environmental Awareness Group
EFL	Emerging Female Leaders
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessments
EMERGE	Each Man Engaging Responsible Genuine and Empowered Programme
EnGenDER	Enabling Gender Responses Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean
EPMA	Environmental Protection Management Act
EWS	Early Warning System
FAO	The Food and Agriculture Organization
FSSD	Family and Social Services Division
FSW	Female Sex Workers
GBSV	Gender-based sexual violence
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRACE Programme	Government Residential Assistants Care for the Elderly and eligible Programme Unit
GPU	GRACE Programme Unit
HPV	Human Papilloma Virus
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEC	Information Education Communication
IHO-GBV	The Integrated Health Outreach - Gender-Based Violence Coalition
ILO	The International Labor Organization
IWD	International Women's Day
JURIST	The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening
L3F	Lifelong Learning for Farmers
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MCI	Men's Critical Issues

MESH	Meeting Emotional and Social Needs Holistically
MSME	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
NAP	National Action Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NEMMA	Northeastern Marine Management Area
NGM	National Gender Machinery
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NODS	National Office of Disaster Services
NVRCD	National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for Disability
NYPAAB	National Youth Parliament Association of Antigua and Barbuda
OECS	Organization of the Eastern Caribbean
OICP	Offshore Islands Conservation Programme
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PDNA	Post Disaster Needs Assessment
PIMU	Project Implementation Management Unit
PM EDP	The Prime Minister's Entrepreneurial Development (EDP) Programme
PSA	Public Service Announcements
RER	Redonda Ecosystem Reserve
RPFAB	Royal Police Force of Antigua & Barbuda
SARC	Support and Referral Centre
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SIRF	The Sustainable Island Resource Framework Fund
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
SOMC	Sexual Offences Model Court
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
SVSU	Special Victims Support Unit
TBF	The BeFoundation
TIP	Trafficking in Persons Prevention Unit
TIPPC	Trafficking in Persons (Prevention) Committee
TRPI	The Red Pledge Initiative

TWM	Together We Must
UN Women	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UWI	University of the West Indies
VAW	Violence Against Women
WHO	World Health Organization
WiREDI	We Resilient Educated Dynamic and Inclusive
WLSP	Work and Life Skills Program
WMO	World Meteorological Organisation
XCD	Eastern Caribbean Dollars
YWiLAB	Young Women in Leadership – Antigua and Barbuda

1. Over the past five years, what have been the most important achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women?

Antigua and Barbuda's country level review process of the Beijing Platform for action was extremely comprehensive and meticulous in nature. It began with a formal communication being sent out to the Permanent secretaries and directors of all government agencies and departments, that detailed and explained what the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) is and also requested their support and cooperation in relation to the provision of relevant information and data that may be required from their entity, for the purposes of the drafting of the national report for Antigua and Barbuda.

The national level review process also encompassed an exhaustive and widespread public awareness and sensitisation campaign for the general public, on the Beijing Platform for action and the reporting process. The Directorate of Gender Affairs (DoGA) issued multiple press releases to national media explaining the history and importance of the Beijing Platform for Action, and the implications of submitting the report and being assessed on the progress the country is making and the challenges that are being faced. Representatives of the Directorate of Gender Affairs also made multiple media appearances on both television and radio to discuss the BPfA and the review process to ensure awareness and knowledge of all key stakeholders and the public at large. Social media was also used as a way to sensitise the general public and ensure that individuals are aware of what the Beijing Platform for action is and that Antigua and Barbuda is reporting in 2024.

Additionally, a national Beijing Platform for Action Working Group and steering committee was established to ensure that the process was inclusive and that there was national ownership of the report and the process. The committee comprised women's groups representatives, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), the police, legal representatives, the national statistics department, legal affairs representatives and others. The committee had a mandate for giving technical advice and support in relation to the coordination of the reporting process, public relations, gathering and compilation of information and administrative support.

The information for the report was gathered primarily through emails and letters being sent to various national stakeholders, and the respondents sent back information which supported the effort to comprehensively answer the questions being posed for the purposes of completing the report. A national consultation and validation session was also held that facilitated the additional gathering of information from key stakeholders, as well as the opportunity being provided for stakeholders to validate the information that was gathered and to provide key and critical feedback to ensure that the report was accurate and reflective of the national reality and facts.

The report was then drafted by the technical officers of the Directorate of Gender Affairs to encompass all of the inputs and feedback given by all national stakeholders in both the public and private sector, as well as civil society.

In relation to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Antigua and Barbuda, there has been great progress, however, there is still room for improvement, as gaps remain. In terms of successes and progress, there has been a gradual and consistent improvement in women's economic opportunities and prospects, which has been accomplished through increased access to tertiary level education with the establishment of a new university in Antigua, the University of the West Indies (UWI) Five Islands Campus, as well as

government offered capacity building programmes for aspiring female entrepreneurs and financial institutions offering loan and grant products that women can take advantage of. Also, the country has been strengthening its capacity to address violence against women as it established the support and referral centre (SARC) in 2017, which was the first one stop centre created in the Caribbean to offer services and support for people facing gender-based violence, women have predominantly benefitted from the SARC based on statistics. Antigua also established a model sexual offenses court and put into place a sexual offenders registry and supporting legislation to protect people from sexual violence and from perpetrators. Also, the Directorate of Gender Affairs has been implementing activities to strengthen women's influence on decision making and leadership, under programs such as its emerging Female Leaders (EFL) Programme which has executed activities such as mock Parliament sessions, public speaking competitions, networking sessions and business seminars. In relation to challenges, more resources are required for the national gender machinery to be more impactful and sustainable, and the issue of Gender based violence is still quite pervasive, and there is likely underreporting taking place nationally, by both women and men. Additionally, there is still a glaring disproportionality in relation to women being underrepresented in politics.

Moreover, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has sought to consider and address the specific needs of women and girls from marginalized groups in line with the principles of leaving no one behind by mandating departments such as the Directorate of Gender Affairs, the national disability office, the AIDS secretariat and legal affairs to focus on and prioritise the issues and concerns affecting vulnerable women and girls, and to mainstream the most pressing considerations into policy, programming and Legislation. All these entities have sought to do this, in collaboration with each other, civil society and with support from both the government, as well as regional and international development agencies.

Antigua and Barbuda has established some good practices as it relates to creating transformative solutions to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment. Some of these are our gender responsive social protection system which includes uniform grants for students, a school meals program, a utility subsidy for elderly persons, food vouchers for local supermarkets, and an amendment in the legislation that was previously created in the 1940's to be more inclusive, strategic and gender responsive, the new legislation came into effect in 2020 and replaced the old one of 1946. Additionally, the Support and Referral Centre has transformed the way gender-based violence is addressed nationally In Antigua and Barbuda, serving as a strong base of coordination, from a trained and gender responsive multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary sexual assault response team, that provides medical, legal, psychosocial and referral services to those facing violence. This has instilled confidence in the general public, in relation to the government's capacity to address the issue of violence against women and has fostered a stronger and more cohesive collaborative approach from the critical stakeholders responsible for provision of services to survivors of violence nationally.

Ultimately, Antigua and Barbuda is a small island developing state and faces inherent constraints and threats that undermine capacity and ability to achieve sustained economic growth and continued national development that is gender responsive and inclusive of women and girls and those most vulnerable within the society. Limited finance is accessible by the national gender machinery to execute programs and initiatives and to undertake trainings, and create policies, this will need to be improved in order to ensure the continued impact of the work of the gender bureau. National gender and social statistics are also severely lacking and this will need to be improved upon and support garnered in order to facilitate the implementation of more evidence based interventions that are meeting the actual needs of

vulnerable groups and key populations. There also needs to be more policies that protect women and girls and vulnerable groups such as a national gender policy, a national workplace harassment policy and updates to legislation such as the domestic violence act to ensure that the legislation is responsive to the evolving trends nationally in relation to violence against women and girls and gender-based violence, more generally.

Additionally, in Antigua and Barbuda our culture still has elements of patriarchy that manifest in different ways that can hinder gender responsive development.

2.) Over the past five years, what have been the top five priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?

Antigua and Barbuda has had a variety of priorities and focus areas for advancing gender equality nationally, over the past 5 years, across different sectors and areas. The top 5 priority areas are listed below:

a. Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes

This has been one of the main and overarching priorities in Antigua and Barbuda over the past 5 years, because many of the gender and social issues that have a detrimental or adverse affect on vulnerable groups of people are due to underlying cultural and societal ideologies that are rooted in discrimination and stereotypes. The Directorate of Gender Affairs has done work to address this issue through comprehensive and extensive public education and awareness raising on gender equality and on the importance of identifying and dismantling harmful gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms. As part of its mandate to empower women and promote gender equality the Directorate of Gender Affairs integrates a basic gender sensitization or understanding gender module into all its workshop and outreach activities. The introductory gender session provides basic definitions of gender and sex and discusses how rigid gender roles and stereotyping can lead to discrimination and more extreme forms of violence, discrimination, and inequality.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs has also drafted a national gender-based violence strategic action plan for the period 2023-2027, which encompasses negative and harmful behaviours and attitudes towards vulnerable groups, and in particular discriminatory and stereotypical actions that can lead to gender based violence and marginalisation. The strategic action plan presents solutions on how to address these issues and guides relevant stakeholders on their role in awareness, response, and prevention. In relation to these issues. The national gender-based action plan is currently awaiting approval from the relevant authorities.

Public informational and education communication materials, brochures and knowledge products have also been produced and widely disseminated across Antigua and Barbuda. The materials are knowledge products are used to provide information on how gendered norms and stereotypes limit women choices, and access to opportunities and resources and may lead to discrimination and violence. Community groups and the

general public have used the materials for further education and training among their populations. The Directorate of Gender Affairs uses various strategies to reach target groups through performing and visual arts at the community level. The annual 16 days of Activism Campaign is also used as a strategic public awareness campaign with the aim to foster change and address harmful social norms and gender stereotypes. Based on feedback provided on the Directorate's public engagement and mobilization work, there seems to be a greater shift among the youth population's attitudes and behaviour towards gender equality.

Antigua and Barbuda also has civil society and Non-governmental organisations that do programming work around gender and social issues, and many of them do awareness campaigns to highlight the harm caused by discrimination and stereotyping, and they have hosted workshops and done community outreach and media appearances to amplify the promotion of gender equality and the eradication of discrimination.

b. Eliminating violence against women and girls

The issue of eliminating violence against women and girls has been a top priority in Antigua and Barbuda over the past 5 years. As stated earlier, the Directorate of Gender Affairs has sought to strengthen the country's policy framework in relation to gender-based violence by drafting a National Strategic Gender Based Violence Action plan, with support from the CARICOM-Canada Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM). This plan covers the period of 2023-2027 and looks at women and men's experience of gender-based violence, looks at cultural and religious factors, effective stakeholder engagement, government and institutional response capacity, improving protection and prevention for survivors and holistic and gender responsive legislation. This policy has been submitted for review and approval to the relevant higher national authorities.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs continues to operate the Support and Referral Centre (SARC), which was the first one stop gender-based violence centre established within the Caribbean. It allows for medical legal and psychosocial services to be offered from one safe and convenient location. As part of the SARC, there is a 24 hours gender based violence national hotline. The crisis hotline is manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide an immediate response to callers' needs. Callers can also contact the Emergency medical services, (911) and be patched through to our hotline at no cost to them. Additionally, The SARC team provides support and encouragement during legal proceedings and guides survivors through the process of getting a protection order. Moreover, The SARC provides a range of counselling options such as individual, couples, group, and family sessions to encourage positive growth and holistic healing after an incident of violence. In an emergency situation, shelter for victims of gender-based and sexual violence can be made available for up to 48-hrs. If the SARC is unable to provide appropriate or ongoing care to a client, they will be referred to an alternate service provider that would be better able to help them navigate the healing process. SARC staff can also assist clients with planning for their ongoing safety in the event of an incident of violence or the threat of violence.

In relation to gender-based violence legislation in Antigua and Barbuda, this has been strengthened within the past 5 years. In 2022 the lower house of Antigua and Barbuda passed the Sexual Offences Registry Bill. The Sex Offenders Registry Bill 2022 seeks

to see convicted offenders' names publicly listed, along with other pertinent information like their date of birth, nationality, current home address and workplace in an effort to make the public aware that a sexual predator may be in the area. It aims to reduce incidents of sexual reoffending by monitoring convicted sex offenders, and by facilitating the sharing of information with participating jurisdictions within the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs continues to educate the general public on gender issues and advocate for the elimination of violence against women through community outreach programs. The Directorate also provides gender-sensitization and capacity-building training to persons working within the public and private sectors. Specialized training is also offered to key stakeholders who offer direct services to victims/survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. Stakeholders who have received specialized training include medical professionals, police officers, counsellors and social workers, judicial officers and judges, and psychosocial service providers.

c. Gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience building and strengthening women's participation in ensuring environmental sustainability

The issue of climate change and disaster risk reduction has been a global priority over the past 5 years, and this has certainly been the case in Antigua and Barbuda, particularly as it relates to ensuring that women and girls, and vulnerable groups are resilient to the implications of the impacts of climate change and disasters and ensuring that they are playing an active role within the environmental and climate change space, generally.

Antigua and Barbuda was the first country to gain access to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in 2018, through the Department of Environment (DOE), whose director is a woman and is also the country's ambassador for Climate Change. In the years since gaining access to the funds, the DOE has executed many climate change adaptation and mitigation projects, policies and grants, including ones benefiting women and girls. In October of 2020, through the GCF, a gender action plan related to improving resilience in the building sector was drafted. This document sought to operationalise the constraints and opportunities for women and men identified during the gender analysis towards fully integrating them into the project design. Also, under the Environmental Protection Management Act (EPMA), Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Environmental Management Plan must include evaluation of environmental and social impacts for any development. Additionally, the Department of Environment has a Sustainable Island Resource Framework Fund (SIRF Fund), which is mandated to provide support to vulnerable groups within the context of disaster risk reduction and climatic impacts and to make funding decisions with gender and social safeguarding being pre-eminent guiding principles.

The Department of Environment also created a Gender, Environment and Social Inclusion Advisory Committee to ensure that Gender Considerations and Social Safeguards are prioritized at all stages of policy, program, and project development for actions funded by the GCF and the Adaptation Fund.

Moreover, The National Office of Disaster Services has partnered extensively with the Directorate of Gender Affairs over the past 5 years to do trainings and sensitisation around gender responsive early warning systems, gender vulnerabilities and disasters, flood based management and gender and gender based violence within disaster and emergency contexts. This continued partnership has allowed for gender and social considerations to be consistently mainstreamed into disaster management in Antigua and Barbuda. Antigua and Barbuda. NODS also works in tandem with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency to incorporate Gender and Social Safeguards through the Comprehensive Disaster Management Framework.

Furthermore, the Environmental Awareness Group (EAG), the most prolific environmental non-governmental organization in Antigua and Barbuda was led by a woman from 2018 until her recent resignation in March of 2024. The EAG has since multiplied its efforts at public awareness about environmental conservationism in Antigua and Barbuda and has also led a community wide effort to discuss sustainable development and land management in the Northeastern Marine Management Area (NEMMA), the largest marine protected area in the twin island state.

d. Gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions)

Antigua and Barbuda has sought to prioritise the strengthening of its social protection legal framework and programs generally, to ensure that vulnerable groups' needs are being met in the most effective and impactful way. In 2020, the Social Protection Act was passed into law, replacing the Poor Relief Act (1961) and added new elements of support such as food assistance/voucher programmes, funeral grants, a fire victims' grant, help for the homeless, home help for the elderly, and support for children, the disabled and the indigent. Additionally, there was also the creation of the Social Protection Board and a Social Protection Commission, to provide essential oversight and promote transparency. This is another new component of the act, in keeping with the increased levels of inclusivity and the evolution of the social protection system. The Act mandates that the Commission must have a representative from a women's rights organisation. This measure ensure that women's concerns are mainstreamed into the Commission's outputs.

The Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Scheme provides a Survivor's Benefit to women who at the time of their husband's death are ten years below the pensionable age or older having been married for not less than three years. The Benefit amounts to 50% of the pension the deceased insured person was receiving or would have received, and no beneficiary receives less than \$350.00 per month. Men are also eligible to receive a Survivor's Benefit once they are an "invalid" who had been mainly supported by their wife prior to her death.

e. Women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises

Antigua and Barbuda has prioritised women's entrepreneurship and women's enterprises through programmes such as the Work and Life Skills Programme which has provided courses on marketing, branding a business, entrepreneurship and financial

literacy. Additionally, Antigua and Barbuda has benefitted from the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs Program which has given local women knowledge, network and access to launch and scale successful businesses and enterprises. Additionally, local credit unions and banks have developed financial products such as savings schemes and business grants to empower aspiring entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the GARD Centre and the Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority provides courses and capacity building to female entrepreneur.

f. The Prime Minister's Entrepreneurial Development (EDP) Programme

The Prime Minister's Entrepreneurial Development Programme (EDP) is for the creation of new business entities which generate revenues, employment and innovation, and is essential for the development of a vibrant micro and small business sector. The overall objective of the EDP is to provide an avenue for Antiguan and Barbudan ownership of a greater stake in the economy.

3) Over the past five years, what specific actions have you taken to prevent discrimination and promote the rights of marginalized groups of women and girls?

a) Women and girls living with HIV/AIDS

The AIDS Secretariat is one of the Directorate of Gender Affairs implementing partner agencies, and as such, the Directorate often works collaboratively with this agency to mainstream issues of gender, including gender discrimination and stereotyping into any HIV/AIDS-related programs and initiatives. Through a collaborative partnership with the AIDS Secretariat, the Directorate of Gender Affairs has been able to integrate the linkages between gender-based and sexual violence and HIV/AIDS transmission into its sensitization and awareness-raising materials. The AIDS Secretariat provides various prevention, treatment, and health care programs that target vulnerable groups of women living with HIV/AIDS. The AIDS Secretariat distributes free commodities including male and female condoms, lubricants, and dental dams through the National AIDS Program.

The AIDS Secretariat also provides free confidential HIV and syphilis testing; and persons who've tested positive for HIV receive free antiretroviral medication, aligning with the World Health Organization testing and treatment recommendations. Additionally, outreach activities targeting vulnerable groups of women with HIV/AIDS, including transgender women and women in prostitution, are organized to help facilitate access to all clinical and treatment services. These outreach initiatives help to encourage adherence to treatment, provide supportive counselling when needed, and address other social needs and concerns that may arise. In order to provide services without stigma and discrimination, the National AIDS Program has established a system where sex workers, who access services, are given three (3) cards for distribution amongst other known sex workers. This allows them, and other sex workers, to access services without any challenges. In addition to the card system, the National AIDS Program offers free and confidential HIV rapid testing. Community Service Organizations also provide free and confidential testing to key vulnerable populations within the community.

Additionally, for female sex workers (FSW) in particular, the AIDS Secretariat provides a package of services to female sex workers of 100 male condoms per month, HIV, Hep B and Syphilis tests every six months, Post Exposure Prophylaxis as needed, for burst condoms and unprotected sex before 72 hours, 3 Dental dams, 5 femidom female condoms and 15 sachets of Lubricant. During the COVID period, the FSW were provided with a package of food for a period of time.

b. Older Women

- i. Grace Program** - Through the government's Elder Care and Residential Assistant Care program, through the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation and the Environment, at-home care is provided for elderly persons and access and accompaniment to recreational and essential services is also provided.
- ii. The Fiennes Institute for the Elderly and Indigent** - Built in 1929 to aid to the homeless, the Fiennes Institute continues to play a vital role in public welfare by providing care and accommodation for at-risk senior citizens, including those who are unable to look after themselves and those without familial support. Residents are housed across six wards and cared for by a staff of dedicated nurses.
- iii. Old – Age Assistance Program** - The non-contributory Old-age Assistance Program serves its purpose in providing pensions for those who never got the opportunity to contribute to Social Security because of their old age. The assistance pension is designed to be terminated with the death of the last recipient. People with disabilities and visual impairments who are not able to earn their own livelihood are also covered by the program with the same benefits as beneficiaries due to the age.
- iv. PDV Caribe Program**- The government provides senior citizens with utility subsidy and cash transfers for basic essentials. The program is managed by the PDV Caribe Antigua and Barbuda Limited on behalf of the government of Antigua and Barbuda and has provided thousands of senior citizens with credit \$100 per month.
- v. Over 80 Utility Subsidy Program** – The Government provides a subsidised rate of payment for water and electricity, for individuals over the age of 80 years old in Antigua and Barbuda. This assists them to have reduced levels of bills and to have more financial autonomy and freedom as a result.

c. Women living with disabilities

- i. Social Protection Board** – Formerly the Board of Guardians, the Social Protection Board, through the Ministry of Health Wellness, Social Transformation and the Environment, implements a cash transfer program that provides persons with disabilities monthly to aid in meeting their basic needs.

- ii. **PDV** – The PDV program provides stipend on a monthly basis, to support persons who are living with disabilities and need economic assistance, to meet their basic needs.
- iii. **National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for Disability (NVRCD)** - NVRCD falls under the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation, and the Environment, and is an agency where persons with disabilities who are able to work, can receive training to equip them for the job market. Further, those who are not able to work are taught how to make various items such as: jewellery, potholders, floor mats, and the remodelling of shoes. Those enrolled at NVRCD are also involved in sailing and backyard gardening. The Centre operates in collaboration with Adele School, Blind School and Victory Centre.
- iv. **Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities (ABAPD)** – The association has a mandate to change the attitude of society towards children & adults with disabilities, and to improve the services available to disabled persons in Antigua and Barbuda. The ABAPD aims to provide access, equality, empowerment and opportunity for disabled locals. The Government signed and ratified the United Nations convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. As a result of ratifying the convention, Antigua and Barbuda has committed itself to enact laws and other measures to improve disability rights, and to abolish legislation, customs and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities. A disabilities and Equality of Opportunity bill was drafted in 2017 in Antigua and Barbuda to ensure that full implementation of the convention nationally.
- v. **Para-Transit Mobility Program** - The Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development, Youth and Gender Affairs provides free transportation services to persons with disabilities to ensure their full mobility, access and participation in public life.

4.) Over the past five years, how has the confluence of different crises affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what measures have you taken to prevent their negative impact on progress for women and girls?

- a) **Covid 19 Pandemic** – The Covid 19 pandemic began affecting Antigua and Barbuda in early 2020 and had significant ramifications for the entire population, but in particular for women and girls. The pandemic certainly had implications on the country's ability to proactively advance its implementation of the BPfA in the country. The pandemic and its social distancing requirements, as well as travel restrictions greatly affected the tourism industry, which many women are employed in, within Antigua and Barbuda. Many women in this sector were laid off for months and struggled economically to meet their obligations in terms of monthly bills, expenses and providing for dependents. Many women also were employed and worked within the cosmetology, and restaurant/food and beverage industry and these sectors were also hit hard and left many women in similarly precarious economic circumstances. The

Directorate aimed to address this issue by instituting various cash transfer programs and food package distribution drives to women within the tourism sector and also to female sex workers.

Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic would have made tackling the issue of gender based violence difficult and complex. This is due to various lockdowns that were imposed by the government, that limited movement and in some instances would have severely constrained survivors of gender-based violence's options, in relation to seeking support and assistance from the perpetrator of the violence, particularly if the survivor and perpetrator lived together. The Directorate aimed to address this issue by establishing a WhatsApp chat support to women who were facing violence and needed support, and also by continuing the operation of our 24/7 crisis hotline.

- b. Climate crisis** – Climate change continues to be a pervasive and existential threat to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and continues to have a disproportionate affect on women and girls and on the country's ability to sustainably advance the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. Continual decimation of the country by natural disasters such as hurricanes, and floods, as well as the impact of climatic events such as extreme heat and extended drought affects women's lives and livelihood, with women being more susceptible to death during disaster events, as well as gender based violence, and damage to property such as housing that may not be climate resilient, due to economic constraints, to ensure adequate resilience can be attained and relevant preparation made, to safeguard property from projected impacts.

- c. Food and fuel crisis** – Antigua and Barbuda, just like other developing countries is greatly impacted by global events such as climate change, global economic instability, geo-political issues, and war. Over the past 5 years, events such as these have taken place, which have led to things such as increases in taxes, increase in the price of food and fuel, due to inflation and this has affected many women, who are overrepresented in lower paying professional fields of employment. The increased cost of food has meant that in some instances women have had to take on multiple jobs or start small businesses to support themselves, through earning supplemental income, this affects their ability in some instances to get adequate rest, to supervise children and dependents as required, and in some cases, to provide a consistently healthy and balanced meal for themselves and others within the respective household. The fuel increase has made it difficult for many persons, including women, to maintain adequate fuel in their vehicle to be able to support their transportation needs and this has led to some exploring options such as seeking more fuel efficient vehicles, downsizing, car pooling, or seeking alternative transportation methods such as public transportation or walking.

5.) Over the next five years, what are the priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in your country through laws, policies and/or programmes?

- a) Eliminating violence against women and girls** – The elimination of violence against women and girls will continue to be one of the top priorities for accelerating progress for women and girls in Antigua and Barbuda. This will be done through a multi-

dimensional approach, involving key actors from various sectors and entities. Efforts will be made to ensure that legislation is strengthened, and that the legislation being created and enacted will be gender responsive and will address the evolving trends and needs of survivors of gender-based violence nationally. Additionally, existing legislation such as the domestic violence act of 1995, the electronic crimes act of 2013 and other relevant legislation that encompasses the protection of survivors of gender-based violence can be reviewed with the input and consultation of relevant stakeholders, and necessary amendments and edits made to ensure that the laws are as comprehensive and robust as possible. There will also be a focus on attempting to establish a national gender-based violence shelter. This is major institutional gap, and it will be a priority to not only provide emergency accommodation, but to ensure that the shelter is a holistic system and programme that encompasses psychosocial support, healthcare, education, referral services and job placement. This will ensure that the survivors of gender-based violence who have to use the services of the shelter, will be able to break the perpetual cycle of abuse and be able to effectively and safely reintegrate into society, empowered.

- b) Political participation and representation** – Political participation and representation of women will be one of the top priorities for the next 5 years in Antigua and Barbuda, for accelerating progress for women and girls in Antigua and Barbuda. Currently, there is only 1 woman in the lower house of parliament and in the Cabinet, serving as a minister. The upper house of parliament has the involvement of more women as there are currently 5 women serving in the senate, which is a positive thing that bodes well for women actively participating at decision making at the highest level, however, senate positions in Antigua and Barbuda are appointed, while the individuals who serve in the lower house are elected. This is an indicator that works still needs to be done to ensure that the electorate, the general public and the political parties, all understand the importance of more equity within the composition of electoral party's political slates. Sensitisation will take place in an effort to have the major political parties consider developing internal policies that ensure that a minimum quota or number of women are being given an opportunity to contest and compete for national office and to be elected. Also, the general public will be exposed to PSAs, media interviews and programmes that are centred around the importance of women in politics and equitable representation so that their increased awareness on the issue can inform their outlook on politics and diversity in representation. It is noteworthy that a major challenge facing women seeking to enter politics in Antigua & Barbuda is the media being used as a tool to present an extra barrier through harmful/stereotypical portrayals of women seeking to enter politics.
- c. Gender Responsive Budgeting** – Gender responsive budgeting will be a critical priority in relation to accelerating progress for women and girls in Antigua and Barbuda over the next 5 years. There have been initial efforts by the Ministry of Finance to engage with the concept and to ensure that there is consultation with the national gender machinery in relation to specific projects that encompass a major gender focus as one of the underlying themes, however there is room for improvement nationally. Gender responsive budgeting is still somewhat of a novel concept in Antigua and Barbuda, and consequently, there will be significant efforts to ensure that public education is done through capacity building and training, to ensure that there is a solid understanding of what the concept practicality entails. Efforts will also be made to engage with regional and international development agencies to assist in more broadly reshaping the

framework of funding requirements and disbursements within national project and programme implementation, to ensure that gender responsive budgeting is one of the key themes and principles featured in the conceptualisation, design and implantation, to facilitate the needs of various groups of people being met in the most efficient and effective way possible.

- d. Unpaid care and domestic work / work-family conciliation (e.g. paid maternity, paternity or parental leave, care services)** - The government recognises the importance of unpaid care and domestic work and the value that it provides to the economy. There are still gaps as it relates to addressing these issues and facilitating the redistribution of roles and responsibilities within the household while eliminating harmful stereotypes and gender roles. Although there have not been many steps taken to address the lack of recognition of unpaid domestic work, individuals do have access to the various social protection programs provided by the government. Also, through sensitisation and awareness raising and advocacy on the topic by the national gender machinery, DoGA, it is anticipated that great attention will be placed on the contribution of unpaid care work to national development and the need for policy interventions. Additionally, some private sector entities have progressive policies as it relates to parental maternity and paternity leave, and some also even have built in care services for employees with children. An effort will be made to ensure this is done more widespread, including within the public sector. Efforts will also be made to lobby the private financial institutions to develop financial products related to women and people engaged in care work to ensure that they can be compensated and be financially secure for the work and contributions that they are making.

6. Over the past five years, what actions has your country taken to advance gender equality in the world of work (including informal and non-standard employment as well as entrepreneurship)?

The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Code CAP. 27, E 8 (1) ensures that there is equal pay for equal work in both the public and private sectors of the economy. The law states: “No woman shall merely by reason of her sex be employed under terms of employment less favourable than that employed by male workers in the same occupation and by the same employer.” This sets the standard for remuneration across sectors.

In Antigua and Barbuda one of the major priorities of the Government is to ensure that gender is mainstreamed into education and training programmes in order to facilitate the transition of citizens from education and unemployment into stable work. One example of this is the Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Program (ABSTEP) which is geared towards enhancing the employability and competence of citizens. The World Bank supported government initiatives aimed at improving the employability and the earning capacity of Antiguan and Barbudans. This included the Labour Department’s Antigua and Barbuda Skills Training and Empowerment Programme (ABSTEP) and strengthening the One Stop Employment Centre (OSEC), which administers ABSTEP and also offers free public employment services to jobseekers and employers. Many women have benefited from both ABSTEP and OSEC and have been able to gain critical skills that they are able to leverage to gain employment opportunities.

In 2020, the DoGA and the Department of Labour engaged in a mass sensitization exercise to discuss the objectives of a draft sexual harassment policy created by the DoGA. This was done

in collaboration with the Government Information System (GIS). The DoGA has also led sensitivity training exercises with government agencies to raise awareness on sexual harassment, and how it upholds and contributes to gender inequality. In 2022, Antigua and Barbuda ratified the ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment at work in 2022 and in that same year, the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development and the Blue Economy, through its Directorate of Gender Affairs (DoGA) with support from the Canada Caricom Expert Deployment Mechanism drafted a National Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Policy. The draft policy seeks to define harassment and discrimination within the workplace, prohibit these behaviours, and provide redress to persons who experience it. The draft was submitted to the Attorney General's chambers for review.

In June of 2021, The Government of Antigua and Barbuda, in collaboration with International Labour Organization (ILO), announced and implemented a free Entrepreneurship Online Training for the following groups of persons who had suffered adverse effects of the COVID19 pandemic: Persons unemployed for at least 3 months, persons ages 18-35 and over 55, women who head single-parent households, former hospitality and aviation sector workers, persons currently receiving a social benefit, and persons with disabilities. This would allow many women in particular to be able to support themselves and create a source or an additional stream of income to boost their economic autonomy.

7. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to recognize, reduce and/or redistribute unpaid care and domestic work, promote work-life and family balance and strengthen the rights of paid care workers?

Over the past five (5) years the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has maintained its Government Residential Assistants Care for the Elderly and Eligible (GRACE) Programme through the Ministry of Social Transformation. The Programme dispatches Eldercare Assistants to provide personal hygiene and domestic assistance to the vulnerable elderly population in Antigua and Barbuda, in the comfort of their own homes. This assistance ensures that the elderly live with some sense of dignity and independence in their personal space. Also, the Eldercare Assistants reduce the burden of care on family members (usually women) who may have to care for the elderly at the expense of education and/or employment opportunities.

The Programme employs full-time staff compliment of 150 Eldercare Assistants, dominated mainly by women (2 males), to provide residential assistance and that has positively impacted the lives of 269 vulnerable individuals. To prevent burnout, Eldercare Assistants are assigned within the residences with a client ratio of 1:1 to perform variety of household services, to include cleaning, cooking, laundry, personal hygiene, and other household errands.

Eldercare Assistants receive a weekly pecuniary which is above the minimum wage and are entitled to vacation time, sick time and all other benefits shared by any other government employees and can contribute to the economic and social development of Antigua and Barbuda. In addition, a Wellness Day was introduced by a student from UWI Five Islands Campus, who was doing her Practicum at the Unit. This was in the form of a Sunset Cruise and it was implemented on the 24th March, 2024, the activity was well received. During our Social Work Week celebrations, a large number of Eldercare Assistants were awarded for their years of service and dedication to the Programme.

Having ratified ILO convention C 189 on Domestic Workers in 2021, Antigua and Barbuda has an obligation to take measures to protect and promote the human rights of domestic workers. The Antigua and Barbuda Labour code provides for the rights of all workers in general but, unfortunately, there is currently no legislative framework which directly addresses the unique set of vulnerabilities faced by this group. There are no provisions for the measurement of the contribution of household duties or homework to GDP in Antigua and Barbuda which has significant impact on women's autonomy and economic empowerment.

The Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Board provides a maximum of 13 weeks paid maternity leave, starting as early as 6 weeks before delivery or as late as the week of delivery.

8. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce the gender digital divide?

The GOAB recognizes that improving women and girls' access to information communication technologies (ICTs) results in more creative solutions and has great potential for innovations that meet women's needs and promote gender equality.

Under the Organisation of American States (OAS) Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Project, the Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority (ABIA) along with several local stakeholders, including the DoGA, aimed to empower women to actively participate in and benefit from the digital economy.

The project's outputs include (i) building local capacity to support women-led MSMEs and entrepreneurs in their efforts to digitize, build their online presence, access financial services, benefit from the digital economy, and access international markets; (ii) establishing a HUB for Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Productive Transformation for the Northern Triangle & the Eastern Caribbean (OECS (Organization of Eastern Caribbean States)); (iii) Sharing capacity building initiatives focused on women decision-makers in business and diaspora resources to support productive investments and entrepreneurship shared; (iv) promoting access to financial products, knowledge, tools and techniques for women and women-led MSMEs; (v) internationalising women- led MSMEs by creating connections to the diaspora market; (vi) creating an international online clearinghouse for women in the digital economy, and (vii) developing, publishing, and disseminating how-to formalization toolkits for Caribbean women.

The Ministry of Education partners with local telecommunications provider, FLOW to celebrate International Girls in ICT Day. International Girls in ICT Day is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of April to raise awareness of the need for more women and girls in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector. The initiative, which focuses on school-aged girls, aims to encourage girls and young women to consider careers and studies in tech.

Since the beginning of the programme in 2019, the initiative has specifically focused on diversity and inclusion in the telecommunications industry by disrupting social stigma that bars women and girls from entering the telecommunications field and promoting technological proficiency among women and girls.

In 2023, the Directorate of Gender Affairs collaborated with the British High Commission in St Johns to host a workshop titled the "DigitALL Summit: Innovation for Gender Equality".

The activity was chosen in celebration of International Women's Day (IWD) and reflected the theme of that year, "DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality." The activity allowed 20 women to learn from and network with women leaders in the ICT space so they could later apply the knowledge gained to their own ICT-based projects and business models.

9. In the past five years, how has the macroeconomic and fiscal policy environment affected the implementation of the BPfA in your country, and what macroeconomic policies has your country implemented in support of a more gender-equal economy?

Over the past five (5) years, there are not enough gender responsive budgeting principals formed in the frame of the nations spending habits. Additionally, there is a larger percentage of our financial budget that needs to be allocated to social transformation and gender-equality.

Implementation of the BPfA in Antigua and Barbuda has been stymied over the last five years. This can chiefly be attributed to three main areas, the first of which is a lack of gender-responsive principles guiding the national budget. Gender concerns have not yet been effectively mainstreamed into national macroeconomic policy. As a result, financial policy tends to be gender-blind, or gender-neutral, which does not effectively support the mission of the BPfA.

Relatedly, the Ministry of Social Transformation receives a miniscule amount of the national budget. Most of the funding it does receive is spent on salaries and office maintenance needs. This results in the national gender machinery having to seek donor funding to execute programmes and initiatives which negatively impact the organisation's efficacy. However, the DoGA has been able to access major financing through national projects that include gender as a necessary component for implementation. These include the Road Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project supported by the Caribbean Development Bank and UK AID, and climate projects supported by the Green Climate Fund.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue as the GOAB has had to reroute spending to revenue-generating sectors like tourism. The national gender machinery will continue to advocate for an increase in gender-responsive policy action.

10. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to reduce/eradicate poverty among women and girls?

There are currently three main social protection mechanisms available in Antigua and Barbuda: The Board of Guardians Scheme; Peoples Benefit Programme; and the Social Security Scheme.

- i. The Social Protection Board, formerly the Board of Guardians Division, provides direct income support to vulnerable families through the Cash Assistance Programme.. In 2019 there were ~526 beneficiaries of the Cash Programme ; approximately 42 per cent of beneficiaries were children, with females accounting for 53 per cent of all beneficiaries. Currently there are ~363 households with 1187 persons receiving benefits.

Additionally, there are additional programmes under the Social Protection Board, such as *HAPI* – a programme that assist households with purchasing materials and

renovating homes and the both the *Funeral Grant* and the *Fire Victims Grant* - both of which gives a stipend to assist with expenses.

- ii. The Peoples Benefit Programme targets vulnerable families, persons with a monthly income below US\$300 and persons with disabilities. In 2018, 2,028 persons/families benefited from the programme, each receiving about US\$80 per month to supplement their existing income.
- iii. The Social Security Scheme targets a broader range of beneficiaries. The Scheme supports: Pension Benefits with individuals receiving payments in the range of US\$130 to US\$1,200 per month depending on their pension contributions; Invalidity Benefits, Maternity Benefits, Funeral Benefit to assist with the expenses of a contributor, Sickness Benefit/Sick Leave.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has collaborated with Antigua and Barbuda's Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs and Ministry of Social Transformation and Human Resource Development on the Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) project. COL's L3F initiative works to strengthen country agricultural sectors and provide livelihoods for poor and vulnerable women and youth. COL has been working with the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs to enhance food security and ensure long-term agricultural sustainability in the country. As of November 2021, with support from the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme, some 200 local farmers have already built critical skills to improve their livelihoods. In 2023 the initiative focused on leveraging communication technologies to enhance learning opportunities. Training objectives included equipping the participants with skills in Microsoft Word, and Excel, email software, Google search engine, and data collection, with an overall aim to empower farmers in effective record-keeping and overall livelihood development.

In 2020, the Support and Referral Centre (SARC) distributed USD 100 or XCD 270 monthly to 100 SARC clients over a period of 3 months (June to August) in the form of direct cash transfers. The majority of these women (63%) were unemployed.

11. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve access to social protection for women and girls?

In 2020, Antigua and Barbuda promulgated its Social Protection Act to deliver more effective social development services and provide a more robust institutional and administrative framework to deliver services to those most in need.

The Social Protection Act of 2020 calls for the establishment of a Social Protection Commission. Among other things, the Commission is tasked with promoting the development and strengthening of an integrated, equitable and sustainable social protection system to help reduce poverty and vulnerability as well as deliver child and gender sensitive programs. The Act also mandates that the Commission have a representative from a local women's rights organisation at all times.

The Government also has drafted a new Social Protection Policy, Action Plan and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. A newly appointed Social Protection Board and Social

Protection Commission have been established, with clear roles and responsibilities for strengthened coordination of social protection programmes.

In 2021 the National Child Protection Policy was implemented to provide for the care and, protection and adoption of children, operation of adoption services and other related matters and for connected purposes. The primary purpose is to protect children from abuse and neglect and to ensure that the best interest of the child is given paramount consideration in all matters relating to the child. In determining what is in the best interest of the child in any particular case the Director or the Court shall have regard to all relevant considerations including: the safety of the child; the capacity of the parent to properly discharge parental obligations with respect to the child; the spiritual, physical mental and emotional needs of the child, and the appropriate care or treatment required to meet those needs; the physical, mental, emotional or psychological development of the child; where appropriate, the views of the child; a secure place for the child and the development of a positive relationship as a member of a family; the love, affection and ties between the child and other persons in the life of the child; the capacity of persons other than a parent to exercise custody rights and duties respecting a child; and the continuity of the n care for the child and the possible effect of disruption of that care on the child.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs (DoGA) through its Support and Referral Centre (SARC) partners with various social service providers (departments) within the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resources and the Blue Economy, Legal Aid and Advice Centre and the special Victims Unit within the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda to ensure that clients who are victims of sexual and domestic violence receive optimal services to resolve their concerns.

The departments which are responsible are all under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resources and the Blue Economy. They include: The Directorate of Gender Affairs, The Department of Social Policy, Research and Planning, Social Protection Department, Family and Social Services Unit, Financial Empowerment Centre, Youth Affairs Department, GRACE Programme, Elderly Care, Substance-Abuse Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre (SPARC), National Office of Disaster Services, and Community Development.

12. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve health outcomes for women and girls in your country?

Recognising the significant impact of gender-based violence on an individual's mental health and emotional well-being, the DoGA SARC maintained its counselling services and other forms of psychosocial support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of SARC services users are known to be women and girls, and as such, this population has benefited significantly from these services. On the other hand, women between the ages of 18 to 60 years are required to pay for mental services which are accessed outside of the SARC through private counsellors.

Additionally, while the FSSD provides counselling services to girls up until age 18, women between ages 18 and 60 are at a disadvantage as they must pay for healthcare services independently. This is of particular concern amidst the rising incidence of women and girls misusing alcohol and other illicit substances.

EnGenDER, further supported the DoGA's GBV response mechanism, the Support And Referral Centre (SARC) by providing post-trauma counselling to 30 women, providing stipends for 8 counsellors to support women and girls impacted by GBV and conducting 2 advocacy and awareness programmes focused on decreasing levels of GBV nationally.

The Ministry of Health continues to provide the HPV vaccines under its national vaccine programme, with the primary target being girls and boys aged 9-14. Additionally, women 35 and older can now easily obtain the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine, which was previously inaccessible to them.

The Antigua Planned Parenthood Association continues to provide sexual and reproductive health services to vulnerable person at a low or no cost, and the GOAB operate approximately 25 free clinics.

In June 2021 Antigua & Barbuda requested technical assistance to introduce and implement HPV testing in the country, to align itself with the second pillar of the WHO cervical cancer elimination strategy.

To provide such assistance, PAHO formally partnered with Basic Health International (BHI) to develop and deliver training based on PAHO/WHO guidance on introducing HPV testing in cervical cancer screening programmes and provided technical support for the cervical cancer screening pilot implementation.”

Through PAHO, the GOAB received approximately 1,500 HPV tests, consumables, and a gene expert machine. PAHO and BHI implemented training programmes to start HPV screening. The training involved planning, implementation, monitoring, and scaling, for about 100 health care workers, laboratory staff and health services managers.

As a result of the support received, between September 2022 and January 2023, Antigua and Barbuda “piloted HPV screening in the primary care system to designated health centres: 1,569 women were screened superseding the 1,500 target.”

In 2022, non-governmental organisation, The Red Pledge Initiative, piloted its Cervical Cancer Prevention Programme. The initiative was aimed at mitigating the spread of the disease, which is the world's biggest cause of death for women. Additional screenings have become available at the satellite and polyclinic locations over the island.

13. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls, including in sectors where they are underrepresented?

Education transforms societies, creating opportunities for all. Education in Antigua and Barbuda is free and compulsory for all children between five and 16 years of age and, since 2013, universal secondary education has been introduced. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda places high priority on education and usually allocates the largest share of the Government's budget to education, recognizing that education is not only key to the advancement of its people and human capital development but also to the overall competitiveness of the island nation. To ensure access to free education up to the secondary level, the government places a levy on all basic wages and these funds are allocated to costs of

supplies, transportation, and school infrastructure maintenance as well as the provision of tertiary level scholarships. The Harrison Centre Antigua and Barbuda Institute for Continuing Education and was opened in 2023 and was established to see the full redevelopment of the existing Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education (ABICE). Since 2016, much focus has been placed on - the completion of the expansion of several schools to allow for the accommodation of additional students and teachers making the environment more conducive for instruction and learning. The Government therefore continues to emphasize the centrality of education as a primary driver to the island nation's development.

The Human Development Report 2020, places Antigua and Barbuda at 107 out of 189 countries on the Education Index with a score of 0.66. The Education Index is measured by the adult literacy rate (with two-thirds weighting) and the combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (with one-third weighting). The adult literacy rate gives an indication of the ability to read and write, while the gross enrollment rate provides an indication of the level of education from kindergarten to postgraduate education. The closer the index is to 1 the higher the human development.

Approximately 21,000 children (21 per cent of the population) are enrolled in school with about 3,400 attending pre-school (ages 3 – 4), 9,771 and 7,838 attending primary (5-11 years) and secondary (12-16 years) schools respectively. These figures are very similar to the population estimates for the same age groups implying that most school age children are attending school. Children with disabilities are facilitated in mainstream schools and facilities to cater to them are Functional Literacy Rate 99% Gross Enrolment Rate in Tertiary Education 23.5% Education Index 0.66% Enrolment Rate in Secondary Education 88.8% included in these schools. Teachers often receive additional training to be able to cater to their educational requirements. There is one specific school for children with disabilities and special needs in the capital.

Notwithstanding, inequality has become more obvious and, in some areas, the most disadvantaged economically and socially may not be enjoying the benefits of the education system. Inadequate access at the pre-primary and tertiary levels exists and gender disparities in performance are evident at all levels.

The focus of education has been on creating an educational system that would adequately develop the capacity for critical thinking and innovation and produce young people who could take full advantage of the knowledge economy of the 21st century. To this end, emphasis has been placed on revising the curricula to one that is more STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) based.

The Education Act of 2008 provides the regulatory system for the delivery of educational services in Antigua and Barbuda whilst, the Education Sector Plan, outlines the education strategies and priorities for Antigua and Barbuda to pursue its educational outcomes. Over the years, the country has shown a strong commitment to improve access to quality education and has achieved universal access to primary education, but there is room for improvement for children living in poverty, boys and children with special education needs. Additionally, since the passing of hurricane Irma and the COVID-19 pandemic psycho-social support has been offered to persons who were affected; to students, families and teachers. Packaged counselling services were offered to discuss challenges that were faced in their lives and how their livelihoods were affected which empowered individuals to accomplish mental health and

wellness. Further, the Family and Social Services Department offers mental health services and other services to children and adults.

The education sector also is guided by the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) education strategy which provides a framework for Member States to align their national strategies and plans. The ICT in Education Policy for Antigua and Barbuda (2013) and other national policies are consistent with the broader OECS regional education policy.

To respond to many of the issues and challenges experienced by parents, students and teachers, the Government has implemented a range of programmes and projects to support the educational sector. Some of these programmes are geared to reducing inequalities. Some examples of the programmes include: 1) School Uniform Grant which provides uniforms to students in school across the country; 2) A grant is provided for all students in schools across the country to enhance equality in access to education in the country; 3) School Meals Program which focuses on providing a hot, nutritious meal to all primary school students across the country, towards aiding students' ability to stay focused and 99 per cent of all citizens 15 years and older have completed at least five years of formal education and are functionally literate. 48 per cent of heads of households possess some level of formal educational certification; 4) Psychosocial Support in Schools Programme to ensure that the psychological health of the students is cared for. Teachers have been trained and provided with tools to enable them to provide support to students in need; 5) Book Loan Scheme geared towards providing books for all students at both the primary and secondary levels to ensure that students' learning is not affected by the lack of resources (books) and to ensure equity in the learning process in schools through the provision of textbooks for all subject areas; 6) Provision of technological devices (furnished with content) to students and teachers to support the implementation of the curriculum in a digitized format and enhance research capabilities as well as to provide infinite access to resources to students and teachers through the world wide web; 7) Provision of internet access in schools across the island to further encourage diversification of the teaching and learning process; 8) Behaviour Management Programme which has been designed to ensure that a safe environment is provided for students physically, socially, mentally, etc.

School children of all ages have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily from the closure of schools in March 2020, resulting in both direct and indirect impacts. The direct impact has been the disruption to children's education. To mitigate this and to ensure that students remained engaged in learning, the mass media was used to prepare students for upcoming examinations through the Homeschool 101 Program. Other virtual platforms also were used to engage students who did not return to face-to-face instructions during the period.

Indirect impacts of school closures have been in relation to the huge increase in time that children have been required spend at home, given that school closures were also accompanied by restrictions on socializing with family members and friends outside the home, leading to several psychosocial issues as children may have found it more difficult to adapt to these sudden changes resulting in frustration, anger, anxiety and depression. During the lockdowns, students from low-income households that were accustomed to receiving meals at school continued to be provided with these.

Vocational training is a strategic focus of the education sector and is delivered and is under control of the national training agency that is responsible for setting and maintaining national standards. The Antigua State College (ASC) delivers courses in office management, home management, agriculture, electronics and refrigeration among others.

More males than females currently graduate from tertiary education institutions. To increase the number of tertiary education graduates, the Government approached The University of the West Indies (The UWI) in 2018 to partner with them to establish a university in Antigua and Barbuda, to meet the needs of the nation but also that of other OECS countries since the post-secondary education participation rate of students in the OECS sub-region is significantly below that of the countries with landed campuses such as Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago.

The University of the West Indies (UWI) Five Islands Campus in Antigua was officially opened in 2019. The Five Islands Campus of The UWI is expected to broaden tertiary education opportunities, recognizing that there exists a direct correlation between higher levels of education and economic development.

EBooks in Secondary Schools Programme the Ministry of Education, prior to the pandemic introduced the EBooks in Secondary Schools Programme The objective of the programme is to ensure that each student has access to textbooks and to expand in the classroom the resources available to teachers and students. The Ebook allows students to make their own notes; to be assessed real time on specific topics; and the teacher has the capability to distribute assignments, homework and additional notes electronically. Additionally, the teacher and students can collaborate easily in class as well as out of class. The teacher can also use the Ebook as a Whiteboard. Further, analytics and detailed reports can be generated for the teachers to assist the students who need additional assistance. This programme continued to be useful during the school closures brought about by the pandemic.

Provision of technological devices for students and teachers and internet access in schools island-wide is a programme which was implemented before the COVID-19 pandemic provides technological devices for students in low-income homes as well as those students who live in homes with multiple siblings and limited devices. Teachers also benefit from this initiative to support the implementation of the curriculum in a digitized format. The programme also enhances research capabilities and provide infinite access to resources to students and teachers through the World Wide Web. There also is the provision of internet access in schools across the island to further encourage diversification of the teaching and learning process. Students without internet access at their homes have also benefited from this programme.

Further, the Directorate of Gender Affairs as of 2023 facilitates the work and Life Skills Programme with the core objective to deliver courses and training opportunities that equip participants with practical skills that can be leveraged to secure or advance in employment and support entrepreneurship. Participants are offered exposure to industry professionals and resources to help them achieve their goals. Also, participants are provided ongoing support by programme partners to help persons reach their full potential.

The Kiwanis club organizes and manages a quarterly initiative called the “Kool Kidz Drive” which provides preschools and daycares with school and cleaning supplies as well as ensuring that the school environment meets good quality standards for learning. With respect to advancing sustainable development goals (SDG) 4, specific outcomes include: 1) the supply of snacks, food items which aims to ensure the provision of food which also serves to advance SDG 2; 2) school supplies such as reading books, learning charts, paper, and pencils, towards ensuring access to educational tools; 3) cleaning and sanitation equipment which serves to ensure that children can learn in clean and safe areas which also contributes to good health and

well-being, advancing SDG 3. Strategies and Actions that will Accelerate the Achievement of Goal 4; 4) Increase investments towards developing and rolling-out a standards-driven and outcomes-based education system that ensures that education and training is learner centered, review and revise the curriculum, including widening it, in keeping with STEAM11 and science, technology, engineering and maths STEM 12 and ensure that all including those with special needs and PWDs are able to access the system; 5) Ensure that the curricula are specifically tailored to meet the needs of the society, particularly the labour market.; 6) Improve the learning achievements of students at all levels, especially in the core areas of English and Mathematics; 7) Ensure that the secondary school system better equips students exiting with the tools and abilities to access further education, training and/or decent work; 8) Develop a special needs policy to cater for persons with disabilities; 9) Create mechanisms to reduce the mismatch between the well trained and educated workforce and the needs of the labour market to advance growth and competitiveness.

14. What actions has your country taken to ensure that economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic closes gender gaps in poverty, employment, social protection, education, and/or health that the pandemic has exacerbated?

The GOAB recognizes that since the pandemic, women in Antigua and Barbuda were faced with financial burdens and found it strenuous to support themselves and their families, and as such the Directorate of Gender Affairs collaborated with the UN Women to assist women and girls at the initial stages. Through the EnGenDER (Enabling Gender- Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean) Project, the DoGA Small Grants Tourism Sector and Sex Workers Project entitled “A Helping Hand Is Everybody’s Business” - EnGender Assistance Programme (EAP). The project’s aims were: Procurement of food items and personal care (daily essentials) for preparation of food packages. Providing assistance through food packages for persons affected by COVID 19 and their households within the tourism sector as results of lack of income due to the closure of the tourism sector. Identifying and distributing food packages to beneficiaries. The Directorate of Gender Affairs was offered a grant of USD\$25,000.00 to assist persons affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the form of food packages. A list of food items and personal care items were identified, and initial quotes requested from the suppliers for prices. The target for beneficiaries was 250 persons, while the actual number of beneficiaries for this program was 502 persons which reflected a double in the anticipated target.

15. Over the past five years, which forms of gender-based violence, and in which specific contexts or settings, has your country prioritized for action?

a. Intimate Partner Violence/ Domestic Violence including marital rape

- i. National Gender-Based Violence Database** - As part of the National Strategic Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Girls, the Directorate of Gender Affairs developed a National Gender-Based and Sexual Violence (GBSV) Database in 2016 to capture, store, and analyze data and statistics on cases of GBSV. The system allows the DoGA and its stakeholders to input standard information obtained during the client intake process and allows for robust case management. Referrals to other organizations can also be made through the system. The system employs siloed data management along with data encryption to ensure confidentiality and also offers data analysis

capabilities which aggregate fully anonymized case data to perform macro-analysis of the demographics, time periods, and nature of recorded incidents. These statistics form the basis of the DoGA internal reports and are the foundation of initiatives and programs implemented by the Directorate. It should be noted that despite recent challenges as it relates to the effective utilization and data upkeep of the national gender-based violence database, efforts are being made to improve these issues.

- ii. Support and Referral Centre** - Established in 2017, The Support and Referral Centre (SARC) provides legal, medical, and psychosocial services to survivors of GBSV and their immediate families. If requested, survivors can receive a complete medical forensic examination from a District Doctor after a report of GBSV is made to the SARC or the Police. Dignity kits and clothing are available in case the survivor would like to clean up after the medical examination. Dignity kits contain various hygiene and sanitary products, such as toothpaste and toothbrushes, soap, towels, lotion, sanitary napkins, etc. The Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda reinstated its Sexual Offences Unit, which is now called the Special Victims Support Unit (SVSU). The SVSU is located at the SARC and comprises of police officers who have received sensitization and capacity-building training to better meet the needs of this vulnerable group. Clients can also receive assistance from the SARC when applying for an Order of Protection.

Additionally, the SARC prepares the application for protection orders for all survivors and accompanies them through its court advocacy service throughout the entire process until the order is granted. All reports of breach of orders are made to the police and the court for further redress. Survivors, and their families, can access psychosocial support from a counsellor. In addition to individual counselling, persons can access help from the national GBV Crisis Hotline which operates 24/7 and is manned by SARC staff and trained advocates. If needed, the SARC also assists its clients with referrals to other agencies to ensure that all of their identified needs and concerns are addressed. Currently, Antigua and Barbuda does not have an adequate facility that provides shelter to survivors. However, in the absence of a shelter, the SARC has established a relationship with several unidentified organisations to provide emergency accommodation for clients in extreme situations for up to 48 hours.

- iii. Sexual Offences Model Court** - The Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening (JURIST) Project, with support from the Caribbean Court of Justice and the Government of Canada, established a Sexual Offences Model Court (SOMC) at the Antigua and Barbuda High Court. The SOMC was officially launched in January 2019 and is intended to introduce specialized procedures to remedy the deficiencies in the court's handling of sexual offences. The four main objectives of the SOMC are: 1) provide timely, gender-responsive and coordinated responses to complainants of sexual assault cases; 2) ensure gender coordination between courts and agencies that provide services to sexual assault complainants; 3) improve the monitoring and evaluation for sexual offences and; 4) reduce the secondary trauma that complainants experience.

The SOMC makes use of video conferencing technology, which allows vulnerable complainants to give evidence from a remote testimony room. This ensures that vulnerable complainants no longer need to be in the physical presence of the accused while testifying. There is also a special waiting room at the High Court, for complainants, separate from the general waiting area. Despite the many challenges that SOMC currently faces, it should be noted that the nation is working on sustainable options to rectify said issues.

Additionally, through the JURIST project, specialized training was provided to key actors along the justice chain. Training included the following objectives: 1) increase police officers' competence in the reporting and investigation of sexual offences; 2) assist medical professionals with how to examine sexual assault complainants; 3) assist prosecutors to effectively prosecute sexual assault cases and; 4) equip justice sector stakeholders with the necessary skills to: (a) deal with complainants sensitively and therefore prevent re-victimization by the justice system and (b) handle secondary trauma, which might result from having to engage with the traumatic circumstances of a sexual assault; and to strengthen the capacity of magistrates to resolve sexual assault cases in a manner that caters to both the rights of the complainant and defendant.

iv. Family Division of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court – In 2022 the Family Division of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court was launched in Antigua and Barbuda. The Division streamlined all Family law matters and standardized the litigation procedure under the Family Proceedings Rules. Domestic Violence Matters and Matters regarding the Care and Protection of Children including Child Physical and Sexual Abuse are specially dealt with by this specialist arm of the court.

b. Trafficking in women and girls

Antigua & Barbuda is committed to addressing human trafficking. The Trafficking in Persons (Prevention) Committee (TIPPC) is the body responsible for the nation's efforts in the prevention of human trafficking. The TIPPC was established under the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention) Act 2010 as amended (Act) and Section 11 of that Act gave the Committee the authority to establish such Task Forces as was deemed necessary to assist in the performance of its function and exercise of its duties.

The committee is comprised of heads or designates of all Law Enforcement agencies, Ministry of Public Safety & Labour, Family & Social Services and NGOs. The wide cross-section of representation from the various organizations and departments allows for a better synergy as these members hold executive positions in their respective organizations which empower them to make decisions and implement policies within their parent body.

There are various points of detection for Trafficked Persons. Once contact is made at any point of entry, the information is immediately forwarded to the Task Force which is mandated to respond within fifteen (15) minutes of receiving any information. A twenty-four hour contingency plan is in place for additional security responses based on circumstances surrounding any detection leading up to the screening and

interviewing of individuals. While the regularization of Immigration status is also part of the holistic care and support services provided to Trafficked Persons, Persons are normally excited to return to their country of origin within a stipulated time, however, regularization of immigration status is done based on needs.

Since information on Trafficked Persons is case-sensitive, detailed information is not required to safeguard Trafficked Persons and all involved. With the increase in knowledge through various dialogues and sensitizations, steps are currently being taken to further revise the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Act of 2010. Part five (V) of the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Act of 2010 provides information on measures to be taken by the State for the Identification and Protection of Trafficked Persons.

The government finalized and implemented a National Action Plan (NAP) for 2023, spending XCD 220,718 on such activities and increased funding for the TIP unit despite the ongoing pandemic-related economic downturn.

Additionally, in 2023, the government conducted a rapid needs assessment of newly arrived migrants, mainly from Cameroon, in cooperation with two international organizations. To raise awareness among migrant labourers on the risks of trafficking, the government posted labour laws and regulations on government and other websites, posted signage at all ports of entry, and conducted awareness training for frontline workers (immigration, police, customs, and labour officers) on how to interview and communicate with migrant workers.

c. Sexual Harassment and Violence in public places, educational settings, and in employment

- i. Convention No. 190** - In 2022, Antigua and Barbuda became the first country in the Caribbean to ratify the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). Convention No. 190 is the first to address violence and harassment in the world of work. It provides a common framework for action for addressing violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence.
- ii. Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Policy** - The Government of Antigua and Barbuda is committed to providing a healthy and safe working environment in the Public Service. In 2022, the Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Policy was re-drafted by senior technical officers within the Directorate of Gender Affairs. The policy defines the behaviour that constitutes Workplace Harassment and Discrimination and explains the procedures for preventing, reporting, and resolving such incidents. This policy covers all Established and Non-Established staff members within the Public Service, non-staff personnel, volunteers, as well as consultants, guests, and clients who interface with Public Officers. This policy applies to all Ministries of Government alongside their programs and activities regardless of whether the offending behaviour occurred at the office. The policy was also reviewed and approved in principle by the cabinet of Antigua & Barbuda. However, full approval was withheld pending legislative review and feedback from Legal Affairs.

16. In the past five years, what actions has your country prioritized to address gender-based violence?

a. Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice

The government of Antigua and Barbuda has prioritized access to justice and non-discrimination under the law. Antigua and Barbuda, with the support of the government of Canada through the Judicial Reform and Institutional Strengthening Project (JURIST) and with support from the Caribbean Court of Justice, has established a Sexual Offences Model Court within the High Court of Antigua and Barbuda to improve access to justice for survivors of sexual violence. The court, which was launched in January 2019, is a set of specialised court procedures for the treatment of sexual offence cases including a dedicated courtroom and presiding judge assigned to the hearing of sexual offences.

The court aims to ensure that survivors of gender-based violence have access to justice and reparation by providing timely, gender-responsive and coordinated responses to complainants of sexual assault cases; ensuring greater coordination between the courts and agencies that provide services to sexual assault complainants; improving the monitoring and evaluation for sexual offences, and reducing the secondary re-victimization that complainants experience.

The special procedures implemented by the court include tighter pre-trial management for the quicker resolution of cases, the fast-tracking process for sexual offence cases, assigning only judges, court administrators, police and prosecutors with specialized training for sexual offence cases, using video conferencing technology to allow vulnerable complainants to give evidence from a remote testimony room, the provision of a special waiting room at the High Court and court orientation for complainants in sexual assault cases and integrating the support services offered by the DoGA Support and Referral Centre (SARC) and the Family and Social Services Division (FSSD) to both adult and children complainants. This will allow complainants to give their report, conduct their medical examination and get counselling.

Also, through the JURIST Project, members of the local judiciary responsible for dealing with sexual offence cases received training and sensitization on how to deal with those who have experienced or committed sexual offences. The session targeted police officers, judges, and magistrates, court personnel, and covered basic concepts of gender and gender-based violence, victim-blaming and other forms of revictimization, and the relevant support services available to both survivors and perpetrators. The training sessions also underscored the importance of taking a coordinated, holistic approach to the provision of justice in these cases. Approximately 30 justice sector stakeholders benefited from this exercise with the aim to improve access to justice for survivors.

During sensitization and awareness-raising exercises the Directorate of Gender Affairs provided education and information on local domestic violence laws and other legislation that speaks to gender-based and sexual violence. This ensures that the public

is not only aware of rights and obligations under the law but is also empowered to make informed decisions when navigating the justice sector.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs has also compiled a booklet of simplified laws relevant to gender-based and sexual violence to make the legislation easier for members of the general public to digest their rights and protection. The booklet contained information on the Domestic Violence Act (2015), the Electronic Crimes Act (2018), and the Sexual Offences Act and also included information on consent, protection orders and how and where survivors of gender-based and sexual violence could access support services. The material has been disseminated widely throughout communities and across Antigua and Barbuda.

Since the launch of the Antigua Barbuda Support and Referral Centre (SARC) in 2017, operated by the Directorate of Gender Affairs, a Special Victims Support Unit (SVSU) within the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda has been established and assigned to SARC and is tasked with handling all cases of domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and other crimes of gender-based and sexual violence seen at the SARC and reported to the police. The SVSU is housed within the SARC and comprises police officers who have received specialized training and sensitization on meeting the needs of survivors of GBSV through a gender-sensitive and client-centred approach.

Additionally, in July of 2022, the first ever Family Division of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court was launched within the High Court of Antigua and Barbuda.

b. Changing negative social norms and gender stereotypes

The government of Antigua & Barbuda, through the Directorate of Gender Affairs, has led a widespread public education campaign dedicated to challenging existing gender norms and discriminatory stereotypes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men. As part of its mandate to empower women and promote gender equality the Directorate of Gender Affairs integrates a basic gender sensitization or understanding gender module into all its workshop and outreach activities. The introductory gender session provides basic definitions of gender and sex and discusses how rigid gender roles and stereotyping can lead to discrimination and more extreme forms of violence, discrimination and inequality.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs approach has included public sensitization, presentations, training, public engagement and information campaigns, public meetings and forums on gender, gender stereotyping and gender-based violence conducted at the community level in churches, schools, local businesses, and community-led organizations and groups.

Public informational and education communication materials, brochures and knowledge products have also been produced and widely disseminated across Antigua and Barbuda. The materials are knowledge products that are used to provide information on how gendered norms and stereotypes limit women's choices, and access to opportunities and resources and may lead to discrimination and violence. Community groups and the general public have used the materials for further education and training among their populations. The annual 16 Days of Activism Campaign is also used as a strategic public awareness campaign with the aim of fostering change and addressing

harmful social norms and gender stereotypes. Based on feedback provided on the Directorate's public engagement and mobilization work, there seems to be a greater shift among the youth population's attitudes and behaviour towards gender equality.

c. Eliminating Violence Against Women

Eliminating violence against women (VAW) remains a top priority for the nation of Antigua and Barbuda. Several measures have been put in place, to address this area. In 2022, the Sex Offenders Register Bill (2022) was passed by parliament, including the establishment of a National Sex Offenders Registry. The Sex Offenders Register Bill aims to reduce incidents of sexual reoffending through the monitoring of convicted sex offenders, and the sharing of sex offender information with participating jurisdictions within the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

Additionally, the National Strategic Action Plan to End Violence and Gender-Based Violence for the period of 2023 – 2027 has been drafted and is currently awaiting approval by the government of Antigua & Barbuda. To ensure that key stakeholders and actors are operating in an efficient and coordinated manner, the overarching policy framework of the strategic action plan has to be put in place to guide our strategic approach to the issue. The nation believes that it is imperative that the relevant stakeholders are trained, sensitized, educated and are ultimately invested in the principles contained within the strategic action plan as it has been developed to ensure that there is improved cohesion in the offering of gender-responsive service provision, as it relates to gender-based violence.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs continues to educate the general public on gender issues and advocate for the elimination of violence against women through community outreach programs. The Directorate also provides gender-sensitization and capacity-building training to persons working within the public and private sectors. Specialized training is also offered to key stakeholders who offer direct services to victims/survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. Stakeholders who have received specialized training include medical professionals, police officers, counsellors and social workers, judicial officers and judges, and psychosocial service providers.

Additionally, A national electronic database to record incidents of gender-based violence and to facilitate referrals between agencies has also been introduced. The database allows for data entry between service providers and aims to improve the collection of administrative data on gender-based violence.

d. Gender-responsive disaster risk reduction and resilience building

Antigua and Barbuda, like many small island developing states, is susceptible to hurricanes, earthquakes and other natural hazards. Regarding the integration of gender perspectives into national disaster management, relief and recovery strategies, steps are consistently being taken for there to be a greater awareness of the importance of mainstreaming gender into this area. The National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) works closely with The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), which is the regional inter-governmental entity for disaster management. CDEMA provides a framework for integrating gender into disaster risk

reduction plans, programs and policies in Antigua and Barbuda. In collaboration with CDEMA, a gender-responsive early warning system was launched in Antigua and Barbuda.

In 2021, the Department of Environment (DOE), in collaboration NODS, hosted a two-day Shelter Management Workshop for over twenty participants from churches and community groups who have received grant funding from the Department of Environment. The main objectives of the workshop were: 1) to provide disaster response and shelter management training to climate adaptation small grant awardees; 2) to provide stakeholders with an overview of the shelter registration process and; 3) to train and certify 15-20 persons in shelter management. The workshops featured presentations from both DOE staff and officers from the NODS.

In 2022 DoGA partnered with NODS to facilitate a session on Gender Mainstreaming in End-to-End Early Warning Systems and Flood Management Systems. The Workshop targeted professionals of the CDEMA sub-region and was hosted by NODS and the World Meteorological Organisation.

In 2023, the DOE and the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre hosted a 4-day training for the Caribbean Climate Online Risk and Adaptation Tool. The tool enables technicians to integrate Climate Risk Analysis into Public Sector Investment and Budgeting practices.

In 2023, a four-day training in Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) was hosted by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) under the UNDP EnGenDER Project funded by Global Affairs Canada, the UNDP Panama Regional Hub and the National Office of Disaster Services (NODS). ~21 participants were taken through the PDNA process looking at the difference between disaster effects and disaster impacts, calculating damage and loss, examining recovery needs and implementing a recovery strategy for a territory impacted by a disaster.

e. Gender-responsive social protection (e.g. universal health coverage, cash transfers, pensions)

The Government of Antigua and Barbuda through its various ministries, and particularly through the Ministry of Social Transformation has sought to implement various social protection programs, in a gender-responsive manner to ensure the unique needs of the populations it is serving are being met, particularly that of women and girls. The social protection reform process started in 2016 and includes the introduction of a gender-responsive draft social protection policy and legislation. The process is supported by UNICEF and UN Women under the National Integrated Social Protection Initiative. UNICEF has been working with the key social protection stakeholders in Antigua and Barbuda to strengthen its provision of Social Protection in line with the new Social Protection Act, including its shock responsiveness.

In September 2020, the Government passed the Social Protection Act, which provided: 1) a new direction for the prevention, reduction and elimination of economic,

discriminatory and social vulnerabilities as it relates to poverty and deprivation in Antigua and Barbuda; 2) new institutional structures (i.e. Social Protection Board, a Social Protection Commission and an Appeals Tribunal); 3) new clarity on the roles and responsibilities across institutions and; 4) an opportunity to use digitized systems (i.e. Management Information Systems) to support administrative functions and strengthen the accountability to affected populations.

17. In the past five years, what strategies has your country used to prevent gender-based violence?

a) Public awareness raising and changing of attitudes and behaviours

The Directorate of Gender Affairs conducts routine sensitization and awareness-raising activities geared towards raising public awareness about gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV), its contributing factors, and the effects of this type of violence at the individual, community, and national levels to reduce and prevent violence against women and girls.

Through partnership with various international agencies including the Caribbean Development Bank, UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean, and the United Nations Trust Fund Project to End Violence against Women and Girls, the DoGA has also produced a series of Information Education Communication (IEC) materials for public sensitization. These include brochures, pamphlets, info-sheets, and other materials which are regularly distributed at community events, such as the World AIDS Day Street Fair hosted by the HIV/AIDS Secretariat. IEC materials are also available nationwide across communities, schools, churches, private entities and public offices and spaces with live-saving information on understanding the issue of gender-based violence, promoting equality and accessing services.

In 2022, the South Leeward Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, in collaboration with the Directorate of Gender Affairs held the “End it Now” march, to raise awareness and take a stand against gender-based violence.

Additionally, in 2022, as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, DoGA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture hosted “HeART for the Cause”, a short series of one-act plays that spoke about gender-based violence and cultural attitudes and behaviours associated with GBV.

In December 2023 the Directorate of Gender Affairs launched its Fete Safe Programme which aims to engage and train stakeholders in the entertainment industry to incorporate safeguards against sexual violence. The initiative aims to realise a reduction in the incidence of Gender Based and Sexual Violence during the country’s Carnival season and Fete/Party season. The initiative also aims to create a better link between event organisers and the National Gender Based Violence referral pathway.

In 2024, The Integrated Health Outreach-Gender-Based Violence Coalition (IHO-GBV), in partnership with the Antigua & Barbuda Directorate of Gender Affairs and IHO-GBV's donor organization, Equality Fund, launched the Men and Women United: Stop Gender-Based Violence 5K Walk. Under the theme, "5000 Steps for Safety", this initiative encourages all citizens to advocate against sexualized and gender-based violence.

b) Work in primary and secondary education, including comprehensive sexuality education

In 2022, as part of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, the Directorate of Gender Affairs along with its partners went on a school tour that targeted youth between the age of 13-17. The goal of this tour was to educate youth on gender, gender biases, types of gender-based violence and the importance of the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

In 2023, the Antigua Planned Parenthood Association (APPA) embarked on the second instalment of their youth summer as part of the Youth Club., which continues to seek opportunities to engage young adults in positive activities that will provide comprehensive sexual education. One of the core sessions surrounded sexual education and gender, with the target audience being boys and girls between the ages of 11-19 – same was facilitated by senior offices within the Directorate of Gender Affairs.

c) Work with Non-Governmental and Civil Society Organizations

NGOs and CSOs play a pivotal role in combating GBV in Antigua and Barbuda. By providing essential support, advocacy, and resources to survivors and communities. Their grassroots presence gives them unique perspectives as it relates to local dynamics and tailor interventions effectively. They often also assist in filling the gaps in government services. Over the past five years, the DoGA continues to work closely with our NGO and CSO partners, including but not limited to Women Against Rape (WAR), The Red Pledge Initiative (TRPI), Together We Must (TWM), the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN) and Her Shine Theory, to continue to raise awareness and encourage change in behaviours as it relates to GBV throughout the nation,

d) Shifting representation of women and girls in the media

In 2021 staff and members from the Antigua and Barbuda Employers Federation (ABEF) participated in the International Labor Organization (ILO) hosted "Gender & Diversity Virtual Workshop". The practical one-day session was designed to improve how women address power dynamics and gender disparities in workplaces, and to strengthen their advocacy efforts on women empowerment. Topics included: 1) understanding gender diversity and leadership in the workplace; 2) strategies for women's empowerment in leadership and decision-making; 3) government initiatives to promote gender diversity and support women's empowerment and; 4) sharing company experiences and developing an action plan.

In 2023, The Directorate of Gender Affairs hosted “DigitALL Summit: Innovation for Gender Equality” for International Women’s Day. With support from the British High Commission, the summit brought together women with an interest in ICT with industry leaders and other like-minded professionals in a space where they can learn, grow and network, providing them with the tools to later apply knowledge gained in this vastly advancing world with the outcome of innovative resolutions. Bringing women and other marginalized groups into technology results in more creative solutions and has greater potential for innovations that meet women’s needs and promote gender equality.

In March 2024, the Directorate of Gender Affairs hosted a two-day workshop geared towards educating members of the media and the public on gender sensitivity in communication. This workshop, which was facilitated with support from experts sent by the Catalyste+ via the Canada-Caricom Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM) programme, addressed the use of gendered language – it also covered tips to prevent situations of fostering gender bias due to the use of language that encourages stereotyping or trivialisation of any one gender. Additionally, the importance of respecting individuals’ rights and embracing their unique identities and the detrimental effects of perpetuating negative stereotypes that limit an individual’s roles in the workplace was also highlighted.

e) Empowering women and girls to promote their economic independence

In October and November of 2020, 41 young women leaders from across Antigua and Barbuda took part in Young Women in Leadership – Antigua and Barbuda (#YWiLAB), an in-depth training programme on transformational leadership, inclusive decision-making, and parliamentary procedure convened by ParlAmericas, Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL), and the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda. YWiLAB was the second in a series of national-level initiatives to be implemented across the Caribbean specifically to foster young women’s interest in public leadership. The programme was designed to support these leaders in building the knowledge, skills, and networks necessary for their work as current and future changemakers.

The first YWiLAB virtual training session focused on parliamentary procedure in order to support participants in their preparations for the YWiL Parliamentary Sitting, and as part of the programme’s overall objective of encouraging young women’s interest in the pursuit of public leadership. The second virtual session provided participants with an introduction to the principles of the transformational leadership approach, its importance in the context of women’s leadership, and how this form of leadership helps to achieve positive change for, and in service of, all of society through its focus on restructuring harmful systems that create and uphold inequalities. The final virtual session guided participants through discussions and exercises on applying a gender lens in decision-making. The session began with an introduction to key concepts related to gender and diversity, as well as critical discussions around norms and stereotypes, to serve as a foundation for identifying the gender dimensions of issues.

In October 2020, in partnership with UN Women, FAO, ILO and UNDP, Antigua and Barbuda implemented the regional UN Human Security Trust Fund joint initiative to empower women and youth in the Agri/Fisheries Small Business Sectors, while advancing comprehensive gender-responsible development.

In 2023, The directorate of gender affairs held the Emerging Female Leaders Seminar, which aimed to provide women who are interested in leadership an opportunity to interact with and learn from established female leaders in both political and entrepreneurial fields, ultimately providing them with an opportunity to: 1) Unpack issues of gender equality, rights access, and human rights advocacy with future female leaders; 2) Access and improve leadership skills and knowledge, honing in on one's unique strengths and characteristics that will contribute to their growth as an emerging, female leader; 3) Learn to harness relationships, connections, and interpersonal interactions. Insights gained from the execution of this seminar provide for the opportunity to continually improve support and visibility on the importance of gender equality and women in leadership.

In 2024 with support from The British High Commission (St. John's) and the Caribbean Union Bank Ltd., The Directorate of Gender Affairs executed the "Pitch Your Business" competition, dedicated to supporting and showcasing the entrepreneurial spirit of women. This competition provided a platform for female entrepreneurs to pitch their innovative business ideas, gain valuable feedback, and compete for a cash prize to fuel their ventures' growth, while receiving constructive feedback from a panel of experienced professionals.

Additionally, in 2024, Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL) launched the Antigua & Barbuda "Femprenuer Fund", a 3-month initiative that aims to provide financial support, mentorship, and resources to women entrepreneurs who are making a difference in their industries, while continuing to drive innovation, create change, and inspire the next generation of leaders.

f) Working with men and boys

Understanding that efforts to reduce and ultimately prevent violence against women and girls must include men and boys, the Directorate of Gender Affairs prioritizes efforts to engage and include them in the conversation through outreach, activities and targeted programs. In 2021 the Directorate of Gender Affairs launched a new initiative called the Men's Critical Issues Series, with the goal being the provision of a platform where prevalent issues that affect men and boys can be discussed critically with the hope that possible solutions can be conceptualized. To date, topics covered during this series included: 1) Paternity and fatherhood; 2) Men's Health and Suicide; 3) Addiction; 4) Men's Education and Professional Development; 5) Stigmatization of Men in Traditional Fields and; 6) low tertiary enrolment rates among men.

In 2023, A Few Good Men Mentorship Program was officially launched. The program's vision is to create a cadre of positive male role models in Antigua and Barbuda, that will form part of a larger network, dedicated to supporting the healthy development of boys and provide a safe space for them to receive guidance, skills and constructive advice. One of the sessions focused on youth leadership and the importance of developing skills and traits that will allow them to be a positive influence and example to their peers.

Additionally, in January 2024, ABS launched a new series called "Man Cave", which is hosted by men and targets a male audience. Held weekly, the Man Cave discusses

topics relevant to the male experience in Antigua & Barbuda, gender stereotypes and cultural expectations.

It should be noted that while working with men and boys in the fight to prevent violence against women and girls has progressed, there is always room for growth. Antigua & Barbuda believes that by engaging men and boys as allies, advocates, and agents of change, harmful gender norms and stereotypes that perpetuate violence can be challenged and effective and sustainable change can happen.

g) Perpetrator programs

- i. The Family and Social Services Division (FSSD)** - The FSSD, within the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation & the Environment, offers rehabilitative services to perpetrators of gender-based and sexual violence, and at-risk youth including counselling and psycho-social support, and youth-intervention programs. The FSSD also provides a parenting program which offers counselling and training for parents, particularly those whose children have had an encounter with the law.

- ii. The EMERGE (Each Man Engaging Responsible Genuine and Empowered) Program** - In 2022, Together We Must (TWM), a legally registered non-profit organization in Antigua and Barbuda, launched EMERGE, its model program for men who commit Domestic Violence; the first of its kind in the twin-island state. Key stakeholders included the Directorate of Gender Affairs, MESH, the Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN), the Magistrate's Court, the Royal Police Force of Antigua & Barbuda (RPFAB) and the Antigua & Barbuda Disability Association. TWM's EMERGE is a homegrown therapeutic intervention that was supported by UN Women Caribbean through the Spotlight Initiative, a global multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Initiative grant funding was complemented by in-kind support from private and public sector companies and individuals, including APUA, ABSSB, Cool & Smooth, the Wishing Well Foundation, and others.

In 2023, TWM completed its first six-month cycle of the EMERGE program by delivering a domestic violence intervention program that provided: (1) case management services, inclusive of a psycho-social assessment and the development of a tailored service plan that assists the EMERGE Member in identifying and accessing relevant social and other services in a coordinated manner; (2) psychological screening that also assessed each applicant's risk of recidivism; (3) individual counselling; (4) a 12-week psychoeducation workgroup aimed at developing EMERGE Member's critical awareness of attitudes and beliefs that support the use of violence, while increasing their awareness of the effects of domestic violence; (5) a peer support group, where graduates meet informally to share ongoing experiences, discuss relevant topics and share supportive solutions to everyday challenges.

18. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence (e.g. online sexual harassment, online stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images)

a) Introducing or strengthening legislation and regulatory provisions

Given the rise of the internet and online communication through social networks like Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook, the government of Antigua & Barbuda has taken measures to protect women and girls from violence and harassment perpetrated through these mediums.

- i. The Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2020** - The Electronic Crimes Act 2013 makes it punishable by law to intentionally and without lawful excuse or justification to take, publish or share intimate photos of another person without their consent, or capture, publish or share the image, whether whole or partial, of another person in a vulnerable position in a manner that would violate their privacy. The Act further precludes individuals from sending offensive messages through electronic communication services. This refers to any information that could be considered offensive or threatening, false, causing annoyance, inconvenience, damage, obstruction, insult, injury, intimidation, enmity, hatred or ill will, including text messages and emails. The act also criminalizes the act of tricking another person into having a relationship online by assuming an identity other than your own, also known as “catfishing”. The Electronic Crimes Act 2013 has been strengthened through the Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2020, which gives officers of the ONDCP and of the Customs and Excise Division the same powers as those given by the police under the principal Act to access electronic data and other information to investigate and prosecute an offence under their respective legislations.
- ii. Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Policy** - The Government of Antigua and Barbuda is committed to providing a healthy and safe working environment in the Public Service. In 2022, the Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Policy was re-drafted by Technical Officers within the Directorate of Gender Affairs. Within this policy, there is a section that details Internet harassment also referred to as “cyberbullying,” and suggested consequences for said action.
- iii.** It should also be noted that agencies such as WAR and TWM have received significant financial support from a multitude of different agencies, as well as technical assistance from DoGA in their fight to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated gender-based violence

19. In the past five years, what measures has your country taken to resource women’s organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV?

- a) The BeFoundation** - In November 2019, the BeFoundation (TBF), an NGO based in Barbuda began working on Big Love Buda, a two-year initiative sponsored by the

Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to TBF, through a partnership with the Directorate of Gender Affairs. The project is facilitated by the Project Implementation Management Unit of the Ministry of Public Works, as the coordinating agency for CDB's 'Natural Disaster Management – Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Loan. Over the two-year initiative, TBF received \$135,000 XCD to lead capacity building, institutional strengthening, youth engagement, men and boys engagement, and public awareness interventions rooted in ending gender-based violence in Barbuda.

In February 2020, TBF launched Big Love – same was attended by residents of Barbuda and broadcast live on Facebook by the Barbuda Channel; the effort introduced parallel services to those offered to survivors of gender-based violence in Antigua, all while engaging Barbudans in positive, community empowerment initiatives.

In 2022, TBF held a workshop, which focused on creating a multi-sectoral awareness of the need for user-friendly services for victims of GBV and children's survivors of sexual assaults in Barbuda.

- b. Gender Responsive implementation** – During the process of updating its National Determined Contributions in 2021, Antigua and Barbuda has enhanced the availability of sex-disaggregated data for gender analysis as well as engagement with women stakeholders. During this process, the Department of Environment and its partners engaged over 2,000 stakeholders which included male and female residents in Antigua and Barbuda, the Directorate of Gender Affairs and NGOs, including women organizations. This not only allowed the updated NDCs to include gender-specific commitments but also allowed the Department of Environment to include budgets for gender in its projects through accurate data.

- c. The SIRF Fund Gender-Responsive Blended Financing Window** - The island nation of Antigua and Barbuda is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and despite its recent classification as a middle-income country, pockets of poverty heighten this risk for some parts of society. Recognizing this challenge, the Sustainable Island Resource Framework (SIRF) Fund, administered by the Department of Environment (DOE) in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance, was established in 2019 as a financial vehicle to deliver climate and environment related projects and programmes both domestically and more widely across the Eastern Caribbean. The Blended Financing Window (BFW) will provide financial and technical assistance to Antigua and Barbuda (A&B) small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Due to the heightened vulnerability of women to climate change, compounded by persistent challenges in women's access to finance, gender-specific portfolio-level financial and eligibility targets were established: 40 per cent of the financial portfolio will be awarded to SMEs in which women comprise 30 per cent or more of the owners, management or staff.

The Ministry of Agriculture encourages the uptake of greenhouses and the adoption of hydroponics systems to increase productivity and attract women and youth, as these technologies are less labour-intensive and lend themselves to flexitime. From a gender-responsiveness standpoint, the BFW will aim to support SMEs that include a substantial (30 per cent or more) representation of women in their ownership, management or staff. A minimum target will be set in terms of the percentage of SMEs in the BFW portfolio that comply with this criterion.

20. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to address the portrayal of women and girls, discrimination and/or gender bias in the media, including social media

a) Providing training to media professionals to encourage the creation and use of non-stereotypical, balanced, and diverse images of women in the media.

- i. Gender Sensitive Communication Workshop** - In March 2024, the Directorate of Gender Affairs hosted a two-day workshop geared towards educating members of the media and the public on gender sensitivity in communication. This workshop was facilitated with support from experts sent by the Catalyste+ via the Canada-Caricom Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM) programme. The workshop addressed the use of gendered language, and how best to use it to ensure that persons feel included as well as to prevent situations of fostering gender bias due to the use of language that encourages stereotyping or trivialisation of any one gender.

b. Promoting the participation of women and leadership of women in the media

There is strong female representation among news anchors and journalists on both radio and television in Antigua & Barbuda. In relation to the Antigua Broadcast Station (ABS), the General manager and the Deputy Director of Current Affairs are both women. However, the decision makers in the media are predominately male. ABS produces Antigua & Barbuda's lone television station, responsible for airing local, regional, and international news daily, and an attached radio station.

In 2024, Secondary school students attended "Closing the gender gap in the 268", a gender equality forum at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Ground, staged by the National Youth Parliament Association of Antigua and Barbuda (NYPAAB). Various guest speakers spoke on matters of intersectionality, women in politics and gender biases. Seeking to raise gender equality awareness and education among Antiguan youth, the group invited students from All Saints Secondary School, Antigua Girls High School, Antigua Grammar School, Clare Hall Secondary, Glanvilles Secondary, Irene B Williams Secondary, Jennings Secondary, Ottos Comprehensive, Pares Secondary, Princess Margaret School, Sir Novelle Richards Academy and St Mary's Secondary School.

21. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken specifically tailored to address violence against marginalized groups of women and girls?

a) Older women

- i. Eldercare Assists** - Eldercare Assistants provide personal hygiene and domestic assistance to the vulnerable elderly population in Antigua and Barbuda, in the comfort of their own homes. This assistance ensures that the elderly live with some sense of dignity and independence in their personal

space. Old age is a crucial phase in life and to allow the elderly to maintain their independence longer and to prevent social isolation, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, through the GRACE (Government Residential Assistants Care for the Elderly and Eligible) Programme Unit (GPU) ensures that the most vulnerable in our society, in particular the elderly and persons with disabilities across the country have access to this service. Eldercare Assistants are employed as full-time Caregivers by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. To prevent burnout, Eldercare Assistants are assigned within the residences generally with a client ratio of 1:1 to perform a variety of household services, including cleaning, cooking, laundry, personal hygiene and other household errands. Eldercare Assistants receive a weekly pecuniary which is above the minimum wage and are entitled to vacation time, sick time and all other benefits shared by any other government employees and they are able to contribute to the economic and social development of Antigua and Barbuda. In addition, a Wellness Day was introduced by a student from UWI Five Islands Campus, who was doing her Practicum at the Unit. This was in the form of a Sunset Cruise and it was implemented on the 24th of March, 2024, the activity was well received.

Over the past five (5) years the Government of Antigua and Barbuda has maintained its commitment to the elderly and persons with disabilities in providing homecare services. The demand for home care service has increased and the government has retained a full-time staff complement of 150 Eldercare Assistants, dominated mainly by women (2 males), to provide residential assistance and that has positively impacted the lives of ~269 vulnerable individuals. In an effort to provide professional service, all Eldercare Assistants are required to undergo a six-month Training Course in the “Care of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities Home Nursing Course”.

- ii. **The Fiennes Institute for the Elderly and Indigent** - Built in 1929 to aid the homeless, the Fiennes Institute continues to play a vital role in public welfare by providing care and accommodation for at-risk senior citizens, including those who are unable to look after themselves and those without familial support. Residents are housed across six wards and cared for by a staff of dedicated nurses.
- iii. **Old – Age Assistance Program** - The non-contributory Old-age Assistance Program serves its purpose of providing pensions for those who never got the opportunity to contribute to Social Security because of their old age. The assistance pension is designed to be terminated with the death of the last recipient. People with disabilities and visual impairments who are not able to earn their own livelihood are also covered by the program with the same benefits as beneficiaries due to their age.
- iv. **PDV Caribe Program**- Through this program, the government provides senior citizens with utility subsidies and cash transfers for basic essentials. The program is managed by the PDV Caribe Antigua and Barbuda Limited on behalf of the government of Antigua and Barbuda and has provided thousands of senior citizens with credit of \$100 per month.

b. Women living with disabilities

- i. Social Protection Board** – Formerly the Board of Guardians, the Social Protection Board, through the Ministry of Health Wellness, Social Transformation and the Environment, implements a cash transfer program that provides persons with disabilities monthly to aid in meeting their basic needs.
- ii. PDV Caribe Program** – The PDV program provides a stipend monthly to support persons who are living with disabilities and need economic assistance to meet their basic needs.
- iii. National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for Disability (NVRCD)** - NVRCD falls under the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation and the Environment and is an agency where persons with disabilities who are able to work, can receive training to equip them for the job market. Further, those who are not able to work are taught how to make various items such as jewellery, pot holders, floor mats, and the remodelling of shoes. Those enrolled at NVRCD are also involved in sailing and backyard gardening. The Centre operates in collaboration with the Adele School, Blind School and Victory Centre.
- iv. Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities** – The association has a mandate to change the attitude of society towards children & adults with disabilities and to improve the services available to disabled persons in Antigua and Barbuda. The ABAPD aims to provide access, equality, empowerment and opportunity for disabled locals.
- v. Para-Transit Mobility Program-** The Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation and the Environment provides free transportation services to persons with disabilities to ensure their full mobility, access and participation in public life.
- vi. Social Security Invalidation Benefit** - Invalidation benefit is a cash benefit payable to an insured person who has not yet reached the pensionable age, but is unable to take part in any further employment because of illness that is likely to remain permanent. Invalidation benefit may be either a pension or a grant.

c. Women Living with HIV/AIDS

- i. The AIDS Secretariat** - The AIDS Secretariat is one of the Directorate of Gender Affairs implementing partner agencies, and as such, the Directorate often works collaboratively with this agency to mainstream issues of gender, including gender discrimination and stereotyping into any HIV/AIDS-related programs and initiatives. Through a collaborative partnership with the AIDS Secretariat, the Directorate of Gender Affairs has been able to integrate the linkages between gender-based and sexual violence and HIV/AIDS transmission into its sensitization and awareness-raising materials.

The AIDS Secretariat provides various prevention, treatment, and healthcare programs that target vulnerable groups of women living with HIV/AIDS. The AIDS Secretariat distributes free commodities including male and female condoms, lubricants, and dental dams through the National AIDS Program. The AIDS Secretariat also provides free confidential HIV and syphilis testing; and persons who've tested positive for HIV receive free antiretroviral medication, aligning with the World Health Organization testing and treatment recommendations.

Additionally, outreach activities targeting vulnerable groups of women with HIV/AIDS are organized to help facilitate access to all clinical and treatment services. These outreach initiatives help to encourage adherence to treatment, provide supportive counselling when needed, and address other social needs and concerns that may arise.

In order to provide services without stigma and discrimination, the National AIDS Program has established a system where sex workers, who access services, are given three (3) cards for distribution amongst other known sex workers. This allows them, and other sex workers, to access services without any challenges.

d. Women in Prison

Women in prison often face discrimination based on their gender, race, sexual orientation, or other factors. This intersectionality amplifies their vulnerability within the criminal justice system. There is always room for improvement when it comes to serving specific marginalized groups. The Directorate is planning to engage in sensitization around women in prison and their unique challenges.

e. Programmes and Interventions

The Directorate of Gender Affairs, NGOs, CSOs, faith-based organisations and relevant government agencies need to create and implement programs and interventions geared towards addressing gender-based violence perpetrated by men, as well as addressing violence that is perpetrated against men. This will encourage more male survivors to come forward confidently to make reports and men who perpetrate gender-based violence to have access to rehabilitation support services. There have been programs geared towards men and gender-based violence previously, but they need to be scaled up and diversified in terms of scope and purpose.

The Support and Referral Centre offers services to all persons who have experienced some form of gender-based and sexual violence. The SARC has a strict confidentiality and non-discrimination policy and fosters an all-inclusive atmosphere. It employs a client-centred and non-discriminatory approach and serves all members of the community regardless of race, colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or political beliefs.

Although there haven't been any legislative steps taken to decriminalize women in prostitution or measures to reduce the demand for prostitution, there are social

protection programmes which can be used for women to exit prostitution. Further, apart from parenting workshops, there have also been no specific measures taken to prevent and address potential cases of exploitation of girls by their parents to supplement family income through prostitution. As it relates to migrant women, through the Department of Labour and Immigration and the Trafficking in Persons Secretariat, there are screening tools and protocols that are used to detect persons who are suspected trafficking victims and migrants. There are also specific victim-centred interventions that are implemented to ensure that their rights are protected once identified.

f. External Forces

In the region, the EnGenDER behavioural change communication project focused on the link between gender and climate change. Under EnGenDER, the DoGA implemented the Wi REDI project. Wi REDI aimed to raise national awareness of these linkages and improve national capacity to take gender-responsive action around climate-related disasters. The risk of increased GBV post-disaster was addressed with workshops for first responders. However, the lack of data on GBV and shelters in the country limits the targeting of programs.

Emerging directions in the region provide an opening for Antigua and Barbuda to both engage around national-level commitments on GBV and demonstrate leadership in driving the regional strategies forward. The OECS gender policy highlights the economic impacts of GBV, a need for conflict-sensitive program planning, addressing sexual harassment and incest, and fostering inter-ministerial collaboration for GBV response. The Caribbean Development Bank currently offers financial and technical support to the DoGA and has noted incest, human trafficking, and problematic socio-cultural interpretations of masculinity as key areas for intervention.

22.) In the past 5 years, what actions and measures has your country taken to promote women's participation in public life and decision making?

Antigua and Barbuda recognizes the importance of women actively and meaningfully participating in public life and decision making. In 2020, The Directorate of Gender Affairs developed the Emerging Female Leaders Program (EFL) which is geared towards providing training, skill building and a widened network to young aspiring female leaders, to ensure that they are given a platform and opportunity to have their leadership abilities nurtured. Since the inception of this program, young women have benefitted from initiatives such as a public speaking competition, a mock Parliament session, a professional networking event, a pitch your business event and a business and political seminar. Additionally, Antigua and Barbuda has a Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL) national chapter. CIWiL is a non-partisan and independent networking organisation committed to increasing the numbers of women in leadership in the region. The organisation has done many networking and capacity building sessions over the past 5 years, benefitting women interested in leadership and public life and they specifically also gave a focus on women's political participation, with a view of transformation the local political landscape to eventually make it more inclusive and representative. Moreover, there is the president's 10 initiative.

Additionally, Antigua and Barbuda has established the National Youth Parliament which has provided an opportunity for youth, including young women to have an opportunity to engage in advocacy and discourse around development and current affairs nationally and to be educated on the local political system, with a view to spark their interest in elective politics and representation. This organisation is a viable pipeline to expose more women to politics at a younger age, and to increase the number of women who are putting forward themselves for politics at the highest levels. It should be noted that the current president of the National Youth Parliament is a woman.

Additionally, there are currently 6 female senators within the upper house of the parliament of Antigua and Barbuda and this allows for women's voices to be heard on issues of national importance and priority. Currently, the president of the senate is a woman. Moreover, in the 2023 national elections in Antigua and Barbuda, the two major political parties both had women running on their slate. One party had 4 out of their 17 candidates being women and the other major party had 3 out of their 17 candidates being women. The third political entity also had women on their slate, as they put forward 4 female candidates. In total, 11 women would have ran for elective politics in 2023. It is also noteworthy that the third political party in Antigua and Barbuda has a female leader.

Furthermore, in terms of women in major leadership positions in Antigua and Barbuda, currently, the Financial Secretary of the Ministry of Finance is a woman, the Director of the country's cyber security division is a woman and the country's high commissioner to the United Kingdom is a woman. There are also 12 female board chairpersons and 11 female board deputy-chairpersons and 11 female ambassadors to date.

Furthermore, the Directorate of Gender Affairs recognizes that despite the gradual progress that has been made locally in relation to promoting women's participation in public life and decision making, there is still much work to be done. As a result, outside of the leadership program for women that the Directorate implements, there is consistent messaging, sensitization and public education being done through school outreach, through media interviews, through workshop and training sessions and through general advocacy, on the importance of empowering women to be leaders and involved in decision making, highlighting the principles of equity and equality and the benefits to be derived from taking a more inclusive approach. Moreover, deeply rooted and stereotypical cultural norms, perceptions and practices significantly impact women's ability to effectively participate in public life and decision making.

23.) In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media, including through information and communication technologies (ICT)?

In the past 5 years Antigua and Barbuda has made efforts to increase women's access to expression and participation in decision-making in the media and in the information and communication technology sectors. In relation to women having a prominent role in relation to decision making in these fields, currently, the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry of Information, Communication Technology, Utilities and Energy is a woman, and additionally, the general manager of the national broadcasting station is also a woman. Additionally, the director of E-Government is also a woman. Moreover, within the last five years, Antigua and Barbuda has established the 4th landed campus of the University of the West Indies, the Five Islands Campus. There are currently more women enrolled within the institution than men who

have been able to benefit from information technology related bachelors' degrees. Furthermore, it has been announced within the last five years that there are plans to establish a school of Science, Artificial Intelligence and Computing that would offer degrees in animation, computing, robotics and other specialities, as part of the UWI Five Islands Campus' offering.

Antigua and Barbuda also has the Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology (ABIIT) tertiary level institution that provides certifications and degrees for individuals within the areas of technology and ICTs. Women /girls are pre-dominantly enrolled and benefit from this institution. It is also noteworthy to state that in Antigua and Barbuda, there are many internet cafe and centres in which students, and people in general, including women and girls are able to access computers and internet for free of cost for educational, business, or casual usage and purposes.

Additionally, within the last five years, there have been many different initiatives within both the public and private sector that have sought to raise awareness to strengthening women's involvement and access to technology and ICT. In 2023, for International Women's Day, The Directorate of Gender Affairs held an event dubbed "The DigitALL Summit", which brought together women and girls with an interest in ICT, with industry leaders and other like-minded professionals in a space where they were able to learn, grow and network.

In 2021, in celebration of the International Girls in ICT Day, a selection of Antigua's 3rd form secondary school students attended an event held at the Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology (ABIIT) to commemorate International Girls in ICT day. It was supported by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Creative Industries. The event was sponsored by Flow, alongside other tech organisations such as Avada Digital, Project Jaguar and UNOPS Global Innovation Centre, who each supported the breakout sessions in Graphic Design, Robotics, Leadership and Teamwork.

Also, Antigua and Barbuda had a robotics team known as Dadlibots, that participated in the FIRST Global Challenge, which is a world-class robotics event that brings together high school students from across the globe. The primary objective of FGC is to inspire and educate young minds in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. The team comprised both males and females.

Furthermore, in 2022, more than 200 students from the primary school to tertiary level took part in a summer camp put on by the Ministry of Education and the University of West Indies Five Islands that focused on six core areas, namely, fundamentals of drones and drone technology, robotics, augmented reality, e-sports, photography and graphic design, and mobile app and web development – all of which are linked to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, known as STEM subjects. The camp had both a virtual and hands-on approach. Students also learned the basics of computer assembly, and some had the opportunity to earn an IBM certification. IBM certification courses are recognized worldwide and can prepare students for lucrative careers in data analytics and software development.

Additionally, the Mill Academy, a primary school opened in 2023, offers robotics as a subject offers to its male and female students.

Lessons Learnt

The statistics below show the number of female students that have pursued ICT courses over the past 5 years at the secondary (CSEC) and tertiary levels (CAPE), and shows that there is significant room for improvement in relation to the uptake of females pursuing ICT subjects.

Female students registered 2019-2024							
CAPE							
SUBJECTS		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Computer Science	Unit 1	6	5	8	14	5	5
	unit 2	9	4	5	6	10	4
Physics	Unit 1	20	9	7	6	10	16
	Unit 2	6	15	9	6	2	5

Female students registered 2019-2024						
CSEC						
SUBJECT	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Physics	87	89	77	94	77	92
Information Tech	187	190	186	188	150	184

24.) Please describe your country’s current national women’s machinery (government entity exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women) and describe the measures that your country taken over the past five years to establish and/or strengthen it.

The Directorate of Gender Affairs is the national gender machinery in Antigua and Barbuda. It falls under the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation, and the Environment, and has a Minister of State, as well as senior Minister who have oversight over the ministry and the Directorate of Gender Affairs. The national gender machinery was created in 1980 by the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, and at that time was known as the Women’s Desk, it evolved into the Directorate of Gender Affairs. The mandate of the Directorate of Gender Affairs is to ensure that the national development process is gender responsive. The Directorate focuses on specific portfolio areas to facilitate the integration of gender into all policies, plans, programmes and projects, and provides technical guidance on gender and development issues in Antigua and Barbuda.

DoGA’s current portfolio areas are:

- Climate Change, & the Environment
- Economic Empowerment
- Education
- Gender-based Violence
- Health
- Institutional Mechanisms for Mainstreaming Gender

- Women in leadership and political participation

DoGA develops comprehensive programs and services geared towards addressing gender inequalities, in order to meet the specific needs of women, men, and other vulnerable groups. This process involves lobbying to amend or enact new legislation that is responsive to the issues of vulnerable groups. The Directorate also aim to provide a practical measure of gender equality nationally. Gender Affairs' programmes and activities prioritize collaboration and partnership with other government and non-government agencies and institutions to integrate a multi-sectoral approach.

Over the years the staff complement and human resources as well as capacity have grown greatly. The Directorate of Gender Affairs has a technical team comprised of an Executive Director, 3 senior technical offices, and 7 support officers. The 3 senior technicians and the Executive Director all have tertiary level education and plans are in place to hire more senior technical officers within this year. The current budget of the Directorate of Gender Affairs for the year 2024 is \$816,094.00 XCD dollars. Resources are a challenge as the Directorate is heavily dependent on regional and international development agencies to drive major projects and programs, however, the department has been able to lobby the support of corporate partners to assist in the department having the capacity to maintain its proactivity and consistency in terms of fulfilling its mandates through things such as trainings, workshops, PSA's, development of information materials and the implementation of programmatic activities.

Additionally, The Directorate of Gender Affairs is also the coordinating body for the management and functioning of the Support and Referral Centre, which is a one-stop location for survivors of gender-based violence and has 4 full time officers that carry out the day-to-day roles and responsibilities, required for the effective operation of the SARC.

In relation to the Directorate's programmes currently, there are four major programs being implemented, these are:

- i. The Emerging Female Leaders Programme (EFL)** – This Program is geared towards providing capacity building opportunities, training and networking to Women in Antigua and Barbuda and has had mock parliament sessions, public speaking competitions, networking events and business and political seminars implemented so far, within the last few years.
- ii. Work and Life Skills Program (WLSP)** – The WLSP was re-established in 2022 and is geared towards providing individuals with the skills needed to be more competitive in the areas of entrepreneurship and the world of work generally. Increased knowledge and better prospects for economic autonomy are major goals of this program. There have been sewing sessions, marketing sessions, branding a business sessions, financial literacy, and investment sessions and entrepreneurship session implemented under this program so far.
- iii. Men's Critical Issues Series (MCI)** – The MCI series was established in 2021 and is geared towards providing a platform for issues affecting men and boys to be heard and solutions conceptualised. This has been done through media interviews with male experts on various topics relevant to men and boys such as substance use and abuse, professional development, education and conflict

resolution. In-person sessions have also taken place to engage men and boys more directly.

- iv. **Support and Referral Centre Support Programme** – This program was established in 2022 and is geared towards providing alternative therapeutic solutions to survivors of gender-based violence and people facing trauma. This program has had yoga and self defence sessions since its creation.

25.) In the past five years, what other mechanisms and tools has your country used to mainstream gender equality across sectors? (e.g. gender focal points in the Executive, Legislature or Judiciary; inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms; gender audits, consultations with women’s organizations)

In the past 5 years, Antigua and Barbuda has made attempts to mainstream gender equality across sectors, through different sectors and strategies.

- i. **Training with diverse and widespread set of stakeholders** – The Directorate of Gender Affairs has led nationally in efforts to mainstream gender across sectors, and one of the primary ways this has been done is through various trainings and workshops that are meant to sensitise and raise awareness of gender and social considerations within sectors in both the public and private sector. Trainings have been done in Barbuda addressing the issue of gender-based violence, training has been done on integrating gender into the media and reporting, and training have been done with disaster management, and emergency response stakeholders on gender responsive disaster risk management approaches.
- ii. **Consultations and validation input in policies, legislation and programmes within the public sector** – The Directorate of Gender Affairs has had the opportunity over the past 5 years to contribute input and validate various policies and programs across sectors. Some of these are the national sex offender register bill, the Caribbean Development Bank Road Rehabilitation Project, The Green Climate Fund Build Project, the gender-responsive blended financing window under the SIRD Fund, the EnGenDER Project and comprehensive disaster management blueprint implementation in Antigua and Barbuda. The Directorate of Gender Affairs was able to contribute to, assist with mainstreaming and play a part in implementing some of these programs, policies, legislation and projects.
- iii. **Media Engagement** – The Directorate of Gender Affairs has been able to effectively leverage and utilise both traditional and modern media, in the forms of social media, television, radio and newspapers to highlight and spark national discourse on key gender and social issues in Antigua and Barbuda, and has also been able to educate the public, sensitise and build capacity amongst key stakeholders within the public and private sector on a plethora of issues ranging from education, gender based violence, health, persons with disabilities and economic empowerment. The work and programs of the department has been able to be amplified, which has helped to strategically mainstream relevant gender considerations into the work of key agencies across sectors and amongst the general public.

26.) If there is a national human rights institution in your country, what measures has it taken to address violations of women’s rights and promote gender equality?

Currently, Antigua and Barbuda does not have a national human rights institution. However, the island has an Ombudsman. The Office of the Ombudsman is an independent officer of Parliament appointed under Section 66 of the Antigua and Barbuda Constitution. It has limited participation in the regional National Human Rights Institution network, the Network of National Institutions in the Americas. Like most ombudsman offices it is primarily concerned with addressing maladministration in public bodies, rather than human rights violations.

It should also be noted that the nation of Antigua & Barbuda is a signatory to various human rights conventions, including:

- i. Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (“Convention of Belem do Pará”)
- ii. Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT)
- iii. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- iv. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- v. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD)
- vi. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

As it stands, treaty reports are conducted by the Ministry of Legal Affairs while engagement as a country on subject matters pertaining to our treaty obligations is conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Meetings are being conducted between the two entities to flesh out the establishment of a coordinating body or Commission for Human Rights, to facilitate harmonization.

27. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to build and sustain peace, promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development and implement the women, peace and security agenda?

Antigua and Barbuda’s economy is on a gradual recovery path, following a sharp contraction in real output of 20 percent in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Growth is estimated at 5¼ percent in 2021, driven by a rebound in tourism and construction activity. Despite the surge in international energy prices, inflation was subdued in 2021 due to price controls on utilities, fuels, and public transportation. The fiscal position improved in 2021 with a narrowing of the primary deficit as pandemic-related spending was wound down and better tax administration and higher external grants bolstered revenues.

The growth momentum is expected to carry into 2022 and 2023, with real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) projected to expand by 6 and 5½ percent respectively, supported by strong

tourist arrivals, foreign direct investment in the hospitality sector, and public sector projects. However, output will return to pre-pandemic levels only by 2025 due to scarring effects of the pandemic. Inflation is forecasted to accelerate to 8½ percent in 2022, reflecting the pass-through from higher global food and fuel prices, before moderating to 4½ percent in 2023. To cushion the impact of rising living costs on the vulnerable, the government introduced targeted subsidies to the transport and fishing sectors to keep public transportation fares and seafood prices stable and removed taxes on flour to contain the rise in bread prices.

Continued fiscal consolidation efforts and the growth recovery have helped improve the fiscal position, but outturns underperformed the targets envisaged in the government's medium-term fiscal strategy, while gross financing needs and arrears to domestic and external creditors remain high. In 2022 the public debt was 1,516 million dollars, has increased 12 million since 2021. This amount means that the debt in 2022 reach 86.24% of Antigua and Barbuda GDP, a 10.08 percentage point fall from 2021, when it was 96.32% of GDP. The position of Antigua and Barbuda, as compared with the rest of the world, has improved in 2022 in terms of the GDP percentage. Currently, it is country number 156 in the list of debt to GDP and 155 in debt per capita.

In the Medium-Term Development Strategy Antigua and Barbuda commits to initiate a harmonious, prosperous and modern Antigua and Barbuda founded on the principles of sustainability and inclusive growth; where equality of opportunity, peace, and justice prevail for all citizens and residents. Antigua has a stable political environment with a democratic political system which is based on free and fair elections. This has been supported by a stable macroeconomic environment, a pursuit for socioeconomic development and an independent and sound judicial system and membership in an integrated OECS legal system known for efficiency, transparency, and reliability. Overall, the island-nation continues to perform relatively well on many of the global governance indicators. In terms of voice and accountability, Antigua and Barbuda, scored on average between 1996 and 2022, 0.56 points with a minimum of 0.32 points in 2003 and a maximum of 0.74 points in 2020. This means that the country has a relatively good framework for allowing citizens to participate in governance matters, allowing freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media. The Freedom of Information Act (2004) gives citizens the right to access official documents, with the exception of confidential reports. It also facilitates mechanisms through which documents can be obtained under the supervision of an information officer.

The landscape of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has been known to be an effective voice for change on issues of equality, calling for transparency and justice and working to keep the power and the spirit of volunteerism and active citizenship alive. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda continues to recognize and create the enabling environment for CSOs to play meaningful roles in governance and policy making processes. To solidify the importance of CSOs, in 2020, Antigua and Barbuda signed and ratified the Escazú Agreement, the first international environmental agreement which guarantees CSOs the right to access information, public participation and access to justice to reduce conflicts since it provides mechanisms for contributions to decision making. Since 2015 for example, the Government has facilitated the participation of CSOs at United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings, providing registration and some financial support to them. Essentially, the country encourages growth and development of civil society organizations as a critical element in the process of governance.

The legal anti-corruption framework of Antigua and Barbuda contains many of the necessary provisions to stem corruption but also has some gaps. The Integrity in Public Life Act (2004) establishes a code of conduct for civil servants and the Integrity Commission as one of the principal anti-corruption institutions in the country. The law requires all public officials to declare all their assets to the Integrity Commission. The Integrity Commission oftentimes lacks the resources to undertake investigations into alleged acts of corruption.

National security is at the core of social stability and an effective and well-managed security sector protects citizens and visitors alike. It is important that the public is educated about their legal rights and avenues for redress and that they have access to legal services. Antigua and Barbuda had 16 murders in 2023, a 60 percent increase from 2022 which had a total of 10 murders. Most of the crimes committed are petty theft, car break-ins, home invasions and malicious damage which account for more than half of the crimes reported. Most of the crimes occur in the both rural and urban communities. Also, there were 10 reported cases of sexual assaults recorded in 2023.

Over the years there have been some issues with cyber security with some government websites being targets of attacks. The government along with other governments of the Eastern Caribbean have been taking steps to develop better investigative infrastructure for cyber incidents as evidenced by the 2017 opening of the Regional Security Systems Digital Forensic Laboratory, significantly enhancing their ability to investigate crimes with a digital nexus. The country also promulgated the Electronic Crimes Act (2013), which addresses the prevention and punishment of electronic crimes and related matters. The Act covers illegal entry into networks and systems, unauthorized use of the systems, illegally obtaining information and sending malicious software and/or messages. It also covers areas including sending offensive messages through communication services; violation of privacy; child pornography; and harassment utilizing electronic means.

Antigua and Barbuda has been progressive in the protection of children. The country has ratified the UN conventions on the rights of children, women and, most recently in January 2016, persons with disabilities. It has also adopted other key international legal instruments aimed at addressing interlinked problems of harmful child labour, trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children for commercial gain. National legislation and policies articulate bold targets aligned with the SDGs and strategic regional visions that aim to improve the lives of girls and boys in the areas of education, health, food security and social protection.

28. In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to increase the leadership, representation, and participation of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response, at decision-making levels in situations of armed and other conflicts, and in fragile or crisis settings?

In 2017, Hurricane Irma devastated the sister isle of Barbuda, with almost all of its infrastructure and buildings completely destroyed. From this tragedy emerged The BeFoundation which works to transform the lives of Barbudans through a focus on sustainable development, as well as restoring and empowering the community through people centred programming and services. Networking and implementation have been a driving force through this group with support from Caribbean Development Bank, through the Project Implementation Management Unit (PIMU) of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. From

2020 to present, there has been various activities being done to revitalize the Barbudan community to restore it to normalcy. These include:

- i. Develop social media campaigns as well as conducting advocacy workshops to train community leaders, religious leaders, and community members and elders on gender based violence and the laws, building their capacity to inform and assist their communities and conduct outreach programmes on gender-based violence within communities.
- ii. Develop information and education materials with community members on key messages to be distributed and displayed within communities.
- iii. Develop functional community partnerships and liaisons and implement capacity building programmes and campaigns for their effective functioning (which commenced with the Launch activity). Research on target participants and populations; use and access to services throughout the project cycle; as to heighten evidence-based interventions for Barbuda aimed at service providers (which also commenced with the Launch activity).
- iv. Develop edutainment and art advocacy campaign involving young people to use creative arts to advocate for a violence free society (commenced in the Launch)
- v. Create advertisements through public service announcements portraying ways of resolving conflict positively, positive images of family relationships and relations between men and women, and non-stereotyped gender roles using community members, sports icons and public figures (premiering on social media and during the Launch)
- vi. Promote the Directorate of Gender Affairs' 24 hours hotline through posters and via print media, television and radio.

29. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to enhance judicial and nonjudicial accountability for violations of international humanitarian law and violations of the human rights of women and girls in situations of armed and other conflicts or humanitarian action and crisis response?

Over the past five years, there has not been any armed conflict requiring humanitarian action or crisis response in the last 5 years. Antigua and Barbuda has enacted anti-human trafficking legislation and continues to enforce laws against human and drug trafficking and illegal firearms.

We have strengthened the capacity of first responders to address the needs of women and girls in natural disasters to prevent sexual and gender exploitation and abuse. Also, the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court which is the Judiciary has continuously been engaged with JURIST to strengthen the capacity of the court system and improve gender equality. The court considers human rights instruments and applicable international law in its judgments. Further, Antigua and Barbuda is entitled to appear before the International Court of Justice and has submitted requests for Advisory Opinions to the court.

30. In the last five years, what actions has your country taken to eliminate discrimination against and violations of the rights of the girl child, including adolescent girls?

The Ministry of Education has established a Girls' Day in most primary government schools consisting of specialized programs for girls specific needs and empowerment. The introduction

of the child friendly school initiatives and safe school project and youth mental health forums, youth for change forums are examples of interventions that have been introduced to eliminate discrimination in schools. In 2023, Flow announced its ongoing partnership with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Creative Industries to celebrate International Girls' Day with an ICT Day under the theme "Digital Skills for Life". This event was hosted for secondary school students where several women who excelled in STEM-careers made presentations. The partnership signals Flow's ongoing efforts to spread awareness about the viability of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers for girls and young women and to encourage their participation in the technology industry and in telecommunications.

Additionally, there are various institutions and policies that are in place to protect the girl child:

- i. Sunshine Home for Girls** - An institution that was established to provide a safe haven for young girls and teens who have either been abused, neglected or delinquent.
- ii. National Youth Policy** - Facilitate a multi sectoral approach to youth development, including the strengthening of mechanisms for coordination and collaboration among youth serving organizations. The purposes of the National Youth Policy are to (i) define a common vision and framework for youth development, (ii) define, promote and protect the rights, the roles and responsibilities of young people in their personal and national development, (iii) serve as a tool for advocating development issues that affect youth, and (iv) provide the framework for monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of youth development programmes and services.
- iii. Youth Intervention Unit** - A department within the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda – has been working with at risk youths and their families to prevent them from going down an unfavourable path in life.
- iv. Child Justice Act** - This act was developed to provide for the equal status of children in Antigua and Barbuda, as well as to amend the Child Justice Act 2015, No. 23 of 2015 to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 8 years to 12 years in keeping with regional standards and for other related and connected purposes.
- v. Childcare and Adoption Act** - To provide for the care and, protection and adoption of children, operation of adoption services and other related matters and for connected purposes.
- vi. Family and Social Services Division** - The Family and Social Services Division (FSSD) within the Ministry of Health, Wellness, Social Transformation & the Environment offers support through social workers and counselling to children, and a parenting programs which offers counselling and training for parents, particularly those whose children have had an encounter with the law.

31.) In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, including climate change adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity conservation and land degradation?

In the past 5 years, Antigua and Barbuda has worked diligently to integrate gender perspectives and concerns into environmental policies, climate change adaptation and mitigation,

biodiversity conservation and land degradation, The Directorate of Gender Affairs has worked closely and in collaboration with the National Office of Disaster Services to do collaborative trainings around gender and early warning systems with key stakeholders to ensure that a gender responsive lens is being integrated into the process and to ensure that the EWS is being tailored to meet the specific needs of various groups of people, based on factors such as their socio-economic status, their education level, their geographical location, their understanding of technology, amongst other factors and considerations.

Women have been prominently involved in relation to climate change action in Antigua and Barbuda primarily through the Department of Environment, as the government's negotiator for climate change and main implementing body of the Paris Agreement. The DOE has a significant amount of women on their staff in both technical and administrative capacities, and is headed by a female Director, who is also the country's ambassador for climate change. The DOE also has an Internship and Apprenticeship programme which aims to provide work opportunities for university students in climate action, offers them a chance to work full time at the DOE, following the internship in some instances. Many women have participated in and benefited from this internship programme.

The DOE has also done various studies that seek to better understand the intersections between gender and climate change and to understand differentiated coping capacities. Some of these studies are:

National Gender Assessment Survey: The Economic Impact of Climate Change on men and women in Antigua and Barbuda - Baseline Gender Assessment of Antigua and Barbuda Climate Change Programme in Agriculture - Gender Assessment of the Just Transition of the Workforce - Baseline Analysis for the Electricity and Road Transport Sectors in Antigua and Barbuda - Gender Baseline Assessment - Baseline Conditions for the Mainstreaming Financial Resilience to Climate Change in Antigua and Barbuda Project - Acceptability and Affordability of Renewable Energy Household Survey

Moreover, the Environmental Awareness Group is a prominent group that has been working in the areas of climate change and conservation and has facilitated women making an impact in these fields, in Antigua and Barbuda. The Environmental Awareness Group (EAG) was established in 1998 and is Antigua and Barbuda's oldest non-governmental environmental organization. It has been at the forefront of conservation work for over thirty years. From restoring offshore islands and saving species from extinction to education, community engagement, and influencing environmental policy, the EAG continues to work collaboratively to enact environmental change in Antigua and Barbuda. Core to their work is the aspiration to have a society with an individual and collective responsibility to care for and value biodiversity and ecosystems for the long-term benefit of people and wildlife. To do that, they stand strong on integrity and the belief that environmental work should not only be worthwhile but interesting and satisfying with a hint of adventure. The EAG maintains three main programs, which are mainly focused on the management of critically endangered species:

- i.** The OICP (Offshore Islands Conservation Programme), whose keystone species is the critically endangered endemic Antiguan Racer.
- ii.** The RER (Redonda Ecosystem Reserve) focuses on the endangered endemic lizards found on Redonda.
- iii.** The AMCP (Antigua Marine Conservation Programme), whose emphasis is on endangered sea turtles who forage and nest in Antigua and Barbuda.

EAG has been led by a woman for the past 5 years and senior members of the team are also women. Furthermore, Antigua and Barbuda also has a community managed national park known as the Walling's Nature Reserve, that has been used to regenerate over 1000 acres of rainforest. It should be noted that Walling's Nature Reserve was founded by a woman. Over the past 5 years, the reserve has done reforestation work, has executed hydroponics courses that women have been able to benefit from, has embarked on a project entitled "Strengthening national health capacities and reducing socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis in Antigua and Barbuda", which focused on providing grant funding to existing Micro, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (MSMEs) operating in Antigua and Barbuda, whose owners were desirous of transitioning their businesses to an online/digital model and providing safe deliveries. They have also done an exercise in which 600 food producing trees were planted.

32.) In the past five years, what actions has your country taken to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programmes for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience?

In the past 5 years Antigua and Barbuda has taken steps to integrate gender perspectives into policies and programs for disaster risk reduction and building environmental and climate resilience through:

EnGenDER Project – EnGenDER was a multi-year regional project that launched in 2019 that Antigua and Barbuda benefited from. The project sought to further integrate gender equality and human-rights based approaches into disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change (CC) adaptation and environmental management frameworks and interventions and identify and address some of the gaps to ensure equal access to DRR and climate change and environment solutions for both men, women, boys and girls. Under this project the Directorate of Gender Affairs was able to create information materials such as brochures that educated the public on the intersections of gender and climate change and distribution was done in various communities throughout the island by DoGA staff. A sporting event was also held in collaboration with the local disaster and environment office with teams wearing climate change and disaster branded uniforms and apparel to raise awareness and presentations were made to educate the teams and viewing crowd about the project and about gender responsive climate change and disaster risk reduction. Trainings were also done in both Antigua and Barbuda with emergency first responders and DRR stakeholders to ensure they have the capacity to mainstream gender into their work long term.

Under this project a policy brief entitled "Gendered Impacts of Climate Change and Disaster Risk in Antigua and Barbuda" was done, that looked at understanding gender and differentiated impacts and coping capacities as it relates to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Additionally, in 2022, the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) held a gender mainstreaming workshop in Antigua and Barbuda that was geared towards strengthening flood preparedness response and ensuring that the processed by emergency and disaster management stakeholders are include and gender responsive.

Antigua and Barbuda has aimed to strengthen the inclusion of gender and social considerations in its updated climate Ambitions through policy and legislative action as well as gender-

specific commitments. Under the Environmental Protection Management Act (EPMA), Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) and Environmental Management Plan must include evaluation of environmental and social impacts for any development. The Sustainable Island Resource Framework Fund is a financing mechanism that was established to fund environmental and climate change related programmes and many vulnerable groups have benefited from this fund.

The Department of Environment (DOE), as the lead government agency for climate change, has adopted Environmental and Social Safeguard and Gender Policies which formalize the DOE's commitment to promote environmental and socially sustainable projects as well as mainstream gender nationally and achieve gender sensitivity in all areas. In the generation of its updated National Determined Contributions (NDCs), Antigua and Barbuda has mainstreamed gender in a more comprehensive and ambitious manner by including gender specific targets which seek to address gender differentiated vulnerabilities and has also ensured that gender considerations are included in Adaptation and Mitigation targets.

Additionally, in May 2024, Antigua and Barbuda hosted the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4), which is a meeting organized by the United Nations every decade. SIDS4 brought together leaders from the 39 independent States and also 18 Associate Members of United Nations regional commissions and other world leaders, officials, and experts from the private sector, academia and civil society, to address the unique challenges facing SIDS. SIDS4 covered a range of important topics, including climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean conservation, disaster risk reduction, access to finance, debt sustainability and the overall sustainable development of SIDS. The outcome of the conference was a comprehensive plan of action dubbed the "Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS", that offers solutions to the unique challenges of SIDS, as well as a new 10-year framework for international cooperation and support. This document includes social and gender recommendations, requirements and safeguards to ensure that SIDS are taking an inclusive approach towards climate change and disaster risk management.

33. Please describe your country's national strategy or action plan for gender equality, including its name, the period it covers, its priority, funding and alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the targets under SDG 5.

There is, at present, no national strategy or action plan for achieving gender equality. The national gender machinery, the Directorate of Gender Affairs, spearheads national efforts to mainstream gender equality nationally. The Directorate collaborates with local, regional, and international partners to execute projects and programmes aimed at increasing national awareness around gender equality.

However, Antigua & Barbuda is presently involved in a multi-year project funded by the Caribbean Development Bank and implemented through CARICOM to draft a national gender policy and action plan. The Directorate of Gender Affairs has met with the project stakeholders to clarify the parameters of the project and is currently formalising the official project timelines and setting up the Expert Verification Team to lead the project locally. The Directorate is on track to complete a draft of the policy and action plan by the start of the third quarter of this year, and to complete the full project by the close of 2025.

34. Please describe your country's system for tracking the proportion of the national budget that is invested in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women (gender-responsive budgeting), including the approximate proportion of the national budget that is invested in this area.

The DoGA receives annual funding allocation from the Treasury, which is used to support staffing and maintenance for the national gender machinery to support gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment activities nationwide. Every year the national budget offers justification for the financial allocations attributed to each ministry and subsidiary department.

35. What formal mechanisms are in place for different stakeholders to participate in the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

There are, at present, no formal mechanisms in place to guide the implementation and monitoring of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, the NGM intends to include these concerns in the national gender policy currently being developed with support from the Caribbean Development Bank and CARICOM.

36. Please describe how stakeholders have contributed to the preparation of the present national report.

The NGM established a National Working Group to support the drafting of the present national report. The Working Group provided recommendations on the NGM's reporting strategy and reviewed the draft report. The NGM also engaged a wide range of local stakeholders to request information for the national report. This approach aimed to ensure that the report's contents would be multidimensional and comprehensive. Stakeholders also attended a national consultation and validation exercise to review the draft report and make any necessary changes and to ensure the report's accuracy.

37. Please describe your country's action plan and timeline for implementation of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (if a State party), or of the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review or other United Nations human rights mechanisms that address gender inequality/discrimination against women.

The state has not yet set an official timeline for the implementation of the latest CEDAW recommendations. However, it is expected that the upcoming national gender policy will encapsulate the recommendations and set forth the mechanisms and timelines for implementation.

38. What are the most important areas in which your country has made most progress over the past five years when it comes to gender statistics at the national level?

- a) Established interagency coordination mechanism on gender statistics

An interagency coordination was established through the introduction of the national electronic gender-based violence database. The coordination mechanism was established to standardize the intake and assessment form for the collection of data between the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, the Family and Social Services, the health sector, statistics, the Directorate of Gender Affairs and civil society.

The working group was established with a memorandum of understanding between agencies, classification tools for reporting gender-based violence, training on the use and management of the integrated database system and protocols between agencies on information sharing and confidentiality. The data from the system is used by the National Statistical Authority and forms part of the statistical information that is collected routinely. The national electronic database was however limited in its scope since it was not linked to the court database system. Presently, there are efforts to merge the system with the Sexual Offences Model Court monitoring and evaluation system to ensure that cases are tracked from reporting throughout the entire justice chain. Members of the Statistics Division have also received training on same.

b. Engaged in capacity building to strengthen the use of gender statistics

As part of the implementation of the National Strategic Action Plan in 2016, through the Directorate of Gender Affairs, a gender statistics training was held with key sector stakeholders and civil society organizations across all sectors on the use and importance of gender indicators and gender statistics in designing programs and policies. The National Statistical Office continues to play a leading role in coordinating the collection of gender statistics across all of the CARICOM gender equality indicators. A valuable lesson learnt from the training process was the need for follow-up and a sustainable coordinating mechanism that will support the sharing of information and further capacity support for stakeholders.

c. Used gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and implementation of programs and projects

In Antigua and Barbuda, there is improvement in the use of gender-sensitive data in the formulation of policy and the implementation of programs. Gender statistics and analysis produced in reports are used to inform policies and programs; the Social Protection Policy, the Prevention of Harassment Policy, the National Youth Policy, the Service Sector Policy, Environmental Policies and Child Protection Policy are a few examples. The design and development of programs across sectors in health and the environment, social services, finance and public works and agriculture sectors integrate gender statistics in the design of programs and interventions.

39. Over the next five years, what are your country's priorities for strengthening national gender statistics?

The government of Antigua and Barbuda is committed to utilizing and improving the collection of administrative data to address gender data gaps - this will also assist the government with

introducing evidenced-based gender responsive policies and programs that seek to address the needs of vulnerable populations.

Currently, Antigua & Barbuda is working on the creation and introduction of a national gender policy and action plan as the overarching framework to promote gender equality and will establish the requirement for all sectors and agencies to promote the development of gender statistics. The policy will provide the tools and accountability mechanisms to ensure that sectors are producing and using gender statistics. Additionally, the Directorate of Gender Affairs will prioritize through its gender equality action plan, the introduction of new surveys to produce baseline information on gender-based violence.

The nation will also prioritize the following, for strengthening national gender statistics:

- i. Capacity Building** - Capacity building is vital for strengthening national gender statistics as it contributes to the generation of reliable, timely, and relevant data necessary for evidence-based policymaking, monitoring progress towards gender equality, and empowering individuals and communities to actively contribute to positive social change - same can be achieved through workshops, seminars and/or virtual/in-person trainings.
- ii. Standardization** - Standardization is essential for strengthening national gender statistics as it enhances reliability, ensures consistency, promotes accountability, and supports evidence-based policy development and advocacy efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.
- iii. Institutional Collaboration** - Institutional collaboration is essential for strengthening national gender statistics as it facilitates the integration of expertise, data sharing, coordination of efforts, promotion of data use, and mainstreaming of gender considerations. By working in unison, stakeholders can generate high-quality gender statistics that can play a pivotal role in creating evidence-based policies, programs, and interventions aimed at advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.
- iv. Advocacy & Awareness** - Essential for strengthening national gender statistics, advocacy and awareness campaigns can promote data collection, raise awareness about gender issues, build partnerships, and empower marginalized groups. By advocating for the prioritization and utilization of gender-disaggregated data, stakeholders can advance efforts towards achieving gender equality.
- v. Localization of SDGs** - Localization of SDGs will include the strengthening of our national statistical system and our national statistical office so that our nation is better able to establish monitoring, reporting, and evaluation systems to track progress towards the achievement of the SDG targets.
- vi. Monitoring & Evaluation** - By integrating M&E into gender-related initiatives, stakeholders can enhance their capacity to monitor progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment effectively. They enable progress assessments, impact tracking, identification of challenges, evidence-based decision making, accountability promotion, and data quality improvement.

40. What gender-specific indicators has your country prioritized for monitoring progress on the SDGs?

The data collection and compilation on SDG 5 indicators and gender specific indicators have begun in Antigua and Barbuda. Various agencies and sectors are contributing to the data collection process. The following indicators have been prioritized are below:

- i. The proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments.
- ii. Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.
- iii. Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence.
- iv. Proportion of women in managerial positions.

Challenges for collecting and compiling data in these indications: (1) Data availability and coverage; (2) Timelines; (3) disaggregation and inclusivity; (4) Data privacy and ethics; (5) resource constraints.

Addressing these challenges requires sustained political commitment, investment in data infrastructure and capacity building, strengthening partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders and improving the data collection, analysis, and dissemination processes. By overcoming these challenges, Antigua & Barbuda can enhance our ability to monitor progress on the SDGs and accelerate efforts towards sustainable development.

41. Which data disaggregations are routinely provided by major surveys in your country

- Geographic location
- Income
- Sex
- Age
- Education
- Marital Status
- Race/Ethnicity
- Migratory status
- Disability

As the country's National Statistics Office, the Statistics Division is the agency responsible for the compilation of Official Statistics which some of the SDG indicators fall under. As a repository of official statistics, the Division plays a vital role in the coordination and generation of these statistics in accordance with international standards that govern official statistics and guidelines for the compilation of SDG indicators. Currently, the country's Statistical Office is leading the process of creating mechanisms for data mining for the SDG indicators deemed applicable to the country's monitoring and evaluation framework for SDG implementation.

The Statistical Office will work collaboratively with other government ministries and agencies as well as development partners and civil society organizations to: 1) Complete an assessment of SDG data availability in the twin-island nation; 2) Work with ministries and agencies for specific SDG targets and indicators to produce the indicators; 3) Populate SDG indicator templates with data obtained from various sources

The successful development and implementation of the national development plan and consequently the advancement of the SDGs in Antigua and Barbuda will require the following: 1) Adequate and sustained financing and removing as the per capita GDP/income as an indicator upon which the ability to access concessional financing is assessed; 2) Development of a new national development plan that is long range in scope and ambition; 3) The establishment of the required governance framework and coordinating mechanisms in-country to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the development plan and the SDGs; 4) Stakeholder engagement and participation will be key to advancing the SDGs; 5) Enhancing the statistical capacity in the country as well as building the capacity of the country's statistical office, recognizing that building national data and statistical capacity, is critical for monitoring of the SDGs Indicators as well as the indicators contained in the national development plan; 6) Institutionalization and mainstreaming of processes to align the 2030 Agenda with the new national development plan and the strategic and operational plans and budgets of government entities; 7) country development plans of international development partners and the work of the private sector and civil society organizations; 8) Integration of the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental - across all policy areas in the development of new policies will be critical ensuring that there is equal treatment and consideration of each pillar in all key areas of national development. This also will involve policy integration and coherence and infusion of the goals and targets into national policy development as well as sectoral and government policies; 9) Regular and timely reporting of performance and progress of the 2030 Agenda; 10) Technology and knowledge transfer and greater levels.

CONCLUSION

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) reporting process has been quite a vigorous and intense procedure which was undertaken by the team at the Directorate of Gender Affairs. From assessing the official requirements of the report, delegating tasks, strategizing the most effective means of collating data from the key stakeholders, compiling the data and simplifying it for presentation, and later seeking and inserting recommendations for the final draft, the compilation of this report reiterated the importance of national collaborations.

Through multiple consultations and stakeholder meetings, it became apparent that although progress has been made as it relates to the advancement of women and girls since the last submission report in 2019, there is always room for improvement. For example, we note that there is a continuous need to ensure that our legislative frameworks, policies, and programmes reflect the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment. Political will goes a very long way in the fight for gender equality. Additionally, there is also still somewhat of a gap/challenge as it relates to pertinent data collection. Improving data collection and analysis, with a focus on disaggregating data by sex, age, ethnicity, disability, and other relevant factors, is crucial for understanding the specific challenges faced by different groups of women and girls.

There is a need for more work to be done by all relevant stakeholders as well as political will for implementation. With outstanding drafted policies, it clearly shows the work that has been put in and now requires the government's commitment for them to become effective.

A comprehensive stakeholders committee was activated for the oversight to draft and make the final presentation of the report, which was a strategy that was deemed beneficial so the committee identified important reports with updated data and stakeholders.

Notably, it's imperative to maintain an updated stakeholders list with current contact details of all relevant parties for capturing important information on work and programmes that have been implemented. Although the validation reporting session was a resounding success in getting feedback and follow-ups via email with the pertinent information, it was initially a challenge getting the stakeholders to be a part of the process.

As it relates to accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) and the 2030 Agenda, especially within the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development, the nation of Antigua and Barbuda believes that a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders and strategies is essential. Some of the priority actions our nation will implement include, but are not limited to: 1) the reaffirmation of political commitment by our government, with a focus on integrating gender equality and sustainable goals into national plans and strategies; 2) adequate funding that prioritizes budget allocations for gender equality programmes; 3) the improvement of data collection and monitoring mechanisms that are sustainable and can monitor the progress on gender equality and sustainable development goals; 4) continue to create and strengthen partnerships between our nation's government, CSO's and other stakeholders; 5) ensure meaningful participation of women and girls, including those from marginalized groups, in decision-making processes at all levels; 6) continue to promote gender-sensitive education and awareness campaigns; and 7) utilize technology and innovation to advance gender equality and sustainable development.

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