



**Convention on the Elimination
of All Forms of Discrimination
against Women**

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women
Eighty-third session**

Summary record of the 1916th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 13 October 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Acosta Vargas

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined fifth to ninth periodic reports of Saint Kitts and Nevis (continued)
(CEDAW/C/KNA/5-9; CEDAW/C/KNA/Q/5-9; CEDAW/C/KNA/RQ/5-9)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Saint Kitts and Nevis joined the meeting.*

2. **Mr. Safarov** said that he wished to know whether there were any State programmes or national action plans to support female entrepreneurs in rural areas. He would be interested to hear what measures had been taken to tackle poverty among female-headed households. According to a report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), adolescents in such households were three times more likely to be living in indigence than those in male-headed households. In that vein, he wondered whether the Government intended to ratify the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) of the International Labour Organization to boost women's participation in the labour market, whether the Saint Kitts Investment Promotion Agency facilitated the financial inclusion of women and how the Agency would ensure that more women were granted credit.

3. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that the Taiwanese mission had provided funding to programmes for women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship, which included business management training and access to microcredit. The Government was currently looking for additional funding for those programmes. An initiative had been launched whereby non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were offered loans and small grants to run women-focused poverty alleviation projects and stimulate key areas of the economy that employed women. The initiative had proved so successful that another call for applications from NGOs was being planned.

4. The Poverty Alleviation Programme would be updated and relaunched to include training on subjects such as financial and business management, and women would be the major beneficiaries. Case management officers would be hired in order to track the Programme's progress in terms of empowering women. The Ministry of International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs was collaborating with the Department of Gender Affairs to adopt a more gender-based approach to trade and investment and to identify opportunities for growth and development that would benefit women.

5. **Mr. Safarov** asked whether any statistics were available on the number of women who had been granted bank loans or State funding and on the amounts such women received.

6. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that data was available on the number of applicants and recipients of credit and the number of trainees under the entrepreneurship programmes. It would be submitted to the Committee in writing.

7. **Ms. Reddock** said that she would like to have a better understanding of the land tenure system in place and its impact on women's ownership of land. She wondered whether the Aquaculture Pilot Project and Environmental Research and the Sea Moss Pilot Project of the Department of Marine Resources were gender-sensitive and to what extent women were involved in the management of marine resources.

8. She wished to know whether women on Nevis had to travel to Saint Kitts in order to access any services and whether the Department of Gender Affairs would consider posting representatives in rural areas or to set up mobile services to provide personalized support to women in rural communities. She wondered whether the Special Victims Unit of the police coordinated with police stations in rural areas to deal with gender-based violence and child abuse cases.

9. In the light of a recent landmark ruling of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, which had declared the prohibition of same-sex relationships to be unconstitutional, and given the need to prevent further discrimination, the Committee would be interested to learn when all the relevant laws would be amended to comply with the new ruling. She wished to know what programmes were in place to support and empower women with disabilities,

whether there was a specific training programme to increase their independence and employability and whether officers of the Special Victims Unit were trained and equipped to assist women and girls with disabilities who had been victims of gender-based violence.

10. It would be helpful to know what policies existed for the integration of Spanish- and Creole-speaking communities into society and to ensure access to education and other services for migrant women and girls. She wondered whether migrant women and girls who did not speak English were encouraged, as part of the country's education policy, to maintain their native language as well as to acquire proficiency in English, given the benefits of bilingualism. Were there obstacles that prevented the full involvement of migrant women, including second-generation migrants, in the national economy and society? If so, it would be useful to have information about any plans to remove such obstacles.

11. She wished to know whether there were any plans to abolish the death penalty in the State party. The Committee would like to know whether the Women's Prison Programme run by the Department of Gender Affairs addressed the specific needs of female prisoners and prison officers and whether gender-sensitive policies and universal standards, in keeping with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules), had been introduced in prisons.

12. She would appreciate information on the progress made in the development of a gender-sensitive plan to address climate change in collaboration with the United Nations system and on the institutional arrangements envisaged to ensure consistent gender mainstreaming in the country's climate and disaster reduction policies. The delegation might wish to specify whether gender focal points, with training in gender mainstreaming, could be established within the relevant ministries. She would like to know how the Department of Gender Affairs collaborated with the National Emergency Management Agency to ensure that shelters were appropriate and safe for women and girls, and she would like to find out whether emergency notices were issued in foreign languages and in Braille and sign language for the benefit of migrants and persons with disabilities. It would be helpful to know what data was available on women's access to services during and in the aftermath of disasters, including how many of the 1,114 homes that had reported roof damage from hurricanes in 2017 belonged to women, and how many of the 400 households that had benefited from the roof repair programme in 2018 had been headed by women. In view of the particular disadvantages faced by women farmers, she wondered whether any programmes had been envisaged to increase their resilience to climate change.

13. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that social services were provided for women in rural areas through satellite offices in community centres. An NGO had launched a food production and agriculture project that focused on providing training in water resource management, including solar-powered irrigation and rainwater harvesting and storage. Of the 20 farmers who had participated, 6 were women, which exceeded the quota of 20 per cent that had been set for women's participation.

14. The Special Victims Unit did not have officers assigned to every police station. When a report of gender-based violence was received at any of the police stations, the case was referred to the Special Victims Unit for follow-up and investigation. The Government aimed to provide gender sensitivity training to all police officers in order to ensure that all complaints concerning offences involving women were handled appropriately.

15. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that the Government was planning to conduct a review of national laws relating to social development, and that the review was expected to be completed by mid-2024. Interpretation services were provided to facilitate migrant women's access to the legal system, social services and health care. Spanish-speaking migrants benefited from the fact that some of the physicians in Saint Kitts and Nevis had been trained in Cuba and were able to speak Spanish fluently. Spanish was taught in schools across the country, and Mandarin was taught in schools on Nevis, under a programme supported by the Taiwanese International Cooperation and Development Fund. No programmes had been established to promote the integration of migrant women.

16. The Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs supported women in prisons by providing them with women's sanitary products and organizing events where they could spend time with their children. Currently, female prisoners were not afforded all the same rights as their male counterparts. For instance, men were allowed to leave the prison to undertake community service, but women were not. The Government intended to address that inequality in order to expand the opportunities available to female prisoners. Training programmes were organized to raise prison officers' awareness of their special needs. Training courses on business and entrepreneurship were delivered to women to help them reintegrate into society once they were released.

17. The Minister of the Environment and Climate Agent, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs, was seeking to appoint a gender expert to participate in the development of strategies to address climate change. The gender perspective was applied in disaster management, and the current chair of the Shelter Management Committee, who was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs, took steps to ensure that women's needs were taken into account in the area of shelter management. The Ministry collaborated with other government agencies to promote the mainstreaming of the gender perspective in all areas of policy.

18. **Ms. Reddock** said that she wished to know whether women were involved in new areas of economic activity, such as aquaculture, and whether training programmes would be established to promote their participation in those areas. The Government might take steps to ensure that the gender perspective was applied to all future strategies and plans related to climate change and disaster management.

19. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that very few women were currently working in the fishing industry. However, the Government would consider establishing programmes to increase their participation. Currently, support for persons with disabilities was mainly provided by an NGO that received funding from the Government.

20. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that she wished to know what steps were being taken to ensure effective access to justice for all women, irrespective of their income level, including for women with disabilities. In that connection, she wondered whether ramps for wheelchair users had been installed in courthouses and whether women with disabilities who engaged with the legal system had access to interpretation services, legal aid and other assistance. The Committee would be grateful for gender-disaggregated data on the number of cases brought before the courts and the number of recipients of legal aid. It would also be interested to know whether, in practice, married woman exercised the right to own property and enter into contracts independently of their husbands, as provided for by the Married Women's Property Act.

21. The Committee welcomed the fact that, under the Maintenance of Children Act, there must be shared family responsibilities for the care of a child and an equal duty must be placed on each parent. However, it was concerned to note that there was no legal requirement for employers to grant paternity leave to fathers. In that regard, she wished to know how the State party would ensure that fathers adequately fulfilled their childcare obligations.

22. She would appreciate details about how fathers' names were entered on their children's birth certificates, which reportedly involved a fairly onerous procedure. The Committee would be interested to know whether any action would be taken to simplify it. She was curious to know whether the State party planned to legally recognize common-law unions, for example to ensure that the rights of women in such unions were protected.

23. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that the Government was planning to change the law to enable complaints of domestic violence to be brought before magistrates' courts. Pending that change, legal aid was provided to women with low incomes to ensure that they had access to justice. Fathers who were absent when their children's birth certificates were issued were able to have their names added to the certificates, at no cost, by presenting an identification document at the registrar's office. Men employed in the civil service and at certain private companies currently were entitled to take paternity leave. The Government would consider the possibility of making it mandatory for all employers to offer paternity leave.

24. **Ms. Toé-Bouda** said that mandatory paternity leave would be beneficial for mothers, as it would alleviate the burden of childcare on them.

25. **Ms. Phillip** (Saint Kitts and Nevis) said that she greatly appreciated the insightful observations and recommendations made by the members of the Committee. It was clear that the Committee had conducted in-depth research into the situation of women in Saint Kitts and Nevis. She hoped that the delegation's answers had reassured the Committee that concrete measures were being taken to advance women's rights in her country.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.