



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

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**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women**

**Information received from Guyana on follow-up to the
concluding observations on its ninth periodic report***

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. The Government of Guyana, newly elected, as of August 2nd, 2020, is pleased to update the Committee on the steps taken to implement the specific recommendations in the Concluding Observations on the 9th Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), submitted on April 17, 2018.

2. The Government of Guyana remains resolute in its commitment towards ensuring an equitable society, where women enjoy all the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Constitution, the CEDAW Convention, and all other Human Rights instruments. Accordingly, the Government will continue to take positive action to remove remaining barriers, and to prevent reversals, that can hinder the full realization of these rights.

II. Recent Developments

3. Since taking office, the GoG has initiated several programmes to accelerate the development of women. Notable among these is the Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN),¹ which is a new programme by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security (MHSSS), providing targeted training aimed at creating new opportunities in business and entrepreneurship for women across the country. This programme also includes transferring functional business skills and legislative literacy with awareness training on social issues in keeping with **paragraph 38** of the Concluding Observations on Guyana's 9th periodic report. Noteworthy is that this programme includes women migrants from Venezuela.

4. The WIIN program was further amplified with the launching of the first women's business incubator on August 17, 2021, under the auspices of President Dr. Irfan Ali. The incubator is poised to help thousands of women to start up, sustain and market small businesses.

5. More women are turning to self-employment and small businesses; their efforts are being supported by new policies that allow for accessing small loans from financial lending institutions at concessional rates as well as grants from the Small Business Bureau and Small Business Council,

6. The resuscitated national housing programme in the last year has distributed 7,000 houselots to low- income households across all 10 Administrative Regions, including interior communities. Of these 2,495 women in last 10 months are now property owners for the first time.

7. The Government launched the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) which will offer 20,000 scholarships over 5 years for certificate, diploma and degree programmes online with universities in India, Germany, the University of Guyana and the University of the West Indies. In this first year, 6000 persons from across Guyana have been awarded scholarships and are virtually attending these programmes; interestingly females 68.6% (4118) dominate and males comprise 31.4% (1882) of the beneficiaries.

8. The Government of Guyana has expanded access to justice for women and juveniles, with the roll-out of a Legal Aid Pilot under the IDB-funded Support for the Criminal Justice System (SCJS), in keeping with the Committee's recommendations in the previous Concluding Observations [**para 18**].

¹ 4000 women have applied to be in the WIIN programmes and within the first 3 months 400 women are in training.

9. Furthermore, Sexual Offences Courts are now fully operational; these courts have the capability to facilitate remote hearings for persons in other parts of the country, including hinterland communities, and allow for sexual offences cases to be dispensed with greater expedience.

10. Guyana's efforts towards addressing gender inequality, gender-based violence and family violence received a major boost with the official signing of the Country Programme Document on October 23, 2020, between the Government of Guyana and the United Nations paving the way for the implementation of the **Spotlight Initiative** Programme, aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This programme is managed by a broad-based committee co-chaired by the Minister of Human Services and Social Security and the UN Resident Coordinator.

11. Further, the Minister of Human Services and Social Security in partnership with the Minister of Home Affairs and the Commissioner of Police on August 24, 2021, launched an initiative called **COPSQUAD2000** where 2,000 officers will be trained before the end of this year. Through this initiative, at least one officer at every police station across the country will receive specialized training on addressing domestic violence.

12. Concrete steps have also been taken to further safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities and ensure that they have access to important support services. In this regard, budgetary allocations to the National Commission on Disability (NCD) and the Disability and Rehabilitation Services of the Ministry of Health have been increased in 2020 and 2021.² Their allocation provides for the NCD to construct a technical/vocational centre to provide job-ready training for persons with disabilities. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Labor, is currently in discussion with various private sector entities to secure job opportunities for persons with disabilities with the aid of available technology. These measures are intended to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to meaningfully participate in national development and enjoy an enhanced quality of life.

13. With regards to legislative changes, two are of particular significance. The enactment of the **Summary Jurisdiction Offences (Amendment) Act (2021)**, Gazetted on August 11, 2021, which repealed the criminalization of cross-gender dressing and will protect transgender women from discrimination and prosecution by the police.³ And, the enactment of the **Adoption of Children (Amendment) Act 2021** which brings Guyana into greater compliance with the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption

14. Moreover, substantial measures have been undertaken by the GoG to provide humanitarian assistance to the migrant population from Venezuela, who continue to arrive in Guyana, and to provide them with necessities within its available resources, as well as regularizing their status in the country. The migrant population from Venezuela is currently estimated to number between 20,000-40,000.

15. These efforts are coordinated at the national level by a Multi-Agency Coordinating Committee established in March 2021. The Committee is chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and includes focal points from relevant ministries, the Guyana Defence Force, the Civil Defense Commission, and all relevant UN agencies in Guyana (IOM, UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF and PAHO).

16. Further details on these and other measures can be found in Guyana's State Party Report on the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) submitted on August 30, 2021.

² The budget for 2021 was 265% more than that of 2020.

³ In compliance with some of the recommendations in **para 48** of the Committee.

III. Follow-up information

A. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 10 of the concluding observations

Translating the Convention into Macushi and Wapishana

17. The State party notes the Committee's recommendation to translate the Convention into Macushi and Wapishana Languages. While some progress has been made in documenting and preserving indigenous languages, it is not yet possible to translate the Convention into the Macushi and Wapishana languages.

18. During the International Year of Indigenous Languages, 2019, several initiatives were undertaken, aimed at furthering the promotion and preservation of Guyana's nine indigenous languages, including the publication of a Patamona dictionary, completion of Akawaio and Warrau dictionaries, an Arekuna alphabet, and the publication of Arawak lessons and dictionary.

19. In 2019, a Quality Bilingual Education Programme for Wapichan Children (QBEP) was developed with three pilot schools in Administrative Region 9, namely, Maruranau, Sawariwau, and Karaudarnau Nursery Schools. The programme is a grassroots initiative by the Wapichan people in collaboration with the Society of Jesus in Guyana, the Ministries of Education and Amerindian Affairs and the Toshoas of those communities with the main goal being to provide quality education for Wapichan children.

Raising awareness on the Convention

20. Raising awareness on this Convention is led by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, with support from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in indigenous communities.

21. Various means are used to promote awareness and build capacity among Amerindian communities, their elected leaders and in particular women and children. The officers from both Ministries and the Child Care Protection Agency produce information and education material on key human rights issues, including, inter alia, Human Trafficking, Child Labour, Sexual and Reproductive Health, and Domestic Violence.

22. Awareness raising is also enhanced through the established radio stations in Amerindian communities. Radio Paiomack, the oldest interior radio station, is owned and run as an indigenous radio station, transmitting in various indigenous languages. Government has also established five (5) radio stations in interior areas.

B. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 18(a) of the concluding observations

Enhance the capacity of the Gender Affairs Bureau

23. In the 2020 National Budget, the allocation for the Gender Affairs Bureau (GAB) was increased by 10% over the previous year and was further increased by an additional 12% in 2021.

24. During the same period, the staff of the Gender Affairs Bureau (GAB) received training to enhance gender specific expertise through the following training programmes:

- **June 7-18th 2021**, "Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand";

- **July 15th to August 15th, 2021, Gender and Climate Change Training Clinics Series** as part of the Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience in the Caribbean (**EnGenDER**) Project;
- **July to September 2019**, an intensive training Programme at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies (UWI), in Women's/Gender/Feminist Studies, Sexuality Studies, Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities and Gender and Development in the Caribbean.

25. The GAB is providing continuous guidance and training to members of the established Regional Gender Affairs Committees⁴ on their roles and functions within the 10 Administrative regions in Guyana.

26. In June 2021, Administrative Region Two Committee held its first men's forum, with support from the GAB.⁵

27. An Inter-Ministry Gender Focal Point Committee, spearheaded by the Manager of the Gender Affairs Bureau, has been established and comprises of representatives from government agencies.

C. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 24(c) of the concluding observations

Establish the minimum legal age for marriage at 18yrs

28. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Guyana remains committed to protecting and respecting the rights and interest of every child living in Guyana. The established age of majority is 18.⁶

29. The **Age of Consent Act (22/2004)** was passed in the National Assembly and assented to on November 30, 2005 after a Parliamentary Special Select Committee recommended that the legal age of consent to sexual activity be raised from 13 years to 16 years old.

30. The **Age of Consent Act** amended, inter alia, **section 32 of the Marriage Act, Cap 45:01**. The **Marriage Act** as amended provides that, where either party to a marriage, is under the age of 18 but above the age of 16, they may still be legally married, provided that the consent of the appropriate persons, i.e., a parent or guardian, has been secured. **Section 32(1)**, however, makes it clear that any marriage involving a person below age 16 is void *ab initio*. Accordingly, no marriage involving a child under the age of 16 can be legally registered in Guyana.

31. Consistent with the provisions of the Marriage Act, the **Sexual Offences Act (SOA)2010, Cap 8:03, Law of Guyana**, criminalizes any form of sexual activity with a child below the age of 16. **Section 10(1)** stipulates that a person who engages in sexual penetration of a child under 16 is guilty of statutory rape, which attracts a penalty of imprisonment for life upon conviction. Any other form of sexual activity with a child is proscribed in **Section 11(1)(a)**, and the applicable punishment on summary conviction is imprisonment for five years, while on indictment the accused is liable to imprisonment for 10 years. Therefore, any person who is licensed to marry persons and who knowingly marries someone below the age of 16 is guilty of an offense, and, anyone who has sexual contact with a person below the age of 16, even with their consent, has committed a statutory rape. Following an investigation by the Childcare Protection Agency and or

⁴ The Regional Gender Affairs Committees are sub-committees of the Regional Democratic Councils with oversight by the Gender Affairs Bureau.

⁵ <https://guyanachronicle.com/2021/06/20/gender-affairs-bureau-hosts-first-mens-forum-in-reg-2/>.

⁶ Section 2(1) Representation of the People (Adaptation and Modification of Laws) Act, Cap 1:09, Laws of Guyana.

Police, any party, (a parent, religious leader) found to be involved in the marriage of an underage child, is subject to prosecution through the Courts.

32. **Section 71, Marriage Act**, prohibits forced marriages. The formalities for the solemnization of marriage requires each party to give their consent to accepting the other party as their ‘lawfully’ wedded spouse. The giving of consent requires that a person is capable of giving such consent, meaning that they have achieved the required age, and they possess the mental capacity to consent.

33. Further, as a multi-cultural, multi religious nation, **Section 55(b), Marriage Act**, apply to Hindu and Muslim marriages. Every marriage must be solemnized by a licensed Marriage Officer in the presence of two or more credible witnesses in order to be legally recognized in Guyana.

34. **Section 4(1)** enables the Minister of Home Affairs, through the General Register’s Office (GRO), to appoint eligible persons to be licensed as Marriage Officers for Guyana. The names of the Marriage Officers must be Gazetted.

35. Only persons duly licensed and named in the Official Gazette are legally permitted to officiate a marriage ceremony in Guyana. Currently, there are one thousand and eight (1008) Marriage Officers (976 males and 32 females) licensed by the GRO to practice in Guyana. These Officers operate throughout the 10 Administrative Regions.

Raise awareness on child marriages

36. Currently the Childcare & Protection Agency’s (CPA) Communication 4 Development Programmes and Teen Pregnancy Prevention & Empowerment Programme include awareness sessions on the disadvantages of early marriages to the development of the child.

37. The Agency is working to bridge the gap that exists between culture and law in some rural and remote indigenous communities; this is done through education and re-education of the public, through: (a) The Communication 4 Development Programme that addresses the social norms that put children at risk: (b) The Teen Pregnancy Prevention & Empowerment Programme that specifically target adolescent girls and boys with skills-based risk reduction programme, directly imparting knowledge of reproductive health and wellness, and developing skills for self-development; (c) The Special Parenting Programme is culturally tailored to meet the needs of diverse groups, on child development;(d) The Multi-Media Awareness Campaign- “Communication 4 Development”: ads and other programmes are broadcast via radio and television across the country, including remote locations in indigenous communities and are presented in two main indigenous languages, Macushi and Wapichan.

38. The Support and Heal Network initiative was officially established in January 2021. The aim of the partnership between Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and faith-based leaders is to address social issues among vulnerable groups and communities across Guyana.

D. Follow-up information relating to paragraph 42 of the concluding observations

Climate Change Policy

Disaster Risk Management Policy and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Strategy

39. Guyana, like the vulnerable countries of the Caribbean Region, is focusing on efforts to enhance resilience at all levels, and to reduce the intensity of impact of natural disasters.

40. Guyana is listed as one of the “high risk” nations. Flooding is already a major concern in Guyana, as the country’s Low Coastal Plain, housing two-thirds of its population, economic activities, and infrastructure, is below mean high tide levels. This is one of the greatest challenges for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) as this translates to a relatively large percentage of persons and national resources being vulnerable to the impact of flooding, and increased threats posed due to projected Climate Change impacts.

41. Climate change adds another layer of stress that vulnerable communities and groups already face. In this regard, Government is moving towards ensuring that its policies for Disaster Risk Management and climate change outline measures to address exclusion, gender inequality, and acknowledge the unique conditions and barriers that limit or deny vulnerable persons and communities’ access to services, resources, or benefits.

42. Following the 2005 and 2006 floods, the UNDP’s Country Assessment Report for Guyana (2009) for Enhancing Gender Visibility in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change in the Caribbean⁷ indicated that the socio-economic profile of Guyana highlights the vulnerabilities of both men and women, however, women are more at risk. The fact that 28 percent of households are female headed increases the hardships for these women and their families.

43. The vulnerabilities of women were also recognized in the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Policy (2013) which recommended several gender mainstreaming strategies and initiatives.

44. Guyana is a recipient of the Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster Recovery, Climate and Environmental Resilience (EnGenDER) Project that began in 2019 and ends in 2023. The project is aimed at improving climate resilience for women and girls and key vulnerable populations and future generations in the Caribbean, through enhanced practices for the sustainable implementation of gender-responsive climate change action and disaster recovery.

45. A key activity under the project was the development of a Gender-based Climate Resilience Analysis for Guyana, which was completed and published in February 2021. The report describes the existing gender and social inequities and the ways in which climate change will impact on the vulnerabilities among men, women, and key vulnerable groups. Importantly, it also highlights key gaps, opportunities, and challenges for two priority sectors for Guyana, i.e., agriculture and health, and provides recommendations for developing gender-responsive and socially inclusive policies and plans to build climate resilience in the priority sectors identified for Guyana.

46. The 2021 floods affected not only the coastal regions but all ten (10) administrative regions and directly affected over 50,000 people across the country, damaged personal property, public buildings, damaged farms and killed livestock, etc., The highest impact and cost are on agriculture and the economy. The recent ECLAC report 2021 has concluded that this was not a humanitarian disaster but an economic disaster.

47. The Ministry of Natural Resources and its Agencies are supporting gender mainstreaming through policies that recognize the important role of women to sectoral development, these include:

⁷ UNDP (2009) Enhancing Gender Visibility in Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change in the Caribbean: Country Assessment Report for Guyana. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/E5D3D452323901708525771F00618BF8->.

- The National Forestry Policy includes gender as one of the principles that guide forest management. The policy recognizes that “Gender and vulnerability issues should be mainstreamed in forestry and eco-tourism development planning and management”;
- The European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EUFLEGT) Programme which aims to “reduce illegal logging by strengthening sustainable and legal forest management, improving governance, and promoting trade in legally produced timber has also identified gender as one of the main areas within the approach”.

48. As a zero-carbon emitter and home to one of the last six intact rainforests, Guyana 2009 and 2011 Low Carbon Development Strategy, a product of 2 years of consultations across the country with special focus on the indigenous communities, designed a path for Guyana to balance between environmental protection and development for its people. This Strategy placed it in a unique position internationally.

49. Today the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030 has been drafted and expanded and is open for public consultation (see <http://lcds.go.gy>) and it continues to endorse mainstream gender within the low carbon sectors.

50. The ambitious initiatives set out in the LCDS 2030,⁸ will be funded from money earned from the sale of carbon credits. These initiatives will advance Guyana’s sustainable development for the next decade. Noteworthy is that the LCDS 2030 places the value Guyana’s forests provide to the world at US\$40-\$54 billion.

51. Guyana earned US\$212.52 million in revenue for the preservation of its forests before (2009-2015) through its partnership with Norway. Some of these funds have been earmarked for renewable energy projects to diversify Guyana’s energy mix.

52. Addressing the 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), President Dr. Ali said, “...*Forest-rich countries must be provided with the incentives necessary to keep their forests intact and to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. Mindful that deforestation contributes 16 per cent to annual global emissions and in recognition of the ecosystem and climate services provided by forests, it is imperative that we finalise the rules for carbon markets and REDD+ so as to properly value tropical forests and the climate services which they provide*”.

53. Guyana’s Draft Local Content Policy with regards to the oil and gas sector also acknowledges the importance of gender which is reflected in its final draft.

54. Guyana will not become a monoculture dependent on finite oil and gas production; agriculture, manufacturing, mining, eco-tourism, information-based technology, shipping hub and gateway, offer a diversified economy with long term and sustainable benefits to improve the quality of lives of its people, especially women and children.

55. The Government remains open to further communication from the Committee.

⁸ LCDS 2030 will be finalised by March 2022.