



# Providing Specialized Expertise that Enables Caribbean Countries to Tackle Persistent Gender Equality Challenges

**Country:** Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Lucia, and Suriname

**Program:** Canada-CARICOM Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM)

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# Context

Like many regions of the world, including Canada, Caribbean societies have been dominated by patriarchal norms that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and limit opportunities for women, who are often relegated to secondary roles in the workforce and society.

Today, these ingrained attitudes continue to impact women's lives, from limited access to education and employment to pay inequality to higher rates of domestic violence. In the region, gender-based violence (GBV), predominantly against women, is high. UN Women Caribbean (2023) notes issues of forced sexual initiation among adolescent girls, victim blaming, culture of silence, injury prevalence, and economic impacts of GBV on victims and the state.

All Caribbean countries have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This means governments across the region have committed to both protecting and ensuring equal rights for women and girls. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has launched a National Action Plan for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (NAP-WEGE), which guides member states in implementing gender equality initiatives, such as:

- ▶ Introducing gender equality legislation
- ▶ Developing their own National Action Plans
- ▶ Establishing ministries or departments specifically focused on gender issues
- ▶ Investing in education or training programs that promote gender equality
- ▶ Launching initiatives to prevent and respond to gender-based violence
- ▶ Implementing initiatives to empower women economically
- ▶ Taking steps to increase women's representation in politics and decision-making roles.

For more than two decades, Catalyste+ has been helping governments and organizations worldwide to improve gender equality in their societies by providing access to specialized expertise, facilitating knowledge sharing and strengthening institutions responsible for promoting women's empowerment and gender equality.

Since its inception in 2021, Advisors from the Catalyste+ Canada-CARICOM Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM) program have teamed up with country partners on nine short-term technical assistance (assignments), strengthening gender equality capacities in six of CCEDM's nine Caribbean partner countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Lucia, and Suriname.

As a catalyst for sustainable development, Catalyste+ offers a broad range of expertise. The organization's recent gender capacity development advisory assignments in the Caribbean (2020/21-2023/24) have focused on two key areas for advancing equality:

1. Strengthening policy/legal frameworks for the design and monitoring of legislation and policies that specifically address gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination.
2. Fostering cultural change by enhancing local communicators' ability to use gender-inclusive language and community engagement that promotes gender equality and challenges harmful stereotypes.

Here are a few examples that illustrate how these assignments are contributing to country partners' efforts to enhance inclusivity.

# Helping Antigua and Barbuda Set up and Monitor its Workplace Sexual Harassment Prevention Policy

In 2022, Antigua and Barbuda became the first island in the Caribbean to ratify the ILO Convention 190 against workplace violence and harassment. The nation's Directorate of Gender Affairs (DoGA), a division within the Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resources Development and the Blue Economy, had drafted a policy to prevent and prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace and a form of redress for complainants.

DoGA requested technical assistance from Catalyste+, with a goal of ensuring the policy aligned with international standards and guidelines for the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation phases.

Catalyste+, via its Canada-CARICOM Expert Deployment Mechanism program, provided a Technical Advisor, Janice Link, with experience in the Canadian Federal Public Service and Workplace Harassment and Discrimination to review the draft policy and assist in developing guidelines for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

As part of the assignment objectives, it was agreed to organize and conduct consultations with Partners of the Department of Gender Affairs. Following small group consultations, a joint meeting with all the partners was held to review and approve the recommendations where appropriate and provide input into the objectives and strategies for the implementation and monitoring plan.

Workplace Harassment and Discrimination legislation generally requires employers to ensure a policy is established and visible to all employees. The employer is also required to provide programs to prevent occurrences of misconduct and inappropriate behaviour and to provide options for reporting and resolving alleged incidents of harassment and discrimination.

The implementation, monitoring, and evaluation plan, completed by Advisor Link in collaboration with the Directorate of Gender Affairs in June 2022, provides objectives, expected results, strategies, and timeframes for each of the key elements of an effective policy, prevention, protection, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation.

Once anti-workplace harassment legislation is introduced and passed by Parliament, the government's goal is to provide a healthy and safe working environment free of workplace harassment, violence, and discrimination.

# Supporting Antigua and Barbuda Plan to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence

In January 2023, the Directorate of Gender Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda partnered with Catalyste+ Advisor, Heather MacIntosh, to create a strategic framework to guide their gender-based violence prevention and response efforts between 2023-2027. With implementation, monitoring and evaluation guidance, the Directorate hoped the plan would enable it to increase its efficiency in combatting GBV.

The assignment entailed working with the Directorate to review the country's past decade of action 2011-2022 during which the island nation made strides, establishing a Support and Referral Centre (SARC) as a primary site for support to female and male victims of GBV, providing medical treatment, emergency accommodation, and counselling. Together, Advisor MacIntosh and the Directorate held consultations with local stakeholder groups, which helped the Directorate broaden its thinking on future directions, objectives and actions as well as expanding opportunities for multi-sectoral cooperation.

During strategic planning, the Directorate came to the realization that greater male engagement is necessary in the GBV space, resulting in the inclusion of a male engagement component in the updated strategy. The Directorate and Advisor MacIntosh drew on some Canadian examples to develop approaches to cultivating male champions. Finally, the impacts of GBV on gay men and non-binary people were discussed, and strategies were developed for addressing stigma around sexual identity issues.

Going forward, the Directorate plans to engage senior leadership to secure high-level visibility for the 2023-2027 GBV strategic framework and is following up on offers for enhanced multi-sectoral cooperation on GBV issues with a diverse range of stakeholders, including Youth Affairs, the Housing Authority, the police services, and church-based groups.



CA Heather MacIntosh and Representatives of the DoGA - Antigua and Barbuda

# Implementing a National Gender Vision Policy in Suriname

In Suriname, the Bureau of Gender Affairs was interested in setting up a system to track better and assess the results of interventions and the gender equality goals defined in its Gender Vision Policy Document 2021-2035. Still, it lacked the resources to develop one on its own. Through several assignments (virtual and in-country) during 2022 and 2023, Catalyste+ Advisor Cheryl Hebert worked with the Bureau and its key stakeholders to develop a plan to support the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Policy.

In January 2023, through a series of workshops with key stakeholders, including gender focal points at various ministries, planning officials and statistics officials, and nongovernment and community-based organization representatives, the Bureau and Advisor Hebert finalized the Monitoring and Evaluation plan and deepened the commitment of these multiple participants to implement the M&E plan collectively. The department now has the mechanisms to collect data and report on national, regional, and international gender equality goals. By tracking the results of its gender policy, the government of Suriname will have the information they need to continue making strides towards gender equality.

Suriname's Gender Bureau recently reported that the tools developed during this assignment are being used for the development of the country's annual gender action plans and have helped to strengthen connections between the Bureau and its network of stakeholders within various departments, who are helping them assess the effectiveness of the policy. Further, as the Gender Results Framework (GRF) is a dynamic document, the Bureau has been able to use the skills acquired to adjust some of the GRF results to accommodate an increased focus on environment and climate change, which has added as a priority area for the Gender Vision Policy in December 2023.



From left to right:

CCEDM Program Manager  
Andrea Benavides, Head of  
the Bureau of Gender Affairs  
Suriname Shiefania Jahangier,  
and Catalyste+ Advisor Cheryl  
Hebert

# Guiding Guyana's Women and Gender Equality Commission Towards More Strategic Communication

In Guyana, the Women and Gender Equality Commission (WGED) needed to improve its public and internal communications. The Commission is a constitutional body responsible for advocating, monitoring, and evaluating current laws. It reports to Parliament annually on Guyana's progress towards achieving gender equality and upholding women's rights.

Charged with an important role in educating the public about gender equality, CEDAW, and upholding rights, Commission Chairperson Indranie Chanderpal and CEO Renata Chuck-A- Sang asked the CCEDM project for help in developing a communications strategy that would act as a roadmap to increase its public profile and public awareness of gender equality and women's rights.

Throughout Fall 2022, Catalyste+ Advisor Douglas Amour worked virtually with Commission representatives to develop a communications and outreach strategy and a PowerPoint presentation on communications training for the WGED. According to the Advisor's assignment report, the assignment helped the Commission to increase its understanding of the need to focus on relationship management with like-minded organizations and to leverage existing opportunities to improve public awareness and position itself as a thought leader on women's rights.

The Commission reported to be very satisfied with its new strategic communications plan and moving forward on several fronts towards its goal of increased public profile. Armed with a new understanding that strategic outreach does not require a large budget, it was revamping its website, engaging a university intern to build its social media presence, planning several interactions with Parliamentarians, and initiating research to produce a "status of women" report.



SWOT Analysis Exercises  
during Gender Sensitive  
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Nov 2022 to March 2024  
Multiple East Caribbean States

# Enhancing Professional Communicators' Skills in Using Gender-Sensitive Techniques

The national gender focal points in Saint Lucia, Grenada, Dominica, and Antigua and Barbuda know that journalists and public relations practitioners need to examine their words and images to promote gender equality and challenge harmful stereotypes.

Language reflects the attitudes, behaviours, and norms within a society and shapes people's attitudes about what is 'normal' and acceptable.

Between November 2022 and March 2024, each country worked with the CCEDM program to host training sessions for government communicators and local journalists, enhancing their abilities to practice gender-inclusive communications. Catalyste+ Advisor Gwen Walmsley, a former journalist and international development specialist, designed and facilitated the two-day workshops in collaboration with the staff of the local gender bureaus, tailoring each session to the country's environment. Grenada and Saint Lucia incorporated the training events into their national "16 Days of Action Against Domestic Violence" awareness campaign calendars in 2022, while Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica chose to host the workshops as part of their programs celebrating International Women's Day 2024.

The workshops helped participants understand the issues that lead to linguistic and visual communication being gender discriminatory and provided practical tools or principles to avoid gender stereotyping, subordination, trivialization, or omission, as well as to ensure their communication products are more gender inclusive.

Attendees agreed that practicing gender-sensitive communication can make it easier to see important differences between the needs of women and men, challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society, lay the foundation for greater gender equality throughout society, raise awareness of how language affects our behaviour; and, make people more comfortable with expressing themselves and behaving in ways that were once not considered 'typical' of their gender.



SWOT Analysis Exercises during Gender Sensitive Communication Training  
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# Why are Caribbean Countries Addressing Persistent Gender Equality Challenges?

The gender pay gap is a stark reminder of the region’s ongoing struggle for equality, with Caribbean women earning an average of 15 to 20 percent less than their male counterparts. This gap has significant implications for economic empowerment, as women often bear the burden of caregiving responsibilities and face more limited opportunities for career advancement.

Gender-based violence is another pressing concern, with reports from various countries indicating alarmingly high rates of physical and sexual abuse against women and girls. In Jamaica, for example, one in three women has experienced intimate partner violence, while in Antigua and Barbuda, the Support and Referral Centre providing support to GBV victims received 339 cases from January 2020 to June 2022: 90% were female and 10% were male.

Although girls’ education rates have significantly progressed in recent years, boys still hold the edge in some Caribbean countries. In some cases, girls are more likely to be excluded from school or drop out due to social and economic pressures. Moreover, women often face limited employment opportunities, getting funnelled into traditional feminized sectors like healthcare or education rather than having equal access to higher-paying jobs.

However, despite these challenges, the Caribbean region has been making cultural shifts and progress. Growing recognition of gender equality as a human right has led to increased activism, advocacy, and policy reforms. In the same fashion, across the region, governments and civil society actors have launched initiatives aimed at addressing violence against women, promoting girls’ education and skills development, and increasing women’s representation in decision-making roles.



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