

High-Level Dialogue on the Care Society in Latin America and the Caribbean

Saint Lucia's contribution to the Panel Discussion

November 9, 2022

Thank you, Madame Moderator, fellow Panelists and distinguished participants,

It is a great honour to sit with such distinguished women pioneers, making history and changing the world. Thank you for the invitation to share my views, reflections and proposals on the care society as a horizon for promoting changes towards sustainability and equality.

We are in challenging times but we are also at a very powerful juncture of opportunity for meaningful, profound and comprehensive transformation towards a more gender equal world. Long before we had articulated the concept of a care society, care was the connerstone of development. Nations have been built because of care – care that has been unrecognized, undervalued and taken for granted, like the women themselves who provide it.

The body of work done by UN Women and ECLAC in bringing to light the issues of care in Latin America and the Caribbean has been phenomenal. Because of the Regional Gender Agenda, ECLAC and UN Women were already well poised to make sense of the crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and highlight one of the most profound structural barriers of our time – the unfair burden of care on women and the answer to that barrier – the creation of a care society, as a much needed recovery and healing opportunity for the sustainability of life and our planet. These are unprecedented times. The ball is set in motion and there really isn't any future in maintaining the status quo – it is a time for healing – a do or die situation.

The reality is that everyone, does after all, need care. Recognizing care as a right is fundamental to creating a care society. Like other rights, the right to care and be cared must be respected, protected and fulfilled by the state, but implies also an all-of-society engagement in its fulfillment. We must consider care our collective business that we are all accountable to. It does require moving from the logic of services to the logic of people, as postulated by UN Women and ECLAC.

Development of our human resource in the Caribbean has been undeniably driven predominantly by women who have created what they themselves do not possess. Yet, we can easily point to the building of school plants and airports and improved road networks and call it development. We do not expect these physical structures to come up by themselves. We invest a whole lot of money into them to make them what they are. They could not be without investment.

The development and sustainability of our human capital likewise cannot be without investment. There have indeed been huge investments – investments that have been made at a huge cost to the carer – a sacrifice. Because we have not counted that investment and not acknowledged it, we have lost because we have not sustained it. Just as we have depleted our natural resources in an unsustainable way and are experiencing the repercussions in environmental degradation, so too we have depleted our human resources in an unsustainable way and we are experiencing the repercussions of societal degradation. Everything is connected. We cannot get anywhere by maintaining the imbalance.

Creating a care society will help us sustain the human resource investment. We have learnt, thanks to the immense body of work that have surfaced surrounding care, of the triple dividend in investing in care policies: Returns in human capital, Returns in taxes and social contributions and Returns in family income.

We no longer have to be paralyzed by the notion that investing in care systems does not produce returns. In a study done by UN Women MCO for the Caribbean through the Joint SDG Fund project in Saint Lucia, *Fiscal Costs of Expanding Early Childhood Development Services in Saint Lucia*, reports that embarking on a policy that ensures universal access to ECDCs for all children under the age of five would mean that the GoSL would have to spend, upfront, an additional XCD 378.9 million or 8.7 per cent of the 2020 GDP. On an annual basis, the Government would also have to spend an additional XCD 37.8 million or 0.9 per cent of the 2020 GDP to properly implement a universal access programme. If less than one percent increase in investment can lead to Returns in human capital, Returns in taxes and social contributions and Returns in family income, then not only would we have made back what we put in, we would make it back with interest.

This brings us to another critical factor: Financing of care systems and policies. Partnership must be at the centre of financing care. Because care is everyone's business, everyone must recognize the collective responsibility for investment and at this point we must take into consideration the global care chains. Social and gender co-responsibility for care requires a paradigm shift that is at the very core of the gender equality cause. But partnership goes even deeper than partnership of civil society, government, development partners and the private sector. It goes deeper than co-responsibility.

Partnership in our context, necessarily must take into consideration the debt burden of many small island developing states, who because of their ranking as upper middle and high income brackets, have limited access to funding and must rely on borrowing to supply the most basic of needs to its citizens. We must collectively support the plight of countries like Saint Lucia and other small island developing states including many in the Caribbean. It is like a single mother who must make the impossible choice of whether to buy food for her children or school supplies. It is a set up for failure.

Back to the paradigm shift that the issue of co-responsibility implies. The dismantling of gender norms and stereotypes that underlie inequality has been the sore point of gender equality and women's empowerment. It is there that we see the slowest progress, and where progress is the most critical. Advancing the care society affords us a space to fully explore public education that promotes the critiquing of daily life. There must be a strategic and systematic approach to this drive. Public education on gender equality and the care society must be enshrined in policy – not as a stand alone initiative but integrated in education policies and other policies such as climate change, social protection and health policies.

But we cannot do it alone. Thanks to UN Women and ECLAC for the excellent road map that the publication, **Towards the construction of Comprehensive Care Systems in Latin America and the Caribbean: Elements for implementation** by Julio Bango and Patricia Cossani really is.

The Government of Saint Lucia has committed to putting people first and at the centre of its development efforts. We are counting on our partners to help us make this commitment a reality for our citizens.

Thank you.