

# Contribution to the End of Decade Report on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non- Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)

## Mauritius

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Ministry of Gender Equality,  
Children Development and Family Welfare  
**Programme of Action on Culture of Peace (2001-2010)**  
May 2010

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## **Background**

The Ministry is mandated to undertake, design and implement policies and programmes geared towards promoting gender equality and equity, protecting the rights of children and enhancing their overall development and promoting the welfare of families. The main objectives of the Ministry are the :

- Promotion of women's rights as human rights, through the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and ensuring that measures are taken to promote equality between men and women through the mainstreaming of gender into policies and programmes of sectoral Ministries, in line with the reform of the Government towards programme based budgeting;
- Implementation of gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies and strategies, including those related to poverty alleviation; and women empowerment in the social, political and economic fronts through specific programmes;
- Development of policies, structures and services geared towards the promotion of fundamental rights of the child in line with the Convention on the Rights (CRC) of the Child (i.e. survival, protection, development and participation rights); and
- Development of programmes and policies geared towards the promotion of family values as well as ensuring the protection and welfare of every member in a family

## **Institutional Mechanism**

### **National Gender Machinery**

The Lead Agency of the National Gender Machinery remains the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare that stands as a policy-making and monitoring body. The Ministry has adopted a rights based approach to development and is committed to achieving the MDGs and is convinced that gender is a cross cutting developmental issue.

The Ministry has witnessed a shift in approach, from a 'Women in Development' to that of 'Gender and Development'. To that effect, the 'Women's Unit' has been restyled as from July 2008 into the Gender Unit. In light of these changes, the mission of the

Gender Unit is two-pronged, namely, to act as a policy making and monitoring body for gender mainstreaming; and undertake activities towards women's empowerment.

Through its four main delivery units, it is mandated to design, implement and monitor gender responsive policies, programmes and outputs. In line with the National Constitution, Human Rights Instruments and Conventions that the Republic of Mauritius is party to at the global and regional levels, the Gender Unit serves as an institutional and coordinating mechanism to the National Gender Machinery to monitor the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies for the empowerment of women and promotion of gender equality and equity. In order to respond to changing gender relations and socio economic conditions, programmes of the Gender Unit are further guided by the National Gender Policy Framework (2008).

## **Gender perspective and empowerment of women and girls as an integral part of development process**

### **Gender Stereotypes**

In light of the reforms of the Government, such as Programme Based Budgeting (PBB) and the Performance Management System (PMS), the 2005 National Gender Policy has been revisited, into a **National Gender Policy Framework, adopted in 2008 (NGPF)**.

The National Gender Policy Framework is a generic policy document that builds on past achievements and ongoing national efforts to achieve gender equality and is guided by State action towards human-centred and sustainable development. It further provides the framework for each Ministry/ Department and Agency to derive their organisational specific gender policy which will guide their strategic framework for programmes and budgeting.

The revised policy framework provides for the following-

- the guiding principles of the policy;
- the broad operational strategies; and
- the institutional arrangements for achieving gender equality.

Given the cross cutting nature of gender issues, the policy framework also calls upon a strategic partnership at the levels of-

- the State;
- within organisations;
- among the private sector;
- the media;
- political parties; and

- civil society organisations to consolidate resources to achieve gender equality.

As part of strategic budgeting initiatives, key entry points for engendering of the Programme Based Budgeting (PBB) exercise had been identified with pilot Ministries, and the services of an international consultant on gender had been retained to facilitate the process. These include *inter alia* the **preparation with Ministries, of their respective gender policies in line with the NGPF and PBB.**

Pilot Ministries have been provided with technical gender expertise to guide them in the process of aligning budgets to sectoral strategies within the context of the NGPF and international commitments made towards a human rights based and gendered approach to development.

To date the following **four Pilot Ministries have formulated their sectoral gender policies:** Ministries of Education, Culture and Human Resources, Youth and Sports, Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment and the lead agency of the National Gender Machinery.

In the same vein, activities of the Home Economics Unit (HEU) are being re-engineered to fit the Gender and Development Model. To that effect, Home Management Classes have been tailor-made to adapt to the changing needs of the new household model, and evening classes are being offered for different target groups, including women and men.

The Gender Unit has been actively involved in undertaking sensitisation campaigns on the gender concept, so as to inculcate a culture of gender sensitivity to do away with the embedded patriarchal norms. An information booklet entitled “Did You Say Gender” has been published and widely circulated, in 2008 amongst the stakeholders of the National Gender Machinery, as well as secondary schools.

## **Development strategies and special measures focusing on needs of women and children as special needs**

### **Addressing the needs of Vulnerable Groups**

In the Budget 2009 (July – December) provision was made for a Special Collaborative Programme for Support to Women and Children in Distress under Programme 524 – Family Welfare and Protection from Domestic Violence, of the Ministry.

The Special Collaborative Programme is being implemented by this Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Empowerment; the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Senior Citizens Welfare & Reform Institutions; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources; the Ministry of Youth and Sports; the Mauritius Council of Social Services (MACOSS); the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) and the Women in Networking (WIN), amongst others.

**The objectives of the Programme are:**

- To support women and children in distress aimed at enhancing their livelihoods and integrating them in the mainstream of development.; and
- To provide financial support to Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Community-Based Organisations and Non-State Agencies (NSAs) (but not excluding local authorities, Rodrigues Regional Assembly and non-profit parastatal organisations) working for the social empowerment of women and children in distress.

The Special Collaborative Programme for Support to Women and Children in Distress encompasses a wide range of issues and possible areas of intervention that could be explored by NGOs and addressed as projects are:

- gender-based violence
- harassment / sexual assault
- broken families
- Reintegration and Protection of Sex Workers
- Prevention of HIV/AIDS and STDs
- Substance / Drugs Abuse / Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women Victims of Drug Abuse
- Abused Children
- Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Alcoholic Women
- Female Prisoners / Reintegration of Female Prisoners
- Illiteracy
- Feminisation of Poverty

- Single Women Heads of Households
- Physical and Psychological Disorders
- NCDs (Alzheimer, cancer, lupus)

These areas highly contribute to the marginalisation of women/ girls, which eventually prevent them to participate fully in the process of development.

Organisations should satisfy the following criteria:

- working for the welfare of women and children in distress;
- NGOs should be duly registered with the Registrar of Associations at the time of application;
- have a proven track record of at least one year of experience/ activities, relating to the welfare of women and children;
- have a sound financial management and good governance; and
- have ability to manage funds as demonstrated by financial return for the previous year(s) as submitted to the Registrar of Associations.

The grant ceiling to be allocated is Rs2.0 M for each project proposal and same has to be complemented by financing from the applicant or as secured by the latter from other donors including Corporate Social Responsibility by at least 10% of the project value in kind or cash. Projects may have both capital and recurrent expenditure components.

Out of the 97 projects proposals received, 17 projects were approved, for which funds to the tune of Rs 20.04M have already been disbursed to Non State Actors on the 04 December 2009.

The Second Call for Proposals has been launched on the 28 January 2010 and an Informative Session was held in February 2010 to provide potential applicants with additional information and guidelines on the Special Collaborative Programme for support to Women and Children in Distress and on the Call for Project Proposals. Following the Second Call, 112 projects were received from NGOs in Mauritius, in addition to 3 from Rodrigues.

## **Women and Children's Solidarity Programme**

The 'Women and Children's Solidarity Programme' created under the vote of the Prime Minister's Office for Financial Year 2007/2008 with a view to helping NGOs that are deeply committed to helping women and children, victims of abuse and violence is highly commendable and does come at an opportune moment since the need for more specialised spaces as well as informed services is increasingly being felt. The project ceiling has been increased from Rs.25M to Rs.50M in the budget 2008/2009.

The existence of the Welfare System which promotes the economic and social rights of all citizens is guaranteed by legislation such as the Education Act which makes education compulsory up to the age of 16, the Social Aid Act which caters for women in need in cases of conditions of poverty, the provision of free health services and the provision of low cost housing for those in poverty.

## **National Solidarity Fund**

The National Solidarity Fund under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions provides:

- Financial assistance to citizens of Mauritius residing in Mauritius who may require surgical operations which can only be performed in private medical institutions in Mauritius, (approved by the Ministry of Health); and
- Financial assistance directly to individuals who have undergone Severe Personal Hardship.

## **Cases covered**

- Needy students:
  - (i) SC/HSC students (Not qualified for refund of exams fees according to Social Aid Act)
  - (ii) IVTB approved courses
  - (iii) University registration fees
- Victims of Natural Calamities
- Multiple births (e.g Twins, Triplets)
- Repatriation of Mortal Remains
- Destitutes
- Fire Victims
- Assistive Devices provided are adapted pushchair, walking frames, hearing aid, spectacles etc
- Patients suffering from incurable diseases - certified by Medical Practitioners

## Implementation of international instruments

Mauritius has ratified several important international human rights instruments. It acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in June 1984 and ratified the Convention in 1985. Mauritius is a party to the 1995 Platform of Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in regard to the advancement of women. The SADC Declaration on Gender and Development was signed in 1997, followed by the signature in 1998 of the Addendum to the Declaration on the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women. Mauritius is also a party to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially in regard to poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality. The Optional Protocol to the CEDAW was also signed in November 2001.

## Equality of women and men in economic, social, political and decision-making processes

### Gender Balance

The 2008/09 Human Development Report ranks Mauritius 81 with a Gender Empowerment Measure of 0.538 and Government has taken the commitment to increase the number of women in decision-making and political life.

### Symposium on Women in Decision Making

The SADC Commitment has been disseminated at national level A Symposium on “Women and Decision-Making” where the issue of greater participation of women in politics was widely debated. A copy of the recommendations emanating from the symposium was handed over to the Prime Minister on 8 March 2006

Individual political parties are aware of the SADC Commitment. More aggressive lobbying and advocacy by women’s organisations are progressing in a sustained manner.

The table below shows that women are still under represented in the political area. However, some progress can be noted at the National Assembly and at Village Council level.

**Table 1: Women in the political arena**

Members of	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
	1983	1987	1991	1995	2000	2005
<b>National Assembly</b>	4 out of 70	4 out of 70	2 out of 66	6 out of 66	4 out of 70	12 out of 70



	Year 1985	Year 1988	Year 1991	Year 1996	Year 2001	Year 2005
<b>Municipal Council</b>	7 out of 126	8 out of 126	7 out of 126	11 out of 126	17 out of 126	16 out of 126
	Year 1986	Year 1989	Year 1992	Year 1997	Year 2005	
<b>Village Council</b>	15 out of 810	18 out of 1176	14 out of 1392	41 out of 1476	86 out of 1476	

Source: Statistics Unit, Ministry of Gender Equality Child Development and Family Welfare

### Women in Public Sector

As regards women in decision-making level in the public sector, Mauritius has already achieved the required percentage, as shown in Table 2 below.

#### Women in decision making level in the public sector

	2005			2006			2007			2008		
	No. of Female	Total	% Female	No. of Female	Total	% Female	No. of Female	Total	% Female	No. of Female	Total	% Female
<b>Director Chief Executive</b>	1	4	25	3	6	50	2	5	40	2	3	66.7
<b>Permanent Secretary</b>	10	31	32.3	10	29	34.5	9	27	33.3	9	26	34.6
<b>Municipal Assistant Secretary</b>	18	58	31.0	23	60	38.3	23	56	41.1	21	58	36.2
<b>Director or of Departments/ Ministries</b>	66	192	34.4	84	234	35.9	73	205	35.6	73	204	35.7

This situation arose in the context whereby women have become more assertive and proactive. Women are more willing to aspire for jobs/responsibilities, which were hitherto considered male domains.

In view of women's significant achievement in their academic performances, changes in the demographic and economic structure coupled with the process of modernisation, women of the latest generation seem to face less barriers in acceding to the top management posts in the civil service.

## **Projects implemented to promote Economic Empowerment of Women**

### **National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWECC)**

In an attempt to empower a larger number of women to engage in entrepreneurship development, the National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWECC) operating under the aegis of Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare has intensified its activities over the past three years. Some of the achievements are as follows:

The NWECC has witnessed an increase of its membership to 2600 since the year 2000. Members include both individuals and associations operating in various fields like handicraft, textile, agriculture and services. Women Entrepreneur Development Programmes have been organized in 14 regions to enhance women entrepreneurship and improve competitiveness of women-owned businesses. Modules imparted to women entrepreneurs included business planning, marketing, production techniques, finance and labour laws. As at date some 800 women have benefited from this programme.

Short Skills Development Programmes of two days duration have been provided to 320 women in areas like human resource management, finance and marketing aimed at improving functional and managerial skills of women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs involved in pickle making followed a training programme to acquire new techniques on skills to upgrade quality of products. Fairs have been organized by the NWECC between December 2006 to December 2008, to increase awareness and sales of products manufactured by women entrepreneurs. Some 300 women entrepreneurs participated in the fairs. 14 women entrepreneurs were provided 6 acres of land to produce and process vegetables. These women have set up a Cooperative in Agro-Industry and have benefited from training, business-planning and pre-starter support by the NWECC in collaboration with AREU.

### **Special Programme for Unemployed Women**

Following the 2006/2007 Budget Speech, the Government launched the Empowerment Programme (EP) with the aim of securing viable employment, encouraging entrepreneurship, improving competitiveness, providing transitional support to low-

income households for housing, and enhancing education for vulnerable children. One of the components of the EP, the Special Programme for Unemployed Women (SPUW), aims at mobilising unemployed women and those retrenched as a result of industrial restructuring, especially in the textile and sugar sectors. In line with its engagement in the area of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, UNDP has been supporting the SPUW through the project “Empowerment of Women through Capacity Building, Re-skilling and Entrepreneurship”. The Government of Mauritius has put in place a series of measures aimed at mitigating the effects of the global crisis. To that effect the Human Resource Development Council (HRDC) and the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF) have been established and one of their main objectives is capacity building for employability. In collaboration with other partners at the national level, women are being encouraged to enter non-traditional sectors of activities. To that effect, the NEF is actively involved in the sensitisation of employers in order to take women on board for training and internships. NEF is also actively promoting non-discrimination on the basis of sex in the employment sector.

A Project Management Unit (PMU) was set up to accompany groups of women to facilitate access to employment and to assist them start small businesses. Capacity building, networking, work placement, and the identification and implementation of feasible small business projects have been instrumental to helping these women improve their socio-economic situation. As of date, the project, commonly called “Women Empowerment Programme” (WEP), has trained more than five hundred women, has facilitated the creation of some eighteen small businesses and has placed about sixty women in varied jobs.

### **Espace des Métiers**

Moreover, an “Espace des Métiers” is being set up in order to counsel all unemployed individuals, including women who are laid off. Under the NEF, a Placement for Training Programme” has also been established with a view to encouraging employers to offer training and on the job placement to unemployed women above the age of 40, and workers who have been laid off . Employers are refunded 75% of the training costs and of the stipends of trainees in these categories, as compared to 50% in other categories. This measure is deemed essential as employers are reluctant to offer employment to unemployed women above 40, or who have been laid off. Under the placement for training programme, a special indicator to monitor the performance is the number and percentage of unemployed women successfully placed and trained.

From January 2007 to April 2009, 2367 women have been trained and placed, out of a total of 16,196. Another area where NEF has intervened is the provision of capacity building in Women’s Prisons. Women were formerly discriminated against as there was no such support provided to women detainees reducing the possibilities of socio-economic integration after these groups have served their sentence. A pilot programme has been connected with professional trainers in the fields of hairdressing, beauty care and information technology. To date, 42 women detainees have been trained, rooms to

host training activities have been identified, equipment for capacity building has been provided to the women prisons. It is now proposed to replicate this process.

### **Social Empowerment of Women**

With a view to promoting the empowerment of women through access to proper infrastructure, the Ministry has in the last five years, inaugurated several Women Empowerment Centres across the Island, as follows:

- The National Women Development Centre at Phoenix was inaugurated on 08 March 2007;
- The Pont Lardier Women Empowerment Centre which is operational since 24 April 2009;
- The Richelieu Regional Women Development Centre was inaugurated on 17 December 2007;
- The Triolet Women Empowerment Centre was inaugurated on 21 March 2009.

Moreover, the Notre Dame Women Empowerment Centre will be operational shortly and the Foundation Stone of the Rivière du Poste Women Empowerment Centre was laid on 03 February 2010.

The Centres are seen as mechanisms to promote the status of women, contribute to women's empowerment by taking into account their triple role (productive, reproductive and social), impart skills to women to enable them to be economically independent, and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

Additionally, fifteen Women Centres are operational throughout the island serving as focal points through which the Ministry implements its policies and programmes for women's empowerment. As at Dec 2009, some **12,000** women and girls benefit from the activities being conducted in the Women Centres

**15 Participatory Advisory Committees (PACs)** have been set up at the level of each women centre. PACs is a grassroots initiative of the Ministry that puts women at the heart of community development. PACs, therefore, aim to improve the power, amount and quality of women's participation in all decision making instances in issues of particular relevance to them whilst ensuring that an agenda relevant to women is promoted in all national negotiations.

An Action Plan has been formulated by PACs members who identified seven main development focus areas.

### **Elimination of discrimination and violence against women**

## **Legislations**

### **Sex Discrimination Act (SDA 2002)**

The **Sex Discrimination Act (SDA)** was passed in 2002 and a Sex Discrimination Division was set up subsequently at the Human Rights Commission to look into reported cases of complaints of discrimination against women.

It gives effect to certain provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It provides for the protection of individuals against discrimination based on sex, marital status and pregnancy in employment, education, provision of goods, services and facilities, accommodation, disposal of property, sports associations and clubs. The Act also provides for the elimination, as far as possible, of all forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, in educational institutions and in other areas of public activity.

Provisions have also been made in the Act for exceptions/exemptions in certain specific cases, such as:

- the ordination of priest, minister of religion;
- in employment, where it is a genuine occupational qualification to be a person of the opposite sex;
- in education, where the institution is only open to students of the opposite sex; and
- in clubs and associations, where membership is restricted to persons of one sex only or where it is not practical for the facilities to be used by men and women simultaneously or to the same extent.

The Act also provides for the setting up of a Sex Discrimination Division under the National Human Rights Commission, taking into account that:

- it may not be appropriate to create a multiplicity of Institutions catering for human rights in a small island state with a population of only 1.2 Million people; and
- Economies of scale will be achieved by having a single administrative set up.

The Sex Discrimination Division receives and enquires into written complaints, following which it endeavours to bring conciliation and make such recommendations as it deems appropriate. For the purpose of holding enquiries, the Division calls for witnesses and production of documents and the enquiries are carried out with as little formality and technicality as possible.

### **Equal Opportunities Act (2008)**

An Equal Opportunities Act has been passed by Parliament in December 2008 but as at date, has not yet been proclaimed. The Equal Opportunities Act incorporates all the different grounds of discrimination covered under section 3 and 16 of the Constitution as well as age, pregnancy, mental and physical disability and sexual orientation in areas dealing with employment, education, the provision of accommodation, goods, services and other facilities, sports, the disposal of immovable property, admission to private clubs and premises open to the public. The Act also provides for the establishment of an Equal Opportunities Commission and an Equal Opportunities Tribunal.

### **Sexual Offences Act (2003)**

The Sexual Offences (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2003 reinforces the sanctions associated with sexual offences. When cases of sexual assault are reported at the Police Department or the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, apart from medical examination, victims are referred to the Family Protection Unit of the Ministry where appropriate structures exist for interviewing or counseling them in privacy and ensuring sufficient emotional support following the stress and trauma they experienced. Sexual assault has been widely condemned in Sensitisation Campaigns through posters, talks on radio and TV, in Women Centres.

### **Employment Rights Act (2008)**

With regard to maternity benefits for female employees, the newly enacted Employment Rights Act (2008) does not limit the number of confinements to three, subject to the worker reckoning at least 12 months' continuous service with the Employer. The Employment Rights Act (ERA) has introduced the payment of a maternity allowance which applies to all confinements. It is to be noted that the Employment's Rights Act 2008 will not apply to workers covered by Remuneration Order in respect of this issue. Female workers whose terms and conditions of work are governed by Remuneration Orders are presently entitled to maternity leave for all confinements.

The new Employment Rights Act has introduced five continuous working days' paid paternity leave to all male workers reckoning more than 12 months' continuous employment on the birth of his child without any limit on the number of children. This provision applies to all sectors of employment, including those already covered by a Remuneration Order.

### **Protection from Domestic Violence Act (1997)**

In May 1997, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act was enacted and proclaimed in 1998. This act has been a major step in reaffirming the rights of women. The Act provides for the issue of protection orders, occupancy orders and tenancy orders and offers a wide definition of domestic violence to include physical, emotional, sexual violence and even threatened violence. The objective is to protect spouses and children from violence at home. Mauritius is one of the few countries in the region to have introduced a comprehensive law to combat domestic violence.

### **Amendment to Protection from Domestic Violence Act (2004)**

In 2004, certain amendments were brought to the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (PDVA), 1997. These amendments aim at:

- covering cases of domestic violence committed by any person living under the same roof,
- increasing the time limit before a notice is served from 7 days to 14 days,
- increasing the penalty applicable in case of offences; and providing for counseling.

### **Further Amendments to Protection from Domestic Violence Act (2007)**

In line with the Government Programme 2005-2010, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act was further amended in December 2007 with a view to providing better services to victims of domestic violence and strengthening the enforcement mechanism of the Act.

The Amendment Act makes provision for the following:

- Provision of alimony;
- Increase in penalty;
- Counseling mandatory under Magistrate order under exceptional cases. The Court will take into consideration the circumstances of the case, the nature of the offence, the character, antecedents, mental and psychological conditions, age, and health and home surroundings of the offender.

### **The Family**

In line with one of the UN recommendations that States should set up appropriate mechanisms to implement policies and programmes in favour of families, the Ministry has set up a Family Welfare & Protection Unit since July 2003.

### **Objectives of Family Welfare & Protection Unit**

- To implement appropriate policies and strategies to promote family welfare
- To adopt relevant strategies and implement actions to combat domestic violence

### **Family Support Bureaux**

The Unit operates from the Ministry's Head Quarters and has a network of 6 Regional Offices known as Family Support Bureaux (FSBx). Two hot lines are operational on a 24 hour basis to cater for family related problems and domestic violence cases.

### **Services**

The following services are offered at the Family Support Bureaux in a holistic way with a view to minimize further trauma to victims of violence:

- Family Counselling Service (by Family Counselling Officers)
- Psychological Counselling (by Psychologists)
- Legal Advice (by Legal Resource Person)
- Assistance to adult victims of domestic violence (by Family Welfare & Protection Officers) –Family Welfare & Protection Unit

## **Strategies adopted by the Ministry to Combat Domestic Violence**

### **National Policy Paper on the Family**

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare is the national mechanism for the protection and promotion of well being of the family in Mauritius and Rodrigues and the outer islands. In this respect, a National Policy Paper on the Family (NPPF) was launched on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2006. The goal of the family policy is to create strong and functional families by creating conditions that will facilitate the formation of a strong base for founding the family and its smooth functioning thereon as the core institution of society which embraces principles of democracy and gender equality, oriented towards protecting human rights approach.

### **Formulation of the National Action Plan on the Family**

A National Action Plan on the Family, emanating from the National Policy Paper has been launched recently, on 25 November 2009, on the occasion of 'International Day against Violence against Women'

### **Objective of the National Action Plan for the Family**

- The objective of the National Action Plan for the Family is to translate each of the five strategic objectives of the priority areas into specific objectives and activities with the aim to:



- Streamline objectives and ensure actions emanate directly from objectives of the policy paper;
- Identify responsibilities of stakeholders in the implementation of activities;
- Identify resources, human and financial, existing and new for activities proposed; and
- Identify indicators for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of proposal action.

The five strategic objectives are elaborated below:

- Creating strong foundation-strengthening marriage relationships;
- Balancing work and family life;
- Promotion of values for family life;
- Enable the family to nurture the young in an environment conducive to their overall development;
- Provide support services for the family to promote and sustain quality of life;
- Addressing specific Family Needs in Rodrigues; and
- Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism for Implementation for the Action Plan.

### **National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence**

To address the problem of domestic violence, a National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence was launched in 2007. The National Action Plan spells out the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders concerned to combat domestic violence. It contains five strategic objectives:

- Improving legislation on Domestic Violence and Strengthening of the Justice System and other agencies response;
- Providing appropriate, accessible, timely, coordinated multi-agency responses and support to all victims and children who need it;
- Sensitise and change attitudes to prevent domestic violence from happening in the first place;
- Promote responsible reporting, advocacy, sensitization and provision of a forum by media specialists to encourage the community at large to discuss domestic violence; and
- Undertake research and studies on domestic violence, strengthen capacity building and set up appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and

evaluation of the National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence for the promotion of best practices.

**70 % of the recommended actions in the Plan have already been implemented.**

### **Report on Auditing of our services and existing shelters**

In line with the National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence an auditing exercise of our services and existing shelters were conducted by a Consultant and the report was launched in November 2009. The recommendations of the Audit Report are as follows:

- Development of a Victim and Abuser Empowerment Policy;
- Signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry and NGO to set up emergency centres at regional level;
- Development of transitional/permanent housing typology for victims of domestic violence;
- Development of a quality assurance tool with indicators to ensure effective delivery of services by shelters;
- Provide training and employment opportunities for victims of domestic violence;
- Strengthen sensitisation campaign in schools and at the work place;
- Conduct working sessions with Managers of Shelters to encourage them to develop job seeking skills, provide job placement and support group in services offered; and
- Conduct Capacity Building Programme for staff to service the shelter

### **Partnership Against Domestic/Family Violence**

The collaboration of stakeholders under the Partnership against Domestic/ family violence (e.g Ministry of Health & Quality of Life, Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, Prisons Department, Police, Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions, NGO; PILS; MACOSS; SOS Femmes and Council of Religions amongst others) has been enlisted to combat domestic violence.

Partners collaborate through the implementation of projects geared at combating domestic/family violence. Projects are on a cost-sharing basis (75% of the total cost to be borne by the Ministry and 25 % by the implementing agency).

### **ZERO TOLERANCE Clubs**

Zero Tolerance Clubs have been set up with representatives of various Community Based Organisations with a view to involving the community in our efforts to combat

domestic violence. Members of these clubs act as watchdogs to ensure that their respective localities are violence free. Six (6) clubs are operational.

### **OASIS Association**

The objective of the association is to provide support and rehabilitation opportunities to victims of domestic violence. The OASIS Association provides opportunities for victims of domestic violence to meet as a group, share experiences and conduct activities for self-help. This process is facilitated with the regular intervention of Psychologists through counseling and group therapy. Psychologists conduct the group therapy activities. Family Welfare and Protection Officers motivate victims to join OASIS Association and initiate and organize activities aimed at establishing a network & support service.

Through this Association, victims of domestic violence are referred to the National Women Council and National Women Entrepreneur Council to encourage them to join Women Associations and empower them to get out of the vicious cycle of domestic violence.

Survivors are also referred to the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment which through its Employment Divisions across the island can assist victims at seeking job placement.

### **Setting up of the National Domestic Violence Committee and Area Domestic Violence Committee**

With a view to addressing the problem of domestic violence, a National Domestic Violence Committee comprising senior officials from different Ministries, department and NGOs has been set up in **February 2009** by this Ministry to promote and adopt a coordinated approach in dealing with the scourge of domestic violence.

The National Domestic Violence Committee has as objective to ensure the coordination at central level and advise on policy matters relating to domestic violence; to assess and monitor the effectiveness of the Area Domestic Violence Committees (ADVC), which has been set up in the six (6) Family Support Bureaux of the Ministry.

The ADVC has been set up with key stakeholders from different Ministries and Departments to organize case conferencing in regard to actions taken by each stakeholder on cases of domestic violence.

### **The main objectives of the ADVC are *inter-alia*, to:**

- Reduce and prevent the incidence of domestic violence;
- Provide accessible, reliable, timely and coordinated guidance on cases of domestic violence and ensure victims receive appropriate treatment and care; and

- Create an environment free from any forms of violence for the family and the community.

### **Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign**

The public at large is sensitised on issues pertaining to the welfare of the family. Talks, workshops and seminars are organised on a monthly basis by five (5) Family Counselling Officers at the level of our six Family Support Bureaux. Issues related to social problems affecting the family, communication in the family, sexual and reproductive rights/health of women, Marriage Enrichment Programme, Drugs and HIV AIDS, Anger Management, and Services offered by the FSBx are addressed in the awareness campaigns.

Awareness campaigns are also organised in order to provide information on the issue of domestic violence, such as:

- -Intervention/ protection of victims and
- -Prevention

The IEC Campaigns are sustained through talks and activities, which are organised by nine (9) Family Welfare & Protection Officers at the level of the Family Support Bureaux. IEC materials, Audio CDs and DVDs are disseminated and a website on domestic violence is also operational. An online service is also operational for reporting of cases of alleged domestic violence. The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare also maintained an abused hotline for victims of domestic violence.

### **Men as Partners Programme**

The “Men as Partners” Project is a gender sensitive project funded by the Ministry and implemented by the Mauritius Family Planning and Welfare Association. It is based on community involvement, which aims at partnership building, and focuses on concerted efforts for the attainment of the highest level of family harmony and happiness.

Components covered under the project are:

- Educational Sessions;
- Counselling Sessions;
- Medical Sessions; and
- Entertain to Educate

Up to now, the ‘MAP’ Project have been implemented in the fifteen (15) regions and in the context of the Commemoration of the International Day Against Violence Against Women 2009, the project has been launched in an additional region.

### **Pre-Marital Counselling and Marriage Enrichment Programmes**

In line with our preventive efforts to address problems such as conflicts with partners, domestic violence and extra marital affairs amongst others, the Ministry is implementing the Pre-Marital Counselling and Marriage Enrichment Programmes since 2003. The objectives of the Programmes are to sensitise engaged and married couples for a more stable married life as well as to prepare them to cope with marital conflicts, hence empowering them to lead a healthy family life. These programmes are conducted both at national and regional level with engaged and married couples.

### **Capacity Building Programme to Combat Domestic Violence**

One component of the National Action Plan to Combat Domestic Violence necessitates the need to sensitise religious and community leaders with a view to breaking down taboos regarding domestic violence and conducting sensitisation campaign against domestic violence .In this endeavour, the Ministry has successfully engaged into partnership with religious bodies to sensitise them on the issue of domestic violence.

The Ministry has also engaged into partnerships with the National Women's Council, a parastatal body under the aegis of the Ministry. It is affiliated with Women's Associations to further strengthen their involvement in the promotion of family welfare and protection from domestic violence at community and grassroots level.

The Ministry has also forged partnerships senior officials of the Local Government Authorities, the Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, Senior Citizens Welfare and Reform Institutions through their Social Welfare Centres, the Ministry of Environment and National Development Unit through the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund to assist the Ministry in combating domestic violence.

### **Evening Courses for men and women**

The Mauritian society is very dynamic and with time, there has been a gradual transformational change in the gender roles. While more and more women are opting for gainful employment outside the home, men are required to contribute more to the day to day management of the household including childcare. With this paradigm shift in the traditional roles assigned to men and women, both of them are being empowered to meet the challenges of daily life.

To that effect, the Home Economic Section of the Gender Unit of The MGECDWF has launched evening courses in the fields of Healthy Eating; Pastry and dessert; and Floral Arrangement for working men and women in August 2008 and its main objective was to empower these target groups with the view to enabling them to better manage their lifestyles through good nutrition, and better home management techniques. The trainees were required to develop their skills and knowledge that enable them to handle a healthier balance between their work and family life. This training programme further assisted trainees to earn additional income through enterprise development.

## **International Family Day**

The United Nations declared the year 1994 as the International Year of the Family. The International Family Day commemorated yearly on the 15 May aims at:

- Increasing public awareness on family-related issues, highlighting the importance of families, increasing understanding of family functions and problems, promoting knowledge of the economic, social and demographic processes affecting families and their members of focusing attention on the responsibilities and rights of family members;
- Enhancing the capabilities of national institutions for formulating implementing and monitoring policies geared towards promoting family values; and
- Stimulating efforts to respond to problems affecting the situation of families.

The Ministry celebrates International Family Day yearly by organizing major activities for public sensitization on the crucial importance of stable and functional families.

## **Anger Management Programme**

The Ministry has sought the services of an international expert to conduct Training of Trainers Programme on “Anger Management & Counselling Techniques” in August 2008. The training involved 32 officers from Government agencies and NGO`s.

The objects of the training were to -

- identify the different forms and manifestations of anger and the effects it has on our well-being and others;
- identify the sources of anger within different levels of our consciousness; and
- provide the trainees with a range of practical tools to enable self-transformation and so create a more peaceful existence for themselves and others.

Following the training programme trainers are implementing the project with Export Processing Zone Workers, members of Zero Tolerance Clubs, residents of Charitable Institutions/Shelters and Rehabilitation Youth Centre Officers amongst others.

## **Launching of Website on Domestic Violence**

The Ministry in collaboration with the UNDP has launched a website on domestic violence on 23 November 2007. It is an online service that provides an easy way of reporting cases of violence. The objectives are as follows:-

- Informing public at large on all activities organized by stakeholders on data available on domestic violence;
- Setting up a forum for stakeholders to exchange views and provide data; and
- Providing snapshot of salient features on legislations, services available, enforcement agencies, trends, glossary of terms and links with other related websites on domestic violence

The website of the Ministry also houses a psychologist corner.

### **“L’Année 2008: L’Année Sans Violence”**

The year 2008 has been declared as “L’Année 2008: L’Année Sans Violence”- The campaign was launched by the Ministry in December 2007 to solicit the collaboration of various stakeholders, namely socio cultural organisations, religious groups and NGOs in the fight against violence. To sustain the campaign throughout the year, the Ministry in collaboration with several stakeholders, conducted talks, workshops both at regional and national levels targeting youth, women and men.

## **Support and assistance to women victims of violence.**

### **Financial Support to Address the Needs of Victims of Domestic Violence**

Under the Families in Distress Scheme, women victims of Domestic Violence who for various reasons cannot return to their previous residence are temporarily placed at a shelter following an Interim Protection Order. Upon their discharge from the shelter, they are given an one-off allowance of Rs 3000 to meet their immediate needs Under the scheme, assistance of Rs 9000 is also provided to widowers (earning an income not exceeding Rs 6000) with dependent children and whose spouses were contributing to family income. The widower’s spouse should have died following accident, murder and other tragic circumstances.

The MGECDWF also assists victims of Domestic Violence by providing services of Barristers as and when required at court level. It further refers victims to the Ministry of Social Security for social aid in cases where the victims have been abandoned by their spouse and are faced with financial constraint. Support services to victims include:

- Shelters provided by NGO’s and by Government;
- Free legal assistance by Government;
- Medical assistance through the public hospitals which are free of charge;
- Police assistance for protection and removal of goods from residence;
- Family counselling; and
- Placement of children in case the parent cannot take care of them.

## **Children, Adolescents and Youth**

In 1993, Government signed the Hague Convention on Civil aspects of Child Abduction and in 2000 legislation was enacted to designate the Ministry as the Central Authority to deal with cases of Child Abduction.

Therefore, the Ministry is mandated to cater for development and protection of children and their welfare and is responsible for the establishment of appropriate mechanisms for the prevention of child abuse.

### **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)**

With respect to children, Mauritius has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 and ratified the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Labour. In 1993, the Government signed the Hague Convention on Civil aspects of Child Abduction. The Optional Protocol on the CRC on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts has been ratified on 13 February 2009 and the Optional Protocol on the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography have been signed in November 2001 and is in the process of ratification. Article 22 on the Convention of CRC has been withdrawn in January 2009. Mauritius has also signed the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and its ratification is in process. Mauritius has also acceded to the African Charter on the Rights of the Child in July 1990

Mauritius, as a State Party, has the obligation under Articles 34 and 35 of the CRC, to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation as well as to take appropriate measures to prevent the sale of and trafficking of children. In that context, it has submitted its second Report on the CRC to the United Nations.

### **National Children's Policy (NCP) 2003**

The MGECDWF & CP with the assistance of UNICEF has prepared a National Children's Policy with a view to establish linkages with all relevant Government Institutions and NGOs, to co-ordinate and monitor children's policies. The adoption of the NCP is an important step taken by Government in its commitment to human rights generally and to child rights and welfare specifically.

### **National Plan of Action (NPA)**

A National Plan of Action (NPA) has been prepared with a view to implementing the policy statements stipulated in the National Children's Policy (NCP). The discussion process in the preparation of the NPA with stakeholders aimed at:

- Streamlining the objectives and action areas ensuing directly from the objectives already outlined in the NCP;
- Stating responsibility/ies of parties involved in implementation;



- Proposing measures for evaluating the effectiveness of such actions and programmes;
- Examining the possibility of immediate launching of actions and programmes for each core policy area;
- Following the Rights-based approach; and
- Addressing the Key issues of Participation, Community Development, Partnership Development, Information, Communication and Research, and Institutional Mechanisms and Legislations outlined in the Policy Document.

## **Legislations**

### **Child Protection Act 1994**

A Child Protection Act was enacted in 1994 to ensure protection of children from all forms of abuse and protection. The national laws have been harmonized in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this respect, a number of laws pertaining to children have been amended in the form of Child Protection (Miscellaneous) Act, the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act and the Criminal Code Supplementary (Amendment) Act.

### **Amendments to Child Protection Act**

The Child Protection Act was amended in December 2005 as follows:

- The definition of the word “harm” has been extended so that “harm” now is defined as “includes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or moral injury, neglect, ill-treatment, impairment of health or development”,
- The definition “place of safety” has been amended to also include “a convent, a charitable institution, an institution for children and a hospital”,
- The definition of who can report cases of suspected abuse has been enlarged,
- Provisions under Section 262A to 267, relating to child abandonment and sections 268 to 271 relating to child abduction are being transferred to new Sections, namely 13B and 13C of the Child Protection Act, respectively,
- It makes provision for all cases of child trafficking, abandonment and abduction to be dealt with by officers of this Ministry who are responsible for child welfare and development. Tougher penalties are provided for in case of contravention of the provisions of the law. Penalties under the present Child Protection Act for sexual offences and indecent photographs of children have been revised from a fine of Rs 50,000 and imprisonment not exceeding 5 years to Rs 75, 000 and 8 years respectively. As for cases of mentally handicapped victims, offenders will be liable to a fine of Rs 100, 000 and

imprisonment not exceeding 15 years instead of Rs 75,000 and 8 years respectively.

The Child Protection Act was further amended in December **2008** to provide for a Child Mentoring Scheme. The Child Mentoring Scheme which is a well structured and well managed programme provides individual guidance and support to adolescents with behavioural problems who may also be prone to becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation and child violence in general. The Child Mentoring Scheme aims at providing such children with a role model to look up to, especially when they are evolving in a precarious and unstable environment. The Scheme ensures that these children are appropriately screened and matched with trained adult mentors for a one to one relationship of emotional reconstruction.

### **Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act**

A Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act was passed by Parliament in April 2009. The objectives of the Act are to give effect to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in persons; prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and protect and assist victims of trafficking. It provides for repatriation of victims of trafficking, and return of victims of trafficking to Mauritius, compensation to victims of trafficking and other penalties and regulations.

Mauritius has moved from the Tier 2 watch list category in the United States Trafficking in Persons Report 2005 to the Tier 2 placement in 2006 and to Tier 1 placement in 2009 through the timely adoption of measures regarding Trafficking in Persons.

### **National Children's Council Act 2003**

The National Children's Council (NCC) Act 2003 became effective as from 28 February 2004, with the aim of making the National Children's Council more dynamic and responsive to the needs of children and to ensure better participation of children.

The NCC Act provides that the Council shall:

- be the key consultative and coordinating national body on all activities related to children;
- protect the rights of children, promote their interest and well-being and ensure their participation in matters of interest to them; and
- promote activities for the welfare of children in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### **Ombudsperson for Children Act 2003**

The Ombudsperson for Children Act 2003 has been enacted with the objective to provide for the establishment of an office of Ombudsperson for Children.

The objective of the Office is to:

- ensure that the rights, needs, interests of the children are given full consideration by public bodies, private authorities, individuals and associations for individuals;
- promote the rights and best interest of children; and
- promote compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and more particularly, to create an effective mechanism for the investigation of complaints regarding violation of children's rights.

The Ombudsperson's Act enables the Ombudsperson to assume the role of an advocate for children's rights, to advise the Minister and other public bodies and Institutions on matters relating to promotion and protection of children's rights and to carry out any such investigations as the Ombudsperson may decide, on complaints relating to the rights of the child.

### **Ombudsperson for Children Amendment Act 2005**

Amendments were brought to the Act in 2005 to:

- empower the Ombudsperson for Children to compel witnesses to attend and give evidence on oath before and produce documents to the Ombudsperson in connection with investigations conducted under the Act; and
- provide for various offences, including failure to attend and take the oath before the Ombudsperson, giving false evidence, insulting the Ombudsperson and willfully interrupting proceedings conducted before the Ombudsperson.

The Ombudsperson for children is responsible for promoting children's interests, protecting victims of exploitation, investigating complaints of violations and presenting proposals for preventing trafficking.

## **Institutional Mechanisms**

### **Child Development Unit**

The Child Development Unit of the MGECDWF was set up in 1995. It is the executive arm of the Ministry to intervene in cases of child abuse and neglect. It is also responsible for the implementation of policies and programmes pertaining to the development, protection and survival of children. This Unit works closely with other agencies such as the Police Department, to provide 24-hour service through hot lines to children at risk as well as free legal assistance and psychological counseling to children.

A Child Protection Unit has been set up in collaboration with the Police Department and the MGECDWF to provide immediate assistance and protection to children, victims of abuse.

### **National Children's Council (NCC)**

The National Children's Council (NCC) created in 1990 is a corporate body under the aegis of the Ministry and is entrusted with the responsibility of vulgarising the CRC and organising creativity activities for adolescents and children. The Council also operates two Creativity Centres at **Mahébourg** and **Floreal** to cater for the creative needs of the growing child with a view to promoting his/her social, intellectual, moral and physical development.

### **Office of Ombudsperson for Children**

An office of Ombudsperson for Children has been set up since December 2003 in order to ensure that the rights, needs and interests of children are given full consideration by public bodies, private authorities, individuals, etc.

The Ombudsperson is appointed by the President of the Republic, to hold office for a period of four years, and is eligible for reappointment for a second term of four years.

### **Projects implemented by the MGECDWF to promote child welfare and child protection**

#### **Tardy Declaration**

A child who is not declared does not have any identity and is not recognized as a citizen of Mauritius. Declaration of birth must be done within 45 days following the birth of the child. The process of tardy declaration of birth is lengthy and cumbersome. The ministry is facilitating the registration process of undeclared children through a coordinated approach, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and other Government departments. Undeclared Children who are identified to be tardily declared are referred to the vaccination unit of the Ministry of Health for immunization. The ministry of Education then steps in to get the children admitted in pre-primary, primary or vocational schools.

#### **High Level Committee (Tardy Declaration)**

A High Level Committee co-chaired by the Attorney General and the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development, Family Welfare and Consumer Protection has been set up in August 2005 to take stock of the situation of tardy declaration as at date and to find means to improve upon the existing system. This committee monitors the tardy declaration of birth program on a weekly basis.

The following actions were taken to streamline the procedures for the tardy declaration of birth:

- A pool of 3 Attorneys was set up to deal with cases, providing free legal aid
- Arrangement has been made with the Magistrate to be on call at court in cases of tardy declaration
- Transport facilities are provided to parents
- Tardy declaration of birth can be made through a hotline which operates on a 24 hour basis.
- Sensitization is being carried out regularly on the media to increase public awareness

Since the setting up of the Committee some 80 undeclared children have been immediately registered at the Civil Status Division.

### **Sensitisation on ECD for parents/community**

Sensitization programmes are carried out throughout the island to sensitize parents and the community as regards to the norms and standards required to run Day Care Centres for children, in line with Regulations (2000) under the Child Protection Act, which deals with 'Institutions for Welfare and Protection of Children'. These programmes are being organized in women centres, village halls and community centres

### **Activities for children to promote a culture of peace**

#### **Promoting Leisure, Recreational and Cultural Activities**

In line with article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, songs, poetry recital, dances and story-telling are dispensed to children, as from pre-primary schooling.

children are thus able to give free expression to their imagination through music, crafts, drama.

#### **Creativity Centre for Children**

The first Creativity Centre in Mauritius for Children based on the National Bal Bhawan Model in New Delhi has been set up at Mahebourg. The setting up of the Creativity Centre enabled children to participate in a variety of activities, thus promoting their social, intellectual, moral and physical development. As the Creativity Centre gained popularity by nature of activities organised amongst children and youth, a second one was constructed at Pointe aux Sables. It is, however, being temporarily used as a shelter for women and children victims of abuse.

## **Sensitization Campaigns of the NCC**

Since its creation, the National Children's Council has been responsible for disseminating the Convention on the Rights of the Child through aggressive *sensitization campaigns*. Publications including posters and booklets on articles relating to the Convention have been disseminated regularly. Ministries and Non Governmental Organizations involved in the promotion of children's rights were provided with copies of the publication.

Students of primary and secondary schools around the island have also benefited from the IEC campaigns. Debates and projects on issues related to the Convention were also organized in secondary schools. Sensitization campaigns including the organization of talks and seminars were also carried out at grass root level for people with lower level of education.

### ***Training & activities on the CRC for children, teachers, social workers and other professionals:***

#### **July 2005 to June 2006:**

- (i) 100 talks delivered on CRC for 5341 students of Primary and Secondary Schools.
- (ii) 25 Talks on CRC for 1000 Women of Women's Associations, Social Centres and Community Centres.
- (iii) 6 Talks for 50 Teachers and Educators of Primary Schools.
- (iv)
- **Training of Trainers on CRC 2004:**

3 days Training of Trainers Workshop on CRC

25 Training were given Training on CRC from 20-25 April 2004.

Children have not been actively participating in the decision-making process so far. However, certain mechanisms do exist whereby the participation of children are encouraged through membership in children's clubs and students councils.

The new NCC Act makes provision for a children's committee comprising 15 boys and girls elected from amongst children's clubs and students councils. The functions of the Children's Committee are to provide a forum for children to discuss about issues concerning them and to express their views/suggestions which are then discussed at higher levels.

Outreach Programmes are organized jointly by the Child Development Unit and the NCC and other stakeholders in the form of IEC activities, sensitization on sports day, 16 days 16 Rights Campaign.

### **“Teens Clubs and “Kites Club”**

At the level of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare appropriate structures have been created such as “Teens Clubs and “Kites Club” so as to give opportunities to children to express themselves or to give their views.

### **Information Education Communications campaign**

In the context of ‘*L’Année sans Violence*’- **Year of non-Violence** (2008), a series of sensitization and awareness campaigns have been organized and children from primary and secondary schools, as well as teachers benefited from the talks.

During the celebration of the **“16 Days 16 Rights Campaign” in 2009**, debates and elocution competitions were organized for members of Kites Clubs, which are affiliated with the National Children’s Council. A workshop was also organized with Police Officers to sensitize them on Child Protection issues. Also, children of day-care Centres, primary schools and the youth of secondary schools were sensitized on their rights.

### **Trafficking in persons**

Mauritius was placed in the TIER 2 Watch List category in the United States Trafficking in Persons Report 2005. The fact that Mauritius has progressed in the TIER 2 placement in 2006 and subsequently to TIER 1 placement in 2009, is a testimony of various actions taken by the Government to combat child prostitution. Moreover, the African Report on Child Well-being 2008 has made the following observations as regards Mauritius:

- The Government of Mauritius emerged out as the most child-friendly government in Africa as a result of:
  - appropriate legal provisions to protect children against abuse and exploitation;
  - high commitment in allocating a relatively higher share of national budgets to provide for the basic needs of children; and
  - the efforts and success in achieving favourable well-being outcomes.

- Mauritius ranked 11<sup>th</sup> for its effort to put in place appropriate legal and policy frameworks for children e.g free primary education and a National Plan of Action and a Government body for coordinating the national strategy for children.
- Mauritius ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the combined index for provision of basic services for children. e.g infant mortality rate, immunization and enrolment rate in primary and secondary school.

The following measures are taken by the Government to deal with child prostitution:

### **International Instruments**

The Government of Mauritius has ratified the **Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict** on 12 February 2009 and it entered into force for Mauritius on 12 March 2009.

Moreover, the Government of Mauritius is making necessary arrangements to introduce new legislations and amending existing ones prior to ratifying the **Optional Protocol on Sale, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography**.

### **Legislations**

The **Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act** has been enacted 2009. The objectives of the Act are to –

- give effect to the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons;
- prevent and combat trafficking in persons; and
- protect and assist victims if trafficking.

**The Child protection Act** 1994 with amendments in December 2005 and 2008

The Ministry is in the process of preparing a **consolidated Children's Bill**. The aim of the Bill is to provide for a comprehensive Children's Act to consolidate the various pieces of legislation on children's rights and to harmonize all laws in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, especially in the areas of adoption and juvenile justice. The assistance of UNDP and Law Reform Commission has been sought.

### **Institutional Mechanism**



## **Drop In Centre**

A Drop-in-Centre was launched in December 2003 in Bell Village. Its purpose is to assist **children victims of sexual abuse and exploitation** and help them to re-integrate in society. A hotline (113) has also been made available to the public for the referral of cases of child prostitution.

PFPU also has a special Children's Corner which has been set up with the help of a child psychologist. It contains items atypical of children such as small colorful table and chairs, toys, white board with markers, colored pencils, drawing books and so on.

## **Residential Drop-in-Centre**

In line with the Government's commitment to the development and protection of children from any forms of abuse and exploitation, a Residential Drop-in-Centre will be constructed shortly at GRNW. The foundation stone was laid in November 2009

This measure is aligned with one of the recommendations of the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in which the Government of Mauritius participated in 2006.

## **Police Family Protection Unit (PFPU)**

The Police Family Protection Unit (PFPU) was set up with the special mandate to provide specific services to a category of people who are termed vulnerable within society. This category of people includes women, children and the elderly. They are considered as vulnerable because they are less able to protect themselves when faced with crimes and criminal justice system as compared to other members of the society. Given their position of vulnerability, their rights are more likely to be violated than others. Hence, a special policing approach towards them is required.

## **Brigade Pour La Protection Des Mineurs (BPM)**

As children are becoming more and more vulnerable in our society, the Mauritius Police Force has at the request of this Ministry, set up a new unit styled "*Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs*" as from May 2004. One of the priorities of the Brigade is to act as a watchdog against all forms of exploitation and abuse against children. The Brigade is providing a meaningful and sound customer care service aimed at optimizing the protection of children and helping to alleviate the anxiety of parents whose children have been subjected to such abuses. From January to August 2008, there have been 41 crackdown operations that have been carried out throughout the island in collaboration with the Brigade Des Mineurs, NGO and the NCC.

## **Child Protection Unit (CPU)**

The CPU provides an integrated and specialized service to children under one roof where both Police and Child Welfare Officers, trained on Child Protection issues are posted to provide Child Protection service.

## **Foster Care System**

One major step towards implementing measures aimed at ensuring better protection to children, especially those at risk and providing a better alternate for rehabilitation and care of children is the introduction of the Foster Care System on a pilot basis. The aim of the Foster Care System is to provide the children with an alternative family environment, which will foster their physical, emotional and social development. The Foster Care Project, launched on a successful pilot basis in 2002 has now been widely extended. Some 71 children have been placed in 50 families as at November 2009.

## **Crackdown Operations**

Since January 2008, crackdown operations have been conducted islandwise at regular intervals by Officers of this Ministry, National Children's Council, Brigade des Mineurs (Police Department), in collaboration with NGOs to ensure that young persons and students are attending schools during normal school hours. Such operations are seen to contribute in an efficient way to prevent young persons from playing truancy and loitering thereby getting involved in illicit activities.

## **National Parental Empowerment Programme**

The National Parental Empowerment Programme has been introduced in 2007 by the Child Development Unit of the MGECDFW on counseling services with parents and other family members.

The main objectives of the National Parental Educational Programme are:

- to avoid conflicts at home.
- to help in strengthening care of children through support and education of parents.
- to empower parents in enabling them to ensure the holistic development of their children
- to improve the relationship between parents and children.

## **Community Child Protection Programme (CCPP)**

The Ministry has launched the CCPP that provides for the setting up of formal forums on a district wise basis as well as at grassroots level to ensure community development with respect to child protection and welfare. This programme allows for interplay of dynamic top down and bottom up forces to provide for equilibrium in an otherwise open system, and as such will be a recipient of much information, education and communication campaign as well as empowerment processes. This programme should, if well implemented, also provides for penetration of communities and eventually

reach out to those families & children who are marginalized and excluded for a process of reconstruction.

District Committees and Community Child Watch projects have been launched in various localities.

The main components of the programme are as follows:

- The Community Child Watch to be set up in the immediate locality of high risk areas to ensure early detection and reporting of child at risk cases.
- The Case Conference at Family Support Bureau level with officers of the Ministry to review and monitor the handling of cases and so to expedite as far as possible on lessening trauma and trigger early rehabilitation of children victims of abuse and neglect.
- The Area Child Protection Committee (ACPC) comprising regional stakeholders to ensure better collaboration and coordination in the handling of cases.
- The District Child Protection Committees to take cognizance, review and monitor Child Protection issues at their level.

The National Child Protection Committee to coordinate and monitor the work of the 6 ACPCs, to develop and agree on policies, review and monitor procedures for inter-agency work for protection of children, to make appropriate recommendation to ensure coordination and concrete action, including training/IEC in relation to Child Protection.

### **Shelter**

There are two shelters for children, one is being run by a Trust Fund and the other is under the management of the National Children's Council. The main types of abuse experienced by the children who are sent to shelters and charitable institutions are related to 'child neglect, abandoned children, incest and battered child'. The majority of the children are in 11-14 age groups.

### **Information, Education Campaigns**

To create public awareness, sensitization and awareness campaigns targeted towards children are carried out on a regular basis through media by way of radio and television programmes. Talks are delivered to school children at primary and secondary levels and to parents, in regions at risks; and to the community at large with a view to sensitizing them on the protective needs of children against all forms of harm and abuse.

There is a standing arrangement between the Ministry and the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation for radio programmes on different issues including Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Mauritius.

Information, Education and Communication Campaigns that are ongoing will be further enhanced in primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions with a view to educating children about the problems associated with commercial sexual exploitation.

**A hotline 113** has also been made available to the public for the referral of cases of child prostitution.

Police Officers visit schools and deliver talks and lectures on a regular basis on child abuse and services available for the protection of children.

Group Therapy for rehabilitative needs of CSEC victims is being carried out on a pilot basis for both CSEC and rape victims.

The Police in collaboration with the Social Workers of the Ministry of Education and the Child Development Unit also redirect children who are cut off from schools to the education system.

With a view to promoting Mauritius as a safe family destination, the Ministry of Tourism has embarked on a sensitization campaign on the impact of CSEC

### **Capacity Building**

Professionals such as Family Welfare & Protection Officers, Child Welfare Officers, Police Officers, Probation Officers, Medical Social Workers and NGOs working with children have been trained by a local consultant with a view to providing better services to victims of CSEC. The training programmes are ongoing.

Police Officers refer children who have been abused to the Child Development Unit for psychotherapy and placement to shelters, if required.

- In addition, the Police Department also provides the following assistance and support through –
- A 24 hour hotline service; and
- A protocol of assistance to child victims ranging from protection to counselling exists, whereby all Police Officers serving in any part of the country know how to deal with reported cases of child abuse

A Training Programme for Trainers and Community Leaders on CSEC has been carried and is ongoing. So far, a total of 831 Police Officers (both male and female) have been trained in courses including Trafficking in persons and Sensitisation against sexual exploitation and abuse of minors.