



CARIBBEAN SHEROES INITIATIVE

Civil Society Organizations Advancing Gender Equality:
Methods & Tools

CARIBBEAN SHEROES INITIATIVE, KNOWLEDGE TOOL KIT

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FOREWORD:

UNESCO Advocates for Gender Equality

In the Caribbean, at least one in three women has been a victim of gender-based violence in her lifetime, making this one of the most widespread violations of human rights. While the numbers on Violence against Women and Girls are shocking, the underlying traditional social norms which shape and perpetuate patriarchal power structures still permeate all layers of society, leading to different forms of inequalities throughout our political, economic, and social systems. Culturally sanctioned behaviors, preconceived notions of traditional gender norms and stereotypical gender roles are often openly or subtly manifested, leading to exclusion and unequal opportunities for women.

In pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality is one of UNESCO's global priorities. In all its fields of competence – Education, Culture, Social and Human Sciences and Natural Sciences, Communication and Information – UNESCO is committed to removing barriers that hinder women's personal and professional development and to ensure that everyone has fair, inclusive and equal access to opportunities, resources and tools that enable them to reach their full potential.

In the Caribbean, UNESCO's Social and Human Sciences Sector supports knowledge creation and undertakes advocacy activities promoting women's rights,

raising public awareness and advocating for eliminating gender-based discrimination and all forms of violence against women.

By launching the Caribbean Shereroes Initiative, UNESCO and the University of the West Indies, supported by the Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO, highlight and document the contributions of women, women's group, and their work regionally, and aim at enhancing capacity among younger generations of women.

UNESCO recognizes that the achievements and commitment of women activists that engage in civil society organizations by investing their time, energy, and efforts is a building block for gender equality in Jamaica, the Caribbean, and globally. Their leadership, resilience, energy and effort should not be invisible. Instead, their achievements should be recognized, celebrated and amplified.

Therefore, this knowledge toolkit aims at documenting the achievements and lessons learned of twelve Jamaican Civil Society Organizations that have worked relentlessly to advance women's rights and social justice, fostering a less violent society and more equal gender relations grounded on human rights. We hope that this knowledge product will serve as a knowledge-building block for inspiring younger generations and further driving the work of other Civil Society Organizations in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean.

Saadia Sanchez Vegas, Ph.D.

Director and Representative
UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean



Caribbean SHEROES: The Shoulders of Greatness

For some, heroes wear capes and masks and live in faraway places and are above the ordinary. But our Sheroes, walk, live and breathe among us and have skin, flesh and hair that are similar to ours. Therefore, when we look at ourselves in the mirror we are looking at a potential shero - someone who has greatness inside, someone with a passion to contribute, to make a difference.

Perhaps that Shero is you, going through your own metamorphosis, similar to a caterpillar growing into a butterfly.

A Caribbean Shero is an outstanding woman, often working in a civil society organization (CSO) or a non-governmental organization (NGO) that promotes Gender Equity and Social Justice.

A Caribbean Shero's work is dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls, raising awareness about all types of social ills and violence, in particular violence against women and girls and child abuse.

A Caribbean Shero is involved in key areas of advocacy, research and working in communities, designing and executing programmes and initiatives that benefit women and girls.

A Caribbean Shero seeks to bridge the gap and connect women and girls to the relevant agencies and resources that will make their lives better.

Tireless and selfless, these visionaries,

SHEROES, are trailblazers who stand proud and have laid solid foundations for you to follow. In honour of the work they have done and the outstanding gains they have made, you are being charged to continue the advocacy, continue to promote and elevate the rights of women and girls, and work on causes which will make their lives better.

Our Caribbean Sheroes have paved a path for you to follow. You stand on the shoulders of women who have worked hard and sacrificed a great deal for the benefit of the majority; you stand on the greatness of Caribbean Sheroes.

Women's rights and women's causes are at the heart of the partnership between UNESCO and the the Institute for Gender and Development Studies Regional Coordinating Office (IGDSRCO), and honouring Caribbean Sheroes is the organizations' way of acknowledging some of the transformational work done by Caribbean women and organizations. This recognition is important for UNESCO because too often, even though women play a critical role in development, their contribution is overlooked. Caribbean gender activists are unsung heroes and the Caribbean Sheroes Initiative is a significant way of applauding and shining the light on some of these amazing women and organizations.



The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Cluster Office for the Caribbean, through by the Social and Human Science Sector, aims at equipping Caribbean Small Island Developing States with the capacities, tools and resources to produce and make meaningful use of policy-relevant, whole-of-society and human-rights-based social and human scientific research and knowledge, thus promoting inclusive and peaceful societies.

In delivery of UNESCO's Global Priority Gender Equality, the Social and Human Sciences Sector undertakes advocacy activities promoting women's rights, raising public awareness and advocating for the elimination of gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence in the Caribbean Small Island Developing States. Furthermore, UNESCO advocates for positive redefinitions of social norms of masculinity and the meaningful engagement of men and boys, alongside women and girls, in the global movement for gender equality.

Jamaica became a Member State of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1962 and in 1965 the Jamaican National Commission for UNESCO was established. Its Mission is to involve in UNESCO's activities, the various national, regional and international partners working for the advancement of education, science, culture, communication and information so that each Member State may play an ever-increasing role in UNESCO's work and particularly in the information and execution of its programmes.



The Secretariat, headed by Secretary General Everton Hannam, is responsible to the Commission for the effective implementation and co-ordination of the programmes and activities of UNESCO in Jamaica, and for advising on and implementing policy decisions. Minister Grange is the Chairperson of the National Commission for UNESCO (JNC-UNESCO), which works towards the development of Jamaica through UNESCO:

1. Advises the Government of Jamaica on issues relevant to UNESCO's objectives through active engagements with Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)
2. Supports UNESCO projects within the country
3. Publicizes UNESCO Participation Programme, grants and educational opportunities
4. Collaborates with the UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean, located in Jamaica

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies, Regional Coordinating Office

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) consists of the Office of the University Director (Regional Coordinating Office, RCO), located in the Regional Headquarters of The University of the West Indies, Mona, and three Campus-based Units, each with its own Head, located at Cave Hill, Mona, and St Augustine. IGDS' goals and objectives are in alignment with the Vice Chancellor's Three As: Access, Agility and Alignment.

The Regional Coordinating Office (RCO) is the administrative hub of the Institute and as such, the University Director has oversight of the Campus-based Units. The primary task of the RCO is to coordinate major regional activities in consultation with the Unit Heads and their community affiliates, and to help finance the enterprise through collaborative initiatives with its partners.

RACE --Research, Activist, Community Engage and Education-- as its axiom, The IGDS-RCO directs the graduate teaching that is guided by Feminist Theories and Gender and Development principles and practises to help in the transformation of gender relations and the promotion of social justice and equity.

The IGDS' Mission is to produce and disseminate knowledge to transform gender relations in the Caribbean, in support of the UWI's mission to enhance regional and international development. Our Vision is that all UWI graduates are committed to social justice and the promotion of gender-responsive human relations and development.

The IGDS-RCO is spearheading the implementation of The UWI Gender Policy.

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My Mother Raised me to be an Activist

Prof. Opal Palmer Adisa, University Director, IGDS-RCO

When I turned 12 years old my mother signed me up to volunteer with the Red Cross, and once a week, after school and after my mother came home from work we would pack the supplies that she had collected the previous weekend from Red Cross in her blue Anglia and we would drive to the Spanish Town hospital. There we went from ward to ward, first the women's then the men's, offering the patients, particularly those who had no relatives or were from rural areas, snacks, biscuits and peanuts, soap and toothpaste and other small items.

I volunteered for the Red Cross with my mother for three years until extracurricular activities demanded many of my evenings. However, that did not stop my mother from guiding me to volunteer in other areas. Growing up, my mother would always instruct, "You must always help those who are less fortunate." She

never referred to people as poor, always as the less fortunate.

As I grew, I saw my mother helping those less fortunate through the church where she played the organ and assisted with Sunday school and other programmes the church hosted during Easter and Christmas. She served as godmother for many children and helped their parents with funds to buy uniforms and books, through her job as the executive assistant and bookkeeper for the sugar estate on which we lived, and she assisted the canecutters to lobby for better wages and to start a credit union. Additionally, she worked with many women in the community who often would come to our house in the evenings and sat on our veranda while my mother taught them shorthand and typing, others how to knit, crochet and even sew. My mother was very skilled in many areas and even helped to

improve the reading and writing skills of some of the women in preparation for a job so they could leave their abusive husbands, or just to become independent.

Although my mother never called herself a Community Activist, as I reflect, I now realize this is the life she led, and this is how she raised me. It never occurred to me to be anything else. In fact, when I began on this path I did not know it would become a life mission. I attended university and earned degrees, but as far back as I can remember, I knew I had a duty and a responsibility to help those who were less fortunate and I would like to think that I have been doing that all of my adult life in some capacity, or the other in whatever space I have found myself.

Contemplating on what it means to be an activist and what it means to us to be a leader, I can't help but consider Jamaica's only

national heroine, Nanny, who my mother always pointed to as a woman who was fierce and who led and who did not allow the possibility of defeat to compromise her struggle. Nanny and my mother Catherine are my role models so I am very fortunate that I came of age guided by someone who led by example, and in this instance, that person was my mother. But I want to speak to those young women who are emerging, and who might not be as fortunate as I was to have had a mother who demonstrated activism, who demonstrated community engagement. In the absence of such a birth right, who are their role models and how do they begin this journey?

First and foremost, your heart has to be centered on love and recognizing the need to bring about change for the benefit of a specific community. Second, you should feel passionate about whatever social cause or injustice that you want to improve or correct. The first step on this path is to find a cause that moves you, that you are passionate about, that you want to make better for the majority. Next, is understanding what the problem is --really investigating it and identifying the problem areas so that you can begin to plan a solution. But even before or while

you're planning a solution, an important component is building alliance; you must identify and invite others to work with you — others within or outside of the community, but who might be similarly motivated and engaged by the topic/issue and therefore are willing to work with you to come up with a strategy to solve these problems.

This Caribbean Sheroes Initiative that we are embarking on came about because I saw the tremendous need for social and cultural change to improve the lives of women and girls and I know that we need all hands on board. I want to mentor young women who are deeply committed to improving our society and making it a safe space for all of us. I want to provide them with the tools that are necessary to be fully empowered so they can develop into leaders, develop into being advocates, develop into being community activists, develop into forming a cohesive, strong voice for social transformation.

I am very grounded and motivated to serve as a mentor because I was mentored my entire life, not just by my mother but by the other women with whom my mother associated, who are also committed to change. For instance

my sister's godmother who was a registered nurse and who worked at the public hospital, and who like my mother would teach her neighbours and people who came to her about basic health care combined with local remedies/herbs.

This Caribbean Sheroes Initiative is intended to develop future activists and leaders, community organizers who will enter the leadership arena, in politics, in environmental justice, in human rights, in all areas to work for change. We have to work to bring about Gender Equity; we have to ensure that women are safe; we have to insist that our girls are safe from physical and sexual abuse; we have to ensure that our community is safe from violence so that we can thrive, so that we can develop to the fullest of our potential without fear, without our dreams being aborted, without being preyed upon.

Sheroes is about spreading Wings; it's about lifting those who need to be lifted so they can see and understand and develop into amazing activists and leaders. Right here and right now in this society I Invite you to step up be one of our helping hands, to be a bright light that helps to make your community a haven for all its members.





My Mother

by Yashika Graham

My mother saves pear seeds
to catch the breed,
the inside of deep-sunset pumpkin
to fill the yard with secrets of its vines.
My mother is a bush woman,
sings river valleys
to mountain tops,
springs light
from the blank
into high sailing hallelujahs.
My mother is a bush woman,
grazing green thumb
in earth revival,
springing life
from concrete.
This woman
raised on yellow-heart breadfruit
and bush tea,
made tomato and cucumber shake
with a salt and pepper resolve
so I fell in love with taste.
This woman,
heavy-handed good-timing

connoisseur of the belly-full,
with kindred gift
of Great River balance,
seldom fails to laugh, to love
even with a tribe of wild pickney.
My mother is a Greenwood woman
bred of the bush.

(The Caribbean Writer, Volume 27, 2013, University of the Virgin Islands)



The poet celebrates the versatility of her mother, especially her mother's ability to grow things, as well as nourish her family. As such the poet associates her mother with the bush, namely the environment and its vital and diverse nutrients.

- Reflect on your skill sets, and how you might be able use them to help others.
- Have you ever planted a seed and watched it grow? Think of one thing you would like to grow, and here I am referring more to an idea or cause than an actual plant.



What Makes a GOOD LEADER

Joan Andrea Hutchinson

Some people criticize leaders, convinced that they would do a far better job. That is often the view from the outside. However, once one is in the position of leadership, one realizes that it is not as easy as it had seemed.

There are many different styles of leadership:

1. Autocratic (rigid, authoritarian leaders who prefer to be in total control);
2. Transformational (leaders who inspire, influence and motivate team members to transform beliefs and attitudes and ultimately actions);
3. Laissez-faire (a leadership style which gives employees high levels of autonomy, with the leader adopting a hands off approach, very rarely micro managing); and
4. Democratic or participative leadership (which takes into account the opinions and attitudes of the team members, ensuring that they are fully involved in decision making).

Many leaders utilize a blend of approaches, styles and strategies, to meet the needs of their organization, the people with whom they work, and to maximize the

output from partnerships.

All of this is underpinned by external influences of the social, cultural and financial environment.

Importance of Communication

A successful leader must be a good communicator. Effective communication is critical to ensuring that the vision of the organization is shared with the team so that all parties are moving in the same direction. A good leader understands the communication style of his team members and uses language and communication strategies to empower and coalesce. Good communication must be clear and understandable to the receiver/consumer of the information, otherwise information is transferred but communication has not necessarily been achieved.

The concept of 'praising in public and criticizing in private' is very important to maintaining balance and harmony within the team. If the leader chooses to embarrass a team member in front of others, the results will not be positive and the team member may thereafter underperform as she feels undervalued and disrespected.

What is expected once you become a member of the team, must be clearly communicated to new members. Penalties for not adhering to rules and regulations should also be clearly communicated so that every team member knows the lay of the land. There should be no surprises.

Of course not every decision taken by the leadership is going to be popular with the team but it is up to the leader to ensure that good communication strategies are employed. This way, even if team members are not happy with a decision or position, they would have been given reasons to indicate why a certain decision is in the best interest of the organization at a particular time. The leader must encourage the team to buy into the notion that the overarching goals of the organization are bigger than the individuals, including the management team.

Communicating in Times of Change

Change is inevitable. Changes will happen within the organization and changes will happen within the environment which will impact the organization. The most important thing however is to be flexible enough to adapt and more importantly, to use the right communication strategies to lead the team through the changes. The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed the world

into a state of turmoil and organizations have been forced to pivot, re-strategize and retool. Effectively communicating the organization's vision of the impact of the changes on the organization and how to deal with them, is the responsibility of the leader.

Failure or success in the face of change is very often a function of the flexibility and adaptability of the leader who applies diverse strategies and approaches to achieve outcomes.

Empowerment

The most effective leader is the one who empowers his or her team, who ensures that the team shares the vision of the organization and understands the mechanisms and the resources which will be used to achieve the organizations goals. A good leader understands the strengths and weaknesses of the team, knows which members have which skills and competencies and validates the team members so that they feel invested in the process. Building and empowering the team ensures that the organizational goals are more

achievable because the team is lifting 'together'.

Leading by Example

Setting the right example is also very important to be a successful leader. There are two useful Jamaican phrases which exemplify this notion. The first: "fish rotten from di head" and the second: "crooked stick, crooked shadow." These phrases indicate the fact that an organization takes its tone from the leadership. If the leader plays fair, is kind and promotes integrity, there is a trickle-down effect and these qualities and practices are likely to be evident in the operations of the organization. If, however, the leader is unscrupulous then it is likely that the organization might turn a blind eye to unscrupulous practices.

While the proverbial maxim is generally accepted as true, "the buck stops with the leader," s/he needs to feel supported by the team. In almost all situations, but especially in a crisis, the team will rely on the leader for direction, and the leader must also have the confidence that he or she can rely on the team for effective and appropriate execution.

"A good leader must have empathy, and must build up and empower the team rather than engage in a total top down autocratic management style."

Shelly Ann Weekes,
CEO, Her Flow Foundation



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE FULL TIME IT STOPS

Rozhaun Walker

The World Health Organization defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in, or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, emotional harm, mal-development or deprivation".

Globally, public health specialists have called gender-based violence (GBV), the 'Hidden Epidemic'. It can affect anyone regardless of environmental location or ethnicity. While females are most at risk, males and other vulnerable groups experience it too.

Gender-based violence can be displayed in many forms and can cause sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. It can happen in private or public places, such as, homes, boardrooms or refugee camps. Examples of violence against both sexes include street harassment, marital rape, trafficking of humans for prostitution; forced marriages; sexual harassment and intimidation at work. This occurs in the family and in the general community, but is sometimes also prolonged through policies or actions of agents of the state such as the police, military or immigration authorities.

Many forms of GBV have been manifested as traditions: child marriages, rape, trafficking of persons, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, and so-called honour killings. It must stop.



Gender-based violence disempowers people and suppresses their voices. Their stories are not heard and their human rights can be more easily breached. Injustice, unavailable resources or lack of economic opportunities continue this cycle of violence, often leading to the survivor's dependency on the abuser. This allows violent groups and individuals to continue abusing their power without fear of consequences.

In Jamaica, the first national survey on gender-based violence revealed a prevalence of 27.8 per cent women - one in every four women has experienced GBV or intimate partner violence (IPV). There was no major difference between women living in urban areas and those in the rural areas. The Jamaican Government is making every effort to reduce the occurrence of gender-based violence (GBV) in Jamaica, especially among women and girls, and, some of the strategies already in place are :

- A 10-year National Strategic Action Plan to eliminate GBV in Jamaica (2017-2027), launched in 2018 by the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport.
- A public education campaign, titled, 'No Excuse for Abuse', established to take anti-violence messages to communities nationwide.
- The establishment of more state-run shelter spaces for victims of GBV

Eliminating GBV requires a legal framework and laws which protect victims, and bring offenders to justice. This must be backed up by public education, ensuring that victims, survivors and perpetrators, and the society as a whole, understand the psycho-social dynamics and the legal framework for combatting GBV.

Whether it occurs locally or internationally, GBV has no place in any society. It must stop!



Conversation

by Millicent A. A. Graham

At the standpipe the women hold
their bellies and swing the dented pails,
empty and dry as the loosening gold
that rises as the evening light flails.
As if there was no drought, no barren earth,
they gather, old fashioned urns, faithful,
waiting for some favorable word;
but the time trickles, and the waters pull
back, until only thirst is in this age,
and the urns are baked with sore regret.
Yet still they wait for water to delay
the hardening of their bodies with its wet.
I hear their whispers rising dry as dust,
see faces; shadow-carved; see buckets rust.

(The Damp In Things, Peepal Tree Press, 2009)



While this poem narrates the lack that many women experience, it ends on an optimistic note. Using drought and lack of water as both a metaphor and an actual reality, the poet speaks to the lack of opportunities that is the experience of many women, but still they gather because in gathering, they can bring a collective will to positively change their dire condition.

- Reflect on a time, when you felt down or hopeless, but speaking to a friend or family member, made you feel more positive and therefore able to forge ahead.

CARIBBEAN
SHEROES'
TOOLS/METHODS

*Those outstanding, visionary women and organizations,
working to improve the lives of, and to support women, girls and vulnerable groups.*



Building partnerships with people and groups of different orientations is important, as long as there is some commonality of objectives.

Civil society activism runs through the veins of Linnette Vassell, human rights, community development and gender justice advocate who has dedicated her life to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. A founding member of the Committee of Women for Progress (CWP, 1976- 1987), she was among those women who advocated for progressive measures including maternity leave with pay. The CWP founded the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre (WROC) in 1983, as a base for social support to women and their families.

Along with other committed leaders, Ms. Vassell supported the organization toward the strategic move to combine welfare work with advocacy, thereby exposing the nature of gender inequity, rooted in patriarchy. Ms. Vassell remained in the day-to-day operation of WROC and was Board Chairperson until 2009. She continued as a Board member until 2017 when she became a Board Advisor to provide support and continuity to WROC's identity as a progressive body within the women's sector.

Her work in activism ran side by side with her academic engagement in research and teaching in Caribbean history and Gender Studies at The University of the West Indies. As a Community

Development and Gender Consultant, she has addressed policy and programmatic issues such as gender and governance, water and sanitation, climate change and biodiversity, violence and vulnerability in communities affecting women and girls in particular and issues of maternal and neonatal health.

Linnette has also been involved in international dialogues on women's rights, children's rights and human rights through the UN and other international bodies. This committed activist has participated in numerous international conferences including the Conference on the Rights of the Child, in Moscow, and the UN Women's Conference held in Nairobi in 1985 which declared the Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. She also attended the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995 which set out the Platform for Action to guide the global agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of Women.

Participation in these dialogues and advocacy platforms enabled Linnette as well as other womanists/feminists from Jamaica and the wider Caribbean, to contribute to and learn from the global women's movement. They enabled the Caribbean to shape and carry perspectives of

the South into the dialogues on development as well as integrating them into Jamaican organizational life. Over the years, Ms. Vassell started organisations including SISTREN Theatre Collective, Women's Media Watch, the Association of Women's Organizations in Jamaica (AWOJA) and WROC, alongside The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), Caribbean DAWN and Red Thread in Guyana, with consistent support of UN Women. This has helped to shape the identity of our movement for the advancement of women's rights.

But all these efforts have had their ebbs and flows, advances and setbacks. For example, facilitated by WROC's research and action initiatives in which Ms. Vassell was a key contributor, the *51% Coalition - Women in Partnership for Development* was formed among many women's organisations in 2011. Although its work has not been sustained, the organisation did see some success. It prepared women for leadership on Boards and advocated for the adoption of quotas to advance women's leadership. Today, the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL) is seeking to build a platform to support women's leadership for transformation and Linnette continues to participate in this work.

I recommend greater involvement of men and boys, to better enable them to understand how they are negatively affected by the pervasive gender system and the normalization of toxic masculinities, even as they benefit, and they should participate in transforming themselves and the whole of society towards more equitable human relationships.

Linnette has contributed scholarly articles on women's history, women's rights and social activism. These have appeared in local, regional and global publications, many of which are used for international research. Among her published articles, which are also strongly influenced by her activist civil society engagement are "Women, Power and Decision-Making in CARICOM Countries: Moving Forward From a Post-Beijing Assessment"(2003); "Gender Politics and Political Parties" (2013); and "Memory Gems of Revolution: The Lives Experiences of Elean Roslyn Thomas" (2018).

The path towards achieving gender equality is founded on the practice of justice and righteousness in all aspects of life and relationships, including personal, private and family life as well as in public policy and governance.

Linnette is shaped by her Faith as a Christian and her rootedness in her family and community as Companion, Mother,





The flame of activism was already ignited in me from childhood, and I saw very early the need to defend the less fortunate and the marginalized.

Joan French has been recognized locally, regionally and globally, as a pre-eminent proponent of feminist consciousness and action. Describing herself as a born and bred feminist, she understood and was involved in promoting, feminism, human rights and gender equality, even before she knew the terms.

In her formative years attending a primary school in deep rural Jamaica, she witnessed first-hand, gender inequalities, abuse, social inequality and the marginalization of people as a result of poverty and discrimination. These were the years of Jamaica Welfare and the Jamaica Federation of Women, and the energy of that social justice environment began to infiltrate her consciousness and her senses.

She was part of the first cohort of Jamaicans who sat the Common Entrance Examination, the great equalizer which allowed children from primary schools to attend high schools based on performance, rather than ability to pay. At high school, she observed social injustice and started to speak up, which saw her making many trips to the principal's office. She recalls an incident where a foreign teacher insulted a student calling her unintelligent, assuming she was poor because

she was black, and stating that she was therefore clearly undeserving of a high school education,

The student started to cry and I jumped up and chastised the teacher in front of the class. She told me to leave her class. I was summoned to the principal's office and I told them exactly what happened. They could not openly side with me but I received no sanctions and mysteriously, after a short while that teacher was no longer teaching at the school.

Joan French has been a leading member of the Sistren Theatre Collective, which spearheaded the use of the creative arts in social activism. She has also been integrally involved with the Women's Resource and Outreach Centre, and is a founding member and for many years a leading activist of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action which led the struggle for the recognition of Caribbean feminism in the 1980s.

In her tenure as President of the National Union of Democratic Teachers, Joan French challenged the status quo by championing the struggle for maternity leave with pay for female

teachers, regardless of their marital status.

She became the first Coordinator of the Caribbean Policy Development Centre in 1991, and in this capacity she was charged with engaging structures such as CARICOM to advance people-centred policies on behalf of regional civil society organizations. Internationally, she is well respected as a thinker, a doer, a mover and a shaker. She gets things done.

In 1995 she joined the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and continued her work for the rights of women and girls through the United Nations. She was UNICEF's global Chief of Gender from 1998 to 2003, and championed the inclusion of gender analysis and action in all aspects of UNICEF's programming. From 2003 to 2007 she was appointed by UNICEF as its resident representative in Burkina Faso, West Africa, where she is well known for her championship of girls' education and the mobilizing of the West Africa region around the issue.

A published author, Joan has written on women's history, the impact of international economics and politics on poverty and underdevelopment in the Caribbean; on undervaluing of women's domestic and care labour; and the fundamental importance of transformation in this area for people-centered development. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has recognized the importance

of her work by publishing her article on the use of drama-in-education approaches to organizing rural women in the sugar belt in Clarendon for transformation. This was done to ensure equal ownership of housing with their male partners and to change the pattern of management of water resources to include their needs as women performing foundation household tasks required water. She has also written on the link between crime, child poverty, women's poverty and male dominance, in Caribbean societies.

Joan French is currently writing about her experience and observations on aging, including that women are called upon to remain the main caregivers while also needing care.

This born and bred feminist, social activist and human rights advocate is also currently lending her voice and using her platform to advocate on women's reproductive rights, specifically the decriminalization of abortion and the provision of services for women who make that choice.





Butterfly of the Earth

Saffron

**Butterfly wings and butterfly winds
hurricane winds that sands
stow away on**

Flowers and flowers
Pollen, more pollen
The glazier remains envious
mimics my painted panes
In trance I beat the air
in sacred dance
to make a ripple through time
pleating folds in space
I shall dance this glad gig
till clouds grumble, gathering
spill rain... pouring
So blow a particle of my shed skin
into butterfly cloud:
When it snows in Iceland
or rains in the Amazon
I'll be there
In ninety days I'm everywhere
the earth is mine
is in me

From my ship, the wind,
I steer my wishes for peace
I'm captain at the helm
I'm butterfly of this earth
in the Monarch's realm



The above poem ends with the poet affirming that she is in the driver's seat, not just of her personal life, but as a protector and steward of nature. Regardless of the kind of activism that we participate in, we are all a part of the world, guided by nature, and as such we should always be mindful to care for and protect our natural environment.

Our goal is to achieve social change through community mobilizing, organizing, and analysis of possible solutions to social and family violence, and to use the Performing Arts as an awareness-raising tool to engage the community to confront violence against women and girls

Sistren Theatre Collective (STC) is the only theatre company in Jamaica, which utilizes the performing arts as a tool of analysis and action to gather important data and implement strategies to influence social change. STC has successfully utilized the 'drama in education' model to analyze the situation of women in Jamaica, to raise awareness of gender issues and encourage grassroots cultural expressions. It holds the mirror up to society, forcing it to confront some of the problems facing both genders, and applies pressure to the need to change negative perceptions about attitudes to women.

The work of STC is focused on women and girls, but extends to unattached youth and other players in at-risk communities. Engagement is done through community organizations, youth groups and schools and this creates safe, nonjudgmental spaces in which community members can speak comfortably about issues such as sexual abuse, domestic and gang-related violence. The vehicles of the performing arts, visual arts and film are supported by psychosocial rehabilitation, to create behaviour change and deal with issues such as teenage

parenthood, health and sexual violence, crime and violence as well as HIV/AIDS, housing, migration, gender, justice and economic policy.

The issues impacting Jamaican women are wide-ranging and the work of Sistren brings some of the challenges to the fore, and presents workable solutions and suggestions. Advocacy is a big part of the Organization's work, and STC is a strong and consistent voice lobbying for legislative changes to benefit marginalized women and girls and others at risk. An approach of inclusivity is employed, allowing for the voices of the communities they serve, to be factored. Building partnerships with like-minded grassroots organizations, government and non-government agencies, educational institutions and the general public has helped STC to maintain a foothold in communities and creates a stronger platform to lobby for social change.

With its focus on capacity development,¹⁹ Sistren Theatre Collective has developed and implemented training programmes for marginalized and at risk groups in different communities, equipping residents with the tools to reorient their situations. Training is also done

with community development workers and volunteers covering areas such as social skills, leadership, group dynamics, gender issues, communication, the environment and health, and general issues that affect both men and women. Some of the community health aides have secured permanent jobs in health centres.

Maximizing the focus on the performing arts, STC created a compact disc (CD) featuring the winners of a music competition involving several communities. The project helped to bridge divides, decrease hostilities and build communication between and within some communities.

Challenges have sometimes created setbacks, but with a mandate to serve marginalized communities, the Organization has stayed the course and continues to champion the cause of the men and women in the communities. The Covid-19 pandemic, for example, shed light on existing inequalities and the increased incidence of Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). Women experience the greatest inequalities due to their intersecting identities, and have the hardest time accessing legal, health and social support services.

With the need for continuous evaluation and retooling the STC core team has participated in local, regional and international training. The Organization has participated in several

international conferences and training workshops, and delivered a presentation at the ninth session of the World Urban Forum in Malaysia.

For its outstanding work, Sistren Theatre Collective received the Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre from the Castillo Theatre in New York, in 2012.



LESSONS LEARNED

Empowering, protecting and expanding women's access to and control of safe space are critical to the success of women's rights organizations. Also, boys and men must be involved in the process to be able to change the perception about gender-based violence



RECOMMENDATIONS

Agitate for regular and transparent information-sharing between Government and grassroots women's rights organizations which are on the ground and have access to real data. They must be allowed to influence policy and involved in decision-making and in designing appropriate interventions.

WMW Jamaica champions gender-equity, justice and violence-free social relations using gender-aware media analysis and transformative action. We will be active in the creation of a more peaceful, caring society that provides equal opportunities for all. Until gender equality is realized and normalized in our society, our work goes on.

WMW Jamaica (formerly Women's Media Watch) was established to develop strategies to achieve a more just world, by harnessing the intersecting promise of media and communication, art, technology, education and social justice. The work of WMW Jamaica has had significant and wide ranging impact and has helped to keep the issues of human rights and women's rights on the agenda. This is particularly important in a country like Jamaica where deeply entrenched cultural beliefs perpetuate gender inequities.

A key tenet of the organization is the belief that each individual has a role to play in the elimination of social violence, and it embraces the importance of raising awareness of how current gender norms reinforce negative and harmful beliefs and practices, which affect women, men, girls and boys. WMW Jamaica has been integrally involved in activism at the local and regional level and functioned as the Caribbean coordinators and leaders in the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). Its activities are centred on advocacy and policy reform, improving the images of women and men in the

media as a way of reducing violence, working with journalists to develop gender-aware media practices, and Media monitoring and research

Advocacy for Policy and Legislative Reform is critical to the Organization's mandate and it has spearheaded some of the legislative, psychosocial and cultural changes which will guarantee the best outcome for women and girls and for the whole society. Its partnership with the National Broadcasting Commission led to the development of broadcast policy guidelines on sex and violence, and its advocacy led to the development of the Children's Code for Programming for Television in Jamaica. WMW Jamaica was also actively involved in the advocacy push which led to the passing of the Domestic Violence Act.

Significant focus is given to training and professional development, and to date over 2,500 training events and workshops on gender, sexuality, interpersonal relations, sexual violence, gender and development and media and violence have been conducted. Additionally, over 10 research projects have been undertaken,

the findings of which are heavily cited. The Organization has also produced resource materials on gender representation and violence in local media and training videos on sexual harassment, gender roles and gender stereotypes. The undergraduate course, 'Media, Gender & Development', at CARIMAC, UWI Mona, was coordinated and designed by WMW Jamaica, and members of its core team have guest lectured in other media and gender-related courses at other tertiary institutions .

Collaborations and partnerships with other local NGOs, and alliances with regional and international organizations, have helped to support to the work of WMW. Being responsive to the changing local and international landscape and recalibrating and re-strategizing accordingly, has allowed the Organization to continue to move the agenda forward.

As with many nongovernmental organizations, consistent funding has continued to be a challenge and WMW Jamaica has had to use creative means to maintain its operations. The Organization is also affected by the inability of community based volunteers to commit to the work of the organization, but nonetheless has scored success in many areas.

The core team has delivered presentations at regional and international symposia including the NGO Forum, Fourth World Conference on

Women, Beijing, 1995, and collaborated with regional agencies on gender and development, and gender-aware journalism. The team also conducted training and performance tours throughout the Caribbean region for various civil society, intergovernmental and international organizations, including PAHO, UNIFEM and the Estella Scott-Roberts Foundation. WMW Jamaica also hosted WACC's Fourth Regional Conference Gender and Communication Policy in 1998 and has pioneered gender training for male leaders, which pre-cursored the Caribbean Male Action Network, CariMAN.



LESSONS LEARNED

We all have a role to play in the elimination of Gender-based Violence and Violence against Women and Girls. In order to safeguard the rights of this and future generations, advocacy is necessary. It CAN and DOES make a difference.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Constantly raise awareness of how current gender norms reinforce negative and harmful attitudes, beliefs and practices that affect women, men, girls and boys. See the work as transformational and devote yourself to the cause.



WROC stands on the principles of integrity, empowerment and the ultimate goal of total equality for every individual, regardless of gender, race or socioeconomic status.

Guided by the philosophy 'by empowering women we strengthen families, communities and the society at large', Women's Resource & Outreach Centre (WROC) advocates for the rights of women and girls, and provides the psychosocial support and training to reorient those at risk and / or marginalized. WROC focuses on the empowerment of women, families and communities, with the vision of achieving a peaceful, healthy, prosperous and equitable Jamaica. In addition to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, WROC also supports boys and men through various programmes.

The mission of the organization is: to provide support for women, their families and communities, within a human rights and gender responsive approach; to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls through engagement in economic, social and political life; and to advocate for legislative reforms which will redound to the benefit of women and girls, and ultimately the wider society.

With deep roots in advocacy, WROC practises a hands-on approach to transformation and has a solid track record of success in the execution of programmes and strategic

interventions. WROC is part of the 51% Coalition - a partnership with 11 other organizations, to secure quotas for the advancement of woman's participation in decision-making and to advocate for the successful implementation of the National Policy for Gender Equality and Vision 2030.

Several services, initiatives and programmes are accessible through WROC, including: the Skills for Integrity (Change Your Future) Project - an intervention to make at-risk, unattached youth more employable and the Senior Citizens Club - which keeps seniors abreast of health and general issues and offers a variety of services including health screening; as well as counseling and mentorship. The organization also runs summer camps and offers several training options to unattached youth, counseling and mentorship. Outreach is a major focus of the work of the organization and WROC offers programmes aimed at creating social and economic development in both urban and rural communities. The programmes have focused on health and wellness, including maternal and child health such as the Programme for the Reduction of Maternal and Child Mortality (PROMAC), and on sustainable livelihoods, environmental management, community capacity building,



advocacy, research and communications, and organizational development.

Some aspects of the environment make the work challenging, including the inconsistency of funding, crime and violence, and the inability of community based volunteers to fully commit to the process because of their need for economic survival. Nonetheless, WROC has stayed true to its commitment to serve marginalized communities, with key focus on advocacy and women's rights.

With the aim of strengthening women's leadership in Jamaica, almost 100 women have undergone leadership, training funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and several of the participants have assumed major leadership roles on public and private sector boards and commissions and in the education sector. WROC has also created a database of women trained in leadership, providing a pool of potential leaders for organizations and continues to form and maintain partnerships and alliances with local, regional and global agencies, facilitating the pooling of resources and paving the way for financial and other support. In terms of its strategic priorities going forward, the organization will focus on governance and organizational transformation, resource and enterprise development, community capacity development and research, and advocacy and

communication

The Women's Resource and Outreach Centre, continues to play a significant role in the lives of Jamaican citizens, including families and the wider community, while constantly advocating to impact national policies to provide greater support and protection for the most marginalized and at-risk members of the population, with a view to achieving wholesome, peaceful and progressive communities which will have a national impact.



LESSONS LEARNED

The absence of shared vision and unity only will blunt the advocacy agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Sustainable investment in community-based women's leadership and development is critical to the gender equality agenda.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Clearly define and be guided by the Organization's goal...and be open to the leadership that comes from below. Commit to build partnerships with other organizations. Collaborate don't compete. Men's advocacy for women's rights and empowerment needs to become a central plank.



Reading Center

Millicent A. A. Graham

I went with a novel idea! To read to them
from a shelf where nothing familiar was written
for girls named Crystal and Patience.

I cautioned them, Sit front and centre,
thinking these stories could brighten
the angry mouths of their houses.

I thought I would reach
the bleached faces, colour them in.
I never looked beyond the plywood panes

at girls named Crystal and Patience,
pencil thin with resistance for hair,
who pulled at me to part skin-lines,

soothe their damaged roots,
press against their scalps, my palms filled
with enough oil to let life and fate-lines disappear,

to plait new styles, to let
the child-old faces glisten,
for girls like Crystal,

like Patience,
criss-crossed on a balding carpet,
who never listened.

(The Way Home, Peepal Tree Press, 2015)



Perhaps the poet/persona is writing this poem from a personal, literal experience.

- Reflect on the stanza below and jot down the things that come to mind after you read it over a few times:

I never looked beyond the plywood panes

*at girls named Crystal and Patience,
pencil thin with resistance for hair,
who pulled at me to part skin-lines,*

- What does the poet mean when she says, “*girls like Crystal*”?
- Why don't they listen?
- In what ways might you be similar to Crystal and Patience?
- In what ways might you be different from Crystal and Patience?

Woman Inc. (Woman Incorporated aka Women's Crisis Centre) is the only organization in Jamaica operating crisis centres for victims of rape, incest, domestic violence, intimate partner violence and sexual harassment. It also operates a 24 hour hotline service and operates a shelter for women, in an undisclosed location, in order to protect the women.

The organization lobbies and advocates for legislative changes to benefit Jamaican women and was instrumental in the discussions on legislation including the Sexual Offences Act, the Matrimonial Causes Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Sexual Offences Act. The Organization also lobbied Government for legal reform relating to the age of consent to move the minimum age from 14 to 16.

The Mission of the Organization is to provide support and assistance for victims of rape, incest and other types of social and family violence and provide psychosocial support to help women transition from victim to survivor. Where necessary, support is provided for their children and families. Capacity building and training programmes are executed and women are taught how to develop self-awareness, how to engage in self-healing and taught coping and survival skills, while building their self-esteem and moving towards greater levels of independence. This reduces their vulnerability to gender-based violence as in many instances, the abuse is tied to financial dependence on a partner.

The need for psychosocial and physical support and a safe facility to meet the needs of victims of abuse, or women rendered temporarily homeless due to domestic violence is critical. Separating victims from the perpetrators is important as it gives the women a space within which they can begin the process of healing in a safe and supportive environment. In many cases small children and babies are involved. The victims are generally seen at the Crisis Centre, the cases assessed and then sent to the Shelter.

The advocacy aspect of the Organization's work is important and at all times the organization lobbies for the best legislative outcome to protect and safeguard women and girls. Information gleaned through the operation of the Crisis Centre informs the advocacy strategy. Legal Aid services are provided for women at the shelter, who need these services and efforts are made to prepare the women to reenter society, more fortified than when they entered the shelter programme.

The public education aspect of the work of Woman Inc. is designed to give victims the



information they need to extricate themselves from dangerous situations, and to have a better understanding of their human and gender equality rights and the mechanisms for protection under the law. They are also coached on how to safely make reports. Public education initiatives are also undertaken to inform the wider society of issues surrounding gender-based violence, women's rights and the attendant legislation. Training sessions are also conducted with the Police to encourage greater sensitivity when dealing with victims.

In order to fulfill its mandate, the Organization collaborates with existing social service agencies in cases where they can provide assistance. Partnerships have also been formed with regional and international organizations/coalitions that focus on women's rights, human rights, gender-based violence, violence against women and girls, child abuse and human trafficking.

Woman Inc. stands on a 35 year old tradition of being the sole provider of an emergency temporary residence for women in crisis, started with proceeds from the staging of its annual trade fair/expo in 1984. The organization has received high marks for its level of confidentiality, sensitivity and its role in providing a safe haven for women who are victims of abuse. Its 24 hour emergency line and a hotline for counseling have provided a useful service and have helped

to save many women. The statistics on gender-based violence in Jamaica are alarming and the Organization is committed to continuing its efforts in lobbying and advocating for legislative change to positively impact women and girls in Jamaica.



LESSONS LEARNED

Behavioral change requires more sustained actions, with designed activity for 3-5 years. Links to crime and violence must be examined in order to mitigate the impact on development work. Flexibility in responding to the changing environment is key because it cannot be business as usual and new approaches, strategies and techniques have to be embraced.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Ensure greater coordination between and among NGOs, CSOs and agencies and lobby for increased, adequate and sustained financial support from Government and the private sector.





Nuggets on ADVOCACY

“Advocacy requires consistently pursuing an analytically sound and shared vision; continually revisiting and revising your strategies for building public awareness, momentum, allyship and agreement, which can sometimes require deep transformation of resilient beliefs and practices; and developing the skills to build relationships and work flexibly, creatively and respectfully with complex coalitions of diverse organizations and individuals. In this context, leadership is about being prepared to listen, learn, be guided, and grow along the way; contribute fairly and reliably to a collective effort; exercise power in ways that innovate, inspire, mentor and share space; and create opportunities for fearless, forgiveness, tears, rejuvenation, and celebration along the way.”

Dr. Gabrielle Jamela Hosein

Head, Institute for Gender and Development Studies, The UWI, St. Augustine Campus Unit

“As advocates, we organize, strategize, mobilize and work to defend the rights of those who need to be protected, but sometimes have no platform through which to voice their concerns and lobby for change. As gender rights advocates we hold government and society accountable, and agitate for legislative and social change to benefit the women and girls with whom we work, as well as the other members of the community. We advocate for gender equality, working towards ensuring that women are safe, protected and respected and free from sexual harassment and other anti-social practices.”

Lana Finnikin

Executive Director,
Sistren Theatre Collective



“As an advocate, you are a channel for positive transformation. You have to have empathy to become an effective advocate. More important however, is the burning fire in your belly which rejects injustice and which fuels the desire to work towards improving the lives of the less fortunate, those who need to be supported. Advocacy is about lending your voice to the cause of people who are sometimes voiceless, who cannot speak on their own behalf. You must have a strong backbone and not be daunted by the negativity and backlash which sometimes come with the terrain, because at the end of the day, you are creating a better world.”

Shelly-Ann Weekes
Founder / CEO
Her Flow Foundation

“Advocacy is 'Love Standing in the gap' for the most vulnerable among us. Our mission is to support girls and women who are victims of sexual violence and safeguard their human rights while helping them to transition from victim to survivor. Advocacy is critical to our work. We represent the women and girls, we speak on their behalf, interface with the authorities and agencies responsible for policies and laws, and put in place the systems to make their lives better and to prevent the same misfortune from happening to other women and girls. Advocacy is walking the journey for the person whose legs are broken.”

Joy Crawford
Co-founder and Executive
Director
Eve for Life

“Advocacy brings into focus the plight of marginalized and victimized members of the population who cannot fight for themselves, and focuses on raising awareness of the problem, but more importantly, strategizing to effect solutions. Advocacy embraces the promotion and protection of human rights, and assists in bringing about change in areas where change is needed, while empowering marginalized persons and communities, not armed with the resources to agitate for change.”

Gaynor Downer
National President
Soroptimist International
Jamaica

“Advocacy to achieve social change is important work. As an advocate, it is not about you. You engage your heart but more so your skills and energy to work on behalf of others, especially the less fortunate who need support. You cannot always do it alone and so it is important to collaborate with like-minded persons and organizations, thereby strengthening the voice and the capacity to lobby for change.”

Shirley Pryce
President,
Jamaica Household
Workers Union

Safeguarding the human rights, and ensuring fair and just working conditions and wages for domestic workers in Jamaica.

The Jamaica Household Workers Union (JHWU), formerly the Jamaica Household Workers' Association, is the leading advocate for decent work for domestic workers and other low-wage workers. A non-governmental, non-partisan, voluntary organization established in 1991 to represent the needs and interests of household workers, it is driven by the belief that domestic workers should enjoy the same rights as all other workers.

The mission of the JHWU is to: protect and advance the rights of domestic workers; be a viable organization that develops the capacity of domestic workers; formulate strategies that guarantee labour opportunities, rights and training for members; represent members, and lobby on their behalf to influence national and international policies.

Domestic workers represent a critical part of Jamaica's service economy, accounting for approximately one third of working class women - the largest single group of working women, approximately 16% of the female labour force. The organization has 12 chapters and serves 690,000 members (a 394% increase since inception) comprising domestic workers including

household helpers, nannies, caregivers, cleaners and cooks.

Prior to the establishment of the Organization there was no organized means of expressing the issues and problems facing domestic workers. The JHWU provides a platform from which their concerns can be brought to the attention of government and the public for discussion and action, and lobbies for laws to protect domestic workers. The organization was instrumental in the development and adoption of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189, to enshrine decent work for domestic workers in 2011, and its ratification in Jamaica and the Region, as well as the development and adoption of the Convention 190, for the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.

Training in household management and other areas, education and empowerment are part of the mandate of the JHWU which signed a Memorandum of understanding in 2020, with the Ministry of Labour, Market Information System (LMIS), to provide training for members and assist in matching candidates to jobs.

The JHWU provides a supportive network for domestic workers and through its various



Every Household Workers' Right!



channels, keeps them informed about labour rights and regulations. It allows a level of visibility for domestic workers, many of whom feel empowered because they now have the backing of a union. Domestic workers have been imbued with a sense of confidence, knowing that unresolved employer/employee disputes are now referred to the Ministry of Labour for arbitration.

The JHWU works tirelessly to make a real difference in the lives and working conditions of its members. A member of the Association of Women's Organization in Jamaica (AWOJA), the union works in collaboration with other women's organization and has lobbied for a fair increase in the minimum wage, better working conditions and other employee benefits.

Through capacity development activity executed by the organization, many women are more skilled at grassroots organizing, which has led to greater involvement at the local and national levels. With bold, visionary leadership, the Union has celebrated a number of achievements. One such is the establishment of the JHWU helpline which provides information on minimum wage, vacation and maternity leave, sexual harassment on the job, laws regarding termination, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and National Housing Trust (NHT) contributions.

The Organization continues to be responsive

to the needs of its members and provided care packages to offset the economic hardship created by the Covid-19 pandemic, through a partnership with Unicomer (Courts).

The Jamaica Household Workers Union continues to successfully represent a segment of the Jamaican workforce which is critical and indispensable, building their confidence and giving them a platform through which they can contribute to nation building.



LESSONS LEARNED

Seasoned women's rights activists must empower and work with younger activists to ensure continuity and building on gains. We must join hands with men, as their involvement is crucial to the success of the movement and the country.



RECOMMENDATIONS

All laws and policies which are oppressive (not only those seen as being specific to women) must be challenged. Make your movement transformative and find ways to constantly renew and re-energize while continuing to advance the rights of women.



Every Household Workers' Right!





JAMAICA NETWORK OF RURAL WOMEN PRODUCERS



We aim to be a socially responsible, creative and innovative organization, dedicated to upward mobility and the provision of education and training opportunities for rural women.

The Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers, JNRWP, was established to advocate for and promote the economic empowerment of rural women, improving their quality of life and the social and economic conditions of their communities. The main objective is capacity building of rural women producers, in areas such as financial, managerial and leadership training and regular training initiatives are executed in partnership with agencies including the Rural Agricultural Development Authority, RADA. The Network also provides economic services, including inputs to aid in production, and helps with the identification of markets for members' produce.

The Network supports and represents over 600 members across all parishes - women who are family farmers, artisans, smallholder farmers and pastoralists. Rural women producers have minimal access to agricultural resources and financing, and are often not recognized for their contributions to maintaining the economic stability of communities. The JNRWP aims to raise awareness of issues that impact the lives of rural women, advocate on their behalf and facilitate their contribution to national and international dialogues on issues affecting women.

JNRW is a member of the Gender Advisory Council (GAC) within the Bureau of Gender Affairs Division of the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports and is actively involved in policy engagement, lobbying and advocacy on behalf of rural women producers. Collaboration and partnership lubricate the pathway to success for the organization, and every effort is made to foster and strengthen linkages with local and regional organizations. This is beneficial to the JNRWP and also serves to shore up institutional support to the individual rural women producers. The organization also assists with the promotion and marketing of produce and products and works tirelessly to ensure the sustainability of women's groups

Like many other nongovernmental organizations, inability to access funding presents a challenge. Other challenges include the absence of supporting mechanisms like social protection, limited access to productive assets and storage facilities, poor land quality and land insecurity. Rural women producers are also affected by the limited access to agricultural inputs and technologies, and the lack of access to reliable and consistent markets, and like everyone else,



climate change. Additionally, there is insufficient support from male counterparts.

Despite all of this, rural women producers continue to demonstrate their flexibility, innovativeness and resilience and continue to lead in their respective communities on the frontline of the Covid-19 pandemic. Tasked with the responsibility of working, monitoring children with their online classes, taking care of household chores, caring for the elderly and in some cases losing their jobs, rural women have in many cases found new, creative ways to generate and supplement their income.

The JNRWP facilitated women's access to 150 acres of land in Trelawny through the All Island Sugar Cane Farmers Association and subleased to approximately 50 rural women for agricultural production. The women producers have had a consistent presence at the annual Denbigh Agricultural Industrial and Food Show, where members exhibit and market produce and products. The Organization has participated in a number of international conferences and fora including the Commission on the Status of Women Annual Conference, in New York and NY, USA; the annual General Assembly of the World Farmers Organization; and the annual Global Forum for Food and Agriculture in Berlin, Germany. The group also facilitated the implementation of the Global Partnership

Network project through the University of Kassel in Germany. Membership in the Organization continues to grow and in 2017, in partnership with the Bureau of Gender Affairs, the Rural Women's Achievers award was launched to recognize and reward outstanding members.



LESSONS LEARNED

This work requires passion and patience, and is sometimes frustrating. The very same women for whom you are fighting, can be the very same obstacle in your fight. It takes tenacity of purpose and commitment and sometimes you have to be aggressive in the fight.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Make sure that the persons you are representing are at the focal point of everything you do. Partner with other stakeholders (government agencies, civil society and corporate entities). Start teaching boys from the preschool level about the important role women play in society.



Tree Huggers Unite

Saffron

the only arms we need
are the ones between shoulder and wrist
that so elegantly bend to curve
around babies, lovers - trees...

for five seconds now, forget the fingers
that itch in their triggering
of indifferent metal in life-defying feats
as one pulls back to make a shot - it is not
as pretty as lifting back; a lock
of hair from a child's forehead,
a floating leaf from swirling water,
or a salvaged feather held up to tickle air
so long, we escaped the wild fauna-ed forest
we used to count on each other with all ten
all hold hands spread against all of this heathen mad-
ness
lay round your arms instead!
encircle each other in celebration
the forest diaspora has lost
so much if we've lost
each other



Have you ever hugged a tree in appreciation of its beauty and gift or just because you wanted to hug someone or something? We humans are gifted the earth that we must protect. Also, we must love and support one another.

- Reflect on the support you need to accomplish one of your goals.
- Think about a friend or family member, and ask that person how you can support her or him.

Soroptimist International Jamaica seeks to create a world where women and girls have an equal voice in creating strong and peaceful communities and achieve their individual and collective potential, while realizing their aspiration.

Women inspiring action, transforming lives - that is the ethos of the Soroptimist International Jamaica (SIJ), the first Jamaica Club for women, and the only organization of women to hold a seat at the United Nations. A strong and seasoned advocate for improved conditions and greater opportunities for the advancement of women and children, SIAJ has significantly influenced policies and programmes which positively impact the lives of women.

The Club actively advocates for legislative reform and has brought to the attention of Government and the public the need for updating family laws, particularly those relating to the status of children and registration of fathers. Given the far-reaching implications and the potential impact of the Sexual Harassment Act now being reviewed by a joint select committee of the Houses of Parliament, the Club has made a submission to the Clerk of the Houses of Parliament, highlighting several deficiencies in the Sexual Harassment Act, 2019 and making recommendations for change.

Though the main target groups served by SIJ are women and girls, the projects seek to benefit the entire community, including the youth, the

elderly and men. The mandate focuses on eight objectives: education, elimination of violence, economic empowerment, food security, healthcare, environmental sustainability, water & sanitation and disaster relief & mitigation. Capacity building of marginalized women and girls is germane to its activities which include a mentorship programme, training, upskilling and empowerment through the provision of legal, medical and financial advice and educational scholarships. The Organization also provides education, including awareness building about human trafficking, health screening, skills training and other services to commercial sex workers.

Engaging the target groups directly to identify the specific needs, has enabled the organization to target its responses, as well as gain the trust of the groups in the communities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, e.g. SIJ responded to the need for devices and donated 30 tablets to wards of state at the Jamaica National Children's Home. The organization has also had to strengthen its psychosocial support to deal with the psychosocial issues associated with the pandemic.

Unfortunately, even with the evidence of



transformational work done with youth and other populations, there is a widely held perception that Soroptimist International is a club for older women. This, along with an ageing membership has resulted in challenges in attracting younger members, many of whom gravitate towards the more high-profiled service clubs. The organization is actively recruiting younger members. Attracting consistent funding is also an issue.

In spite of the challenges, SIJ continues to serve marginalized populations, focusing on women and girls. The annual health fair hosted by the Kingston Club provides screening and information to hundreds of people representing different ages in under-resourced communities, several of whom have chronic illnesses. The Montego Bay chapter received an International Programme Action award from parent club Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland for establishing a crèche, which later became an award winning basic school and assisted in establishing a health centre, the Hope Clinic. The Mid-Eastern Club hosts the first basic school in Jamaica to integrate mentally and physically challenged (differently abled) children with fully abled children.

In addition, the Mandeville and St. Ann clubs established culturally focused entrepreneurship opportunity centres for women and the

Organization founded the Melody Home for Girls for abused girls, which receives referrals from the family court. Flexibility and the ability to respond to a changing environment has served the Association well, as it stays true to its mandate of transforming lives.



LESSONS LEARNED

Greater impact is achieved when women's rights organizations work together and speak with one voice. Men and boys must be incorporated in the discussions about defining and achieving gender equity. If unmanaged, diversity in thought and approach to problem solving can lead to unintended consequences.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Be vocal in addressing gender equality issues and ensure that female voices are included in the decision-making process. Build awareness through capacity development since empowering women will strengthen their impact in the wider society.





JAMAICA WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS

Our goal is to encourage a cultural shift which fosters greater interest by women in representational politics and leadership and to increase the number of women in representational politics to 41%.

The Jamaica Women's Political Caucus (JWPC) advances the cause of women in representational politics and those with political aspirations. Through advocacy, the Caucus challenges and redefines the prerequisites for women entering representational politics and supports and facilitates the growth of women aspiring to leadership in other spheres of community or public life.

As a patriarchal society, representational politics in Jamaica has been dominated by men. The same is true of leadership of companies and institutions. It is clear that women bring certain distinct qualities to leadership and bring balance to certain processes, therefore a cultural shift which facilitates and promotes the greater involvement of women in representational politics is necessary and will benefit the country.

The JWPC highlights women's perspectives on social issues including domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace and corruption, and promotes participation by women, while providing the framework for their ascension to major political roles. Men, in particular men in politics, are encouraged to appreciate the

value which women bring to the political arena. Through its Institute for Public Leadership (IPL) programme, female politicians and political aspirants are trained in areas such as leadership, the history of politics, Public Speaking, dealing with the Media and networking. The Organization also pays the nomination fee for candidates for general, parish council and by elections.

The Caucus is actively working to increase the number of women who operate as political campaign managers and offers training in fundraising strategies, networking and budget management. Many women are new to the issue of campaign managing so it is a steep learning curve to get them ready to assume the role.

The organization has continued to challenge stereotypical norms of behaviour, structural barriers and standards of performance, and its ability to interact with politicians regardless of political affiliation, facilitates networking for aspiring politicians. A major part of the success is the nature of 'give back' by those who have benefited from the services of the Caucus, and they often use their established platforms to 'introduce' fledgling politicians. The organization





JAMAICA WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS

believes that Jamaica is hungry for the greater involvement of women in representational politics, making it easier to attract aspirants to the process. Some notable female politicians, who have risen to the highest levels of political office, have been groomed by the Caucus, and its mentorship programme facilitates knowledge sharing with incoming politicians and succession planning.

Even with the Government subvention, financing for the JWPC is challenging. The limitation of financial resources has forced the Caucus to operate with a skeletal staff. Another challenge is the attitude of male dominance and patriarchy, which makes some political aspirants shy away from the process. Additionally, there is the attempt in some quarters to paint women as weak and emotional, with the suggestion that they would bring these qualities to bear on representational politics.

In spite of all of this, the JWPC continues to advocate for the rights of women, and the importance of having women strategically placed as pivotal to the decision-making process and leadership. It has managed to enlist the support of some well-established male politicians for training and mentorship. The Caucus has participated in regional and international conferences and several team members have benefited from training at various political institutes in the USA. International trainers have also been invited to Jamaica to work

with the organization's core team as well as active and aspiring politicians. The group cohosts an annual breakfast event for women in politics, with the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport.



LESSONS LEARNED

There is an old saying "Many hands make light work", and in fighting for the rights of women this is true. We cannot be selfish with what we know and when we work together, we have a stronger platform for advocacy.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Draw on the experiences of those who have walked the journey before you instead of always trying to reinvent the wheel. Make honesty and integrity your hallmark, and leave behind a legacy which is strong and blemish-free.



Make Your Mirror **YOUR FRIEND**

Joan Andrea Hutchinson

Most of you have a mirror at home. In fact you might have several mirrors. Usually, you use the mirror just to look at outward appearance, to make sure your hair and make-up look good and that your clothes look great.

What if you were to change it up and make the mirror become your friend, the one to which you turn in good times, who will tell you how wonderful you are, but will also, in bad times, tell you that no matter how challenging the situation, tomorrow will be a better day and you need to keep on pushing.

There is a Jamaican saying "Di longest road has a bend" which suggests that no matter how difficult a situation is, there is the possibility that it will soon turn in your favour.





There is a comparative narrative many of us feed ourselves, which goes like this: "Everyone has it better than me." Many people will be eager to give you advice without really considering your specific situation. As we say in Jamaica "mouth cut crossway and mouth meck fi chat" which means that people are free to say anything, and sometimes their utterances have no value or relevance. However, you don't necessarily have to be affected by what others say. You must own the narrative you feed yourself to bolster your self-esteem. Ultimately your opinion of yourself is what matters.

Look at yourself without judgment

What do you tell yourself? How do you affirm that girl / woman in the mirror? What do you say to her in good and bad times? Do you like her? If you don't, will other people like her?

Here are some of the things you can start telling that girl/ woman in the mirror:

- You were born to succeed
- Not everyone is on the same path...your path is your path
- You are an overcomer
- Today may be a 'not-so-good day, but you are going to work on making tomorrow better
- Whatever you do ... do your best
- Sometimes it's okay to get off the treadmill and take

some down time

- Take care of yourself
- Pay attention to anything or anyone who makes you uncomfortable
- Learn to identify red flags and act on them
- Don't suffer in silence. If you need help, seek it

In life things happen! Flexibility and resilience must be part of your tool kit. The narrative you feed yourself has a big impact on your outlook on life, your self-esteem and your sense of fulfillment. In the maritime industry they say "you cannot control the wind, but you can adjust your sails." Changing how we talk to ourselves is part of the adjustment of our personal sails.

We are often kind to others, but not kind to ourselves. Let's change that. Fall in love with the person in the mirror. Don't compare yourself with others. You are good and wonderful. Some days you might not feel that way, but there is always tomorrow to change your outlook.

Look at the girl in the mirror and laugh with her and say "Hey I like you... you are okay and you will be okay."

Please Don't Talk To The Mirror In Public!

“Eve for Life has impacted my life in so many positive ways. When I first went to them I was a new mother...shy, lacking in self-esteem and did not have goals or a purpose. Through their programmes, I have grown so much that now I am a life coach, helping other young women. I have a sense of purpose about life and my self-esteem is way up.”

– Rushell Gray, Regional Officer/Mentor, Eve for Life

Eve for Life champions the rights of women and girls and is committed to shaping a world where the sexual health and rights of young women and girls are protected and upheld. Catering to adolescent girls and young adult women, the Organization provides support for women and children living with HIV and AIDS and offers 'a safe space' for those at risk.

The adolescents and young adults who utilize the services of Eve for Life have been exposed to vulnerabilities such as HIV, teen pregnancy, childhood rape, gender-based violence and sexual abuse. Through a variety of interventions and services, the goal is to help the women and girls transition from the status of victim to survivor to overcomer. Eve for Life uses education and training to provide comprehensive, client-centred, non-discriminatory sexual health services for adolescent girls and young adults, and health support services are provided through the Mentor Mom initiative.

Eve for Life's core services and programmes include parenting interventions, HIV and

AIDS counseling, social support, training and capacity development, education, community sensitization, mobilization and advocacy. Life skills programmes are offered to empower children and young people living with HIV. The Organization also provides Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) support and training for its clients, and to other organizations to ensure the effective provision of counseling and support.

There is also a major programme of public sensitization and promotion of positive attitudes towards people with HIV. The NGO is also committed to strengthening policy engagement for teen mothers and women and girls living with HIV, and addressing behaviours fuelling the epidemic such as sexual coercion, violence against women, transactional and cross-generational sex, and sex trafficking.

In Jamaica, within the 15-24 age group, there are two times as many HIV positive women compared to infected men. Even though there are laws against HIV stigma and discrimination, the practice is common. With stigma and



EVE for Life



discrimination, health challenges and sometimes the inability to get and keep a job, women need psychosocial support in order to make the best of their situation. In order to set the young women on a path towards financial independence, capacity building development programmes include skills training, parenting skills, healthy sexual behaviours and the promotion of positive attitudes to PLHIVs (Persons Living with HIV and AIDS) are executed.

Eve for Life embraces best practices in HIV and AIDS response from like-minded organizations as far away as Uganda, including the AIDS Support Organization (TASO) of Uganda, and constantly reviews its programmes and strategies to strengthen its support for women and girls. For its outstanding work in HIV response, it has received several awards including: the American Chamber of Commerce Award for Excellence in Civil Leadership 2017; the Ministry of Health National HIV & STI Programme for Outstanding NGO (2017); the Medical Association of Jamaica, Outstanding NGO (2018) and the National Family Planning Board award for invaluable contribution towards ending violence against women and girls, (2020).

Statistics indicate that women account for 42 per cent of cases of HIV in Jamaica, and it is women who shoulder a number of responsibilities as caregivers and breadwinners for infected

husbands and children. There is still a lot of work to be done and the Organization reaffirms its commitment to placing the beneficiaries at the centre of its strategies, working to ensure that young women who have been victims, transition and achieve their full potential. With a strong held conviction that GBV survivors can play a bigger role in advancing equality for all, Eve for Life will continue to provide the psychosocial support and the tools to make it happen.



LESSONS LEARNED

Silos are barriers to success and there is tremendous benefit in collaboration and networking. Projects and interventions MUST be sustained, because scars have long-term effect.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Always maintain the 4 GBV Guiding Principles: safety, confidentiality, respect and non-discrimination of the GBV survivor. Ensure that your approach and output are client-centered. Be self-aware and practise self-care and support.



Eve for Life



"First time I ever had anybody explain how my body functions and I fully understand it. All these years I didn't know all these things about my body and my menstrual cycle, wow!"

- Opal Davis, St Thomas

Ending Period Poverty, the state in which young women find it difficult to access and afford menstrual products, is the flagship project of Her Flow Foundation. In addition to ending Period Poverty, the Foundation works to empower women and girls about reproductive health and rights through education and mentorship, and advocates greater access to comprehensive reproductive health care.

Her Flow Foundation works through schools, clubs, community organizations, state care facilities and penal institutions. Though the main target is adolescent girls and young women, there is an important need to help boys and young men understand reproductive health, especially menstruation, to decrease their insensitivity. Older adult men and women are also targeted in the interventions as they are often decision makers, whose actions impact the attitude and behaviour of young people.

In Jamaican, menstruation is often shrouded in shame, and sometimes the biggest obstacles are women who are unwilling to change the status quo. Conducting workshops in schools is sometimes difficult as female teachers are often

uncomfortable being in a session with adolescent boys, where the female body and menstruation are being discussed. One of the goals of the Foundation is the greater inclusion of men and boys in conversations about reproductive health. Boys and men are often embarrassed to handle women's menstrual products and use words like 'nasty' and 'disgusting' to describe what is to a girl, a regular and natural body function. Many men and women have limited understanding of women's bodies, the reproductive system and the changes they go through in association with the menstrual cycle.

The Foundation is fighting to end 'period shame' - the culture of stigma and shame associated with menstruation, and reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, born of lack of knowledge of the reproductive system. The erosion of cultural myths which feed unhealthy reproductive health practices is also a focus of the Foundation's activities. Education and training are the vehicles through which comprehensive, client-centred, non-discriminatory sexual health services for adolescent girls are delivered and counseling services are widely available. Peer



counselors from schools and community groups are also trained to help with the outreach activity, some of which is done virtually.

Free menstrual products are distributed widely, in a bid to ensure that no girl ever has to be without her needed supplies to deal with her period. Greater emphasis is placed on servicing young women in communities which are likely to experience period poverty, based on the unavailability of finances.

Her Flow Foundation continues to evolve and uses social media as the main way of connecting with its target audience. Collaboration and partnership are important to the success of the organization, and connecting with corporate Jamaica and other donors has led to donations of cash and products to support the campaign to end Period Poverty. Through partnership with local and Diaspora-based organizations the Foundation has distributed over 200,000 packs of sanitary products to young women in schools, juvenile detention facilities, state-run homes and community organizations. Outreach activity and presentations have been conducted in over 300 schools, and in adult and juvenile prisons. In recognition of the outstanding work of the Foundation, the founder and CEO was given the Gleaner Distinguished Woman Award in 2019.

What is next for Her Flow Foundation? The organization is now looking at reusable menstrual

products as an option for Jamaica and is currently in partnership talks with potential donors.



LESSONS LEARNED

Boys and men must be involved in discussions about the physical and emotional health and well-being of girls and women. Changing attitudes and behaviours steeped in cultural norms is difficult, but not impossible. Education often results in change.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Educate children (age appropriately), from the minute they can speak, about their body and its function, and teach them how to respect each other's body. Organizations should collaborate to strengthen the emphasis on teaching sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We are grounded in the belief that empowered women transform communities. Our goal is to see a Jamaican society where LBQ women are empowered and fully equipped with the tools to participate meaningfully in national development, thereby, achieving Vision 2030, where the rights of all persons are upheld without prejudice.

WE-Change is a rights-based, feminist organization that advocates for and with lesbian, bisexual and queer women. Though queer-centred, the organization's advocacy caters to and impacts women and girls in all their diversities. An affiliate of J-FLAG, (Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All sexuals and Gays), the women-led, community-based advocacy group was established in 2015, out of a need to strengthen the women's movement within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual (LGBT) community, where formerly, LGBT advocacy spaces were largely controlled by and focused on men, which served to further marginalize and invisibilize LBQ women.

WE-Change is guided by one of the tenets of the 1995 Beijing Declaration, which states "women's participation in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process, and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development, and peace." The organization is driven by a mandate to achieve a more equitable and just world, through an intersectional approach to matters of importance to LBQ women. It also

seeks to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and protect the equal rights for women and girls in all aspects of social, political, emotional, spiritual and economic life.

Though the main target group comprises lesbian, bisexual and queer women in Jamaica, WE-Change advocates for the rights of a diverse range of women and girls. The organization envisions a society where the rights of every person are recognized, respected, and protected, and where sexual and gender identity will cease to be the basis to ostracize, malign, or invisibilize persons. Human rights are enshrined in law, but stigma and discrimination often manifest in unsavoury and dangerous practices and behaviours towards LBQ women.

Increased participation of LBQ Women in national and regional leadership, the creation of safe and alternative spaces that facilitate LBQ women's healing and wellbeing, and eliminating human rights violations faced by LBQ women in Jamaica, are major areas of focus for the Organization. Utilizing community-based research to evidence its advocacy, WE-



Change relies heavily on the use of social media to conduct public education. A major gap in psychosocial and advocacy support has been filled through the activities and interventions of the organization, and volunteers have been instrumental in executing the work.

In fulfilling its mandate, activities of the Organization include: Social and Economic Justice Training for LBQ women, advocating for abortion rights and legislative reform, and healing and support services for LBQ women who are survivors of sexual trauma. Collaboration is critical to its work, and partnerships and alliances have been formed with local, regional and international organizations to advance the agenda. The rights group has also conducted virtual workshops looking at rights and responsibilities, legislation and a variety of health related topics and the findings from a major study on LBQ women and trans masculine persons, have been used in their advocacy and lobbying activities.

The levels of stigma and discrimination meted out to LBQ women, and their fear that justice will not be served, has resulted in under reporting of physical and sexual violence. There is also reluctance to access needed health services because LBQ women feel that health care is denied to them based on their sexuality. Additionally, within the target group, there is higher vulnerability to stress and

greater likelihood of suicidal ideation because of rejection by family, employers and community. It is for reasons such as these that WE-Change must continue to agitate and lobby for inclusion, rights and protection on behalf of the community of LBQ women.



LESSONS LEARNED

Effective strengthening of the LBQ movement in Jamaica requires women representing women. LBQ women must become more active agents of change in reinforcing the critical role of the women's movement in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Build solid partnerships and work together to minimize overlaps and maximize results. Many agencies are doing the same work but not working together. This has to change, established women's rights activists should mentor younger activists, so we know how to navigate the potholes and avoid the mistakes which they made.

"I was only 14 years old, and pregnant. Life was already hard enough, as my mom struggled to support me through school. I cried day and night and told myself that my life was over, so I might as well commit suicide. I was afraid to tell my mother, so I moved in with my cousin, who offered emotional support, and even assisted me with registering at the Women's Centre. It was only at the Women's Centre where I was able to feel at ease. The family counsellors were more like mother figures to me, and my classmates were like my sisters."

- Ruchell Britton, former teen mother

The state machinery for providing transitional education for girls who leave school during pregnancy, currently resides in the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation (WCJF), a government-owned entity reporting to the Office of the Prime Minister. The Foundation currently serves approximately one-third of all teenage mothers, and is globally recognized for its successes in reducing the recidivism rate among its students, recording a 2% recidivism rate.

The WCFJ embraces a new and innovative approach to the problems associated with teenage pregnancy, especially in the area of interrupted education. Part of its mandate is to provide psychosocial support to adolescent mothers, to reduce the chance of repeat pregnancy. With a strong focus on education, training and developmental counseling, the Organization aims to get adolescent girls back on track with their education and increase their opportunities for employment, moving them

towards greater levels of financial independence, thereby reducing their vulnerabilities. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) education is also provided and adolescent mothers who matriculate to tertiary institutions are sometimes offered scholarship support through the A-Stream Programme.

Pregnancy remains the highest risk factor for female dropout, both before and after reintegration, and student mothers face cultural and institutional resistance to their right to an education. The organization's role in facilitating the completion of their Secondary Education is vital to the future success of the girls.

The Programme of Adolescent Mothers is the Foundation's core programme, executed at all main centres and outreach stations island wide, with some 1,250 adolescent mothers registered annually. Family members are encouraged to get involved to support the girls' further development and counselors conduct home visits where the



girls and their parents are introduced to the Programme

While the enactment of the Child Care and Protection Act gives statutory weight to parents' responsibility to ensure that all school-age children enjoy their right to education, without discrimination and stigmatization, in reality this is not the practice. The Education Regulations, (1980) provide that a girl who becomes pregnant shall leave school during the period of her pregnancy, and whereas the Minister of Education has the discretion to facilitate their re-entry, there is no policy framework to support this. Consequently, schools have at times chosen to misinterpret this provision and treated absence from school as permanent.

Undaunted by challenges such as the unavailability of instructors, the inability to fulfill some of the welfare needs (those not accommodated by government subvention), and irregular attendance patterns due to ill-health or the need to access healthcare services, and situating the service in the digital space due to the Covid-19 pandemic, WCJF constantly pushes the envelope to deliver on behalf of its target group. The Centre is recognized as being a national & international best practice and was the recipient of the 2018 UNESCO Prize for Girl's & Women's Education. The work of the Foundation is the subject of frequent study and its mandate,

practice and output are replicated in countries across the world.



LESSONS LEARNED

Better results are achieved when interventions include the family and the community -parents of the girls and the fathers of the babies. A collaborative, multi-sectoral approach is the only way, because some of the needs of the young mothers can only be met by other agencies.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Secure the buy-in from a wide cross section of supporters and stakeholders. Maintain a gender-balanced approach to interventions and seek to ensure sustainability by identifying ways to become self-sufficient.



Spanish Needle

Ann Margaret Lim

He's gallivanting, drinking the money.
It's you alone and the baby
the cooking, the washing,
ironing, the bills on the floor.

Since he's gone and can't hear
makes no sense you cuss.

Look outside at the troupe of Spanish Needles
in their white skirts, commandeering the sidewalk
that despite the cyclones of exhaust
from construction trucks and constant buses
hold on to their sweet-smelling heads.

And though they travel in packs
the jauntily sturdy Spanish Needle
in her white skirt,
is her own complete sister-hood.

What do you think of that?



In the first stanza of the poem, the poet narrates the story of a woman with a baby who is abandoned by her partner. Nonetheless she has to go on with her life, and the poet invites her to shift her gaze, and see that she by herself is enough, just like Spanish Needle.



Sustenance

Yashika C. Graham

"Better to be home than out in the world hungry." -A.G.

Mother worries for me that in this city
every ounce of earth I eat is paid for.
She questions whether it might not suit me better to
be home.

There is no outa grung in this jungle no sprouts of
grass
to soak the palms with dew,
to mark a life renewed.

She knows I cannot walk out and pick the recurring
okra Maas Richard planted,
no breadfruit behind this house.

She knows no neighbour of mine
will come down through the coco walk,
cross the stone wall to bring me sweet potato, red
peas and accept a couple limes.

For things
like these,
one must pay
with inedible currency.

So each time I move home intent on staying,
mother goes hunting
under wide leaves of pumpkin
pulls down boil banana trees digs the early yam
makes a tart juice from passion says, here, take this.
Be filled.

(from Jamaica Journal, Volume 37, 2018, Institute of Jamaica)



In this poem, the poet compares the urban and rural environment. She privileges the rural, not only because that is where our food is grown, but also she suggests that there is a greater communal sense of community where people look out for and support one another. By contrast, she paints the urban space as sterile, and somewhat unfriendly.

- Reflect on where you live, urban/inner-city or rural.
- What things grow in your community?
- Are your neighbours friendly?
- Think about one concrete thing that can you do to improve your community.



The Positive Power of a **FORCE RIPE GIRL**

Amanda Hutchinson

In Jamaica, the term 'force ripe' is used to shame little girls who dare to step outside of their box, to push the envelope and boldly express themselves. It has negative connotations and forces bright and bold young girls and women back within the lines of submission to societal norms.

In 2013, in my teens, with the rise of the beauty industry on social media, makeup was no longer reserved for special occasions. We did makeup for fun --just because. I had a deep unwavering love for lip-gloss (at one point I had 20) and always had four on my person at any time. I loved make-up, but was wary of wearing too much, particularly lipstick as that was seen as not for children; that was 'big ooman' tings. I had an unhealthy obsession with red lipstick especially that shade between the crimson sunset at Rick's café, and the scorched skin of a sun burned Julie mango.

The first time I wore my offensively bold red lipstick, the words hurled at me were, "Yuh too force ripe!" like an unseen hand pushing me back in my place. Cowed into submission, after that incident I only

wore lipgloss, clear and unassuming, often vanilla scented, afraid to be bold, afraid to express myself, to go beyond society's prescription of age-appropriate behaviour. I never wanted to be 'force ripe'.

I had never truly understood the meaning of the phrase, but I knew the consequences of the label. Force ripe girls who behaved older than their age, got unwanted attention. I've realized now, that the behaviours that people label as 'force ripe' don't matter. You could do absolutely anything, or nothing, and be called 'force ripe'. I didn't want to seem unruly because unruly girls were more likely to be in danger, but there was nothing unruly about wanting to express myself.

The idea that women must avoid certain behaviours lest they endanger themselves is rooted in a culture of victim blaming and shaming. My red lipstick was my joy, but instead it was presented as me inviting things I wasn't 'big enough' for. The truth is whether I wore clear lip gloss or bright red lipstick, shorts or a long skirt, I would still have to endure lascivious stares and cat calls. Girls then start to



dumb down, fail to maximize their full potential, and live a bland and unbold life.

The label 'force ripe' was meant to limit me, prevent me from being my bold, wonderful self and make me afraid of me. It took leaving my sacred space and moving overseas as a student, to understand that you will never be ready to face life, if you wait for life to happen. The world will not wait for you to be ready, so sometimes you have to be 'force ripe', to drop from the tree to deal with new challenges and experiences.

To be 'force ripe' is to stare into the face of the unknown, wearing your offensively bright red lipstick. It is that refusal to wait for someone else's "okay", allowing yourself to embrace the bold spirit to chase after new things.

Wearing clear lipgloss for years, was me refusing to step outside the society's boundaries ... afraid of boldly expressing myself as a young woman. To some I might seem brazen, 'brite', brawling, daring, and any other label of shame ... but I am a proud member of the 'force ripe committee' and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Are you familiar with the term 'force ripe?' It is often levelled at girls, who adults deem are acting above their age. It is not said as a positive attribute, and often 'force-ripe' girls are perceived as bad and blamed for their own victimization. However, in this piece, Amanda, the author, defines force-ripe as assertion, not submitting to society's limited norms of what a girl should be.

- Can you recall a time when someone might have called or thought of you as being 'force-ripe'?
- How did that make you feel? Do you feel empowered to assert your true personality and demand your rights?
- What support do you need to walk boldly in your own shoes?



All That and More

Opal Palmer Adisa

I tell my daughters
they are all that and more
and when others try to make
them feel as if there's something
wrong in being proud
in walking with their heads high
in not thing taking crap from anyone
I whisper into their ears
You're all that and more
much more
I chant this when I send
them out into the world
I remind them they have
ancestors they should call on
that they belong to a community
that loves them
that their hearts are bigger than their
fists and their dream can silence
any claim of inferiority
You're all that and more
much more
I chant
I rub this into their skin
with lotion
I braid it into their hair

and weave it into the clothes
they wear
My daughters know
they are all that and
much more..



You too are all that and more. Don't allow others to make you feel or act small.

- Reflect on a time when someone made you feel small.
- Tell that person who you are...
- List 3 strengths or things that you are good at.



If Upendo Can, So Can You

Joan Andrea Hutchinson

Every now and then you meet someone who totally inspires you, who despite the odds has, through determination, hard work and a desire to have a better life, made monumental strides, and is proving to be a source of inspiration to many, regardless of age, gender or social standing.

Meet Upendo Burgess - 31 year old entrepreneur and mother of three, who lives in Gordon Town, St Andrew. Her Lady Upendo line of products - scented candles, soaps and jewellery, has been creating a buzz and she has a steadily increasing clientele. As a single mother of three girls, one of whom has serious health challenges, life not been easy. She has witnessed gender-based violence, struggled to put food on her table and there have been times when she had to fight off feelings of depression, born of not being able to provide for her children in the way she wanted.

With a fire in her belly, she was determined to change her life and realized that constantly upgrading yourself is the only way forward. Always on the lookout for new training opportunities, constantly learning how to do new things, and applying her entrepreneurial spirit to everything she learns, in a bid to become financially independent she says, "If I see a course in tree climbing or a course in painting offered I am going to do it because I never know when I will be able to use those skills, and I want to have as many skills as possible."

Upendo has completed a number of short training and

capacity development programmes including a special certificate course in Social Work, at the University of the West Indies and two upskilling and capacity development programmes executed by the NGO, Children First Agency. Some of the skills she has acquired are jewelry making, soap making and candle making.

She completed the level one certification in Entrepreneurship with HEART / National Skills Training Agency (NTSA). The work was hard but she was driven by her desire for self-improvement and her dedication to her children, who were her constant source of encouragement. "Upendo is not a quitter," she said, "and I want my girls to see that hard work brings rewards." She received a grant from HEART to purchase equipment and converted a space at home into her workshop. She has officially registered the business and now employs a young woman from the community to assist with production, and a bike bearer for deliveries. Constantly experimenting, her line includes coffee and coconut candles and soaps, and her super seller, a lemongrass infused anti mosquito candle.

Not an Easy Road

Upendo is convinced that when Reggae superstar Buju Banton sang 'Not an Easy Road' he must have been singing about her. Life has been a struggle but she focusses on the solution and not the problem. She has made mistakes but has used them as opportunities for learning. Getting her products to market has been challenging "Is nuff time mi parch in the



sun, rain wet me, my feet hurt from waking up and down, trying to make sales." Now she has systems in place and uses social media to market her products. Her clients include gift shops and villas in Ocho Rios and Montego Bay and at Strawberry Hill, pharmacies and supermarkets. In addition she has a number of repeat individual clients and attests to the fact the word of mouth is the best promotion. Even a few visitors to the island have sampled her products and have ordered more items after they left Jamaica.

So from humble beginnings, Lady Upendo has taken charge of her life and has achieved financial stability, doing something which she loves. She is also training other young women in the art of soap, candle and jewelry making, so that they too can become self-sufficient, thereby reducing their risk of becoming victims of gender-based violence.

How does she feel about being able to properly provide for her family? "I am proud of what I have achieved through hard work and believing in myself."

Her advice to young women "Make sure that you do not have to depend on a man for financial security, because that sometimes leads to abuse." She also advises women to get trained and to ensure that honesty and decency are a part of their business plan.

If Upendo can ... you can too.

The writer advocates for women's economic independence. Data indicates that many women stay in abusive relationships because they are financially dependent on their husband or partner. This story is about one's woman triumph to independence.

- Do you think it is important that women are able to take care of themselves financially, even if they are not in an abusive relationship?
- List as many reasons as you can about why this is a good practice, generally.





Roots and Wings

Saffron

such weight of hope lies sleeping
in these few pounds of flesh
unaware that my heart
beats bated, on your every breath

your ancestors are leaning
and some press on my shoulders
and squeeze my weak hand
from their ghostly cool realms
as the past, and the future
collide in our present:
we are all here...

and through this lead fatigue
where burden was lost
yet reward's burden is found
I feel I must give you, and tell you things
to irrigate the seed you are
to nest young feathers into song
now I do want to live that long
to help you grow roots
to let you spread wings



In the above poem, the poet connects the past with the present --ancestors with the living-- as a source or unit of strength, as well as to show the line of continuity from one generation to the next. The Sheroes initiative continues that connection of linking the past to the present, and continuing the legacy of activism.

- Reflect on what you can learn from past and current activists to help you define your own path of transformation.



Why Yuh Never Meck Mi Leave?

Joan Andrea Hutchinson

(If a woman is in an abusive situation and turns to you for help, would you encourage her to stay? This might be the result)

Mi dream love, everything mi ever wanted
More dan mi could ever perceive
Big splash wedden, big house wid pool
Mi know mi would never leave

Mi plan was fi give him all a mi love
Fi him plan was to deceive
More lie dan any fiction writer best fantasy
Mi love him, mi never waan leave

Mi ask question, him box mi till mi aise ring
Even di neighbour dem grieve
Mi just soak mi troubles in di marble jacuzzi
Love-paralysed, mi could not leave

Sometimes mi feel like mi did waan run way
But den mi hear yuh pleas
Him is a good catch, teck di lickle one an two lick
Yuh woulda be stupid to leave"

Well, the last battering a seventeen stitches mi get
Him beat widout reprieve
But when mi look, is a benz an flowers mi see come
Mi glad mi never did leave

Fi mi aunty a tell mi say mi fi leave him
Jealousy inna her heart a heave
She wish she did have all dem luxury yah
Mi sure she woulda never leave

Well ...
dem bury mi bruck-up body backa di church today
Now mi spirit deh pan di open seas
No bother wid di cow bawling an long eye water
Why yuh never meck mi leave?



The poet speaks directly to you, you the reader, and implores you. In this instance the 'you' refers to anyone and everyone who knew or even suspected that she, the persona, of the poem, was being abused, but turned a blind eye. In fact, the speaker of the poem also turns a blind her to her own abuse because of not wanting to give up her very comfortable life-style.

- If the persona of the poem were your friend and you suspected or knew of her abuse, what would you advise her to do?



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ANN-MARGARET LIM: Her second poetry collection, *Kingston Buttercup* (Peepal Tree Press: 2016) was shortlisted in the poetry category of the 2017 Bocas Prize and her first book, *The Festival Of Wild Orchid*, (Peepal Tree Press: 2012), was nominated for the UK Guardian First Book Prize and received Honorary Mention in the 2013 Bocas Prize.



JOAN ANDREA HUTCHINSON is a writer and a performance poet who has written three books and released seven CDs on aspects of Jamaican culture. Heavily chastised in 1996 for wearing an afrocentric hairstyle on national TV, she owned the 'bumpy head gal' moniker and has used it in her writing to motivate women.



MILLICENT A. GRAHAM is the author of two poetry collections: *The Damp In Things* (Peepal Tree Press, 2009) and *The Way Home* (Peepal Tree Press, 2014). She is a fellow of the University of Iowa's International Writing Program, 2009 and an awardee of the Michael and Marylee Fairbanks International Fellowship to BreadLoaf Writer's Conference, 2010.



AMANDA HUTCHINSON is a 22 year old Jamaican, Sociology major at the Brandon University in Canada, where her studies include critical race theory, sexual violence and GBV. She has contributed articles to several campus publications, and has been published in the *Jamaica Observer*.



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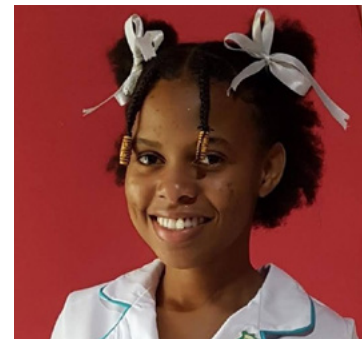
OPAL PALMER ADISA is a diverse and multi-genre talent. Currently the Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of West Indies, Adisa has lectured and read her work throughout the world. An award-winning poet and prose writer Adisa has over sixteen titles to her credit, including the novel, *It Begins With Tears* (1997).



YASHIKA C GRAHAM is a Jamaican writer and poet. She is the 2019 recipient of the Mervyn Morris Prize for poetry from the University of the West Indies, Mona where she is a student of Literatures in English. Her poetry, prose and literary criticism have been published and presented internationally and she is currently working on her first collection of poems.



SAFFRON is the author of the chapbook "Soft Flesh" published with the Calabash International Literary Festival Chapbook Series in Jamaica. Her poems have also appeared in their anthologies: "So Much Things to Say: 100 Calabash Poets" and "Jubilation!", and the Drawing Room Project's "Fire Stick", The Caribbean Writer and elsewhere.



ROZHAUN WALKER, age 17, is the first place winner in the Children First GBV Essay Contest by Project Gyal.

USEFUL LINKS & ARTICLES

Get the Facts- Assistance for victims of intimate partner violence

Jamaica Oman, Hon Dr Louise Bennett Coverley 

Ministry of Justice Victim Support Unit

UNESCO Priority Gender Equality

The Chilling: global trends in online violence against women journalists; UNESCO research discussion paper

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UN Women Virtual Knowledge Center to End Violence against Women and Girls

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876 553 0372
876 929 2997
(24 hr emergency line)



**Centre for the Investigation
of Sexual Offence and Child
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876 838 1062
876 926 4079



**Child Protection and Family
Services Agency**
888 PROTECT (888 776 8328)
876 878 2882 (WhatsApp)
Report abuse 24 hr emergency line



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“ Andaiye, co-founder of Red Thread, a multi-ethnic organisation of grassroots women in Guyana, by her livly, actions, organising and thought demonstrated that we need to reject limited notions of advocacy in favour of organising with women. She demonstrated that leadership means building strong organisations which are capacious enough for both the leadership of many women and an ever-expanding vision of freedom and transformation.

I take seriously her insistence that "different sectors with different levels of power must organize autonomously so they can cross their divides on the basis of equality." This requires a recognition of the power imbalances between and among women. Transformation and solutions are only found in collective action. This means we must claim the legacy of women organising and conspiring from the streets, the fields, the kitchen-table or the classroom. Women's leadership is everywhere in our creative and collective unrelenting work to build societies where we can all thrive. ”

Tonya Haynes, PhD

*Lecturer, Interim Head and Coordinator of Graduate Programmes
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“ Advocacy seeks to arrive at consensus through persuasion across various networks of interests, influences, and constraints. It has been a major tool employed by feminists as they have sought to empower women and transform gender relations and systems. Most feminist leaders recognise that a shared sense of reality and need for action are achieved when the opinions and experiences of all are acknowledged, considered, and recognised as being important. This heterarchical (as opposed to hierarchical) leadership style has been associated with women, and it allows for information and authority to flow across those networks to identify common goals and priorities, build trust and facilitate effective, collaborative and coordinated action.

Elsa Leo-Rhynie PhD

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CARIBBEAN
SHEROES
INITIATIVE