**A Gender Transformative Response to mitigate the impact of Gender-based Violence (GBV) during the COVID- 19 Crisis**

A Gender Transformative Response is necessary to mitigate the impact of Gender-based Violence during the COVID-19 crisis. This response requires a significant investment in the people of the country, to help them adjust to negative changes in the economy and labour market, from unexpected social and economic shocks.

During times of crisis, this intervention is heightened and must support the sustainable transition for vulnerable groups and families, with specific focus on women and girls, the elderly, persons with disabilities, rural women and the working poor, who are often times, faced with unexpected economic losses during disasters.

The Human Rights Approach will be used to ensure that the eligibility criteria is transparent, gender sensitive and minimizes the exclusion of potential beneficiaries.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), National Social Protection Floors should comprise at least four (4) social security guarantees, as defined at the national level:

* Access to essential healthcare, including maternity care;
* Basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;
* Basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in case of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability;
* Basic income security for older persons.

As a country, we’re concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic has far-reaching implications for our most vulnerable and at-risk groups. This is because disasters reinforce existing inequalities in society. Now more than ever, as a country, we are faced with the stark reality that intimate partner violence (IPV) is a pervasive and unique type of domestic violence which deserves immediate attention and certainly, a robust response.

Due to the impact of this global scourge, several persons, including women and girls face the risk of rape, incest and other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, child abuse, elder abuse and other forms of community violence.

These forms of discrimination and abuse are “part and parcel” of the overarching Gender-based Violence and often result in severe physical, psychological, emotional, cultural, economic and other consequences for the victims, witnesses of the abuse, members of the community and the wider society.

The Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport has implemented a number of strategies to fight the spread of COVID-19 and to support ongoing work to facilitate access to a range of goods and services.

1. Launched the Spotlight Initiative in partnership with the EU, the UN Country Team and other key stakeholders as part of a global multi-year programme to reduce violence against girls and women. This intervention focuses largely on Family Violence which includes tackling domestic violence or intimate partner violence, child abuse and addressing forms of discrimination against vulnerable groups;
2. Phased and strategic implementation of the Ministry’s 10 year National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-based Violence (NSAP-GBV, 2017-2027). This is being done in partnership and collaboration with key publics and multiple stakeholders to challenge the normalization of gender-based violence to build resilience and provide empowerment before, during and after periods of disasters;
3. Robust needs-based situational analyses to determine the scope and impact of disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic on women’s health, safety and security;
4. Increased support to victims and survivors of Gender-based Violence and provide a gender-differential response and options in case of intimate partner violence incidences;
5. Increased social media presence under the “No Excuse For Abuse Campaign” to ensure that the public is aware of the Hotline for the current shelter for domestic violence, as well as the Help Lines/Hot Lines to call and report intimate partner violence and other forms of Gender-based Violence;

**Help lines/Hot Line Numbers**

**Crisis Centre: 876 929 2997**

**Females: 876 553 0372**

**Males: 876 553 0387**

1. Ramped up the Special Service Desk for Men at the Bureau of Gender Affairs and a Social Intervention Response Team to accept calls and make referrals regarding Intimate Partner Violence (IPV);
2. Messages through the BGA’s social media platforms re: social distancing, with a special focus on women who are currently trapped in abusive or toxic situations or are potential victims of intimate partner violence;
3. Ongoing discussions with other ministries, departments and agencies, private sector, community based organizations, international development partners and other civil society organizations to ensure that the gender-differential needs are prioritized during and after the COVID-19 pandemic;
4. “Dignity Packages” issued to four hundred (415) girls enrolled in the Programme for Adolescent Mothers (PAM) under the Protection component of the National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-based Violence (NSAP-GBV) 2017-2027;
5. “Sanitation Kits” provided to the Divisions, Departments and Agencies and other public bodies within the Ministry to ensure that all the locations are equipped with the requisite protective gear, resource materials as part of the national response;
6. Increased allocation in the Bureau’s Budget for the FY 2020/2021 to provide additional Grant Funding for seven (7) existing community/advocacy groups as second time recipients under Phase 2 of the Community Outreach through Partnership for Empowerment (COPE) Initiative;
7. Ramped up the COPE Initiative to include two (2) new groups from the community for persons with disabilities (i.e. Jamaica Society for the Blind and the Jamaica Association for the Deaf).
8. Under Phase 2 of the COPE Initiative, nine (9) groups will receive monthly subventions to support the efforts of the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport to eliminate Gender-based Violence in keeping with the five (5) Strategic Priorities Areas of the NSAP-GBV.

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic presents the perfect opportunity for us to utilize and strengthen the Gender Transformative Disaster Management Framework which exists. It also serves as a platform to assess the level of resilience, to ensure that we continue to build on the strategies which are most effective and synchronize the existing framework with our ongoing work in gender and development.

We will continue to work in partnership with the Ministry of Labour & Social Security and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies to provide the requisite support to women and girls, particularly in the informal sector, who are in dire need of financial assistance.

We will intensify support through the Gender Advisory Council (GAC) for a review of data collection on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) at the national level, to facilitate improved tracking of IPV, more frequent reports from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) and sex-disaggregated data on Violence against Women and Girls (VAW/G).

The Ministry of Finance & Planning recently announced a ‘Stimulus Package’ which will also be beneficial to several categories of persons in the formal and informal sectors. However, we are aware that help is needed immediately. For instance, women in violent relationships are identified as a group with a special type of vulnerability as they are oftentimes, unable to leave these relationships due to the uncertainty of the existing labour market and a range of other factors.

While we have learnt from similar disasters in the past, COVID-19 is new and requires gender-transformative approaches to ensure that we continue to build the capacities of women and girls.

We rely on our people as powerful resources and change agents, during times of disasters; therefore, their empowerment is extremely critical to building community and national resilience.

We welcome your collaboration and partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport during this period, to support the gender transformative response to mitigate the impact of Gender-based Violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 crisis. Support can be provided to create and implement the following:

1. Gender-based Violence Referral Pathway
* Protocol for data collection on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), as a form of GBV;
* Protocol for Gender-based Violence Hotlines and Toll-Free lines;
* Protocol for Online GBV Platform;
1. Training for National Shelter Unit staff members;
2. Shelter Messaging;
3. Trauma and Grief Counselling training for Social Workers and other Fit Persons;
4. Training - Online Communication/Conferencing Tools (Zoom, Moodle, WebEx/ Other)

We all have a role to play in providing protection to the most vulnerable persons among us, particularly, those in under-served and volatile communities to stand up for a safe, healthy and violence-free Jamaica.

We welcome your support to make a difference to the lives of our most vulnerable!