**UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**

**Questionnaire on girls’ and young women’s activism**

1. **Women Participation in Election**

The minimum age to stand as candidate as well as to qualify to be registered as an elector is 18 years, as provided under section 33 and 42 of the Constitution. There is no disparity as regards gender, voting age and the minimum age of eligibility to stand as candidate for elections. More so, protection from discrimination is guaranteed under section 16 (3) of the Constitution whereby *‘….different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, caste, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex….’*

Nevertheless, a smaller number of women are engaged in politics, for various reasons. It was in this context that when the Local Government Act was amended in 2011 and 2015 respectively, provision was made to ensure meaningful participation of women as candidates at an election of Municipal Council and Village Council and that any group presenting more than two candidates shall ensure that not more than two thirds of the group’s candidates are of the same sex. There are proposals that these provisions should be extended to the General Elections.

Moreover, the issue of better women representation was also addressed by an amendment to Section 16 (Protection from Discrimination) of the Constitution, which came into force in 2011, the purpose of which was to provide that a law shall not be deemed discriminatory if it provides *“….. for a minimum number of candidates for election to local authorities to be of a particular sex, with a view to ensuring adequate representation of each sex on a local authority…”*

The Constitutional (Amendment) Bill (no.XX11 of 2018), was introduced in the National Assembly in December 2018. The objects of the Bill, amongst others, were:

* amendments to the electoral system; and
* proposals to guarantee better women representation

In furtherance of the objectives of the Bill, with regard to the First Past The Post (FPTP) system, it was proposed that at least one third of the total number of candidates on the PR list of each party or party alliance should be of the same sex.

The Bill was debated in the National Assembly but was not put to a vote as there was no consensus across the political spectrum with respect to the proposed reforms.

 In a nutshell, the statistics in relation to the National Assembly Elections, 2019 are as follows:

* Out of 810 candidates nominated, 148 were women, representing 18.3%.
* Out of 70 Members of Parliament, 14 are women, representing 20 %.

The percentage of women representation at Local Government level, increased by 47.2% at the Village Council Elections 2020 compared to the said election in 2012.

In a brief, the statistics in relation to the Village Council Elections, 2020 are as follows:

* Out of 538,727 registered electors, there were 273,425 women registered representing 50.7% who were eligible to vote for the Village Council Elections, 2020.
* Out of 5,275 candidates contesting the election, there were 1,684 women candidates representing 31.9%.
* Out of 1,170 candidates elected, there were 274 women candidates representing 23%.

The only document required to be able to vote is to produce the National Identity card or any other document acceptable by the electoral laws. The Office of the Electoral Commissioner takes necessary measures to facilitate the registration of electors, including women without additional administrative burden.

All measures with respect to the maintenance of public safety and public order are taken by the Commissioner of Police, as from the issue of writ of election for the safety of the public, including safety of women standing as candidates. It is noteworthy that the safety of women candidates has never been an issue neither during the election process nor during the election campaign.

Concerning Rodrigues Island, amendments were brought to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, through the Rodrigues Regional Assembly Act, through the Rodrigues Regional Assembly (Amendment) Act 2016. Concurrently, an amendment was brought to the Constitution to make provision for a minimum number of candidates for election to the Rodrigues Regional Assembly to be of a particular sex, with a view to ensuring adequate representation of each sex in the Rodrigues Regional Assembly.

Government is clearly committed to comply with recommendations of the Committee by announcing in its Government Programme 2020-2024 at paragraph 181 that “Government will pursue its initiative to bring an electoral reform that will ensure political and social stability in the country and higher women participation.

1. **Fair gender representation**

With regards to gender diversity on the right to participate in public affairs, the State of Mauritius implemented the National Code of Corporate Governance (2016) which lays down the main principles of governance and encompasses the concept of gender balance and equality under Principle 3: ‘Director Appointment Procedures’, Board structure and Board Diversity. The Principle calls for all organisations to ensure appointment of Directors from both genders (at least one female Director) as members of the Board.

As a budget measure 2019/2020, the Companies Act and the Statutory Bodies (Accounts and Audit) Act have been amended to cater for Public Companies and Statutory Bodies to have at least one woman on their Board of Directors to have a fair gender representation on the boards.

Stakeholders are sensitised with a view to increasing the representation of women on Board of Directors. Women should therefore be provided with relevant training, necessary skills and expertise to become representatives on Boards. In this respect, the Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance, in collaboration with the Financial Services Institute (FSI) has already set up a Training for Board Readiness programme to train current and prepare potential persons for board readiness. The training programme addresses the issue of Gender Diversity on Boards and provide training and upskill to women for Board readiness, which is in line with measure 174 of the Government Programme 2020 – 2024 to ‘strengthen governance of parastatal institutions by ensuring, among others, adequate and appropriate gender representation on their Board of Directors’.

Moreover, it is to be noted that the Equal Opportunities Act was enacted with the aim of promoting equal opportunities for both men and women. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and the Equal Opportunities Tribunal have been set up to address cases of discrimination made on the basis of race, religion, status, sexual orientation and sex amongst others so as to ensure greater equality in term of access to opportunities and life chances to all citizens. This Act coupled with the setting up of the Commission and the Tribunal contributes to address the issues of Gender Equality and discrimination against women and ensure enhanced participation of women.

1. **Girls and young women’s access to technology**

 There is no digital divide concerning access to technology and other infrastructure by young girls and young women in Mauritius. This is mainly because students around the island follow compulsory ICT classes as a subject up to grade 9 (13-14 years) in schools. All students, irrespective of gender, are also encouraged to choose Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects at higher level.

 Furthermore, the National Computer Board has been implementing the Universal ICT Education Programme (UIEP) since September 2006. One of the priorities of the UIEP programme being the introduction of the internationally acknowledged Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC3) course with a view of making it the benchmark for digital literacy/proficiency in Mauritius. The UIEP programme aims at training a maximum number of persons comprising students, employees (including Public Officers), housewives, senior citizens and public at large on the IC3 course in line with Government’s vision to transform Mauritius into a Cyber Island and ICT Hub.

Social media in Mauritius is doing lots of harm to women and girls. The harm done to women and girls through the distribution of images on social media can have lifetime consequences. However, there are laws that take care of online harassment irrespective of gender.

Combating violence against women in the public and private sphere often confronts established patriarchy structures as well as Cultural, societal and religious norms. This has met with resistance and impeded progress in addressing GBV. Often our political ladies are bullied online, but same is not necessarily true for their male counterpart.

1. **Empowerment of women and girls to alleviate poverty**

Promoting gender equality and greater opportunities for women, young girls and children of the Marshall Plan Social Contract beneficiaries are, therefore, important themes which are fully integrated throughout the Marshall Plan against Poverty.

In the effort to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, there is a commitment towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls, and protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations.

**Various schemes/ measures are as follows:**

1. The Crèche Scheme was introduced in February 2017 to empower mothers of children aged between 3 months to 3 years to be placed in registered child day care centres, thereby allowing their mothers to take up employment or follow a training course for the purpose of their empowerment. The scheme is applicable to children aged between 3 months to 3 years, who are attending a registered day-care centres and have achieved at least 75% monthly attendance. This scheme has mostly benefited young mothers of the vulnerable groups.
2. A wide range of training are being provided to unemployed women and young girls as a means of empowering them and enhancing their living conditions. The purpose is to develop the soft skills of women so that they can better respond to the market needs all while promoting their social inclusion and cohesion. For instance:
* training on various fields such as Electrical Installation, Plumbing & Pipe Fitting and Housekeeping mainly dedicated to women are provided to beneficiaries. As an incentive, participants are given a monthly stipend of Rs 5,000 and a travelling allowance of Rs 1,000 to successfully attend the training and provided with placement opportunities in parallel with training. In addition, a toolkit is being provided to the beneficiaries so that they can start their own practice/business.
* training in housekeeping, pastry, shoe making, bee keeping, quail egg production, poultry project, home gardening project, farming, hair dressing, beauty care, and eco-bag making are also dispensed.
* Moreover, many women are being encouraged to operate through cooperatives and are being provided with sewing machines and start-up kits.

(c ) Job fairs have been organised to regroup potential employers and unemployed beneficiaries for job and training opportunities. The holding of Job Fairs across the island have been an appropriate mechanism to reach out to vulnerable and deprived women and girls to ease their access to job opportunities.

It is to be noted that integrating gender perspective in policies and strategies and accelerating the transition of women from informal to formal employment through training and empowerment, and girls from schools to employment, have always been a driving force of the Marshall Plan to tackle the root cause of poverty.

1. **Youth Participation**

As far as the young population is concerned, their participation in public affairs is rendered very accessible and in a very non-discriminatory approach. All categories of youth including those with disabilities can exercise this right as no discrimination based on age, gender, race or ethnicity is made.

It is important to note that various advocacy groups have been set up to enhance youth participation in public affairs, namely the National Youth Council whose objectives are to:

1. establish and maintain effective communication between government and youth organisations;
2. assist in the implementation and evaluation of government policies relating to youth needs; and
3. initiate youth development projects/activities with the aim of encouraging the active participation of the youth.

Moreover, several platforms namely the National Youth Environment Council, the Volunteer Mauritius, Youth NGO networks, etc. have been created for the youth to voice out their concerns. There are also institutions such as the National Empowerment Foundation, which are working towards promoting youth participation in public affairs. Public affairs are rendered more accessible to them through online youth-friendly services such as communications through the website and social media of the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation and activities/trainings organized online.

However, one of the challenges faced by the State of Mauritius is that youths, from outer islands of the Republic of Mauritius, namely Agalega and St Brandon, have difficulties in participating fully in public affairs due to lack of necessary technological facilities and infrastructures.

**11 October 2021**