

GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Article 4: Implementation of Rights in the Convention¹

Since ratifying the Convention in 1993, Antigua & Barbuda has made moves to introduce legislation dealing with the rights of the child. However, much of the legislation either has not been implemented or has failed to provide adequate levels of protection to the nation's children. As a result, Antigua & Barbuda still lack laws which effectively focus on promoting the rights of children.

In the initial Country Report the Government asserted that the Ministry of Planning had been mandated to prepare a four-year strategic development plan and that said plan sought "to create a single comprehensive policy, designed to promote youth access to the competencies and character development required to be fully prepared adults, effective citizens and well-equipped leaders." POWA notes that while the plan was scheduled to run for the period 2001-2004, to date we are not aware that any such policy has been implemented.

Towards the end of 2003, Parliament passed a bill to create a **Child Protection Agency**. Prior to the passage of the bill, the Social Improvement Division within the Ministry of Health & Social Improvement invited stakeholders to attend a national consultation which was staged in collaboration with UNICEF on January 23rd, 2003.

Civil society participation at the above-mentioned consultation was quite good with delegates representing the student body, the NGO community and political parties. While handicapped by a lack of access to copies of the draft legislation, participants were very vocal in expressing their concerns about the bill. Ministry officials pledged to take the concerns on board and to revert to the stakeholders before tabling the revised draft in Parliament. Unfortunately, this pledge was never fulfilled.

Recommendations

The following are some of the concerns that were raised in the January 2003 consultation but were not reflected in the bill.

- The specific functions for the Child Protection Agency (CPA) are not outlined in the legislation.
- The stated penalties for not reporting criminal acts against children include a written reprimand for a first offence only. There is no stated action for a second offence. We do not consider this penalty to be a deterrent. We did then and do now strongly recommend the introduction of more stringent measures.
- The number of persons mandated to report on cases of child abuse is limited. This responsibility should be extended to all state agencies, medical practitioners as well as the wider community. The task of protecting the nation's children should not be considered as the exclusive purview of select governmental agencies.

¹ Please see Appendix A for an implementation checklist.

- The Act stipulates that the director of the CPA may suspend or revoke a license for the holder of a childcare facility. However Ministers of Government may hear and determine the appeal. The duly appointed Child Care Board should handle this appeal, where suitably qualified individuals can rule on it rather than exposing the process to possible political interference.

In 1995 the **Sexual Offences Act** was passed in Parliament. This act seeks to prevent sexual activity with minors. However the child is still at risk due to several severe limitations and lack of stringent implementation.

In January 2002, POWA submitted a petition to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable Minister of Public Affairs and Attorney General requesting that the Government amend the legislation in order to provide greater protection to the nation's children. Some nine thousand residents and citizens affixed their signatures to this petition. To date the Administration has failed to act on this petition.

Recommendations

The recommendations contained in the 2002 petition are reproduced verbatim below:

1. The issue of pornography be directly addressed by the law and that firm measures be adopted to deal with persons who engage in this activity.
2. That the issue of pornography involving children under the age of 18 be particularly addressed to send a clear message that our society will not tolerate this outrage.
3. That the notion of consensual sexual activity between adults and persons under the age of 16 be abolished from the law.
4. That all terminology in the Sexual Offences Act relating to or suggestive of an "age of consent" in regard to children under the age of 16 be abolished.
5. That the law adopts an "**age of protection**" in relation to sexual offences to be established at 16, consistent with this age in other areas of the law and that persons under the age of 16 be given legal protection in regard to sexual activity with persons over the age of 16.
6. That the defense afforded to adults of the reasonable belief of the age of the victim of a sexual offence be abolished and that the law uncompromisingly impose legal duties and responsibilities on adults in incidents involving sexual activity between adults and children, and that breaches of these duties by adults be visited with the strictest sanctions.
7. That focus groups and other organizations be permitted to make representations to both Houses of Parliament during any debate relating to the Sexual Offences Act.

In addition to the previously documented recommendations, POWA and its associates submit the following:

- That every effort be made to ensure that the spirit and intent of the law are observed in order to enable girl children who have become pregnant to complete their education in the public school system.

- That the judiciary utilizes the full force of the law when sentencing persons convicted of sexual offenses involving a child victim. This recommendation is based on the fact that the maximum sentences stipulated in the act are not generally imposed by the courts. For example, where it is recommended for a male person who is engaged in sexual intercourse with a minor under 14, he is liable on conviction to imprisonment for life. However persons have been sentenced to as little as 5 years.
- That the maximum penalty of ten (10) years for persons convicted of committing statutory rape with children between the ages of 14 and 16 does not constitute an adequate deterrent.
- That there is currently no law on the books protecting children between the ages of 16 and 18. This deficiency should be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- That all cases of statutory rape shall be reported to the authorities.. In Antigua there are statistics of children between the ages of 12 – 16 years who have delivered children in the public hospital. However, there are no corresponding statutory rape cases on record. These cases should not go unreported.

Article 42: Making the Convention Widely Known²

The articles of the convention are not widely known. Little has been done in terms of a sustained effort to inform the public. While a national committee was established, its efforts appear to be somewhat ad hoc. At least one national workshop has been staged in collaboration with UNICEF. There have also been a few programmes in the local media. However, we can point to no sustained initiatives on the part of this committee or the Government in general.

In contrast, POWA and the Observer Group, a private media house, have collaborated on the production of a number of public service announcements designed to educate the public about their rights and responsibilities under the Convention.

While a collaborative approach to the public education process would be most efficacious, the Government's general reluctance to engage the civil society partners has been quite evident. Despite offers by POWA to co-facilitate national consultations on the reform of existing legislation in order to afford greater protection to the nation's children, no such cooperation has been realized.

Government's reluctance to collaborate with NGOs is rooted in their belief that all such organizations are political and anti-government. The Prime Minister has repeatedly accused the NGO community and POWA in particular of being political. This bias has precluded any meaningful collaboration.

² Please see Appendix B for an implementation checklist.

Recommendations

- There must be more public information programmes based on the Convention on the rights of the Child by both Non Governmental Organizations and the Government.
- A Monthly/Quarterly newsletter discussing various articles of the Convention of the rights of the Child should be prepared and widely disseminated.
- Parents and other stakeholders who have responsibility for the care and protection of the nation's children should be informed as to the rights of children and what they can do to ensure that the nation's children are protected.

Article 44.6: State Parties shall make their reports widely available to the public in their own countries

The national reports presented to the United Nations Committee on the Conventions of the rights of the child have not been made widely known to the community. Further, as Non Governmental Organizations we are not aware of any additional information that may have been submitted to the committee subsequent to the presentation of the initial country report.

In addition to the failure to disseminate the Initial Country Report, the Government has been less than cooperative in facilitating the preparation of the NGO Alternative Report. The work on this report was widely publicized in the print and electronic media, yet we were unable to secure the support of the relevant governmental agencies in our efforts to obtain copies of relevant documents.

Recommendations

- Prior to the finalization of official government reports, the authorities should submit said reports in draft form to the social partners for comment and feedback.
- Once finalized all official governmental reports on the Convention and any issues related to the nation's efforts to implement the Convention should be disseminated to all churches, service clubs, professional associations, trade unions, political parties etc.

DEFINITION OF THE CHILD

Antigua & Barbuda's Initial Country Report conceded that there is no single, uniform definition of a child that holds true for all circumstances. It is noteworthy that, while one needs to have attained the age of 18 in order to vote or obtain a driver's license, for very many other functions which require significant levels of maturity, the qualifying age is less than 18.

The following table outlines the definition of a child as stipulated in the relevant legislation: -

CIRCUMSTANCE	RELEVANT LAW	DEFINITION
Criminal and Civil Liability	Magistrates Code of Procedure, Cap. 255 Amendment No. 17 of 1973	Criminal offenses → in the opinion of the magistrate, the person is under the age of 14 and of sufficient age and capacity to commit the crime; Civil & quasi criminal offenses → a person under the age of 16 Criminal offenses → in the opinion of the magistrate, the individual is between the ages of 14 and 16
Juvenile	Juvenile Act, Cap. 42 of 1951	Any person under the age of 16
Compulsory School Age	Education Act of 1973	All children between the ages of 5 and 16
Age of Employment	Antigua & Barbuda Labour Code of 1975	A person under the age of 14 ³
Age for Child Maintenance	Children Act, Cap. 49	A person under the age of 16
Maximum Age for Adoption	Adoption of Children Act, Cap. 343	An infant is a person under the age of 18
Age of Sexual Consent	Sexual Offences Act of 1995	Age of consent for both males and females is 16 years ⁴
Age of Marriage	Marriage Act, Cap. 347	A minor is a person under the age of 18
Domestic Violence	Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act of 1999	A child is any person under the age of 18.
Citizenship	Citizenship Act of 1982	A minor is a person under 18

Recommendation

- In all cases the definition of a child should be a person who has attained the age of 18.

³ It should be noted that, in keeping with the compulsory school age, there can be no full time employment of any person under 16.

⁴ However, females between the ages of 14 and 16 are afforded less protection since the age for statutory rape is 14 years.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Article 2: Non-Discrimination

In Antigua & Barbuda's Initial Report it is stated that Chapter II of the Constitution sets out the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals. The report goes on to state that all persons are protected from being treated in a discriminatory manner. Discrimination is then defined as follows: -

“different treatment to different persons attributable wholly or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions or affiliations, colour, creed or sex...”

We note that there is no mention of **age** as one of the criteria associated with discrimination. As acknowledged in the Antigua report, children are not mentioned specifically in the Constitution as it relates to discrimination. The report states: -
“Children are not mentioned specifically, but as citizens or persons living in the state, they are entitled to the same fundamental rights and freedoms as any one else.”

We are concerned that this statement does not take account of the fact that, due to their peculiar vulnerabilities, children require special consideration and protection above and beyond those usually extended to adults. For example, truancy laws are not enforced; too many children are unattended. Only two truancy officers are in the entire island. This is inadequate.

Recommendation

- Each school zone should have a truancy officer who is held accountable for ensuring that the children are in school.
- The school day should be 8:00 to 2:30 with a lunch break. Sports and other extracurricular activities could then be accommodated during official school hours.

In terms of discrimination on the basis of **sex**, in practice girls who become pregnant in school are generally not permitted to return to the classroom. However, there is no such restriction placed on boys who impregnate girls. While the existing policy stipulates that the girls can return to school if they are under 16, what happens in reality is quite different.

Recommendation

- Girls who have become pregnant should be reintegrated into the mainstream. They should be given the choice of going back to the same school or transferring to a new school.

Immigration policy does not require migrants to disclose how many children they have or what the language skills are. Parents are therefore, putting their children in the school that is closest to them without any consideration of whether the particular school has the ability to meet their specific needs.

There is a large and growing Hispanic community in Antigua & Barbuda⁵. These children may be disadvantaged by the fact that the educational system is almost exclusively English. Greenbay, Villa, Potters & Liberta primary schools have a high concentration of Spanish and in 2001 the Government introduced some sort of foreign language tutelage. Asian and French children are also in the system. However, there is no special programming in place for them.

Recommendation

- Immigration policy should require all migrants to complete a form stating how many family members shall accompany them and their language capabilities so that the Government can ensure that the requisite social services infrastructure is in place.
- We should introduce English as a second language classes.
- The government has adopted a de facto open door policy, but has done nothing to prepare the indigenous population to welcome the migrants – no diversity training etc. Recommend that the government launch such a programme.

The Amazing Grace Foundation operates a residential facility for **disabled** children. However, this facility is chronically short of the financial, material and human resources required for an optimal level of operation. In an interview with one of the founders of the Foundation, we learnt that the institution now serves seven children with severe disabilities. While all monies come from fund raising and donations, the Government does provide in kind support by providing two workers for the facility.

Dr. Thomas Martin, a paediatrician, donates a lot of his time to children with disabilities. Through his and other related efforts, a national survey of children with disabilities was conducted. This research revealed that there were some 150 children who needed some form of assistance. The most severe who had no one to help them were selected for admission to Amazing Grace. However, there are many more out there with no form of, or minimal, assistance.

Prior to the establishment of Amazing Grace, disabled children were sometimes abandoned at the public hospital or sent to the residential home for the destitute.

Article 3: Best Interests of the Child

The legal system does not take adequate consideration of the special needs of children. No family court exists at this time. In a recent court case involving a minor and the Prime Minister of the country, an application for security for costs was brought – under which the minor was being requested to deposit the projected legal costs before she could gain access to the courts.

⁵ There are no official statistics to indicate the number of Hispanics in Antigua & Barbuda. Unofficial estimates vary from 3,000 to 10,000. (*The Spanish Language in Antigua & Barbuda: Implications for Language Planning and Language Research* by Dr. Bernadette Farquhar Faculty of Humanities and Education, UWI Cave Hill)

Police are not adequately trained to deal with matters involving children. The Convention does not form a part of the training curriculum.

There are no standards of operation for Boys Training School (aka Comfort Hall). In conducting our research, we interviewed one of the Magistrates who revealed that she is extremely upset with the system's failure to adequately address the problem of young boys who constantly get into trouble. She went on to point out that the Boys Training School at Comfort Hall does not seem to be properly run and the boys leave whenever they feel like. She further revealed that, while she fights to keep them out of jail, such incarceration is her only alternative. Not surprisingly, when the juvenile offenders are sent to prison they generally come out worse than they were when they went in.

The legislature recently passed a new Bill bringing into being a Child Protection Board which should be responsible for such institutions.⁶

Recent amendment to the Juvenile Act gives the police the permission to arrest and detain children who are found out and about after 10 p.m.⁷

Recommendations

- A family court should be established to deal with legal matters involving children. The staff for this court should have specialized training to enable them to effectively meet the needs of the children who come before the court.
- All parties should be estopped from bringing legal actions - such as security for costs applications – which effectively serve to remove justice from the reach of the nation's children.
- The judiciary should make every effort to ensure that matters involving children are dealt with speedily and in camera.

Article 6: Child's right to life and maximum survival and development

Frequently parents have to resort to public appeals for money to cover life-threatening medical expenses. This is due to the inability of the existing healthcare system to adequately provide for the needs of the nation in general and children in particular. While the Medical Benefits Scheme may provide financial assistance to persons seeking medical treatment abroad, there are a number of restrictions governing the illnesses that are covered and the amount that can be disbursed to any single individual.

We were frustrated in our efforts to thoroughly research this issue since there is a dearth of statistical information. In the absence of such data, we were hardpressed to render an informed assessment of the country's performance in relation to the implementation of this aspect of the Convention. However, the anecdotal information and all informal sources that were explored all speak to deficiencies in the existing systems.

⁶ See the section on General Measures of Implementation for further commentary on this issue.

⁷ See the section on Civil Rights & Freedoms for further commentary on this issue.

Recommendation

- The Government should commit to collecting, analyzing and publishing quality of life statistics which are disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity and country of origin.

Article 12: Respect for the views of the child

School children participated in a consultation on the proposed Child Care Act. They were promised that their comments would be taken into consideration in the revised draft. This was not done. While the Initial Report makes reference to a National Youth Council and a National Youth Policy, neither initiative has had a significant impact.

Recommendation

- In order to give children a forum to express their views, student councils should be established in all secondary schools. Such councils should have the assistance of school-based counselors.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOM

Article 7: Birth registration, name, nationality, and right to know and be cared for by parents⁸

In the laws of Antigua & Barbuda the births of all children should be registered. Chapter VIII of the nation's Constitution outlines the avenues through which an individual can become a citizen of the country. Children have rights of nationality if born in the country or born to parents who are themselves citizens of Antigua & Barbuda.

The right of the child to know and be cared for by parents is however not enforced. It is common for children to Antigua not to be familiar with one of their parents. Many times this decision is made by the parent in whose care the child resides. A trend also exists where some children are not acknowledged by their fathers. Paternity tests are costly and are therefore seldom used. There is no provision for the test to be provided by the state if the party requesting it does not have the financial means to pay for it.

Further, it should be noted that it is not a legal requirement for the name of the father to be recorded on the birth certificate of a child.

Recommendation

- Antigua & Barbuda needs to create laws designed to ensure that a child's right to know both parents is protected.

Article 8: Preservation of Identity

Children in Antigua and Barbuda do not have a choice as to the surname they carry. If born out of wedlock the child could end up carrying the surname of the mother if that is the mother's choice. However if born in wedlock it is automatic the child carry the name of the Father.

In terms of safeguarding a child's culture and language of origin, it should be noted that Hispanic children are, for the most part, integrated into the general public school system where English is the language of instruction. While this poses obvious challenges to the students in question, in the long run, it serves to place them at an advantage as they develop bilingual skills. Given the scarce resources available to the State, it might not be reasonable to expect the Government to implement a dual education system to cater to the needs of the minority Spanish-speaking population. However, all reasonable efforts should be made to integrate such students into the educational system.

Recommendation

- All children should have the right to their identity and should be allowed to take the name of their parents.

⁸ Please see Appendix C for an implementation checklist.

Article 13: Child's Right to Freedom of Expression

The Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda Chapter II section 12 allows for freedom of expression for all people. However there are very few areas in the Antiguan society for children to express themselves.

There are a few notable programmes that offer the youth an opportunity to express themselves. The Antigua Sun, a daily newspaper, profiles selected children in its weekend edition. Observer Radio has a popular call in programme for children. This programme airs each weekday afternoon. Family Radio recently launched a similar Saturday morning programme. All these programmes are private sector initiatives.

Recommendations

- When policies are being made which will impact the lives of children their views should be sought and should then influence the formulation of said policy.⁹
- Ministry of Youth Empowerment should create a newspaper and Radio and Television where children can express their views.¹⁰
- At different times in the year the children should be exposed to mock Parliament and political situations.¹¹

Article 14: Child's Right To Freedom Of Thought, Conscience And Religion

In Antigua & Barbuda, the parents' right to provide religious guidance for their children is largely respected. Religion is not legislated and religious education is by choice.

Article 15: Child's Right To Freedom Of Association And Peaceful Assembly

Children have a right to association and peaceful assembly.

Article 16: Child's Right To Privacy

The Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda protects the rights to privacy of individuals (Chapter II section 3). However it does not address children specifically. The cultural norm in the society does not readily accept that children have a right to the level of

⁹ Leading up to the tabling of the bill establishing the Child Protection Agency, the Attorney General and the Social Improvement Division held such consultations. However, the input of the participants including a number of students was not taken into consideration

¹⁰ While the State has not managed to sustain quality programming by and for the youth, a number of such programmes are aired on at least two of the private radio stations – i.e. Observer Radio & Family Radio.

¹¹ In 2003, the Young Leaders of the Clare Hall Secondary School approached the relevant State agency with a request to utilize the Parliament Building for the staging of a mock parliament. This request was denied with no explanation or suggestion of an alternative venue.

privacy envisioned in this Article. Rather it is perceived that any such rights are vested in the parent or guardian who has the responsibility of caring for the child.

Recommendation

- A proper reporting mechanism needs to be put in place so that children can seek redress.

Article 17: Childs Access To Appropriate Information

The Children of Antigua and Barbuda are exposed to a wide variety of information. There are many radio stations which relay news information and entertainment from around the world. Cable Television and Satellite Television are widely available. There is a small public library available and there are some small community libraries also available.

In Antigua & Barbuda there are no enforced laws as to the type of information that is disseminated during daytime programming. Therefore songs with sexually explicit lyrics are played over the airwaves at any time. Children can purchase any type of music and view movies at the public theatre regardless of ratings.

Recommendations

- A public education campaign should be conducted to familiarize all parties with the meanings of the various ratings (e.g. R, PG, PG13 etc.) and what actions should be taken when movies or other programmes have these ratings.
- Laws should be passed to find theatres and music retailers guilty of an offence if they allow children to become exposed to rated materials which are not suited for their consumption.

Article 19: Child's Right To Protection From All Forms Of Violence

Children in Antigua & Barbuda are exposed to a variety of violent acts including physical and sexual abuse, verbal abuse and harassment. The Department of Social Welfare handles reported cases of abuse. In 2003 A "Child Protection Bill" was passed in parliament in order to create a Child Protection Agency. However, the agency has not yet been established.

The avenues available to them for redress when faced with the threat or reality of violence or other forms of abuse are not generally known by children in Antigua & Barbuda. As a result, children often suffer in silence, and the abuse may only be discovered when a change in behaviour is noticed in the school environment. However, not all the public schools have a trained counselor in their employ.

In 2001 a child pornography ring was exposed, and very little was done to protect the children and bring the perpetrators to justice. For two years now one of the victims has been waiting to have her day in court. POWA has been in close contact with the complainant and her family since the inception and have witnessed the frustration that

resulted from their interaction with a judicial system that succeeded only in victimizing the minor yet again. A number of the other complainants have left the country in order to escape the stigmatization that followed the discovery of the ring.

Recommendations

- More public education programmes should be produced in order to inform parents and children about the dangers, signs and symptoms of child abuse.
- Clear and responsive reporting procedures should be made available to children to report violence perpetrated against them.
- The workers in the Social Services Department, the Police Officers and Medical practitioners should be trained to protect children and defend their rights without consideration for the identity of the perpetrator.
- The judicial system should be structured in such a manner as to afford swift hearing of matters involving allegations of violence against children.
- Protective shelters for children need to be established by the state.¹²
- Each public school should have a trained counselor on staff.

Article 37(a): Torture, Degrading Treatment And Deprivation Of Liberty

Chapter II Section 5 of the Constitution of Antigua & Barbuda states, “**no person shall be deprived of his personal liberty save as may be authorized by law ...**” The Constitution further states in Chapter II section 6, “**No person shall be held in slavery or servitude.No person shall be required to perform forced labour.**”

The Constitution does not provide separately for the treatment of children. Therefore the special needs of children are not specifically outlined in the Constitution.

Corporal punishment is widely utilized in the educational system. However, in the Education Act of 1973 it was established that it should be used as a punishment of “last resort”. This punishment is to be administered by the principal of the school, or in the presence of the principal. In the administering corporal punishment in the schools, there is no discrimination on the basis of gender – i.e. such punishment is administered to both male and female students.

In addition to be employed in the school system, corporal punishment is utilized in the home environment of many families in Antigua & Barbuda.

In October 2003, the Government tabled a proposal to amend the Juvenile Act, Cap. 229. The explanatory memorandum that accompanied this proposed amendment is reproduced below in its entirety.

¹² The envisioned Child Protection Agency may serve to meet this need.

The purpose of this Bill is to amend the Juvenile Act (Cap. 229) so as to impose an obligation on parents and guardians to control the movement of their children by preventing children from loitering after ten o'clock at night without reasonable cause.

Under Clause 2 of the Bill, which is intended to introduce a new section 6A into the Act, a parent or other person having legal custody, charge or care of a juvenile (i.e. a person under the age of sixteen) commits an offence if, without reasonable excuse, he or she allows a juvenile to loiter on the street or in any other place after ten o'clock at night or if he or she does not restrain the juvenile from doing so.

A juvenile is liable to arrest and detention at a police station if he is found loitering after ten o'clock at night without reasonable excuse until he is released to his parents or guardian. If, however, after reasonable enquiry, no such person can be found, the juvenile may be brought before a juvenile court for appropriate orders to be made regarding his care and protection.

This Act has not yet come up for debate in parliament. However, since becoming aware of its contents and intent, POWA has been sensitizing the populace to the fact that this proposed amendment is in contravention of article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Further, we are concerned that – in the words of Senator Joanne Massiah – “the focus on persons under the age of sixteen is both misguided and prematurely prejudicial as there are no known statistics or proof that persons under the age of 16 are largely responsible, as a group, for the escalating crime”. Senator Massiah has also suggested that the proposed amendment may constitute a violation of the constitutional rights of the nation’s children.

This State-sanctioned plan to arrest the nation’s youth in addition to depriving them of their liberty will also serve to make criminals out of our children.

Recommendations

- It is recommended that more public education initiatives be conducted in order to inform persons of the adverse effects that corporal punishment may have on children.
- The Education Act should be amended to introduce other more effective forms of correcting children with the ultimate objective of eliminating corporal punishment from schools.
- There should be a systematic process of reviewing all legislation that impacts the nation’s children in order to ensure that such laws are fully compliant with both the spirit and intent of the Conventions on the Rights of the Child.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT & ALTERNATIVE CARE

Articles 5 & 18: Parental Guidelines and Responsibilities

While the laws of Antigua & Barbuda seek to punish the parent for a failure to provide for a child, there are no provisions for the State to assist such parents with the responsibilities associated with meeting the basic child care needs.¹³ The old British law under the Small Charges Act, Cap 77, Section 24 makes way for the courts to punish the parent (i.e. father) for neglecting to maintain the child. This applies to all children whether they were born in or out of wedlock. A man may be imprisoned for a term of up to one month for such an offense. It is presumed that the mother will at all times take care of the maintenance of her children. This is not necessarily the case.

Under the Juvenile Act, the courts may seek maintenance/support for the juvenile while in custody. The maintenance of said juvenile is the responsibility of the father, stepfather, adoptive father or any other male figure that at the time lives with the mother.

Through the recently passed amendment to the Juvenile Act¹⁴, parents are deemed to have committed an offence if they fail to prevent a juvenile under their care from loitering on a street or other place after 10:00 p.m.

Article 9: Separation from Parents

The State's law gives every child the right to live with his/her parents. It claims to only intervene if the child is in any danger of abuse and abandonment. This is done in accordance with the previously mentioned Juvenile Act Cap. 42.

There are no laws that speak to the right of a separated parent and/or child to remain in close contact with each other. This is especially so in the case where the State is responsible for said separation – e.g. cases of imprisonment, death, detention etc.

Article 10: Family Reunification

Antigua & Barbuda does not speak to any laws or means of family reunification. With a large immigrant population, this issue takes on great significance. In a case which garnered international attention in 2003, a young Jamaican national whose mother had migrated to Antigua and subsequently left him behind when she entered the United States illegally was involved in a series of fatal sniper attacks in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Since Antigua & Barbuda is routinely used as a stepping stone to the

¹³ The caveat here is that the Government provides free health and education through the network of health clinics and primary and secondary schools.

¹⁴ See also the section of this report dealing with Civil Rights and Freedom.

North American continent, it would be advisable for the Government to address the matter of family reunification as a matter of urgency.

Article 11: Illicit Transfer & Non-Return of Children

Antigua & Barbuda is a signatory to three international treaties dealing with the illicit transfer and non-return of children. These are the International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and Children of September 1921 and its 1947 protocol along with the 1989 Inter American Convention of the Intentional Return of the Children. This latter Convention was ratified in 1994.

Statistics show that few – if any – cases of abduction within or outside of the state. None have been taken to the courts. However, given the increasing prevalence of marriages and procreation between Antiguan nationals and immigrants, it behooves the Government to move ahead with the implementation of laws to deal with such eventualities.

Article 20: Children Deprived of Their Family Environment

There are two residential homes for girls who, for various reasons, have been removed from or deprived of a family environment. The Good Shepherd Home for Girls currently has fourteen residents who range in age from six to seventeen. The facility which caters primarily to girls who have been referred by the Social Welfare Division is owned and operated by the St. Vincent de Paul Catholic charity.

The other residential facility, the Sunshine Home for Girls, which is owned and operated by the Salvation Army with State subsidies has six residents ranging in age from nine to fifteen. In addition to their schooling, all the girls receive counseling services.

Boys who find themselves in a similar position are transferred to the Boys Training School. This situation is unsatisfactory since that institution is designed to accommodate juvenile delinquents.

The parents of the residents of all three facilities may be granted visitation rights based on the particular circumstances in each case.

In Antigua & Barbuda, there are no state-owned institutions designed to accommodate children who have been abandoned at birth. As a result, such children may remain at the sole public hospital until age four or five at which time they may be placed in a foster home or in one of the privately-owned and operated facilities described above.

While a foster care network does exist, there is no legal framework within which this system operates. The following table provides statistics on the number of children in foster care in 2003. The overall figures have remained fairly constant over the past few years.

FOSTER CARE RECORDS FOR 2003			
Age	Male	Female	Total
Under 1 year	1	0	1
1-5	16	5	21
6-10	13	23	36
11-15	16	15	31
16-18	9	3	12
18-20	0	3	3
Age not stated	3	2	5
TOTAL	58	51	109

Article 21: Adoption

The Adoption of Children Act, Cap 343 governs all adoptions in Antigua & Barbuda. In order to be eligible to be adopted, an individual must be single and below the age of 18. An adoption gives full rights to the adoptive parent(s). The State maintains an Adoption Children Register with all relevant information on children who have been adopted.

While there is a legal process for the adoption of children, informal arrangements whereby someone “raises” a child in order to help out are more common. Under such arrangements the parent – typically the mother - retains the right to see the child. However, discord may arise when the biological mother tries to reclaim the child when he/she becomes of age to “be useful”.

Article 25: Periodic Review of Placement

There are no existing requirements for the periodic review of fostered or adopted children since there is an assumption that the foster or adopted home is a safe and suitable environment.

The Juvenile Act, Cap 42 speaks to a periodic review by the court. Such a review may lead to the court order for the child to be admitted to a residential facility being varied or revoked.

Article 27.4: Recovery of Maintenance for the Child

The legislation dealing with child maintenance is currently under review under the Family Law and Domestic Violence Reform Initiative. The law in its current form stipulates that the court can seek to obtain maintenance from the father. The father is obligated to provide said maintenance until the child attains the age of 16¹⁵. In cases

¹⁵ It should be noted that the original version of this report inadvertently listed this age as 18.

where the child is deemed to be physically or mentally ill or when he/she is pursuing higher education, this period may be extended. Should it become necessary so to do, a child may initiate legal proceedings in order to obtain support from a parent.

BASIC HEALTH & WELFARE

Article 18: Parents Joint Responsibilities, Assisted by the State

In relation to parents' joint responsibilities there is no evidence provided that Antigua & Barbuda have adopted any measure to assist parents. Paragraph 104 of the Initial Country Report suggests that free education and free health services are considered such measures.

There is evidence of the Government's support for some pre-school facilities which may also be considered beneficial. As stated elsewhere in this report there are crèches. These were originally donor funded and were free. While it is agreed that the government heavily subsidizes the crèches, and quite a few of the private facilities have government trained and paid personnel, the qualities of the trainees and training are areas of concern for some.

The regulating and managing of the fast growing pre-school and day-care facilities has been sometimes chaotic according to social workers. The body that issues approvals for the opening of these institutions, the Early Childhood Education department in the Ministry of Education, Culture and Technology, has no authority to suspend or terminate their licenses. Our sources in that Department further asserted that many of these facilities should in fact be closed.

In commenting on the government's report and responses to the provision of the article, there is general consensus that there is much work to be done to come up to expectations. Many commented that their informed inputs are not given enough airing much less inclusion in the policies that are formulated.

Recommendation

- The oversight of early childhood educational facilities should be vested in a regulatory body. Said body should also have the authority to restrict the operation of said facilities when it is determined that they are operating at a suboptimal level.

Article 23: Rights of Disabled Children

The issue of the disabled child is an area of grave concern. The NGO Community and the social workers whom we interviewed in preparing this report generally agreed with statements contained in the Initial Country Report. However, the issue of delivery and effective management of the services available is a matter of grave concern especially in regards to the age group 13-18. The management structure and mode of operation of the Government operated facility at Gunthropes came in for harsh criticism. One volunteer

at the facility lamented the manner in which the disabled clients are treated describing it as “scandalous”.¹⁶

Article 24: Child’s Right to Health & Health Services

The statistical data presented in the Initial Country Report are generally accepted by the people closest to the work – i.e. the clinic nurses, social workers, volunteers. The data related to births and deaths and the reasons that are given by the government are regarded as true by the St. John’s Clinic nurse. However, she did express some concerns about those statistics related to the delivery of services after the age of five.

Practitioners have also expressed concern about the Government’s policy priorities. Proactive and preventative programmes, some funded by outside donors, have not been sustained, even after obtaining additional funding.¹⁷ Concerns also expressed about the infrastructure at some of the clinics with some workers suggesting that some of these clinics should be closed. The resources available - both financial and material - are said to be woefully inadequate.

The social workers whom we interviewed endorsed the data presented on HIV/AIDS and the child and the government’s reported response. Special concerns are shown by the AIDS Secretariat to children such as private treatment and no public exposure. The fact that most children are cared for at home by their families and its extensions, is also considered a plus by the Secretariat. There is a ward at the Holberton Hospital that is used for the treatment for AIDS patients but there is no special facility for children. There is also concern in regard to unreported cases and to the trend of immigration of whole families.

The Initial Country Report made mention of the number of trained workers who address the many issues that concern the right of the child to health and health services. However, in conducting the research for this report we spoke to workers who assert that they are underutilized and often ignored. Many decry the misplacement of personnel, resources and responsibilities.¹⁸

The lack of a clear policy, even though a draft National Youth Policy is said to have been developed some time back is also an issue with youth and social workers. The constant shifting of ministers, ministries, departments and personnel that have responsibility is often cited for the lack of coherent response. The Initial Country Report mentions the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE), and this is an example of the incoherence that is cited. The UNV funded a local volunteer, a teacher, Ms. Clara Parks, for a year to

¹⁶ Just as we were putting the finishing touches on this report, one of the residents of the Amazing Grace home for disabled children died. POWA was distressed to read in the paper that the home was soliciting assistance from the general public in order to raise the \$4,000 required for the child’s funeral.

¹⁷ UNFPA funded and extended an adolescent outreach project aimed at fertility and sexuality.

¹⁸ These workers point to the fact that the Boys Training School, Comfort Hall falls under the Ministry of Public Safety as one example of such anomalies.

strengthen the programme but when her contract was up, the Government transferred her out of the programme without making any arrangements for a suitable replacement.

The comments on this article are that the stated priorities of those in authority and the realities of those on the ground are somehow not connecting. Many involved question the willingness to implement sound policies and also the willingness to acknowledge the resources that are available to carry them through.

Article 26: Child's Right to Benefit from Social Security

The vagueness of the Initial Report in relation to this article also reflects the government's response on the ground. The only instrument that avails coverage as described in the article is the survivors benefit granted through regulations made under sections of the Social Security Act. It is available to orphans up to the age of 16 years in some cases and up to 18 in others. There is no stated or planned policy that addresses the issue of coverage.

The social workers whom we interviewed expressed concern about the inadequacy of the existing legislative and regulatory framework. However, they were unable to provide specific recommendations for ameliorating the situation.

Article 27: Child's Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

The issue of maintenance as parental and governmental responsibility is enshrined in law. However, the enforcement, collection and payment as well as the implementation of the allowable penalties constitute a travesty. One of major stumbling blocks is that many of the enforcers, i.e. the police, are also offenders. The fact that payments come from the consolidated funds of the treasury also puts distress on the process. Mothers are often left waiting for long periods to access the funds due to them. There have been numerous publicized cases that point out the flaws in the system.

The Initial Report does not address the parts of the article involving "adequate standards of living". This information would in some part be revealed in a census but given the fact the last census results have not been officially released, interested parties are forced to rely on guesstimates and dated data.

Recommendations

- There appears to be a great need for proactive, cohesive policies and practical methods of implementation of such policies.
- There is also a need for institutional and infrastructural strengthening for efficient delivery of the existing services.
- Greater and more meaningful participation of social workers and civil society in the formulation of policies is desired and recommended.
- The Government must undertake to collect, analyze and disseminate data and quality of life indicators which can be utilized to inform decision-making and programming.

EDUCATION, LEISURE & CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Article 28: Child's Right to Education

Compulsory primary education, available free to all

Section 43 (1) of the Education Act, makes it compulsory for all children aged 5 – 16 years of age to attend school. All Government primary schools are free to all.

Different forms of secondary education including general and vocational education available and accessible to every child with appropriate measures in place for free education and offer of financial assistance in case of need

Section 44 of the Education Act states that it is the duty of parents/guardians of every child of compulsory school age to ensure that their child receives efficient, full time education suitable to his/her age, ability and aptitude.

The enforcement of the 11 plus examinations however sometimes forces children who are late developers or for other reasons unable to perform at that specific time to become sidelined in the education system. Apart from the stigma attached to failure, the post primary system has not produced the results which could deem it a success.

The board of Education Act passed in 1994, section 9 (1) has responsibility for carrying out the Governments policies as they relate to, but not limited to, the areas of studies and training for the award of bursaries, financial assistance and scholarships and also administering and managing the textbook assistance scheme. This scheme provides textbooks to children in both primary and secondary schools.

There are instances however where books are unavailable for significant parts of the academic year and where students are at a distinct disadvantage because of this.

With respect to the award of bursaries and financial assistance to deserving students, there are significantly more applications than available funds. Timeliness of disbursement is becoming more difficult for the Board of Education as government's contributions into the scheme are generally irregular.

Higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity

The Board of Education through the National Scholarship Committee has the responsibility to make scholarships and bursaries available to qualifying persons to attend tertiary institutions at home, in the region and around the world.

Recommendations

- A mechanism must be put in place to ensure that qualifying persons can receive disbursements in a timely manner.
- The Government must commit to paying in the Education Levy contributions deducted from the wages and salaries of its employees.¹⁹

Educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children

The Ministry of Education through its Guidance and Counselling programmes has counsellors in five of the nine Government Secondary schools. As part of the counsellor's functions, educational and vocational information and guidance is available to students of those schools. An annual International College Fair is also organised by the Ministry to widen the information base on career options.

Recommendation

- All secondary schools should be allocated guidance counsellors. Educational and vocational information and guidance should be included as part of the timetable to help with students' decision making process rather than waiting until when they have come to the end of their course of study.

Measures to ensure students' regular attendance at school and reduce drop-out rates

The administration of education is divided into two main categories: General Administration and Educational Administration. The Chief Education Officer is responsible for Educational Administration which includes such matters as teaching staff,

¹⁹ While such deductions are withheld from the employees' pay, the Government has not been transferring the monies to the Board of Education. As a result, the Board has to rely exclusively on contributions from the private sector. The failure to issue disbursements in a timely manner has been attributed to the Government's non-payment.

curricula, finance and also the conduct in schools, school premises, student admissions, attendance and discipline.

Whereas the majority of schools keep relatively good records of the daily attendance of students at school, the Ministry of Education only has comprehensive statistics of the schools in Antigua for 1994-1995. At the pre-school level there were slightly more boys than girls enrolled in 1994-1995 – 51% males to 49% females. At the Primary school level, enrolment showed 53.4% males to 46.6% females. At the Secondary school level in 1994-1995, there were 44.9% males and 55.1% females enrolled in all 14 secondary schools. “At this level, it can be seen females far outnumber males.” This situation continues to persist as, in 1999-2000; available figures indicate that 43.3% male and 56.7% females were enrolled in 13 secondary schools. Few studies have been done to determine the reasons for these trends.

Recommendations

- More schools need to be built in order to resolve the problems associated with overcrowding.
- More attention needs to be paid to the drop out rates of mainly the males but of students in general from our schools.

Appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity and conformity with the present convention

Secondary Schools in Antigua and Barbuda have developed various methods to address the issue of discipline in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity. Included are demerit and detention systems, counselling and corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is administered by the Principals or by the Principal’s designate in special cases.

Recommendations

- A greater effort has to be made to develop the self- esteem in the nation’s youth. Stronger programmes are needed in the schools to instill positive attitudes and thus decrease the anger and low self-esteem experienced by many of our youth. This will lead to a reduced need for negative disciplinary measures such as corporal punishment.

- The school day should provide a concrete structure whereby young people can become part of service clubs and other activities in a safe and supervised environment.

International cooperation in matters relating to education with a view to eliminating ignorance and illiteracy and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods

The Government of Antigua through the Ministry of Education is committed to a number of regional and international initiatives relating to education. The Chief Education Officer or his designate has a responsibility to take decisions in light of the above.

Article 29: The Aims of Education

Development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities

The Government's Education Policy states that the child should be primarily "socialised as a human being". The Educational system is expected to develop creative/innovative and adaptable men and women and in the process, identify, nurture and cultivate as fully as possible each child's capability, aptitude, skill and strength".

At most secondary schools some technical/vocational subjects are included in their curricula along with the more traditional subjects. Technical/vocational training, Information Technology and Hospitality Training are available to children in the nation at specific Technical/vocational centres, the Free Trade Zone Institute of Training and Technology and the Antigua and Barbuda Hospitality Institute²⁰ respectively.

There is a Sports and Games Department in the Ministry of Youth Empowerment, Sports, Carnival and Community Development. Most schools have organised sports and games.

Community and Club teams have developed significantly whereas actual school- sports development seems to have declined.

²⁰ The Hospitality Institute (formerly known as the Hotel Training School) has been non-functional for a number of years. It is expected to resume full operations some time in 2004.

There is a striking lack of cultural and performing arts opportunities within the schools' curricula. Children who have an opportunity to be involved in these activities privately are called upon on special occasions to represent the schools.

Recommendation

- Students should be exposed to sports as well as cultural and performing arts in the school system in order to provide greater opportunities to enhance the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities.

Development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms

- 1. Development of respect for the child's parents, his/her own cultural identity, language and values, for national values of the country in which the child is living, country of origin, and for different civilizations**
- 2. Preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society**
- 3. Development of aspect for the natural environment**

The current approach to education with respect to information gathering (knowledge), skills development and attitudes provides avenues so that the child is exposed to some of the necessary life skills.

Parental counselling is available for adults with specific needs.

Recommendation

- With respect to Article 29 items 2, 3, 4 and 5, a more holistic approach to education is needed within the school system. Much of the preparation of the youth for civic responsibility is taught in service/community/church/religious settings. Whereas there is much merit in this, there is a large number of youth not affiliated to any of these organisations, which is not exposed to these issues. The Government may have to develop policies to fit these opportunities into the school system or pay the high price of delinquency, as youth become adults.

Article 30: Child's Right to Leisure, Play & Culture

A child belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin is not denied the right in community with other members of his/her group to enjoy his/her own culture to profess and practise his/her own religion or to use his/her own language

There is no discrimination in access to public schools for children of compulsory school age.

There have been instances where children of minority ethnic, religious and linguistic groups find it difficult to access the public school system. This is symptomatic of the limited spaces in public schools which, in unwritten policy, tend to be held for nationals.

SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

Article 22: Refugee Children

The problem of refugee children has not yet manifested itself in Antigua. Children who migrate to Antigua usually do so in the company of parents or guardians or to meet parents residing in the country. Also the nation's immigration policies allow entry for unaccompanied children only if they are received by an adult.

Article 30: Children of minorities or indigenous groups

Antigua is a country in which many cultures exist due to an open immigration policy. However there is no discrimination against the children who have migrated to Antigua and Barbuda. They receive free education and free medical services.²¹

Article 32: Child Labour

The Education Act and the Labour Laws of Antigua and Barbuda act as a deterrent for child labour in most cases. However if a child under the age of sixteen (16) becomes pregnant while in school, all formal school education for this child ceases. If these children are from homes that are economically sound, alternative methods of education which caters for teenage mothers may be sought. If not these girls must find gainful employment regardless of her age. The minimum age for employment of sixteen (16) is therefore disregarded.

There is no system in place in Antigua to assist these young girls in providing adequately for their children. These children must therefore fend for themselves.

Recommendation

- The Government should be more proactive in assisting teenage mothers who are generally ill-equipped to support themselves and their babies.

Article 33: Children and Drug Abuse

In Antigua & Barbuda there is little or no enforcement governing the sale and use of alcohol among children under the age of eighteen (18). Any child can purchase alcohol. Often children can be seen publicly consuming alcohol. Under aged drinking takes place not only at carnival but at fairs, concerts, car races etc. Alcohol is generally sold at almost all social activities patronized by children under eighteen (18).

²¹ See segment on General Principles for commentary on the plight of Hispanic children in Antigua & Barbuda.

In the elementary/primary schools there is a drug awareness programme in the schools called the **Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE)**. However only a small group the students are exposed to the programme. The programme is not continued into the secondary school curriculum.

At different times in the year especially around Drug Awareness month there is a visible anti-drug campaign. There are billboards promoting a “Say no to Drugs” campaign in the city.

Recommendations

- The DARE campaign should be expanded to all schools.
- There should be a greater focus on preventing the use and abuse of alcohol and marijuana - the two major drugs of choice in Antigua.
- There should be a greater effort by the law enforcement department to get drugs off the street. Too many times one can view the sale of marijuana on street corners in the communities.
- The laws governing the sale to, and use of alcohol by children under eighteen (18) need to be revisited and enforced. It must be made clear to vendors that children under the age of eighteen (18) should not be allowed to purchase alcohol.

Article 34 - Sexual exploitation of children

Antigua & Barbuda has had a history of the sexual exploitation of children as the statistics for teenage pregnancies shows:

	Age of Mother at Delivery					
	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>17</u>
1997	2	-	7	14	21	34
1998	-	3	5	10	29	32
1999	-	1	4	12	27	38
2000	1	1	4	17	30	34
2001	-	1	5	13	32	52

Under the Sexual Offences Act for 1995 a child cannot legally consent to sex until they have attained the age of sixteen. However this law is not strictly enforced. If a child under the age of sixteen (16) shows up to the nation’s hospital to give birth to a child, there is presently no follow up procedure and no one is arrested or charged with statutory rape. Also parents in Antigua and Barbuda seldom do anything when a child is sexually molested. There is an issue of pride and ignorance which comes before what is right

under the law. There is popular belief held as well that the children are responsible for what happened to them. Therefore very little is done to protect the interest of the child after the sexual abuse takes place.

Many persons in Antigua and Barbuda are not aware of the laws governing sex with minors. Also the reporting mechanism in Antigua needs lots of work. When victims report cases of statutory rape to the Police Department the questioning often leaves the victims feeling even more degraded. The system is not supportive of the victims. Also the statistics for the number of convictions for statutory rape is not collected as separate data in Antigua on a yearly basis.

In 2003 Parliament passed a Child Protection Act which should aid in improving the current situation. The Child Protection Agency is yet to be set up, and mandatory reporting as stipulated by the law is yet to begin so exploitation continues.

In 2001 there was a discovery of a child prostitution and pornography ring in which adults were arrested for soliciting sexual activities from minors. This case was not given the priority it deserved by the legal system. Some charges were dismissed against some of the offenders and one child victim has been waiting for two years for her day in court. Every time the child showed up to court the case was postponed for one reason or another. This was of grave concern as there was no speedy end for this child's trauma. There have been many articles written in the local newspapers on this issue and the consensus is that the adults, who included a number of prominent businessmen, were given special treatment in this troubling case.

Recommendations

- A better reporting system be put in place for victims of sexual exploitation.
- The persons handling these reports be properly trained so they could be sensitive to the present needs and concern of the victims.
- The mandatory reporting system be put in place immediately for persons who come in contact with children of sexual exploitation – e.g. nurses, doctors, lawyers, teachers, pastors etc.

Article 35: Prevention of abduction, sale and trafficking

The abduction sale and trafficking in children has not manifested itself as a problem in Antigua. However there are no laws in place to deal with this issue in the event it does manifest.

Article 37: Torture, Degrading Treatment and Deprivation of Liberty

The Convention stipulates that children should be held in separate holding areas to adults when arrested. This is not done in Antigua & Barbuda, and children are often placed in

the same holding cell for some period of time with adult criminals. Similarly juvenile cases are tried in the same courts as adults.

There are no separate prisons for children who have committed serious crimes. Minors are normally housed with adults to serve their sentences.

There is a concern though that some juveniles detained are allegedly subjected to beatings by police officers in order to solicit confessions. One attorney stated that she has seen bruises on young clients which they claimed were caused by blows received from police officers.

Article 39: Rehabilitation of child victims

The housing for the rehabilitation of child victims is woefully inadequate. Therefore children who are homeless and those who have committed minor offences are housed together. It is recommended that this be changed as the needs for the children are different. The home for boys at Comfort Hall is a Government operated institute which is run down and does not meet the needs of the country. There are still no Government-operated homes for girls.

There is not a full social structure in place for the counseling of children who suffer from emotional difficulties. There are many schools without a full-time counselor on staff. Students with emotional difficulties are many times referred to CCOPE, The Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of Emotional Health in Children. This is a Non-governmental Organization with some government funding where volunteers work with children who have emotional problems.

Recommendation

- There is need for Children who suffers loss of a parent or sibling through death to receive mandatory counseling.

EPILOGUE

Since the initial submission of this report in January 2004, there has been a change of government in Antigua & Barbuda. While the current government has only been in power for just over two months, there have been some preliminary indications of the Government's intent to address some of the concerns raised in this report.

Two of the primary campaign promises of the new administration were the introduction of a school feeding programme and a uniform grant to assist parents with providing for their school-aged children. Within the past few weeks, it has been announced that committees have been established in order to implement these two measures in time for the new academic year.

POWA is also encouraged by the new Government's pledge to engage civil society partners in ongoing dialogue. The new Prime Minister Honourable Baldwin Spencer has pledged to enshrine this commitment in the law of the land by establishing a National Economic & Social Council (NESC) as the formal channel for such consultations. It is anticipated that this Council will be made up of private sector, community based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs.

It should also be noted that the new Government has created a Social Improvement Ministry. While it is still too early to comment on the efficacy of this Ministry, POWA is optimistic that its creation is indicative of a tangible commitment to remedy the social ills that afflict the nation's youth.