Caribbean newspapers are replete with the despairing accounts of the violence against women and children. In Trinidad, on 15 March, a Dominica woman and her three children were stabbed to death, allegedly by a Dominican man whom she had refused to marry. In Trinidad and Tobago where many murders of women have been committed this year, on International Women's Day 27-year-old Polly Ramasami was chopped to death by a male relative in the presence of her 11-year-old daughter. On 12 March, Jennifer Ram, 26 and mother of three was chopped to death by her husband of 11 years. The killing of Jennifer, in the presence of her three small children, was the culmination of an extremely abusive relationship which started when Jennifer was an unwanted child of 15. In the words of one relative "he used to beat her for every little thing". In March in Tobago, a 17-year-old girl, stabbed to death her 22-year-old brother and his 26-year-old wife in the presence of their three children. These cases of femicide are the culmination of a vicious cycle which defines the face of our region. While there is no doubt that the region has started to address gender-based violence, very few prosecutions proceed against men who perpetrate criminal acts against their intimate partners and the dominant message continues to be that crime committed against a female is to perpetuate an ideological notion of masculinity and femininity. Commentaries on violence against women are replete with the notion of woman as the property of another and in the denial of protection of the female person. The idea of female infidelity as the cause of all violence rooted in patriarchy, a value system which not only accepts but perpetuates the notion of woman as the property of another and in the denial of protection of the female person. The idea of female infidelity as the cause of all violence rooted in patriarchy, a value system which not only accepts but perpetuates the notion of woman as the property of another and in the denial of protection of the female person.

In March 2001, in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, a man was sentenced to three years imprisonment for the killing of his 24-year-old wife whom he alleged had been unfaithful to him. In passing the sentence after the jury found the accused guilty, but of murder but of manslaughter, the judge reportedly stated that "it was clear that the jury accepted the man's evidence that his wife had conducted herself in a manner inconsistent with the love he had for her and the family life that they shared. It turns out that the killing of women is sufficiently "normal". This trend typifies a discourse on gender equality and the advancement of women, particularly in the education sector. The understanding that violence against women is most often an expression of unequal power relations between women and men has led to an analysis of the ways in which socializing agencies (schools, families, churches, the courts) promote and maintain stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. The United Nations human rights system, based as it is on the idea of the indivisibility of all rights (political, social and economic), guarantee family responsibilities and rights and equality of women and men. The understanding that violence against women is most often an expression of unequal power relations between women and men has led to an analysis of the ways in which socializing agencies (schools, families, churches, the courts) promote and maintain stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. The understanding that violence against women is most often an expression of unequal power relations between women and men has led to an analysis of the ways in which socializing agencies (schools, families, churches, the courts) promote and maintain stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. The United Nations human rights system, based as it is on the idea of the indivisibility of all rights (political, social and economic), guarantee family responsibilities and rights and equality of women and men. The understanding that violence against women is most often an expression of unequal power relations between women and men has led to an analysis of the ways in which socializing agencies (schools, families, churches, the courts) promote and maintain stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. The United Nations human rights system, based as it is on the idea of the indivisibility of all rights (political, social and economic), guarantee family responsibilities and rights and equality of women and men. The understanding that violence against women is most often an expression of unequal power relations between women and men has led to an analysis of the ways in which socializing agencies (schools, families, churches, the courts) promote and maintain stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity. The United Nations human rights system, based as it is on the idea of the indivisibility of all rights (political, social and economic), guarantee family responsibilities and rights and equality of women and men. The understanding that violence against women is most often an expression of unequal power relations between women and men has led to an analysis of the ways in which socializing agencies (schools, families, churches, the courts) promote and maintain stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity.
In November 2000, the Directorate of Gender Affairs was presented with the opportunity to access technical assistance from UNDP to mobilize women to effectively participate in the Constitutional Reform process. The Directorate seized the opportunity and conducted its first meeting with Mrs. Ingalill Colbro, Senior Policy Adviser/Civil Society in November 2000.

Ms Colbro emphasized the importance of participating and highlighted the need for women to mobilize and work together in an organized manner so that they could effectively impact the process. At that meeting it became evident that participants lacked an appreciation of how the constitution could promote the cause of democratic governance. Participants agreed that in order to proceed they would need to increase their understanding of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda.

Constitutional Workshop for Women

A constitutional workshop for women was held in January 2001. The aims of the workshop were three-fold:

- To explain in simple language the meaning of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda;
- To persuade participants that knowledge of how the Constitution works is a source of empowerment for civil society to participate in the reconstruction of a democratic society; and
- To prepare a list of issues on which to make submissions before the Constitutional Reform Commission (CRC).

The workshop took the form of a lecture on the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda, followed by an identification of issues. It was then decided that the issues discussed would be put before a larger group of women for further consideration and a request for a special hearing for women with the CRC.

Women’s Constitutional Conference

As a follow up to the Constitutional workshop, a Women’s Constitutional Conference was held on 8 March 2001, International Women’s Day. The theme of the Conference was “Gender Equality under the Constitution”.

The Conference was organized as part of the process to ensure that women were adequately educated to effectively contribute to the current Constitutional debate. It aimed to raise awareness of gender issues for proposal to the CRC and to develop strategies for future action.

The conference attracted over 200 women from various governmental, NGOs, church groups, service organizations and associations. Participants discussed the following aspects of the Constitutions and agreed on the issues for submission to the CRC:

- The preamble;
- Electoral reform;
- Mechanisms for ensuring gender equality; and
- Social and economic rights for women.

Special hearing for women with the CRC

At a special hearing for women with the CRC on 20 March, representatives from various women’s organizations attended. Submissions were made to address gender equality in the following areas:

(a) Public service and public life;
(b) Electoral reform;
(c) Women’s social and economic rights;
(d) The Ombudsman;
(e) Gender Equality Commission;
(f) International conventions such as CRC and CEDAW; and
(g) Other issues such as the Rights for minority groups, the disabled and the elderly.

As part of the ongoing process of review the group reserved the right to return to the Commission with other views in the near future. The coming together of groups was to submit the initial thoughts and the group will be presenting at a later date the full written proposal.
Human Rights - the Context for Women’s Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly on 10 December, 1948 defines and codifies human rights standards and sets forth the essential principle of equality and non-discrimination. Beyond the general provisions on non-discrimination found in the major human rights instruments, the United Nations has addressed the pervasive and structural nature of violation of women’s human rights through the formulation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Women’s Convention).

The goal of the Women’s Convention is to redress inequities in a comprehensive manner through the elimination of direct and indirect causes of discrimination. Discrimination is understood as:

"any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

The Convention, which has been signed by all independent Caribbean countries, contains provisions addressing political and civil rights as well as economic and social rights. The bringing together of these rights was based on an understanding of the mutually reinforcing relationship between women’s economic dependency and their lack of political and civil autonomy.

The enforcement of women’s human’s rights was further advanced by the development of an Optional Protocol to the Women’s Convention. The Protocol, which came into force on 22 December 2000, provides two procedures for the bringing of complaints to the attention of the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) alleging violations of the Convention: a communications procedure allowing individual women, or groups of women, to submit claims of violations of rights to the CEDAW Committee and an inquiry procedure enabling the Committee, upon the receipt of “reliable information” to initiate inquiries into situations of grave and systematic violations of women’s rights.
Commentary: Male Marginalisation or Gender Justice?
by Michelle Rowley

Having read the summary of Dr. Eudine Barriteau's work on male marginalisation, titled "Male Marginalisation and Masculinity in the Caribbean: Policy Implication," I want to enter the ongoing discussion on male marginalisation.

The point of departure taken by Riley in his response "Males and Females are Victims of Marginalization" (December, 2000) does not adequately capture Barriteau's thesis. Therefore his subsequent analysis, while relevant, misses the broader complexities of her argument. Riley reads Barriteau's work to conclude that it is "absurd" to think of male marginality because of the prevalence of an ideology of male dominance and privilege (patriarchy) in society. While Barriteau does highlight the pervasive nature of male dominance and privilege, her work extends beyond this dualism.

Nonetheless, I see the work as a very sobering and valuable contribution to our discussions of male marginalisation in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, I see the work as a very sobering and valuable contribution to our discussions of male marginalisation in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, I see the work as a very sobering and valuable contribution to our discussions of male marginalisation in the Caribbean. Nonetheless, I see the work as a very sobering and valuable contribution to our discussions of male marginalisation in the Caribbean.

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Males and...
The Caribbean Youth Summit, October 1996, found that existing programmes do not adequately address the needs and have little or no input from young people themselves. The participants called for a systematic and comprehensive policy on adolescent reproductive health and rights, in line with the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and for legally protected rights to social and medical services.

The young people called for guidance and help in making positive choices about sexual activity, including abstinence; and for their recognition as equal, active and responsible partners in the efforts to bring reproductive health services to young people. They specifically called for the right of adolescents to information, services and decision-making in reproductive health matters, and for their recognition as equal partners in the effort to bring reproductive health services to young people. They also called for the recognition of the right of adolescent girls who get pregnant to return to school in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW].

The data presented in the sidebar and the statements of young people themselves should lead us to examine from a rights-based perspective, the Caribbean's status in regard to supporting the sexual and reproductive rights of young people. The International Conference on Population and Development, in 1994, adopted a rights-based approach to population and development. This rights-based approach was re-affirmed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and at the ICPD+5 and Beijing+5, and built on existing international human rights agreements. The main components of their approach are gender equity and equality, sexual and reproductive rights and a client-centred approach to health care, as well as the recognition of adolescents' rights to confidentiality, informed consent and services and parental guidance.

Sexual and reproductive rights as they relate to adolescents include the rights to information and services, privacy, confidentiality, respect and informed consent in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC] and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW].

The countries of the Caribbean were in the forefront of many of the negotiations that resulted in the final documents of these international agreements. In particular, the Caribbean actively participated in the negotiations leading to the ICPD, the Beijing Platform for Action and the plan of action for the 5th World Conference on Women, which were adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

Steps have been taken, for example, to reorient and expand services to better meet clients' needs for sexual and reproductive health services, and to address gender equity and equality, and to promote sexual and reproductive health rights for adolescents. However, much more needs to be done if the intents of these rights-based approaches are to be fulfilled. Specifically in the Caribbean, the issues of adolescent sexual and reproductive health cannot be ignored when the unmet needs, some of which are illustrated above are so many.

The Caribbean region is becoming aware and beginning to respond to the sexual and reproductive health needs of its young people. There are individual projects and initiatives in the region that have begun to address the issue but much more needs to be done. Financial constraints have impacted on the coming to fruition of creative programmes for providing adolescent services. The international donor commitments of funding fall far short of the agreed upon levels pledged at Cairo, and the Caribbean is finding it more and more difficult to compete for the dwindling funds. In many instances it is the non-governmental organizations [NGOs] that have taken the lead in providing services for adolescents. With little or no financial support, NGOs can take risks, explore and prepare the way, and often move more agilely than governments can.

Clearly the way forward must be to reaffirm the rights-based approaches to reproductive health, and it must be based on strong and smart partnerships between government and civil society and between the actors in civil society themselves.

**Special points of interest:**
- 34.1% of all school Caribbean adolescents have had sexual intercourse.
- 50% of boys and 28% of girls state that 1st sexual intercourse was at age 16 or younger.
- 66% had sexual intercourse before 15.
- 26.1% were sexually active at age 15.
- [Data from 1990/91 study of adolescent health in the Caribbean](http://196.32.51.36/gender/Apr2001/Sexual_and_Reproductive_rights1.htm)
Issues Affecting Indigenous Women in Guyana

A report on "Indigenous Women: [Title Paper]" commissioned by the National Commission on Women in Guyana reveals that Amerindian women are among the most economically, socially, politically and culturally marginalized groups in Guyana. The reason for this is because they are both indigenous and women.

The Amerindians in Guyana live primarily in the hinterland of the country and engage in a subsistence lifestyle consisting of slash and burn agriculture and the utilization of forest products for the consumption and income of their communities. They are the descendants of the indigenous Guianas, who are known as the purun of Guianas people. According to the report, 78% of households headed by Amerindians live below the poverty line.

The culture of the Amerindians people is very traditional and women's roles and values are generally very high in their communities. Women have more limited alternatives for employment, for example craft production, which brings in small and irregular sums of money. In addition, Amerindian women who leave their villages in search of employment are subject to withholding of salaries, ill treatment and sexual exploitation. These increased activities in the hinterland have also brought with them social, economic, cultural and environmental change, some of which are seen as definite threats to the Amerindian people and their way of life and which affect the status of the Amerindian women.

Attempts on the part of non-Amerindians to address and advance the status of the Amerindian women have not been successful. Among the few exceptions are the Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana, the Guyanese Organisation of Indigenous Peoples and their Alliance, the Amerindian Action Movement of Guyana.

Amerindian women continue to be under-represented in Guyana's political and educational structures. At the level of the national political assembly, only two women have been elected to represent the Amerindian constituency. At the level of the village council, which is the first level of political administration in which Amerindian women can exercise their political rights, women's representation is much lower. Although efforts have been made to improve health conditions in the Amerindian communities, there is much that needs to be done to ensure that women have access to health services. A lack of effective public health education programmes designed to sensitize and create awareness in the Amerindian communities as to the need to maintain good health conditions in Amerindian communities.

The health status of Amerindian women and children, as outlined by the World Bank in 1997, is often described as very limited. The effects of maternal, infant and child health problems are further exacerbated by the limited availability of health services and the delays in the response to the need of Amerindians people. The Ministry of Labour was asked to look into reports of sexual exploitation. The increased activities in the hinterland have also brought with them social, economic, cultural and environmental change, some of which are seen as definite threats to the Amerindian people and their way of life and which affect the status of the Amerindian women.

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