

Information on the Montevideo Consensus

Introduction

Background/Country Profile

Antigua and Barbuda is a small, twin-island nation located between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The population is approximately one hundred, two thousand and twelve (102,012) and the capital and largest port and city is St. John's in Antigua and Codrington in Barbuda. As per the findings of the 2005/2006 Country Poverty Assessment (CPA), the country's poverty headcount stands at 18.3 percent. A new CPA will be conducted in 2020/2021 to provide updated data.

Overview

A. Full Integration of Population Dynamics into Sustainable Development with Equality and Respect for Human Rights

The Ministry of Social Transformation, Human Resource Development, Youth & Gender Affairs is responsible for providing services and programmes aimed at improving standards of living and thus reduce poverty levels. Other Ministries and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) also offer programmes and services which help to reduce poverty and hence, help to break the cycles of exclusion and inequality.

The UNICEF-funded Integrated Social Protection Systems project is based on a National Safety Net Assessment which was conducted by the World Bank in 2010 as a follow-up from the Country Poverty Assessment (2006) and the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (2011-2015).

The main goals and objectives of this project are:

- To review and repeal the existing Poor Relief Act of 1961 and to provide the Government of Antigua and Barbuda with the appropriate, supportive, legal framework to improve integration of social protection policies and programmes germane to the current and future needs of the poor and most vulnerable in the country. To date, the first reading of the National Social Protection Bill has been completed and a Functional Review of the Board of Guardians which is the country's only social cash transfer programme) has been completed and submitted.

The culmination of the Project should will also set the platform for the following:

- i. A National Social Protection Policy
- ii. A Central Beneficiaries Registry. Support will be given by the European Union (EU).
- iii. A Common Targeting Mechanism
- iv. A Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System

The Financial Empowerment Centre (FEC) was started through financial and technical support from the Organisation of American States (OAS) and is geared towards fostering financial independence for residents living at or below the poverty line. This programme's main objective is to assist the financially vulnerable persons in society to become more self-reliant through the provision of free financial coaching or counselling and in so doing contribute to the development of the economy. The FEC is now in operation and will also function as an Exit Strategy from the government's cash assistance programme once the new Act is passed.

The Home Advancement Programme for the Indigent (HAPI) programme was started in November, 2016 and focuses on repairing homes for indigent or poor households. The chief objective of this programme is to help the indigent population to have better access to decent and safe housing.

The Ministry of Labour offers employment and training opportunities to unemployed youths. The One-Stop Employment Centre (OSEC) offers numerous useful services ranging from job placements, training and referrals and an active Labour Market Programme which prepares young people for the work force. One of the most prominent programmes is the Antigua & Barbuda Skills Training & Empowerment Programme (ABSTEP), launched in 2013 to improve the income and employability of low-income, low-skilled workers through two (2) complementary interventions: Temporary Employment Programme (TEP) and Training Programme (TP).

Soup Kitchen

The Soup Kitchen was opened in February, 2019 in the capital city of St. John's and serves to provide daily hot and healthy meals for vagrants, the homeless or needy persons.

National Vocational and Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NVRCD)

The country has a National Vocational and Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NVRCD). There are three (3) primary services offered by the NVRCD:

- *Teaching independent living skills to clients
- *Teaching trade or occupational skills to clients
- *Providing assistance with work placements

There is also an Association for Persons with Disabilities whose mandate is to change the attitude of society towards children & adults with disabilities, and to improve the services available to disabled persons in Antigua & Barbuda. The ABAPD aims to provide access, equality, empowerment and opportunity for disabled residents.

Eye Care

The Government is collaborating with the Caribbean Council for the Blind (CCB) to provide all public sector employees and officials with a comprehensive eye examination (without charge) every two (2) years.

Public Sector employees who are earning less than EC\$2,000.00 or US\$ 740.00 monthly after statutory deductions (and who need prescription glasses) will have their spectacles paid for by the Government. This will be facilitated by the CCB invoicing the respective Ministries for remission to the Ministry of Finance. On the other hand, employees earning more than EC\$2,000.00 will get 50-60% off all eye glasses including progressive-transition, transparent-transition, bifocals and single vision lenses.

Cancer Treatment Centre

In June 2016, Antigua and Barbuda opened the Cancer Centre of the Eastern Caribbean, advancing the health care infrastructure of the region. The Minister of Health cited the establishment of the centre as a major step forward to reduce the cost of healthcare services pertaining to cancer treatments, since patients (especially the poorer persons) would no longer have to travel overseas for treatments.

B. Priority Area - Rights, Needs, Responsibilities and Requirements of Girls, Boys, Adolescents and Youths

As stipulated in Section 27 (1) of The Education Act, 2008, it is mandatory for all children to attend school between the ages of five (5) and 16.

A number of social assistance programmes are offered by the Ministry of Education, Science & Technology to help students in various essential ways. These programmes include: the National School Meals Programme, the School Uniform Grant and the Free Textbook Scheme. The main goal of these programmes is poverty reduction.

Universal Secondary Education (USE) commenced in Antigua & Barbuda in 2012. The chief aim is to remove all barriers to students accessing secondary level education.

The fourth landed University of the West Indies (UWI) campus was opened in Five Islands, Antigua on 3rd September, 2019. This campus will make tertiary level education more attainable, affordable and accessible for Antiguan and Barbudans as well as other students in the member countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and beyond. UWI already has campuses in Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados.

Furthermore, the Department of Youth Affairs is the government agency responsible for national youth development and was established in 2005. The main services and programmes currently in place are as follows:

- Youth Leadership Training
- English Literacy Programme
- Skills Training
- Youth Education and Empowerment Programme (YEPP)
- Youth Media Network

The Department has noted that the main problems or setbacks that the youths are experiencing include the following:

- Youths are facing unemployment and that is why the YEOP programme and the skills training programmes were implemented. Approximately, 200 people have taken advantage of an opportunity for a second chance at academic success.
- Some youths are having a problem with literacy and for this reason, the English Literacy Programme was started.

The Youth Media Network is a very successful programme which has been ongoing for the past eight (8) years. The youths are trained to do videography, photography and journalism.

C. Priority Area - Ageing, Social Protection and Socio-economic Challenges

In collaboration with the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), Antigua & Barbuda is in the process of formulating a National Policy and Plan of Action on Healthy Ageing (2017 – 2027).

In general, the population of Antigua and Barbuda is living longer. In 2011, the life expectancy at birth in Antigua and Barbuda was 75.5 years in aggregate with 73.5 for males and 77.6 for females (PAHO, 2011). The average number of children per household (1.3) is quite low by Caribbean standards, suggesting there presently exists a phase of declining birth rates (Kairi, 2007).

There are many notable services offered to the elderly in Antigua and Barbuda, for example: The Government Residential Assistance Care for the Elderly & Eligible (GRACE) Programme offers:

- ❖ Eldercare assistance within the homes
- ❖ Beach Exercises
- ❖ Island Excursions
- ❖ Independence Concerts
- ❖ Christmas Food Packages
- ❖ Training School for Eldercare Assistants
- ❖ Paratransit Bus Service - Provides free and convenient transportation for the elderly and persons with disabilities who are unable to use the regular transportation services.

D. Priority Area – Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services

The AIDS Secretariat works collaboratively with other government departments, NGOs, the business and service sectors at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels in the country's response to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS.

In addition, the Antigua Planned Parenthood Association (APPA) provides multiple services including the provision of safe, reliable and affordable contraceptives and other medical services, for instance, daily blood pressure and blood sugar tests. APPA also offers other services, such as: pap smears, HIV testing, pre and post-test counselling. APPA personnel give lectures in sexual and reproductive health at the School of Nursing, the Royal Police Force of Antigua & Barbuda, the Antigua & Barbuda Defence Force and in primary and secondary schools. In the schools, the lectures complement the Health & Family Life Education (HFLE) programme.

Integrated Strategic Framework Project

The Government is partnering with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to conduct research on the main reasons for the notable decline in teenage pregnancy rates in the twin-island nation.

Field research was conducted in November, 2018 in order to ascertain the main underlying reasons for this decline. Hence, meetings were held with the key stakeholders from various professional spheres, such as: health, education, social transformation, etc.

E. Priority Area - Gender Equality (and Gender-Based Violence)

One of the main objectives of the Directorate of Gender Affairs (DoGA) is to promote gender equality and to put an end to violence and discrimination against women and girls.

Crisis Centre Equipment and Supplies

With the assistance of the United Nations Trust Fund, DoGA has sourced and secured all of the equipment and supplies for the functioning of the Support and Referral Centre (SARC). This fully resourced centre was established to provide a comprehensive client-centered service that will allow victims of gender-based and sexual violence and human trafficking to access a range of quality services and care at one location.

Men as Partners Programme

The Men as Partners (MAPs) Programme was an initiative spearheaded by the Directorate of Gender Affairs. Its reason for formation was to create and increase the presence of male advocates to support gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and to reduce/eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.

The main objectives or goals of the programme are to:

- To increase the number and presence of male advocates.
- To train other men and boys to become male advocates.
- To reduce negative gender stereotypes, in particular among young men and boys.
- To reduce/eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.
- To assist the Directorate of Gender Affairs in its initiatives.

Women Against Rape Inc.

Women Against Rape Inc. (WAR) was formed in 2008 in response to an unprecedented number of rape committed against women in their homes by masked nocturnal uninvited male(s). The primary focus at the time was to offer psycho-social assistance to women and families affected by the sexual violence and establish working relationship with the police, health facilities and the State enterprise with the responsibility for gender issues.

F. Priority Area – International Migration and Protection of the Human Rights of all Migrants

Trafficking in Persons Act and Migrant Smuggling Act

According to the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report, Antigua & Barbuda is deemed as a destination and transit country for men, women and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour.

Antigua & Barbuda has a Human Trafficking Investigative Committee and adheres to the Trafficking in Humans Act and the Migrant Smuggling Act. The number of cases is continually increasing over recent years although most of the cases are unreported. This includes both Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling. Amendments to the laws have recently been revised and education awareness has been increased.

G. Priority Area – Territorial Inequality, Spatial Mobility and Vulnerability

Antigua and Barbuda, like many Caribbean island states, possesses abundant renewable energy resources, including considerable solar, wind, ocean and biomass potential. The challenges in harnessing these resources are significant and include financial, technological, environmental and other barriers.

The Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) provides running water, electricity, telephone and Internet services to Antigua & Barbuda. In fact, APUA is the sole provider of water, electricity and landline telephone services in the twin-island nation. There are private companies that also provide Internet services.

Although Electricity is readily available island-wide, the country occasionally suffers from power outages and power surges. The monthly charges for electricity can sometimes be too much for poor and low-income households.

The country sometimes suffers from long periods of drought which negatively affect the water supply. This causes APUA to ration the water supply to consumers which involves providing a schedule as to when the water will be available. Sixty (60) percent of the water is sourced from desalination, thirty (30) percent from surface water and ten (10) percent from ground water. In the event of water shortages, residents are encouraged to have alternate or back-up sources of water, such as cisterns or tanks.

Producing water via reverse osmosis is a costly venture which requires a large amount of electricity. APUA tries to rely on surface and ground water as much as possible given the inexpensive nature of its production. As a drought prone island, relying on surface and ground water often becomes difficult and this thus creates the need for reverse osmosis.

Disaster Management & Response

The National Office of Disaster Services (NODS) provides administrative and emergency support based on requests from the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) to assist any of the CDEMA member states. NODS assists in the planning and execution of comprehensive stakeholder disaster management exercises at the national level. This is done to test the effectiveness of existing plans and to identify deficiencies that need to be addressed by various agencies. Hurricanes are natural disasters which are of great concern to the Caribbean region due to its location.

Both Barbuda and Dominica were severely damaged by hurricanes in September, 2017. The Bahamas was gravely devastated by Hurricane Dorian in September, 2019. There is no doubt that the adverse and devastating effects of climate change have been very damaging and disastrous for Small Island Developing States (SIDS); notably in the forms of extremely strong or catastrophic hurricanes and rising sea levels.