

## **St. Vincent and the Grenadines 2016 UPR: Joint Submission from the United Nations Subregional Team for Barbados and the OECS**

Please note that a significant challenge in assessing the human rights situation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (“St. Vincent” or “SVG”), and the Caribbean region, is the systematic lack of disaggregated data. As a result, to the extent that it is available, much of human rights related analyses for St. Vincent are available only through regional studies of the Eastern Caribbean region. It is also frequently somewhat dated. Further, it should be noted that current, official census data for St. Vincent is unavailable. Although the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (“GOVSVG”) conducted a national census in 2011, much of the census data was destroyed in a fire later that year. The GOVSVG is in the process of trying to recover what data is possible from that event.

### **I. Background and framework**

#### **A. Scope of international obligations**

- St. Vincent has ratified a significant number of the core international human rights treaties, although it is not a party to all. Also, St. Vincent has not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child Optional Protocol on a communications procedure (“CRC Optional Protocol”).

#### ***Recommendations to the Government:***

- Consistent with the recommendations issued during the 2011 Universal Periodic Review of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (“2011 UPR”), the UNST encourages SVG to ratify international human rights instruments to which it is not yet a party, especially the CRC Optional Protocol.

#### **B. Constitutional and legislative framework**

- St. Vincent is an electoral democracy. The Constitution provides for the election of 15 representatives to the unicameral House of Assembly. Six senators are also appointed to the chamber, four chosen by the government and two by the opposition; all serve five-year terms. The Prime Minister is the leader of the majority party. A Governor-General represents the British monarch as head of state.
- In 2009 the GOVSVG engaged in a constitutional reform effort after a consultative process with the people of St. Vincent from 2003-2008. Voters were asked whether they approved of a new Constitution which would have replaced the constitution in force since independence in 1979. Among the proposed changes to the Constitution were a number of provisions with positive human rights implications. However, the proposed new constitution was supported by only 43.13% of voters in the referendum, well short of the required two-thirds threshold.
- In 2015, Parliament passed a new **Domestic Violence Act (“DV Act”)** which introduced a comprehensive definition of domestic violence and made reporting of domestic violence obligatory.

- St. Vincent participated in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (“OECS”) **Family Law and Domestic Violence Legal and Judicial Reform Project (“OECS Project)”**<sup>1</sup> which resulted in the new DV Act. Additional draft legislation addressing the rights of children was also developed under the OECS Project. However, none of the draft bills are currently pending before Parliament.

***Recommendations to the Government:***

- Complete the review of the draft legislation relating to the rights of children and submit to Cabinet for approval as soon as possible.

**C. Institutional and human rights infrastructure and policy measures**

- During the 2011 UPR, St. Vincent did not accept any of the recommendations to establish an NHRI in accordance with the Paris Principles. Currently St. Vincent does not have an Ombudsman or a human rights institution of any kind.
- Although St. Vincent has made efforts to be responsive to some of the recommendations received during the 2011 UPR, the country’s ability to do so effectively would be greatly strengthened by the establishment of an institutionalized, permanent mechanism to coordinate Government engagement with international and regional human rights mechanisms aimed at implementing recommendations and carrying out required reporting.

***Recommendations to the Government:***

- With the support of international partners, establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles.
- Establish an inter-ministerial, institutionalized mechanism to monitor and report on the implementation of recommendations from international human rights mechanisms.

## **II. Cooperation with human rights mechanisms**

**A. Cooperation with treaty bodies**

- In 2015 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considered St. Vincent’s combined fourth to eighth periodic report which was produced with technical support from UN Women. The next report is due in 2019.
- With the support of UNICEF, in 2013 the GOVSVG submitted a state periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

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<sup>1</sup> The OECS Family Law and Domestic Violence Reform Project forms part of the wider Judiciary and Legal Reform Project of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court (ECSC) aimed at increasing the capacity of the judicial system and related institutions to improve the administration of law and quality of justice in the OECS. The project reflects the commitment by the OECS Governments to develop harmonized model family legislation for the Member States and to create a climate that would facilitate greater access and equity to justice as well as a more integrated and holistic approach to resolve matters related to the family and children.

### C. Cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

- To date, the GOVSVG has had to limited to no engagement with the OHCHR with regard to seeking technical assistance in meeting its international human rights obligations or facilitating human rights training and education.

## III. Implementation of international human rights obligations, taking into account applicable international humanitarian law

### A. Equality and non-discrimination

The constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, race, place of origin, political opinions, color, or creed, but no specific legislation addresses discrimination based sexual orientation, gender identity, or social status.

#### Gender equality and women's rights

- Societal attitudes towards women and cultural gender norms result in various forms of discrimination against women which includes gender-based violence; sexual harassment in the workplace and daily life; employment discrimination; income inequality; a lack of representation in electoral politics; and a paucity of women in positions of power in both the public and private sectors.
- There are discriminatory provisions and gaps in the legislative framework. There is no legislation addressing the issue of sexual harassment; the law does not explicitly prohibit marital rape; the Marriage Act provides a minimum legal age for marriage 15 years for girls and 16 years for boys; and employment legislation prohibits a woman over the age of eighteen from being employed at night in any “industrial undertaking.”
- Intimate partner violence, sexual violence and child sexual abuse are among the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence in St. Vincent, disproportionately affecting women and children. Cultural norms and values which sanction violence within relationships and which support unequal gender power relations have a devastating effect on women's rights. Not only are the crimes of rape and incest defined in an extremely narrow manner in the Criminal Code, but law enforcement and judicial officers often do not apply the criminal code to what are determined to be domestic violence related matters. This restricts access to justice and remedies available to victims, thereby failing to protect all women and girls. Enforcement of protection orders or occupation orders is inadequate, creating a climate of impunity for perpetrators of violence.
- In 2015, Parliament passed a new **Domestic Violence Act (“DV Act”)** which introduced a comprehensive definition of domestic violence and made reporting of domestic violence obligatory. However, critics of the new DV Act point out that it places a financial burden on victims and it does not specify the role of **the Crisis Centre** which is intended to be a shelter for battered women.
- In 2015 the GOVSVG adopted the **National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (“GBV Action Plan”)**. The GBV Action Plan is a multi-sectoral, time bound framework to be adopted by various stakeholders of the GOVSVG and civil society. The GBV Action Plan aims to 1) eliminate

gendered inequalities and attitudes which support gender-based violence and empower women and children; 2) eliminate of all forms of gender-based violence through the adoption of a zero-tolerance approach; 3) address men's responsibility for reducing and eliminating gender-based violence; and 4) improve mechanisms measuring gender-based violence.

- While the GOVSVG, through its various Ministries, collects data on the occurrence of violence, it does not specifically disaggregate it by gender, age or locality. In addition, there is no specific Ministry which further documents or analyses this data. The Family Court and the police will collect information on cases but there is no pooling or analysing of the collected information.
- There are two Family Courts which are responsible for enforcing the protections outlined in the DV Act. Domestic violence is not treated as a criminal offence under the DV Act although violation of an order can result in criminal sanctions.
- Women and girls' access to justice is significantly hampered by a general lack of resources, a lack of understanding of the justice system, and a lack of trust in the police and court system. For example, in a UNIFEM Baseline Study for SVG, several interviewees expressed the view that sexual offenses were grossly under reported, particularly where the victims were girls. While family dynamics is a major factor in the underreporting of child abuse cases, there was also a reluctance of parents to subject their child to the court system. Likewise, underreporting by female, adult victims was also attributed to a lack of trust in the police and the judicial system.
- The Royal St. Vincent and the Grenadines Police Force continues to be a key player in the fight to end GBV. After years of lobbying and requests from the Gender Affairs Division, a specialized unit to investigate sexual crimes was established by the Commissioner of Police. This unit is located at the **Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D)**. In addition, female Police Officers are attached to all police divisions throughout the Island. According to the Assistant Commissioner of Police, it is now procedure for officers to use a special form when handling a domestic violence situation which then forwarded to the C.I.D. This process is intended to improve data collection on gender-based violence.
- In October 2015, UNDP held a meeting in St. Vincent on Sustainable Development and the Citizen Security Agenda: Defining Priority Actions in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. During that meeting, the Director Social Development highlighted that there was a 1.5% - 3% increase of child abuse cases reported per year resulting in more children requiring foster care. A decrease of 16.2% of domestic violence cases reported per year and yet more women required state safety. There was an increase of 33.9% of child justice cases reported per year which meant more children were recommended for state rehabilitation.
- In terms of reported cases of rape, according to a joint United Nations (UN) and World Bank (WB) report, St. Vincent has one of the highest rape rates in the world. It is important to note however that most incidents of rape and child sexual abuse are often not reported to state authorities. The 2007 UN/WB report suggests that since rape is greatly under-reported globally. When a high incidence of

rape is identified from official statistics (most often drawn from police records) this usually represents a serious problem.<sup>2</sup>

- In spite of the available statistics suggesting otherwise, in 2015 during an interview with a local radio station, the Police Commissioner stated that “domestic violence isn’t as great an issue as reported...[and] isn’t alarming.”
- There are essential services available to women and children who are victims of domestic violence including counselling, referral and information services. Victims are educated on the role of the police, legal matters, and the family court in dealing with domestic violence. There is a fully operational shelter in SVG, **Marion House**, which provides a place for women and their children seeking to escape violence in the home.
- In addition to domestic violence, available evidence suggests that there is also a high incidence of sexual violence against women and children. According to a joint United Nations (UN) and World Bank (WB) report, St. Vincent has the third highest reported rape rate in the world. There is also strong evidence of sexual violence against children. A large majority of the respondents in the 2007/2008 Country Poverty Assessment of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (“SVG CPA”) identified sexual abuse of children a major societal problem. Data from a 2001 reproductive health survey by the Community Health Unit in SVG indicated that 48% of girls and 20% of boys said they were forced into their first sexual act.
- For many Vincentian women sexual harassment is almost daily occurrence. The law does not specifically prohibit sexual harassment although it could be prosecuted under existing laws. Local human rights groups indicate that these laws are ineffective.
- The law in St. Vincent provides women with equal access to vote and to run for election. Historically, women have outnumbered men at the polls. However, women are underrepresented in elected and senior positions within government. Currently women represent 13% of elected officials between the Government and the Opposition. Approximately 40% of the civil service is comprised of women. While there are women who hold senior administrative posts in government, the vast majority occupy low level clerical or administrative positions.
- The Gender Affairs Division is engaged in gender mainstreaming programmes and gender policy development with other government ministries and agencies. One of the expected results of these efforts is the increased participation of women in the design, implementation and monitoring of social, political and economic policies. However, these mechanisms need to be strengthened because the nature of the administrative presence of women in political and public life suggests that women have only the opportunity to implement rather than influence the formulation of domestic policies and decisions.
- The informal economy has traditionally played an important role in most Caribbean economies. As is true for the rest of the world, women in St. Vincent are more likely to work within the informal sector. Similar to the formal sector of the economy, the informal sector tends to be segmented along gender

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office on Drug and Crime and the Latin American and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank, “Crime Violence and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean,” Report No. 37820, 2007. UN/WB Report, 2007, 12.

lines with men working in industries such construction or mechanics and women working as agricultural workers or low wage service providers.

- According to the SVG CPA women and men experience poverty differently. Several women indicated that being in situations of poverty led them to be taken advantage of by men. The SVG CPA quoted women as stating that prospective employers will request sex in return for employment. The assessment also indicates that it is not uncommon for some women to engage in transactional sex for goods or money with casual, serial or concurrent sexual partners. Women interviewed for the CPA indicated that they perceived poverty as “doing anything you have to get something for your children – even having sex for money;” “running from man to man in order to maintain your family;” and “if a man say not to use contraceptives you don’t cause he providing the money.”

### **The rights of children**

- St. Vincent participated in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (“OECS”) **Family Law and Domestic Violence Legal and Judicial Reform Project (“OECS Project”)**<sup>3</sup> which resulted in the new DV Act. Additional draft legislation addressing the rights of children was also developed under the OECS Project. However, none of the draft bills are currently pending before Parliament.
- In 2014, UNICEF reported that St Vincent had enacted the model **Child Care and Protection Bill** without amendment.
- Significant gaps remain in children protection laws due to a significant backlog of legislation which still needs to be drafted or revised. The GOVSVG indicated that the backlog is due to a lack of legal professionals and limited resources to hire external consultants.
- As of April 2014, **the Juvenile Justice Bill** is under discussion in the context of the OECS Project, with a view to revising it before presentation to Parliament.
- Under the current **Juveniles Act**, a “child” is defined as a person under the age of fourteen and the age of criminal responsibility is eight years old. The act also proscribes granting a juvenile bail when “the charge is one of homicide or other grave crime.”
- In 2015 shortcomings of SVG’s juvenile justice system were evident in the case of a 12 year girl who was accused of homicide. Arrangements for holding the accused girl were complicated by the fact that St. Vincent does not have juvenile detention facilities for girls. An SVG lawyer also indicates that most lawyers are not aware of some of the fundamental rules of criminal procedure governing juvenile defendants, compromising their due process rights.
- Corporal punishment is lawful in the home, school and correctional/alternative care settings. It is also available as a criminal sentence. As part of an initiative to reform child laws in the region, the OECS

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circulated a number of draft laws for consideration by member states, including St Vincent. As originally drafted by the OECS, **the Juvenile Justice Bill** corporal punishment as a criminal sentence would be prohibited.

- In 2013, in collaboration with UNICEF, the GOVSVG launched the **Child Friendly Schools** initiative which promotes child-seeking, child-centred, gender-sensitive, inclusive, community-involved, environmentally friendly, protective and healthy approaches to schooling and out-of-school education. In the first phase of implementation, 13 schools were targeted. In the second phase; an additional 21 schools are targeted which represents just about half the total number of primary schools in the country. The Ministry of Education indicates that eventually it will introduce the model in all SVG primary schools.
- Numerous stakeholders indicate that child abuse, incest and violence against children are "prevalent" problems in St. Vincent. Similarly, according to a 2009 UNICEF report, sexual abuse of children in St. Vincent is "vastly under-reported" but believed to be a "significant" problem.
- According to the 2012 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, some children in St. Vincent are engaged in the worst forms of child labor. There also have been reports of trafficking in St. Vincent, including children who are trafficked for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and work in agriculture. The SVG CPA references the phenomenon of mothers encouraging their teenage daughters to have sex with older men to augment the household income. However, due to the lack of data on the prevalence of child labor, especially the sexual exploitation of children, the full extent of the problem is unknown.
- In 2013, in collaboration with UNICEF, the GOVSVG launched the **Break the Silence** campaign which empowers children, families and victims of sexual abuse to report cases of sexual offences and to break the stigma surrounding the issue. Within the Break the Silence framework, a number of workshops had been conducted and has included the participation of religious leaders, sport and other public figures.

#### ***Recommendations to Government:***

- Urgently pass and proclaim **the Juvenile Justice Bill**, which embraces the restorative justice and non-punitive approaches to dealing with young offenders

#### **Discrimination, violence and stigma against persons living with HIV/AIDS, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons**

- St. Vincent is a Christian, very conservative community where homosexuality is openly criticized by public figures and, according to LGBT activists, "very much frowned upon" and "considered an 'abomination' by many."
- Sexual acts between same-sex couples are illegal for both men and women in St. Vincent. The **Criminal code, 1990 Edition 101 s.146 and s.148** states that any person who commits "buggery" is guilty of an offense and is to subject to imprisonment for ten years. Any person who commits an act of "gross indecency" with another person of the same sex is liable to imprisonment for five years. SVG LGBT activists indicate that these laws can be used to subject homosexuals to stigma and discrimination.

- LGBT activists indicate that the homosexual population does not identify themselves as belonging to a sexual minority group due to a "high level of fear" among homosexuals of stigma and discrimination. Discrimination against LGBT persons can include eviction, refusal of housing and employment, and bullying at school. Activists indicate that although incidences of violence against LGBT persons are relatively low, there have been occasions where LGBT has been attacked and threatened.

## **B. Right to life, liberty and security of the person**

- Violent crime is an increasing concern in St. Vincent. In 2012 the homicide rate was estimated to be 25.6 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, a more than two-fold increase on the 11.1 per 100,000 registered in 2001.
- In October 2015, UNDP held a meeting in St. Vincent on **Sustainable Development and the Citizen Security Agenda: Defining Priority Actions in Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean**. During that meeting, the Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) indicated that most crime in SVG was a result of direct or indirect involvement of the drugs and ammunition trade. The DCP also indicated that the GOVSVG is considering the decriminalization of marijuana.
- There is also a human trafficking dimension to sexual violence against women and girls, although the extent of which is unclear. SVG is among countries on the U.S. State Department's Tier 2 Watch List. In its Trafficking in Persons Report 2015 ("TIP Report"), the State Department said NGOs and local government officials in SVG "report that some adults pressure children under the age of 18 to provide sex acts to men in exchange for money or gifts." The TIP Report indicates that although the country serves as a transit and source point in the international trafficking of people, GOVSVG did not demonstrate proactive victim identification efforts nor identified or referred any trafficking victims for care. It also did not prosecute or convict any trafficking offenders.

## **C. Administration of justice, including impunity, and the rule of law**

- The judicial system suffers from long delays in preliminary inquiries for serious crimes, and there is currently a backlog of cases in the magistrate's court in the capital Kingstown. Delays are typically attributed to staff shortages in the judiciary. In addition, there are reports of witnesses refusing to cooperate out of fear of retaliation.
- In 2011, St. Vincent adopted a **Code for Prosecutors** to strengthen the country's prosecution processes, having developed the code with the help of the British High Commission. The code helps standardise and modernise the prosecuting process, and establishes technical and ethical guidelines for prosecutors to follow.
- There is currently an effort underway to implement a **National Prosecution Service** similar to those in Grenada and Dominica. The establishment of an NPS would eliminate the current practice in which, at the magisterial level, the police both investigate and prosecute criminal offenses. The NPS would place prosecutorial decision-making in the hands of an independent, impartial agency. Furthermore, creation of the NPS would help in streamlining prosecution proceedings and improve efficiency and inter-agency cooperation. However, some have also have argued that it is unconstitutional for the Director of Public Prosecutions ("DPP") not to control the proceedings currently conducted by police prosecutors.

- In 2011, the Supreme Court and Family Courts took steps to address witness intimidation by installing a video-link facility for vulnerable and child witnesses to testify.
- In 2012, the St. Vincent implemented a law making it mandatory for interviews of defendants accused of serious offenses such as homicide and human trafficking to be electronically recorded, in an effort to improve permanent and accurate record keeping.
- The police have internal mechanisms to address complaints against police officers. The DPP indicates that complaints against police officers can be lodged in any police station or to the Police Public Relations and Complaints Department, which is under the authority of the police and is set up to handle police complaints. According to the Commissioner of Police, in 2009, Cabinet appointed a police oversight body, which consists of three people, whose purpose is to investigate, adjudicate and report upon cases of excesses committed against persons by members of the police force. The Commissioner of Police noted that people can make complaints against police officers directly to this civilian oversight body, to the Attorney General or to the Director of Public Prosecutions.
- Human rights activists in SVG indicate that while there are occasional complaints of police abuse, it is not the same problem that it was in the past because mechanisms have been put in place to decrease abuse, such as procedures to record interviews of suspects and providing sensitivity training to officers.
- In 2011, the country's prison system was operating at approximately 200% its official capacity and conditions were poor. In 2009 the GOVSVG built a new facility, **the Belle Isle Correctional Facility** which has curbed the overcrowding in the prison in Kingstown, which remains operational.

#### **G. Right to work and to just and favourable conditions of work**

- Much of the workforce in St. Vincent is employed in the agriculture (primarily banana) and tourist industries. Under the law, women have equal opportunity to employment and are officially subject to the same criteria for selection. **The Equal Pay Act 1994** explicitly prohibits discrimination between male and female employees.
- However, according to the SVG CPA, in practice there is segmentation in the labour market along gender lines with men working in higher paying occupations such as construction and women working in lower level, lower paying positions in the hospitality industry. Although current census data is unavailable, according to the World Bank, in 2012 women comprised 41.12% of the labour force. The ILO indicates that in 2013 the labour force participation rate for persons over the age of 15 years was 55.70% for women and 78.40% for men.
- Unfortunately, there is insufficient data to determine how many children or young people are engaged in child labour. While there is evidence of child labor in the region, specific data on child labour in St. Vincent, and the specifics of the issue as it relates to gender, is virtually non-existent. However, child labour has been identified as an issue of significant concern among adults in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In a UNICEF study, several adults indicated concern that home conditions were a significant barrier to education, such as children being forced to drop out of school to work or babysit. The UNCRC committee was also concerned with the child labour situation in St. Vincent and suggested both a survey to assess the scope and nature of the problem and a review of legislation with regard to working children.

## H. Right to social security and to an adequate standard of living

- The 2011-2025 National Social and Economic Development Plan (NESDP) serves as the primary guide for policies governing economic and social development in St. Vincent, as well as social protection policies, outlines the country's long-term strategies and vision.
- Through several line ministries, an array of social assistance programmes is implemented to address vulnerability in the population. These include the **Social Investment Fund, 9 Basic Needs Trust Fund, Social Welfare Programme and the National Insurance Scheme Non-contributory programme** among others. The NESDP proposes measures to foster greater coordination and cohesion of these programmes.
- National Insurance Services provides social security protection to all contributing SVG nationals providing sickness, maternity, invalidity, employment injury, and funeral and survivor benefits.

## I. Right to health

- Primary health care is available to all Vincentians through district hospitals, community clinics and roving Family Nurse Practitioners who are primarily responsible for school health and diabetic and hypertensive care. Through the work of PAHO, one rural hospital is now being remodelled and retrofitted to meet the standards of the Smart Hospital. Government continue to strive to strengthen administrative capacity in the health sector, re-orient the primary health care system to create a more positive impact on the health status of the nation and expand secondary and tertiary health care services to include new treatment modalities.
- Recent basic health indicators for St. Vincent and the Grenadines have been positive. Most notably, access to medical facilities is at a satisfactory level, with 95 percent of births being attended to by skilled personnel and 24 nurses registered per 1000 population (as of 2005). Particularly in infant and maternal health, expansion in primary health care coverage has brought SVG on target to achieve MDG 4, "Reducing Child Mortality" in 2015. There is full immunisation coverage for the under-5 age group and maternal deaths (per 1000) are negligible. Fertility rate is at a stable 1.8 children per woman with an average life expectancy at birth of 74.3 years, comparable to that of developed countries.
- The total fertility rate for 2014 is estimated to be 1.84 children born per woman. The adolescent birth rate for females between the ages of 15-19 years old was 58.90 per 1000 births representing approximately 19% of total births. Trained health personnel attended 98% of births. The infant mortality rate for females was 11.87 deaths per 1000 live births and males 14.24 deaths per 1000 live births. The maternal mortality rate in 2013 was 45 deaths per 100,000 live births.
- Teenage pregnancy is a major factor in Vincentian family life. Teen pregnancy accounts for approximately 20% of live births in St. Vincent. The SVG CPA indicates the frequently the father is an older man. Although teenage pregnancy is not a phenomenon exclusively of the poor, the teenage birth rate is significantly higher for girls from lower socio-economic backgrounds.
- Power within family relations is heavily influenced by gender dynamics. Unequal power relationships within the home also extend to sexual relations and procreation. Women in the SVG CPA indicated that

sometimes they are not free to negotiate the use of contraceptives or condoms when in a relationship with an income earning man.

- The GOVSVG administers a national family planning programme in which the Ministry of Health provides free family planning services in all health-care centres. For the period 2006-2010, the contraceptive prevalence rate was 58.3%. The policy of the GOVSVG is to maintain the current rate of fertility and population growth. Adolescent fertility, however, is viewed as a major concern and special emphasis has been placed on youth, for whom outreach programmes have been developed.
- While health clinics are equipped to distribute several types of contraceptives for women, NGOs report that traditional attitudes sometimes hamper the promotion of contraceptives, particularly to young women. Clinic nurses are directed to supply contraceptives to any girl or woman who asks for them and to advise them about birth control. However, due to a cultural attitude that it is not appropriate for schoolgirls to be sexually active, some nurses either refuse to give them contraceptives or inform their mothers, or other persons, about their sexual activity.
- Abortion is illegal in SVG with a few exceptions. However, NGOs report that many clandestine abortions occur every year. A proper medical procedure is extremely expensive, so it is not an option for many women. Abortion generally receives little attention unless a woman becomes ill or dies. Doctors who perform the procedure do so in private clinics and are well known. They are not prosecuted for performing abortions.
- During the period 2006-2010, HIV prevalence rate in St. Vincent was approximately 1%. As of October 2009, 319 persons living with HIV were receiving medical care, including 175 persons receiving antiretroviral therapy. In 2010, the HIV incidence rate was 32.7 per 100,000, with a male to female ratio of 2:1. However, in the 15-24 age range, the majority of new HIV infection cases were among females. The primary mode of HIV transmission is heterosexual contact and women and men have equal access to prevention and care.
- The GOVSVG has developed an HIV and AIDS National Strategic Plan for 2010 to 2014. The strategic objectives include policy development and legislation; multisectoral involvement and decentralization; prevention of HIV transmission services; treatment care and support; and strategic information, M&E and research. The HIV and AIDS National Strategic Plan acknowledges and addresses the issue of gender inequality as it relates to HIV/AIDS. The strategic objectives propose policies, programmes and legislation to address gender equality, gender sensitive prevention services, and using gender equity as a guiding principle in the development, planning and implementation of the plan. The HIV and AIDS National Strategic Plan also indicates that the GOVSVG has developed education strategies for strengthening HIV education and awareness activities in schools. The GOVSVG was able to make progress on all strategic objectives despite challenges.

#### **L. Persons with Disabilities**

- According to SVG disabled persons' organizations ("SVG DPOs") some progress has been made with regard to disabled rights. However, the organizations also indicate that there is a lack of adequate health and social care services and employment discrimination. Though there are government policies to support special education and there is a school for children with special needs, there are capacity concerns and

gaps in teachers' expertise. There is also no tertiary-level vocational training – particularly for those who are intellectually challenged.

- According to a **2006 UNICEF Child Vulnerability Study**, children with disabilities were not integrated as a matter of policy into regular schools, and an insufficient number of teachers received specialized training in this regard. Priorities for children with disabilities include St. Vincent: public awareness programmes targeting parents, teachers, caregivers and the general public on stigma and coping with disabilities; improved screening and detection systems, improved training of nurses and keeping of medical records, and better infrastructure and resources, especially in schools.
- One of the main SVG DPOs, the National Society of Persons with Disabilities (NSPD), developed a comprehensive draft national policy on the disabled which covers everything from human rights to health and employment. However, the draft policy is dated and apparently not on the agenda for implementation any time soon.
- Accessibility for the disabled in St Vincent has improved with the introduction of building codes which require that any new public building must provide wheelchair access. However, SVG DPOs indicate that there is a lack of access support for the blind and deaf.