

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PILOT PROJECT:
Child Support, Poverty and Gender Equality in the Caribbean**

Final Draft

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INTRODUCTION

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is critical for the effective and efficient implementation of all development projects. M&E allows the project implementers to critically assess the ways in which they do their work in order to identify their achievements and learn better ways to implement their projects. The objective of this assessment is for improved and sustainable impact on their beneficiaries, in the most cost-effective manner. M&E also facilitates good governance since it allows for transparency and accountability in the management and implementation of the projects.

The broad aim of this paper is to assess the pilot phase of the project - ***'Child Support, Poverty and Gender Equality in the Caribbean'***, which was conducted in Barbados. Issues surrounding application for child support and the awards that are made on the basis of these applications are linked to a complexity of factors, issues and systems that can make research into this area difficult. The decision to launch a full scale pilot project in Barbados, using a number of methodologies, allowed for the garnering of lessons and best practices for subsequent phases of the research.

This pilot research can be seen as having two main objectives. The first objective is to learn from this research in order to make better decisions for the next phase of the project to be conducted in other countries. In this regard, this pilot research in Barbados allows for the refining of various components of the project to ensure that the objectives are met. The second objective of the pilot phase of the project is linked to the overall development objective of the entire project which is to develop and strengthen empirical knowledge around the issues relating to child support in the Caribbean. In this regard, it looks at the ways in which prevailing knowledge, attitudes and practices in Barbados, especially within the legal and judicial system, impact on women and children, especially with regard to outcomes of poverty, gender inequity and gender inequality.

It is intended that the outputs of the proposed research will be used as the basis for the development of policy, guidance on law reform, public assistance programmes, infrastructure development, and capacity building to improve gender equity and efficiency of the administration of justice in child support matters in keeping with the intent of the Women's Convention and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The evaluation of the pilot project is therefore both summative and formative, since it assesses the outcomes of the project for their usefulness in the Barbados context, while also evaluating the processes and findings in

order to identify issues that could lead to the redesign and modification of the project for execution in two other countries of the region.

Methodology

The methodology utilized for this exercise is qualitative. It involved the following methods:

1. Participant observation in the following settings:
 - ✓ Committee meetings;
 - ✓ Meeting held with interviewees (field Marshalls, magistrates) to provide feedback;
 - ✓ Public consultation held in December
2. In-depth interviews with key informants including the following:
 - ✓ Project Manager
 - ✓ Representatives of the Executing Agencies
 - ✓ Researchers
 - ✓ Research Assistants
 - ✓ Selected interviewees
 - ✓ Staff members associated with the administration & execution of the project
 - ✓ Select committee members of the
3. The evaluation also involved desk reviews.

Objectives

The general aim of the evaluation exercise was to report on the *relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency* and *sustainability* of the project, as well as to identify the potential *risks* involved in the execution of the project. The following areas were therefore identified for evaluation:

- a. The research design and methodology;
- b. Project management and execution;
- c. Achievement of the development and project objectives;
- d. Dissemination and communication strategies utilized; and
- e. The potential impact in selected areas on capacity-building among stakeholders.

EVALUATE THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY USED DURING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT PHASE IN BARBADOS.

The five main components of the research project were:

1. Legal review of child support law (for Barbados and the wider Caribbean)
2. Public assistance records review
3. In court observation
4. Court Records Review
5. In depth interviews and focus groups with users of the court system (litigants (applicants and respondents), judicial officers, social workers, lawyers, and field marshals among others)

These components were consistent with the objectives of the research and provided a broad perspective of the process related to the award of child maintenance and support in Barbados. The research utilized qualitative and quantitative methodologies to unearth the data necessary to achieve the objectives of the project.

Different research methods were also used. This included desk reviews; focus group discussions; in-depth interviews and participant observations. The findings associated with each research method were then made available to the writers of the report, allowing for rich analysis, from multiple perspectives. This approach is definitely one that needs to be replicated for future research elsewhere.

Legal review of child support law

This activity entailed a desk review of the statutes, and of decided cases, dealing with child support in the Supreme/High Court and lower courts in Barbados and from selected Caribbean countries. The aim of this review was to determine the legal principles used to establish the quantum of child support awards.

This comprehensive exercise was of inestimable value for understanding the duality of the judicial system in dealing with child support cases in the Supreme/High Court and lower courts. The legal review revealed the origins of statutes in both court systems that have led to current differential practices, including the treatment of litigants and the awards made to applicants.

One example of this was how a criminal law perspective impacted negatively on the civil rights of applicants in the lower court, and helped to nullify the intended outcome of obtaining support for children was used to indicate the need for law reform in this area.

The legal review has also facilitated the identification of gaps in the creation of legislation and implementation of the law that could help to develop consistency in the process related to child support cases, and which would better meet the needs of women and children for financial and non-financial support.

The desk review utilized the resources available at the UWI Faculty of Law Library, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, and interviews with legal officers.

Family Services and Public assistance records review

The review of the provision of family services and public assistance to applicants for child support was a very important component of this research. It effectively highlighted the relevant issues and factors that impact on the successful negotiation of child support between applicant and respondents. It also identified areas of strength in the system, as well as those areas in need of improvement, and provided data that could be used to compare the experiences of clients in both the public assistance and the court arenas.

The research objectives were clearly stated, and addressed, using appropriate methods of research. Both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies were, in this regard, quite well utilized and clearly illustrated the issues pertinent to the provision of these services.

In-depth interviews with service providers as well as clients – both applicants and respondents; file reviews which captured the profile of the clients and information obtain, from desk reviews, about the institutions and their objective, as well as background information which gave some detail of the ADR process, lent coherence and comprehensiveness to the analyses.

It is the very strength of the analysis that makes the absence of a thorough description of the methodology of this component noticeable. The method used to obtain the information used in the analyses is very important as an example of best practice. Among the questions that suggest themselves to the reader were:

- What was the process of selection for the 40 files that were reviewed?
- What was the total number of files from which the 40 were selected?
- In the case of the in-depth interviews, how were clients to be interviewed selected?
- Were all 40 applicants identified in the files interviewed, or just a sample?
- To what extent were the focus group discussions with judges, lawyers and court marshals pertinent to your analyses? (This question is raised because there is little or no obvious reference, in the analyses, to information that might have been obtained from such focus group discussions).

The recommendation here is that the very pertinence of the information and strength of the analyses calls for a thorough explanation of the methodology, so that it can be replicated in another setting, or for another component of the research.

In court observation

The in-court observation has yielded rich data about the proceedings in both the High Court and Magistrates Courts. It provides triangulation of data with other information obtained from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions held with users of the Court, as well as the court records review.

The advantage of the in-court observation is that, while in the other methods of data collection, this information is also being obtained from persons who have intimate knowledge of the court system and the child support cases, the process here has been filtered by trained researchers, with legal knowledge, and through gender lens, which provides a feminist perspective to the proceedings. The latter might especially be lacking in the accounts of the other users of the court, regardless of their other areas of expertise.

In this context, the training for the research assistants who undertook this aspect of the research, and which was conducted by legal anthropologist, Mindie Lazarus-Black, was very important. The hands-on nature of the exercise, which allowed the assistants to practice this method and receive feedback on their efforts from the expert, has undoubtedly led to the high quality of the data collected.

The research assistants were high in their praise of this training session and spoke enthusiastically of the thoroughness of the training session, which allowed for an ongoing, on-the-job evaluation of the products of their court room observations.

This method was also useful when providing feedback to the groups that were interviewed, at the end of the data collection exercises. Instead of asking only questions about data that were obtained from interviews and reviews, members of the research team were able to link the court room observations with the data received. This led them to ask more probing questions of their interviewees in the feedback sessions. This process helped to enrich the analyses and provided greater opportunities for recommendations to be made in a participatory and reflective manner.

Court Records Review

The Court records review is a very important component of the research. It has the potential to provide excellent background material that is consistent with the general aim of this component of the project to collect quantitative data on variables that are statistically significant and which could be generalized, in order to promote evidence-based public dialogue and policy reform. Among the specific objectives of the Court records review were:

- To obtain a demographic and socio-economic profile of users (applicants and respondents);
- To understand the nature of case management (length of proceedings, legal representation of parties; number of judicial officers involved, nature of fact finding);
- To also understand the outcome of processes (orders made, prevalence of consensus between the parties on outcome; quantum of orders); and
- To assess the prevalence of non-compliance of orders

The process of collecting the data was at first constrained by ethical considerations of the need to protect the privacy of clients, since the process involved accessing files that contained personal information about individuals who had initiated, or were part of the court proceedings. This was satisfactorily dealt with by ensuring that the research assistants all signed a legally binding confidentiality agreement prior to the commencement of the research.

Much more challenging than this though, was the state of record keeping in the institutions, which limited the extent to which all of the objectives could be met.

At the **Magistrates Court**, researchers explained that there were 4,590 records on child maintenance from 2001 to 2003 and it was apparent that reviewing every record would be impossible. More daunting than the numbers, was the manner in which the records were kept, which made it impossible for the research assistants to go through the actual files.

Since the significant details of every matter heard in the court was recorded in an '*order book*', which contained information on the address of the litigants, the quantum of the award, the number of children involved, and arrears due, a decision was made to conduct a review of the order book instead of the court records, in order to select the sample of records to be reviewed. A total of 867 cases were therefore reviewed.

In the **High Courts**, not only were the number of cases to be reviewed, smaller – a total of 930 court records related to child maintenance – but also, the system of record keeping was much better than in the Magistrates' Courts. This led to a decision on the part of the research team to review all

930 cases. A total of 750 cases, which related directly to matters of child maintenance were analyzed. This placed an enormous burden on the available resources, in terms of time and money, since a statistically significant sample could have been selected to represent the population, resulting in a smaller number of records to be reviewed.

This aspect of the research was very time consuming, since it required careful scrutiny of the files, to obtain the information needed to be recorded in the data capture form. The data capture form used to obtain information from the files were useful from the perspective of collecting the data that were needed, and also for identifying the gaps that exist in the system of recording and storing information, currently used by the Courts.

The records provided excellent information on issues such as 'case management', 'legal representation', 'outcomes: orders granted', and 'arrears'. However, data on the socio-demographic profiles of the applicants and respondents were unavailable due to data gaps and inconsistent recording formats. This has affected the analyses in some sections of the report, with high enough levels of non-response to make the analyses in this area questionable.

There was, for example, over 50% of non-response with regard to employment status of litigants in the High Court. No age was available for 27% of applicants. In the Magistrate's court, data on ages of children with respect to child support was available for less than one third of all children. Generally, more useable information was available from the High Court records, than from the records obtained from the Magistrates court.

The quality of the data and system for storing same, reinforces the hypothesis of duality in the judiciary that is being explored in this research. Also, the information relating to the state of information storage and the ease of data retrieval should prove useful in helping the responsible State officials to develop a better system of data collection and storage that makes for easier retrieval, especially in the Magistrate's court.

The experience with the review of the Court records suggest a need to modify methods, and to some extent the questionnaire. In the first instance, it would be useful to select samples that are statistically significant, rather than to review all of the cases, especially when there are large amounts of cases to be reviewed. Secondly, this pilot study indicates that there are questions in the data capture form that may not be pertinent or easy to collect because of the system of recording. These questions should be eliminated.

There were also, a few weaknesses in the design of the questionnaire, which were identified in the pilot research, and which could be used to improve the questionnaire design in the other stages of the research. One example of this was the failure to assign a unique identifier to the children in relation to

whom application was made. This meant, that in cases where there were different types of orders or a different quantum of support for each child, it was not possible to identify these.

By and large, these weaknesses did not affect the actual provision of the information. It only made it more difficult to take full advantage of the technology to obtain the information using the statistical package in which it was entered.

Since this is potentially the most complicated aspect of the research and is also the component that lies most outside the control of the researchers, more time and preparation needs to be taken to understand the system that is used for recording cases and storing files, in order to ensure a smoother data collection process. In this regard, the pilot in Barbados would have provided excellent lessons on some of the challenges that might emerge as this research is expanded.

In-depth interviews with users of the court system

Although labeled as in-depth interviews, this exercise was really a quantitative one, with several open-ended questions that sought to understand the process from the litigants' point of view, including their levels of satisfaction with the system and the quantum of child maintenance awarded by Judges and Magistrates.

Given the limited data in the Court records, this method was a useful adjunct to the Court review and provided data that were otherwise not obtainable from the court records. However, being neither fully quantitative nor fully qualitative might have resulted in the full benefits of either methodology being lost to the researchers in the pilot research.

From a quantitative point of view, sample selection does not allow for statistical inferences or generalizations to be made. Counts were therefore used to categorize data for analysis or as summaries of analysis. On the other hand, the absence of a full qualitative methodology did not allow for the full probing that would elicit meaning and allow for greater follow up of points and issues raised in the interviews. This assessment was confirmed in post-discussions with the research assistants who conducted the in-depth interviews. They explained that there were times when they felt constrained by the instrument and could not go as far as they might have wanted to, in the follow up of issues and meanings, during the in-depth interviews.

The questionnaire that was developed has been created to address all of the relevant issues and is more rigid than a semi-structured interview schedule, notwithstanding the space for 'further observations'. As it is used in the pilot study, there is not much opportunity to probe and expand issues further as they are raised, which is normally the usefulness of in-depth interviews.

If this is the method that will be used in further research, there is a need to restructure this method of the research in order to get more benefits. There is a need for more purposive sampling, using relevant categories such as area of residence; type of litigant; and sex as three examples of basic categories that are of interest in the research. There is also a need to expand the number of respondents being interviewed in order to obtain a better understanding of their characteristics, since it is especially this information that has not been properly obtained from the court records.

Another route that could be taken would be to adopt a case study approach, whereby fewer interviews are conducted, but more probing takes place in order to unearth the plethora of issues, experiences and reasons for actions on the part of the applicants and respondents.

EVALUATE PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND EXECUTION.

The process for formulation of the research project, selection of partners, and planning for the implementation of the project is surely one of the strengths of this research project. It embodies the principles of collaboration, and inclusion of stakeholders and relevant experts at every stage of the project.

The *executing agencies* of the project were UNIFEM and Faculty of Law of the University of the West Indies, while the *implementing agencies* were the Faculty of Law of the University of the West Indies; Centre for Gender & Development Studies; Grenada Legal Aid & Counselling Clinic.

The structures set up to ensure the efficient management of the project were:

- The Regional Advisory Committee (RAC)
- Country Advisory Teams (CAT)
- Project Management team
- Project Manager
- Research Team

RAC and CAT

The Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) was established in January 2005 and consisted of experts, from within the Caribbean region, in the fields of gender, sociology and law. The role of the RAC is to provide guidance and expertise in the implementation of the project from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The RAC was not able to meet as often as planned, nor were all of the persons invited to sit on the committee able to be present at the times of the meeting. Nonetheless, during the times they were able to meet, twice during the life of the project, the discussion and participation was rich and the project was able to benefit from advice given at the meeting.

At the first meeting for example, the RAC made several recommendations, including the development of a communications strategy through which information on the project could be widely shared and public commitment built to the reform of the administration of family justice where necessary. The Committee also recommended the identification of a senior policy maker to join the Committee. This person would be able to represent the project at the level of CARICOM and thereby increase regional visibility and applicability of the research outcomes. Pursuant to that recommendation, Mr. Damien Graves, Minister of Health, Family Services and Gender Affairs, St. Lucia was invited to join the Committee and has accepted. Unfortunately, he was never able to attend a meeting. Also, based on the participation and feedback from one member from St. Lucia, there has been a request from that country's Ministry of Social Development to replicate the study there.

Like the RAC, the Country Advisory Teams (CAT) was an important part of the research project. The CATs are intended to ensure the involvement of the key policy-makers at all stages of the research process. The members of this group were primarily government officers and representatives of non-governmental organizations from within Barbados. The Country Advisory Team (CAT) met twice and made suggestions for the time period for the court records review; and the communications strategy for Barbados.

Processes like these can however increase the overall cost of the project and must be explicitly budgeted. Where experts are sourced from outside of the country, transportation and per diem costs also contribute to the total cost of the project. However, the extent to which it contributes to valid data and sound research makes the cost worthwhile.

There were two main challenges to the scheduling of meetings, which resulted in fewer meetings than anticipated. The first was the time constraints faced by members of the committees as they went about their daily duties. This made the setting of dates that were convenient to all members very difficult. The other challenge related to the delays in the research process itself. Meeting could not be held in the absence of progress in the writing up of the research.

Project Management Team

The Project Management Team is a sub-committee of the Regional Advisory Committee and comprised representatives of UNIFEM, the Faculty of Law, and the Grenada Legal Aid and Counseling Clinic. The Project Management team was responsible for the execution of the pilot project and met regularly by teleconference and by meetings as required.

Project Manager

The Project Manager has responsibility for the administration and management of the project and is based at UNIFEM. She is responsible for ensuring the execution of the project under the guidance and supervision of the Management Team.

Research Team

The Research Team is made up of the lead researchers on the project along with resource persons with expertise in social science methodology. The lead researchers are:

- Tracy Robinson, *Lecturer, Faculty of Law, UWI*;
- Jackie Sealy-Burke, *Director, Grenada Legal Aid and Advisory Clinic*;
- Roberta Clarke, *Regional Programme Director, UNIFEM*;
- Jacqueline Cornelius, *Attorney at Law*; and
- Professor Christine Barrow, *Professor of Sociology, UWI*.

The Research Team was responsible for defining the methodologies to be employed, training or identifying trainers for the research assistants on the project, supervising the research, analyzing the findings and preparing the research report.

Research skills and Competencies

The Research Team is a rich combination of interdisciplinary areas consisting of experts in the areas of Legal Analysis; Social Science Research Analysis; Social Policy Analysis; and Project Management. Institutionally, collaboration with the University of the West Indies, UNIFEM and the Government Agencies relevant to this research is an admirable example of how policy could be informed by research utilizing institutional resources and expertise grounded in experience.

It was clear that both in terms of qualifications and experience, that most of the members of the research team were admirably suited for the job. This is reflected in the quality of the report, valuable for its insights and analyses, from all perspectives. The strong gender awareness and expertise possessed by all members of the research team, combined with legal expertise, and program management experience in the case of some members; and legal and sociological expertise in the case of others resulted in a project with clear objectives and astute analyses.

The research assistance was also particularly strong, with valuable training given to Research Assistants, (these were law students in advanced stages of their studies), that were particularly sound in terms of their own capacities. Their enthusiasm for and interest in the project was clear in the feedback given to the evaluator, and served as an advantage to the achievement of the objectives of the project.

The addition to the research team, of consultants to fill specific gaps was especially important to the research output. The input of Mindie Lazarus-Black and the training related to in-court observations must be highlighted. The on-the-job methodology used to build capacity was lauded by the research assistants who found the sessions extremely helpful and suited to the task they were employed to undertake.

In spite of these skills and competencies, the project suffered from delays that were related to the resources available to the main executing agency, UNIFEM. There is no doubt that the gender, legal and sociological skills and qualifications possessed by the Regional Programme Director of UNIFEM, was crucial to the research process. Nonetheless, the small size of the staff and other duties related to the mandate of the organization made it difficult for her to give full attention to the project at all times. Additional resources could allow for the garnering of assistance, especially for the write-up process, in order to support the valuable input of this team member.

UNIFEM is already skeletally staffed for its work program. The undertaking of this ambitious and important project also meant an additional burden for the staff. The institution could have also benefited from additional human resources, the absence of which meant that the Project Manager was often overwhelmed with a multitude of tasks that spanned not only program management tasks, but also research roles and administrative tasks that might have been better managed with assistance.

Financial Considerations

This pilot research encountered cost over runs, associated primarily with the research process. For example, the original budgetary allocation of \$9,000 for fees for the research assistants had to be increased due to the number of court records that had to be reviewed and the extremely complicated manner in which the records were kept. This resulted in two extra months being spent on data collection.

Fortunately, additional funds of \$23,000 were obtained from the UNICEF office for Barbados and the Caribbean. These contributions were directed towards the payment of research and data processing fees. This allowed the application of IDRC funds to meet the increased costs of the research assistants and one lead researcher.

The legal review prepared by Tracy Robinson, was a contribution to the project by the Faculty of Law as one of the executing and implementing agencies. The statutory rules relating to child support in Commonwealth Caribbean jurisdictions are therefore being researched and assessed without the utilization of financial resources of the project. She also contributed to assisting with the writing up the pilot research report free of cost as well.

The research instruments were also designed by the research team and presented and refined in the country advisory team meetings without the need for consultancy services by the lead researchers.

The financial difficulties bring to light a number of issues associated with this research specifically, and research projects in general. These include:

- 1. The fact of unanticipated costs in exploratory research.** The state of the court records was one of the reasons why costs increased. It was noted that even when initial research was undertaken regarding what information might be present in the courts, there was little expectation that the records would be so difficult to access.
- 2. The fact of higher costs in participatory research.** Research projects in the feminist tradition, which places a high value on participation, feedback and reiterative mechanisms, tend to be more costly than those that are not. Donors that are committed to the feminist methodology should therefore take this into consideration in their funding of projects like these.

3. **The need for realistic budgeting.** An important observation here is that sometimes research proposals are constrained by a lack of knowledge of how much money donors are willing to put towards a project and the need to gain access to the funds for research. The cutting of corners at the proposal phase can however impact negatively on the project as it is implemented.
4. **The importance of collaboration with natural partners at the conceptual phase of the project.** The natural linkage between the advancement of the rights of women and the rights of the child in a project such as this might have meant increased access to resources from natural partners, such as UNICEF.

It seems imperative, in light of the lessons highlighted in the pilot project, that the budgetary allocations be reviewed and re-presented to reflect the realities of conducting research of this kind.

ASSESS WHETHER THE PILOT PHASE OF THE PROJECT MET THE DEVELOPMENTAL OBJECTIVES AND PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES CITED IN THE PROJECT DOCUMENT PROVIDED BY UNIFEM.

The pilot project has been identified as a substantive research that seeks to achieve the overall project objectives for Barbados, as well as providing lessons learnt for the second phase of the project due to be conducted in Trinidad & Tobago.

It is not expected that the pilot phase of the project will, in the short term, meet some of the development objectives that have been outlined in the project document. In this context, the achievement of the objectives of reducing women's vulnerability to poverty; advancing gender equality; and spreading the value of shared family responsibilities are best evaluated over a longer term than the pilot phase would allow.

With regard to meeting the specific objectives of the pilot research however, the project has been able to meet all of the objectives; namely:

- a. Examining, using feminist methodology, the manner and ways in which the courts and alternative dispute mechanisms resolved applications for child support;
- b. Assessing the criteria and legal principles used to resolve these applications, as well as the quantum and enforcement of the awards;
- c. Analysing users' perception of the family justice system', and its responsiveness to women's experiences and realities.

It cannot be emphasized enough how much the triangulation of methodologies has contributed to the achievement of the objectives of the research. In understanding, for example, **the manner and ways in which the courts and alternative dispute mechanisms resolved applications for child support**, the in-depth interviews with officers of the court, the in-court observations and the review of Public Assistance programs have, together, provided a clear picture of how the institutions work to resolve these applications. Important findings in this regard, include the duality of the judiciary system in dealing with applications and enforcement of awards, as well as the differences in the methods used by the Judicial System and the Welfare system in coming to agreements on the quantum of awards for the maintenance of children.

In **assessing the criteria and legal principles used to resolve these applications, as well as the quantum and enforcement of the awards**, the Legal review, in-depth interviews with officers of the court; in-court observations; in-depth interviews with clients and most of all, the Court Records Review, all help in the achieving this objective. However, this is one of the objectives which has been affected by the state of the environment from which the data has had to be collected. For example, identifying the quantum of awards made in the child support cases has greater informational gaps than the other areas.

The main source of information for the **analysis of users' perception of the family justice system', and its responsiveness to women's experiences and realities** has come from the in-depth interviews with litigants, as well as the review of public assistance programmes.

The information obtained from the research project is also supposed to achieve the following outputs:

- a) *Develop policy guidance on law reform* (both substantive and procedural);
- b) *Provide justification and evidence for public assistance programmes and infrastructure development;* and
- c) *Build the capacity of policy makers to improve gender equity and efficiency of the administration of justice in child support matters.*

Each of these outputs involves a process, in which there are stages to their achievement. Common to all three outputs, is the need for social investigation and research, as well as sound analysis of the important issues to provide the foundation for moving forward. In this regard, there is no doubt that the Project has contributed very timely and sound analysis to the achievement of the stated outputs.

The next critical element is engagement with policy makers in each of the areas – that is, the judiciary and policy makers responsible for the provision of public assistance and welfare. The project has begun this stage of the process through the research, to the extent that the members of its committees and the officers interviewed in the project and to whom feedback was given were able to pass on information to the policy makers in their respective fields.

It is expected thought that this would have limited impact, and other opportunities for engagement with permanent secretaries, Ministers of Government and other policy makers will be necessary to achieve these goals. This is especially so, since as policy makers, the information gleaned from the research will allow policy makers to more effectively formulate policies for implementation based on the recommendations in the report. For law reform, the attorney general and chief justice will become the key persons to target. In this regard the presence of the Chief Justice at the public consultation held in December provided an important fillip to these efforts.

The project has also provided important linkages to planned reform projects in the form of persons who have been associated with the project. For example, the Family Law Council in Barbados has undertaken the task of reforming the Family Law Act. The chair of this committee, Justice Cornelius contributed to the research; Ms. Tracy Robinson, one of the chief researchers

on the project is a member of Council and Mr. ... Boyce of ... (MESA) is on the national committee of the project.

In terms of time frames for achieving these outputs, legal experts have opined that policy and law reform in Barbados is not really possible in less than two years. However since this too is a process, there are important steps that can be taken towards this aim. These include the following:

- ✓ The need to immediately begin efforts at improved record keeping in the courts
- ✓ Improved collection mechanisms, including information on the clients and outcomes of court action
- ✓ The development of guidelines for child support even if not formally introduced through law reform.

With regard to Public Assistance, interviews with officers in this area have revealed that the report has already provided justification for work in this area, for which the Barbados Welfare Department is happy to have documentary evidence. The response to recommendations for improvements to this delivery has also been particularly impressive, since, not only have many of them been taken on board for implementation, but the Department has already taken action to make changes in specific areas. This includes the need for better record keeping.

The ability of the project to "build the capacity of policy makers to improve gender equity and efficiency of the administration of justice in child support matters" remains a challenge of huge proportions, which might go beyond the capacity of the research project to deliver. There is still a major deficiency, in terms of gender sensitivity and the ability to conduct gender analysis, among policy makers and many members of the public. This has led to observations, during the Public Consultation for example, where whenever findings by researchers were analyzed around gender issues such as the multiple role of women; feminization of poverty; etc., many participants, including judicial officers were seen disagreeing with the analysis, and not the findings. This seemed to suggest a lack of understanding of gender issues.

The challenge continues to be finding ways of mainstreaming gender among policy makers and the public at large, and building the capacity of policy makers to conduct gender analysis, especially of issues in their areas of work.

EVALUATE THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY USED DURING THE PILOT PHASE

The communications strategy utilized during the pilot phase involved multiple strategies; was conducted both internally and externally; and targeted multiple groups. The strategies included the following:

- ✓ Meetings with Governmental and Non-governmental officials, as well as officers from other United Nations Country offices, through the Country Advisory Team and the Regional Advisory Committee.
- ✓ Reporting on the project in other meetings that UNIFEM attended, including the United Nations Heads of Agency meetings.
- ✓ Interface with the media in order to sensitize the listening audience to the project
- ✓ Public consultations aimed at multiple audiences, including policy makers as well as court users, both actual and potential

One of the reasons for the creation of the advisory committees, both at the regional and national levels, was to ensure that information about the project would be disseminated, especially to the organizations represented on the committees. This objective was largely achieved, with representatives returning to their respective organizations and reporting on the aims, objectives and progress of the Project. In some cases however, this did not happen. Happily, the approach of multiple communication strategies filled some of the gaps, with positive outcomes. For example, the United Nations Heads of Agency meeting provided opportunities for UNIFEM to share information on the project, with positive and enthusiastic responses from many of the Heads of Agencies who were able to indicate interest in future collaboration.

Both the print and television media have been used to project the work of the research project. There is still more to be done in this regard. However, given the limitation of funding, the effort made has been commendable. The print media have published some stories based on the research project. Selected researchers have discussed the project on a morning television show. There are also further plans to use the media for Public Service Announcements (PSAs), through the use of personnel specifically contracted for this purpose.

Newspaper articles addressing the Child Support Project:

- ***UNIFEM: Women not making any gains.*** *Midweek Nation Extra, December 20, 2006*
- ***Welfare not meeting all needs.*** *The Barbados Advocate, December 13, 2006*
- ***Women continue to run the households.*** *The Barbados Advocate, December 13, 2006*
- ***Project to deal with indignities of family justice.*** *The Barbados Advocate, December 9, 2005*

Public consultation

One Public Consultation was held on December 12, 2006. The main objectives of the Public Consultation were (i) to share findings of the study with participants/stakeholders; and (ii) to solicit recommendations from participants for the way forward. Both of these objectives were met, especially the first.

The consultation was well organized and well attended. A broad range of stakeholders were in attendance including members of the judiciary, personnel from the Barbados Welfare Department, the University of the West Indies, other agencies, users and media. High-level policy makers were also present at the meeting, including the Chief Justice of Barbados.

There was however a bit of an imbalance in the representation of participants, with an overwhelming number of officers of the judiciary represented. (See annex 1). Mutual benefits could have been obtained from the presence of policymakers responsible for allocation of budgets and general public service planning at the Public Consultation. Questions of how the state could intervene to ensure that the needs of children are addressed, could best be discussed with the support of persons familiar with budgetary allocations, and other government accounting procedures.

The programme included a presentation of the findings of the report by the researchers in the project, and stakeholders were allowed to participate and provide feedback. This opportunity was enthusiastically accepted by participants. More time for discussion would have been welcomed however, especially by those primary users of the systems who wanted to tell of their experiences. This constraint of time presents the organizers with the challenge of honing the presentation of findings (which is absolutely important in such a setting) to the shortest time possible without losing the substance of the findings. The answer might also lie in the holding of several consultations geared towards different audiences.

Time was not the only constraint. Multiple group meetings can be disempowering for persons who perceive themselves as having less power than other participants. This was constraint was voiced by some users of the system who were present. One female user who wanted to share her experiences and thoughts about the system, said she was intimidated by the fact that her ex husband's lawyer and the magistrate who presided over the case were present. She said some of her concerns had to do with how they handled the case and she could not speak in front of them. A different space for such discourse is therefore recommended for full disclosure on the topic by these stakeholders - the users of the system.

The meeting brought out once more, the overwhelming need for gender awareness and gender sensitization among public officers responsible for policy making in areas where gender is a major factor in the issues under

consideration. The absence of this awareness and understanding among participants at the Consultation was obvious, and some public officers were seen and heard disagreeing with the analysis of findings that were presented in terms of their gender implications, because such analyses were deemed irrelevant to the discussion.

There is clearly much public education around the research that needs to take place. The project team has indicated plans to move further in this direction. In terms of project management, there may be a need to end this segment of the project and develop a new proposal around dissemination of information and advocacy as a means of taking the work of the project forward. The findings of the project and their implications for women and children will be well worth such a strategy.

EVALUATE THE CAPACITY-BUILDING IMPACT OF THE PROJECT.

Capacity building speaks to growth and development; to the improvement and creation of skills and resources where deficiencies and gaps once existed. This section is meant to assess the extent to which the pilot phase of the project was able to reinforce **UNIFEM's** research capabilities through:

- the provision of additional resources that could be used for future exercises
- the creation of new partnerships and contacts that are important to the overall work of the institution
- improved utilization of the competencies of staff members
- increased profile of UNIFEM as an institution, and a greater understanding within the population in which it operates of its role and responsibilities as an organization.

It also examines the extent to which the research skills, including data collection and analytical skills, of the researchers and research assistants were strengthened, as well as the extent to which there has been an increased public understanding of the relationship between child support, gender equality and women's poverty.

Indicators of growth and development require baseline data for any analysis of change to take place. This can be easily done with respect to some aspects of this part of the evaluation. For instance, the reinforcement of UNIFEM's research capabilities is both a quantitative and qualitative exercise in which resources that existed before the implementation of the project can be compared with those that now exist. Interviews have also been conducted to assess the extent to which new partnerships and contacts have been developed and if and how the competencies of staff members are being differently utilized since the implementation of the project.

The objective of understanding the extent to which UNIFEM's profile as an institution has increased and whether there is an increased understanding on the part of the population about the roles and responsibilities of the organization is a longer term objective that requires resources beyond the scope of this exercise in order to properly undertake such an assessment.

Capacity-building

The project ***Child Support, Poverty and Gender Equality in the Caribbean***, has served to strengthen the capacity of the project partners in a number of ways. The most visible of the processes, is the way in which national level policy makers have been better able to understand the workings of the family justice and public assistance systems, through the research. Interviews were conducted with selected persons from the Country Assessment Team, Court Marshalls, Magistrates, UNIFEM staff, the research assistants and the Barbados Welfare Department with regard to what aspect of the research they benefited from most. The overwhelming response was

the **impact of the information gleaned from the research to their general awareness of the problem**, including the gender implications of the situation which were highlighted.

While some of the interviewees explained that many of the findings confirmed what they already knew with regard to the situation of women and children with regard to applications for child support, many expressed surprise at some of the findings that came out of the research. One of the findings, for example, which was a surprise to even the most knowledgeable interviewee, was the extent to which the system did not work for clients. Many felt that there was a disjuncture between the way in which the justice system was portrayed as working for its clients, and the reality of how it really worked. It was felt that this was an area in which steps could be immediately taken to alleviate some of the hardships.

While the information and its impact were common to all interviewees, some expanded on other specific gains received from the project. These included the following areas:

Institutional Reinforcement and Sustainability: The Barbados Welfare Department and the Public Assistance Programme which it runs have expressed their appreciation for the way that the research has validated the importance of what they do; demonstrated the gaps in their procedures; and revealed some of the weaknesses in their outputs. This has led to some immediate action to correct some of these gaps, including the modification of their record keeping in order capture important data on the characteristics of their clients. It is also the intention of this department to work with the Courts to make longer term changes that would improve the delivery of services to their clients, and help to ensure outcomes that are in the best interest of children.

Both UNICEF and UNIFEM have highlighted the links that this project has to *the OECS Family Law and Domestic Violence Legal and Judicial Reform Project*. It is felt that there are synergies to be exploited, in terms of information coming out of the projects; individuals who have worked in both projects; and partnerships at the institutional level, which will take the objectives of both projects forward.

Although new partnerships have not been formed through this project, UNIFEM has highlighted the way in which this project has led to the strengthening of partnerships with key organizations; institution and groups which, it is felt, would help to further UNIFEM's mandate. The interaction with Men's Education Support Association (MESA), is one such example, as are interactions with Government and other United Nations partners, such as UNICEF.

Increased Research and Administrative Skills of the Researchers Involved: The research assistants on the project are also to be highlighted in this regard. Not only have they enthusiastically expressed their delight and awe, in some cases, with the knowledge gained in this process of data collection, but also they feel that they have gained new skills and perspectives through the training received and experiences gained while working on this project. This has stimulated new interests, to the extent that some of the research assistants have expressed their intention of incorporating their new knowledge in their ongoing academic and intellectual pursuits.

Members of the research and management team, some of whom have links to other institutions, have gained experience and skills in social and legal analysis, as well as strengthened administrative capacities. This will no doubt be of benefit to the project as it is undertaken in other countries, as well as the future work of members as they take their skills with them to their own institutions.

Because of the small size of UNIFEM, existing staff members were only used in a supporting capacity to the project. Instead a project manager was hired to oversee the conduct of the project, and she was able to call on staff for support and advice when needed. The experience and capacity gained by this new staff member will be of immense value to the organization in future projects.

The Head of UNIFEM in Barbados was the only other staff member who worked on the project on a full time basis. Her roles as research team member as well as member of the management team, would have stretched her capacities to its fullest, given her other duties in the organization. These experiences would undoubtedly be of benefit to the office, which she heads.

The ability of the pilot to inform the next phase of the project: There have been some lessons learned in the pilot phase of the project, which can definitely be utilized in future phases of the project, as it is undertaken in other countries. Among these is the need to do the following:

1. Budget more realistically
2. Ensure that greater research is conducted to identify potential problems in the capture of data from Court records
3. Utilize best practices (such as the triangulation of data; utilization of multiple methods; specialized training of research assistants; the use of law students as research assistants;)

There are differences in the context, circumstances and culture of other countries within which the project will be conducted, for which the pilot study will not prepare the team responsible for its implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are some recommendations arising from this monitoring and evaluation exercise of the pilot phase of the project entitled Child Support, Poverty and Gender Equality in the Caribbean.

1. **Replicate the research methodology in future phases of the research.** It has produced outstanding results.
2. **Pay special attention to the condition of court records and to what data it gives access.** It is clear from the pilot that the state of records everywhere, whether in the Courts or the Public Assistance Department, can influence progress in the research undertaken, both in terms of time, as well as financial costs. (it also impacts on the creation of the data capture form).
3. **In-depth interviews should not be used to provide generalized information on the users of the court system.** This is especially with regard to their employment status and other personal characteristics. It provides the richest data when it speaks to the personal experiences of the users, and their reasons for doing what they do.
4. **Be more specific about the objectives of the Country Advisory Team and the Regional Advisory Committee,** especially as it relates to the importance of representatives disseminating information to their counterparts in their own organizations and countries.
5. **Make greater use of the technologies to schedule meetings,** especially regional meeting, which are both costly and time consuming, leading to an inability to schedule meeting where all member are able to attend.
6. **It is important to include UNICEF as a natural partner from the beginning of any future phase of this project.** This project underscores the complementarities and synergies that are inherent in projects and programs that seek to advance the rights of women and children.
7. **Ensure follow up, to identify whether the longer term objectives of the project have been met.**
8. **Develop a separate proposal for funding for advocacy and dissemination of information arising from the project.** This is in order to ensure that the outputs of the project do not dissolve, leading to a renewed invisibility of the issues surrounding this social problem. If this is done within the context of the project, then the project itself will be without end.
9. **Conduct a more realistic budget for future phases of the project.**

CONCLUSIONS

This pilot project, **Child Support, Poverty and Gender Equality in the Caribbean**, is without doubt a valuable contribution to the knowledge and information base around the issues of child support poverty and gender equality in the Caribbean, in general, and Barbados in particular.

In the implementation of the project, the project team has remained faithful to the tenets of participatory research and the use of the feminist methodology. Their triangulation of methods, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies has also been most useful and has helped to reduce the effects of some limitations that were related to poor record keeping on the part of the institutions from which data were being collected.

The approach to the research has also resulted in rich findings that have been validated by the experiences of the stakeholders and keen and insightful analyses that will undoubtedly be useful to policy makers as they seek to improve the delivery of services to users. It has also resulted in strengthened relationships with organizations, institutions and groups that could help to advance the objectives of gender equality and the alleviation of poverty, especially as it relates to maintenance for children.

The project has however been affected by cost overruns. This was due to various reasons, some of which will be better managed with the strengthened capacity gained through experiences in this pilot phase, and others which will always be difficult to anticipate. It is clear, that although there are several benefits to be gained through the approach used in this project, it costs more to undertake projects in this manner. Participatory research is reflexive and will involve undertaking some unplanned for activities based on information coming out of the research. Given the outcomes of this pilot research conducted in Barbados, the additional expense is justified.

ANNEX 1

ADMINISTRATION OF FAMILY JUSTICE: Child Support, Shared Family Responsibilities and Gender Equality

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