

TRINIDAD and TOBAGO

NEWSDAY

Supplement

WEDNESDAY 8 MARCH, 2023



Together we can
forge women's
equality. Collectively
we can all
#EmbraceEquity.

March 8



International
Women's Day

internationalwomensday.com

Happy International Women's Day | March 8



Celebrate the power within

RBC Caribbean women tell us what their inner power is



Gretchen Camacho-Mohammed
Head, Human Resources
Caribbean Banking
Trinidad & Tobago
Humility



Rose Hall
Relationship Manager
Turks & Caicos Islands
Resilience



Rae Skinner
Senior Regional Enablement
Coach
Caribbean Banking
Barbados
Empowering Others



Monique Crawford
Area Vice President
Private Banking
Bahamas
Creating Balance



Khadene Lobban
Branch Manager
Cayman Islands
Adapability



Cherhen Zinck
Relationship Manager
Business Banking
Aruba
Self Confidence



Yvette Dupis-Van Putten
Relationship Manager
St. Maarten
Sheer Determination



Suzanne Seepersad
Regional Vice President
Wealth Solutions
Caribbean Banking
Trinidad & Tobago
Purpose



Lillian Goele
Regional Manager
Investment Sales
Curacao
Perseverance

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[#embraceequity](https://twitter.com/embraceequity)





From online learning and digital activism to the rapid expansion of high-paying tech jobs, the digital age has generated unprecedented opportunities for the empowerment of women and girls. But advancing technology is also introducing new forms of inequality and heightened threats to their rights and well-being.

Women and girls remain underrepresented across the creation, use and regulation of technology. They are less likely to use digital services or enter tech-related careers, and significantly more likely to face online harassment and violence. This limits not only their own digital empowerment but also the transformative potential of technology as a whole – over the past decade, women's exclusion from the digital sphere has shaved US\$1 trillion off the GDP of low- and middle-income countries.

In the face of escalating global crises, we stand at a crossroads: allow technology to widen existing disparities and further concentrate power in the hands of the few, or put it to work on behalf of a safer, more sustainable, more equitable future for all.

1. Close all gaps in digital access and skills

As our daily lives become increasingly digitalised, gender gaps in digital access threaten to leave women and girls even further behind. Though efforts to close these gaps have led to improvements in the gender parity score, the absolute gap between men and women's access has actually increased by 20 million since 2019. Today, 63 per cent of women have access to the internet, compared to 69 per cent of men. And women are 12 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone, a figure virtually unchanged since before the pandemic.

These global averages don't tell the whole story: race, age, disability, socioeconomic status and location all play a role in determining women's digital access and use. Marginalised groups such as older women, rural women and women with disabilities face significantly greater barriers to connectivity. In the least developed countries – where, despite mobile broadband signals covering 76 per cent of the population, only 25 per cent is connected – men are 52 per cent more likely to be within that online minority.

All of which makes clear that bridging access gaps will require more than just better digital infrastructure. Addressing factors like affordability, access to electricity, online privacy and safety, social norms and digital skills and literacy – all of which are mediated by gender – will be key to getting women meaningfully connected.

Explicitly working gender and intersectional perspectives into digital plans and policies is a crucial starting point, given that only half of national information and communications technology (ICT) policies or master plans make any reference to gender today.

But knowing what works isn't enough – governments need to invest in evidence-based programmes and initiatives.

Subsidising smartphones and laptops for women and girls and incentivising the provision of low-cost data plans can go a long way in overcoming gendered access barriers.

Power on:

How we can supercharge an equitable digital future



Two girls learn how to code and construct robots at a workshop for girls and women organised by UN Women's Arab states regional office and UNESCO,

PHOTO COURTESY UN WOMEN/EMAD KARIM

2. Support women and girls in STEM

Today, women remain a minority in both STEM education and careers, representing only 28 per cent of engineering graduates, 22 per cent of artificial intelligence workers and less than one third of tech sector employees globally. Without equal representation in these fields, women's participation in shaping technology, research, investments and policy will remain critically limited.

The same challenges apply to their access to fast-growing and high-paying careers – an inequality compounded by the fact that, as tech and digital innovation disrupt industries, women will bear the brunt of job losses.

Stereotypes about who is, and isn't, well suited to STEM play a major role in discouraging girls from entering these fields. These beliefs become a self-perpetuating cycle: without encouragement in tech fields, girls end up lacking necessary knowledge – thus making them less likely to express interest.

Those who do make it into tech often face an actively hostile environment, with a significant pay gap (21 per cent) and considerably lower rates of promotion (52 women for every 100 men). Nearly half (48 per cent) report experiencing workplace harassment.

Effective solutions must target both the barriers that force women out of STEM jobs and those that keep girls from pursuing them in the first place.

Providing universal broadband access

for teachers, students and schools – and ensuring digital literacy for its users – can increase girls' exposure to STEM, particularly those from less privileged backgrounds. Digital learning provides new opportunities to adapt educational environments and curricula to the needs of girls and students from marginalised groups.

Working to eliminate gender biases from schools is also key, as is ensuring that girls have access to women mentors in STEM fields with whom they can identify.

3. Create tech that meets the needs of women and girls

Technology reflects its creators. So when women and girls are left out of tech and innovation spaces, it's no surprise that digital tools fail to meet their needs. Severe underinvestment in, for example, digital tools that promote sexual and reproductive health is the natural outcome of decision-making processes that systematically exclude women's voices.

At the same time, digital access gaps mean women produce less data than men, and a lack of data disaggregation leads to unequal representation in data sets. This has major downstream effects on machine learning and AI enabled service delivery. A global analysis of 133 AI systems from 1988 to today found that 44.2 per cent displayed gender bias, with 25.7 per cent exhibiting both gender and racial bias – which led to lower service quality, unequal resource

distribution and the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes.

This problem has gone largely unchecked owing to the inadequacy of tech-sector oversight. Even where ethical frameworks have been developed, they lack safeguards – and since regulation has been largely left to companies themselves, many have ignored or underinvested in harm mitigation strategies.

Creating more inclusive, less biased tech starts with design and regulation processes rooted in human rights. That means centering the voices of marginalised and vulnerable women, as well as social and behavioural scientists and human rights experts, in the design of new digital tools.

4. Address technology-facilitated gender-based violence

Despite its prevalence and gravity, there is no universally accepted definition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, but it can be understood as any act of violence committed, assisted or aggravated by the use of ICT on the basis of gender. Though such acts often take place in the virtual sphere, they result in tangible harm – physical, sexual, psychological, social, political and/or economic.

This kind of violence doesn't end when women log off: there's a continuum between real-world and online violence, with technology helping to perpetuate and heighten surveillance, trafficking and other forms of abuse.

As social media becomes an increasingly crucial space for both socialising and organising, it has also become a key site of gendered disinformation, misinformation, sexist hate speech and more – all of which undermine women's online expression and movement.

For women who face intersecting forms of discrimination, including women of colour, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ people, the risk is even higher. Same with women in the public eye – journalists, politicians and women's rights defenders, for example – who face significantly higher levels of hate speech and other violence than their male counterparts.

And online violence (like all forms of gender-based violence) is seriously underreported, with only one in four women reporting violent acts to the platform where they took place, and even fewer – 14 per cent – reporting to a protective agency.

Action is urgently needed. Expanded legal frameworks must be developed and centred on human rights and survivor-informed approaches. Policy makers should co-ordinate with the justice sector, civil society organisations, the media and other sectors to develop coherent responses and strategies for mitigation.

And design processes based in human rights can improve reporting and moderation systems, helping to take the onus off victims.

Finally, teaching digital citizenship can help cover issues of online violence – while also instilling empathy and ethical digital-media use, and teaching boys and men to become advocates for gender equality.



International Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity



Executive director of NIBTT,
Niala Persad-Poliah.
PHOTO COURTESY NIBTT

"We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored." – Sheryl Sandberg

NIB executive director advises women, girls

'You're worth more than 'likes''

BAVINA SOOKDEO

"I believe that resilience comes from one's strength of character, focus and dedication. I am resilient, in the midst of life's challenges.

"No one's life is perfect, we all encounter challenges and losses, including loved ones. It is how we respond to these challenges that determines our real mettle."

This is how Niala Persad-Poliah responded when asked what makes her resilient.

Persad-Poliah stands proudly at the helm of the National Insurance Board (NIBTT). She joined the NIBTT 20 years ago and has held many senior executive leadership positions there. In 2014, she was appointed executive director.

Her role involves strategically leading the NIBTT to success through transformational growth and

organisational change.

"I am passionate about serving people, especially the most vulnerable in society, and ensuring the sustainability of the NIS through much needed reform," said Persad-Poliah.

She said being a woman in a key leadership position, her goal is to empower, inspire and motivate.

"I believe that visionary and transformational leadership, coupled with empathetic management, are integral for all leaders," she added. She believes when people are empowered to freely contribute and share their ideas, "strategic goals are more easily within reach."

Asked to send a message to women and girls on International Women's Day, Persad-Poliah advised them to be their sister's keeper.

"Be that pillar of strength to each other and uplift. Lend a helping hand and a comforting word.

"I would say that empathy and leadership can co-

exist in one space and to keep focused on their goals. Often, we see teenagers in a hurry to grow up and to assume adult realities. Stop and think.

"If I can borrow from a popular saying, I would reiterate that, 'Your worth is not measured in likes, comments, notes or followers, but in your ability to love.'"

The theme for International Women's Day 2023 focuses on embracing equity and spotlights the importance of digital education and advancing technologies in transforming and bridging gender division. So what contribution is the NIBTT making towards the empowerment of women?

Its executive director says the NIBTT's 23 benefits work to embolden and strengthen the economic well-being of women and families in general. The maternity and special maternity benefits are key financial contributors, at very pivotal points, for the women who qualify.

Additionally, there is gender equity for other benefits, for example, the survivor's benefit, which can have a meaningful impact on the lives of families in a small but positive way.

Of note too, is the NIBTT's most recent attempt at digital transformation, which will bring about greater operational efficiencies with a clear customer-centric focus.

On May 27, 2022, the NIBTT made a master agreement for managed service with Fujitsu Caribbean (Trinidad), a significant milestone for the Empower project.

The Empower project is the NIBTT's digital solution, which is designed to address strategic organisational needs and the business requirements of several key areas. Leveraging technology is a fundamental deliverable of the NIBTT's vision 2024 strategic plan, and the Empower project is critical to advancing this technical thrust.

Persad-Poliah explained, "The NIBTT is a 50-year-old organisation, and we are highly paper-based, but our transformation through the Empower project is going to address our pressing need for improved operational efficiency.

"I have no doubt that our partnership with Fujitsu Caribbean (Trinidad) Ltd will yield the results necessary to technologically propel the NIBTT into a new era of business operations."

She said all NIBTT stakeholders will benefit from this large digital transformation. "Employers, employees, customers, staff and persons who interact with the NIBTT...The NIBTT will transition and transform into service excellence."

Questioned on other plans for women in ICT at NIBTT, Persad-Poliah said, "We are proud and cognisant of our leadership role in parity matters and we strive to endlessly #EmbraceEquity.

"It should be noted that NIBTT's Technology portfolio is led by a female executive, ably supported by male and female ICT professionals.

"In addition to that, several key areas within the NIBTT are also led by female executives, including human resources, legal services, insurance operations, communications, investigations and controls and our corporate secretariat.

"Over 66 per cent of our total staff complement is female, and we do not take lightly our role as nurturers, caretakers, wives and mothers, while still being leaders, industry experts and trailblazers in business."

FLOW CELEBRATES ITS WOMEN LEADERS!

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE REMAINS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR FLOW.

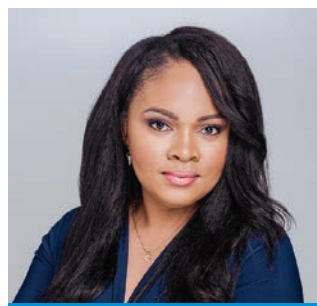
Against the backdrop of International Women's Day, which this year is celebrated under the theme #EmbraceEquity, Trinidad and Tobago's leading telecommunications provider has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting equity across all segments of the company through a culture of diversity and inclusion.

Flow Trinidad has ten women on its Senior Leadership Team of twelve. Here's what seven of them have to say on #EmbracingEquity:



Simone Martin-Sulgan
First Female Vice President of Flow Trinidad

Allies are incredibly important for the advancement of women; we need clear endorsement from male allies in the pursuit of gender equality. If you want to go far, you need to go #together.



Reneasha Simmons-Phillips
Senior Manager – People

It is a privilege to be part of a team that allows you to be your authentic self. I am proud that at Flow we implement policies and support programs that promote equity for future female leaders. Key to our success as women is tangible support through the different phases of our lives.



Cindy-Ann Gatt
Director – Commercial Operations

I have had great mentors over the years at Flow, of both sexes. It's important to lift the next generation of leaders through mentorship and give them the opportunities that we may have benefitted from.



Yolande Agard-Simmons
Senior Manager – Communications

Empower, mentor and inspire the next generation of leaders by giving them opportunities to shine. Join me and do your part to contribute to a world of work that is more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.



Krystle Lake
Director – Business Operations

It's amazing that Flow promotes the best person for the job. They are creating a path to accelerate one's career. I ask that you avoid limiting women's choices and allow a woman to define what success means to her.



Nikita Maharaj
Director – Finance

To be part of such an open and welcoming organization is a privilege. I firmly believe we need to embody the change that we want to see, and this means embracing equality. I encourage my colleagues to not only focus on your professional development, but also get involved in the community and give back. This is how, as women, we can lead by example and mold future leaders.



Roberta Norman-Reverand
Director – B2C

As a mother of a young woman, doing my part to create a more equitable world of work for her to inherit is of paramount importance to me. As a female working at Flow and part of a robust leadership team, I feel empowered and respected. As a Company, we live this message of embracing equity.

International Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity

Female executives paving the way for new generation

WORTH: from Page 4

Does Persad-Poliah work in a male-dominated field?
 "There are gender-equity issues in any sector. In 2019, AmchamTT noted that the figures related to gender parity, at the most senior levels of business in TT, were not encouraging. They reported that although there was gender parity up to middle management. At the C-suite level this ratio falls to less than 25 per cent female participation."

But she was optimistic.

"I think that it is fair to say that while executive female leadership may be rare in TT, there are female executives who are paving the way for a new generation of future leaders on the horizon."

As for the challenges of being a woman in such a position, Persad-Poliah said, "Every role has its challenges, but through perseverance, faith and a steadfast sense of self and belief in my purpose at the NIBTT, I am able to successfully lead this organisation which impacts the lives and well-being of so many in society."

Speaking of challenges, the covid19 pandemic posed many to several sectors. How did the NIBTT survive it?

Throughout the height of the pandemic, the NIBTT continued to provide social insurance services to the insured public and their dependants.

"Like many other organisations, we had to rapidly adapt to the changing environment in order to ensure the health and safety of our internal and external customers.

"Being a service industry, the closures did in fact impact our claim submissions and verification processes.

"But adjustments were made and we were generally able to continue to operate within our statutory framework and maintain our business processes with minimum disruption.

"I think covid19 caused many organisations to accelerate their digital and online presence and the



Niala Persad-Poliah, executive director of the National Insurance Board (NIBTT), gives the keynote address at the Work Life Balance Conference – Connecting the Dots, on the topic Work/Life and Ageing in relation to planning for a longer working life. The conference was hosted by the Institute of Gender and Development Studies and the University of the West Indies (UWI) St Augustine, from April 26-27, 2018, at UWI's Teaching and Learning Centre, St Augustine. PHOTO COURTESY NIB/UWI.

NIBTT was not exempt from this reality. Thankfully, the NIBTT had already started to embark on a transformational journey with our Empower project."

Where does she see the NIBTT in the future?

"If I look into the not-so-distant future, the NIBTT will have seen a full transformation and we will be reaping the rewards from our current efforts" she stated.

"I look forward to the implementation of ICT initiatives



National Insurance Board office, on the corner of Oxford and Edward streets, Port of Spain.

and other customer-focused projects at the NIBTT, to better serve the needs of all of our customers."

Persad-Poliah may seem like a superwoman, but she's also a mother. On how she handles the multiple roles in her life, she admitted, "It is always a balancing act when one considers business and family. All we can do is to strive for excellence as we work to create a stable and loving environment for our family and a professional and safe workplace for our colleagues."

As for the woman she most admires, Persad-Poliah disclosed that would be her mother.

"She is my true hero. She showed me what it is to be resilient and to persevere.

"My dad passed away when I was a child, so for most of my life, I have seen my mother sacrifice and dedicate herself to our family. If I can borrow from a popular adage, I will say that I am a strong woman because a strong woman raised me."

Persad-Poliah lives by the motto, "See each other as people." She explained that when people can to collaborate, actively listen and lead with personal accountability, they can flourish and sincerely have an outward mindset.

If someone asked her, "Who is Niala Persad-Poliah?" she would say Niala would do the right thing, even when no one is watching.

"I live by my mantra of honesty, humility and integrity.

"I firmly believe that as parents, we must invest time in the lives of our children to bring about positive change and excellence at every level. Personally, I spend as much time as possible nurturing my son and actively supporting his education and school through volunteerism and engagement.

"When all is said and done, one can only hope to be remembered positively because of one's actions in the lives of people with whom we have interacted."



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DIGICEL'S EMBRACING EQUITY



Trijata Maraj

Reyanne Sobers

Penny Gomez

Trijata Maraj

Director, Marketing and Digital Products

As a Marketing Director in the tech industry, I have found that my commitment to diversity of thought and perspective has been crucial in overcoming challenges and thriving in my space. It can be all too easy to fall into the trap of clichés and conventional thinking, however, by breaking away from these norms and embracing new ideas and perspectives, I have been able to make a real impact.

At Digicel, we firmly believe that having a variety of voices at the table leads to better outcomes and more innovative solutions. When we challenge ourselves to think beyond the obvious and explore new ideas and perspectives, we open ourselves up to new possibilities and opportunities for growth.

As young women, you may find it challenging to speak up and assert your ideas and opinions, where it's easy to be labelled as aggressive or dogmatic. In the spirit of International Women's Day and the theme of "Embracing Equity," I encourage all women in tech to stay committed to diversity of thought and perspective. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself and your colleagues to think beyond the status quo, and always be willing to explore new ideas and perspectives.

Penny Gomez

CEO, Digicel Foundation

I have personally witnessed that women who lead charitable foundations are determined to make a real difference in the lives of those they serve. Through my own journey and having seen that of others, I know we have to overcome many challenges to ensure that our programmes and initiatives are effective and impactful.

One of the ways we do this is by using data and feedback to continuously improve our programmes. At the Digicel Foundation, we gather feedback from our beneficiaries and other stakeholders to understand their needs and how we can better serve them. We also use data to track the impact of our initiatives and make data-driven decisions to ensure that our resources are being used effectively.

Embracing equity is important to me not only as we celebrate it this IWD but also as a core principle since I have seen how women leading charitable foundations are making a real difference in the world through their passion and vision. They are creating more equitable and just societies by addressing the root causes of social issues and empowering those who are most vulnerable.

Reyanne Sobers

General Manager, Mobile

In honour of International Women's Day and the theme "Embracing Equity," we must acknowledge the challenges faced by women managing large Profit and Loss (P&L) portfolios in tech and how they overcome them to succeed.

Women managing large P&Ls in tech often find themselves as the only woman in the room, leading to an isolating experience. Luckily, I have found that at Digicel, the experience has been filled with support and I've been able to rise in the organization as it has not only made space for me but countless other women.

I encourage women working in tech industries or departments to find spaces where they are celebrated and developed to unleash their greatest potential without being subject to discrimination and glass ceilings. Where you can't find this, I challenge you to create it as we #embraceequity on International Women's Day.



Digicel

Better Together



International Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity



Karen Darbasie, First Citizens Group CEO, interacts with participants in the bank's Girls First Festival.

SOURCE: FIRSTCITIZENSGROUP.COM

BAVINA SOOKDEO

Believe in yourself wholeheartedly, go after your dreams passionately, make valuable contributions committedly and be sure to have fun along the way." This is Karen Darbasie's message to women and girls on International Women's Day. Darbasie is the Group CEO of First Citizens.

Women currently account for the majority of First Citizens' workforce in the non-management sector while among its leadership team, the ratio is 44 per cent male and 56 per cent female.

"Our statistics speak to First Citizens as being a prime employer for women, from early career to executive level," said Darbasie.

Darbasie is responsible for the operations and oversight of all entities across the First Citizens Group. First Citizens Group Financial Holdings Ltd (FCGFH) is the parent company of its largest group sector, First Citizens Bank, and alongside First Citizens Investment Services Ltd – the Caribbean's largest full-service securities trading company (TT, Barbados, St Vincent and the Grenadines and St Lucia); First Citizens Bank (Barbados); the First Citizens financial services office in Costa Rica and other subsidiaries, First Citizens Trustee Services Ltd and First Citizens Depository Services Ltd.

"We serve and connect these Caribbean communities," Darbasie pointed out.

Darbasie joined the First Citizens Group as CEO almost eight years ago on April 7, 2015. Prior to her appointment at First Citizens, she held several senior positions at a local subsidiary of a US-based financial institution, a career spanning almost 21 years.

Being a woman in such a position on a journey of leadership is quite a feat. How does Darbasie view this opportunity?

She disclosed, "As a woman in a senior executive position, I feel fortunate to be an example for other girls and women with ambitions of advancement to the corporate ladder – I am one of many examples nationwide that there is potential for boardroom access for women and that with hard work, anyone can move up in their chosen area."

And while she feels fortunate to be in such a position, she admits that there are challenges and biases.

"In any profession there is potential for biases to arise but I have always allowed my work and contributions to speak for me. I encourage women everywhere to do the same – focus on being the best at what you do, treat what you do as a calling and an avenue through which you can contribute to building a family, your community and ultimately our country."

Her joy comes from the impact that her work and service have on others.

"My triumph is the example I get to demonstrate to my children that it is possible to make valuable contributions both in your career and other aspects of your life. I get to make a meaningful difference, with the support of so many others, through the contributions of the organisation I lead."

Like many other women across the country she is also a mother. How does she cope with her multiple roles?

She explained, "To balance that responsibility to my family alongside my professional demands, I have always tapped into that spirit of community that has always been a part of Caribbean life. The saying that "it takes a village to raise a child" is so true. I have had the support of family members, friends, colleagues and my own leaders along the way. My children have also always been tremendously supportive and we have discussed and

First Citizens CEO Karen Darbasie:

'Go after dreams with purpose, passion'

agreed on all my career moves."

But what makes her so resilient? How has she managed to survive the many ups and downs of life? She attributes this to her "never give up" attitude, combined with knowing that she is never going it alone.

"This has always been something I've channelled to help me maintain my focus," she explained. "I am also always proactive and prepared for matters not going exactly according to plan and I work on alternative actions upfront. Everyone, everywhere is faced with challenges but experience has taught, shaped and convinced me that the indomitable human spirit is capable of recovering with resilience, in the most trying of circumstances."

The First Citizens approach is one of collective responsibility where in every aspect of what is done and with everyone on its team, they challenge themselves to #EmbraceEquity.

"IWD 2023 is another opportunity through which we can further galvanise support for this cause, through the combined contributions of the organisation, its leaders, its employees and its customers," stated Darbasie.

"There is executive-leadership commitment, cemented through policies and practices that help employees practise and experience the equity and fair treatment of which we speak."

She further noted that First Citizens has always been interested in advancing not just the women at the organisation but women all across the country.

"In fact, we also target men and children as well. This is evident at various levels of our operations," stated the Group CEO who pointed out, "In our corporate social responsibility thrust we undertake programmes under our community – gender pillar. We are very proud of initiatives like First Citizens Girls First Festival – an event aimed at building a sense of sisterhood, resilience and high self-esteem among teenaged girls; our Young Men's Development Programme (YMDP), an intervention programme for at-risk young men; and our women's conference, which has touched thousands of women in St Lucia, St Vincent, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago over the years.

"As part of our products and services we also have the Purple Card – a card for a cause that allows holders to make monthly contributions towards ending violence against women. The First Citizens Advancement of Women Committee undertakes many socially-impacting programmes directing aid and support to women and children.

"Through it all, our staff members, both male and female, have contributed significantly – male employees have served as mentors in the YMDP, females have served as the volunteers and facilitators at our Girls First Festival over the years."

Questioned on the attitude and qualities of women of First Citizens, Darbasie proudly shared, "The women of First Citizens are strong and industrious, diverse and phenomenal! Our entire group represents females across St Vincent & the Grenadines, St Lucia, Barbados and TT so we're talking about a range of contributions, cultures, interests and experiences. Yet, we bond over our Caribbean identity and we take our responsibility for delivering financial services to citizens, with pride, everywhere that we serve."

For International Women's Day, all First Citizens staff members have been encouraged to get involved in one way or another. They have been challenged to strike the #embraceequity pose and to participate in sharing their talents on the theme through poetry and spoken word. First Citizens is also highlighting a few females who will share their experience in the organisation and how supported they feel by the organisation from an equity standpoint. "On International Women's Day, everyone can get on board with an exciting initiative, "Taking a Stand...Fashionably," where employees will be encouraged to wear purple attire to work."

It is Darbasie's hope to see women go after their dreams with purpose and passion but also to take the time to contribute not just to their own success but that of others. "Advancement for all should remain our ultimate goal," she urged.

When asked about the contribution that First Citizens is making to the empowerment of women, Darbasie stated, "The programmes and initiatives that we have undertaken throughout the years have been deeply appreciated by our corporate social responsibility partners, those who serve on our First Citizens Foundation and its various committees, and the many beneficiaries who are directly impacted. For 30 years we have been financing the dreams – homes, businesses, education and a host of opportunities for our clients. We are pleased to say that we have been partners in helping many women achieve their financial goals and the objectives of their families.

"Everything from our financial products and service to our contributions to NGOs and, to our own programmes, have gone a long way in empowering, equipping and helping women to lead successful lives."



Karen Darbasie, CEO, First Citizens Group (FCG).

PHOTO COURTESY FCG



Equity starts with fairness

First Citizens celebrates the achievements of women and the power in equity to bring positive change. We are proud to continue supporting programmes and initiatives that encourage women to grow and achieve their true potential.

#EmbraceEquity International Women's Day 2023



Happy INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The PTSC joins the international community in celebration of International Women's Day 2023 with gender equity deeply embedded in the organisational culture as we continue to promote training and development of all employees and the positioning of women at all levels of the organisation, from the Board of Directors and Management to business operations in the form of drivers, technicians, engineers, operations supervisors, administrative professionals and customer service representatives.

One of the themes for International Women's Day 2023 is **#embraceequity** and the PTSC takes the opportunity to highlight **women in our organisation of all levels**. We thank them for their invaluable contribution to the Corporation.



VANESSA MONROE
Driver / Conductor attached to the Point Fortin Depot



ZORINA HOSEIN
Driver / Conductor attached to the Port of Spain Depot



KAREN MAXWELL
Charge Hand - Engineering Department - San Fernando Depot



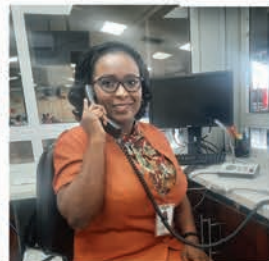
MANDY HARPER
Operations Supervisor - Arima Depot



CHRISTAL CHARLES-GRIMSHAW
Operations Supervisor - Tobago Depot.



ANN MARE ALEXIS-LOREGNARD
Chief Clerk (Ag.) - Finance and Accounts Department - San Fernando Depot



EMMA SMITH
Customer Service Representative Supervisor (Ag.)



DONNA DAVID
Charge Hand - Engineering - Port of Spain Depot



ANJANIE JULIEN
Assistant Deputy General Manager - Finance and Accounts (Ag.)

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International Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity

TT Coalition of Services Industries CEO on leadership 'Be a disruptor, get the hard jobs done'

BAVINA SOOKDEO

"This is the perfect age to be a woman."

So says Vashti Gaitri Guyadeen, CEO of the TT Coalition of Services Industries (TTCSI).

Guyadeen, who has been at the TTCSI for approximately five years, sent out this message to women and girls on International Women's Day: "Don't limit yourself. Stretch yourself and never take for granted the freedom and opportunities that are available to us now. And most importantly, adopt a motto and live by it."

Asked about the motto by which she lives, she responded, "My high school, Naparima Girls' motto is what I chose to live by since age 11: Non Nobis Solum Sed Omnibus, which means, 'Not for ourselves (alone) but for others.'"

Guyadeen has worked at the TT Chamber of Industry and Commerce, TT International Financial Centre (TTIFC), Economic Development Board and Council for Competitiveness as manager of research at all of these institutions. She has also been a technical adviser at the ministries of energy and energy industries and public administration, Arthur Lok Jack GSB and UWI, St Augustine.

Her current role has primarily evolved over the past five years during which the TTCSI transitioned into a body that advocates vociferously for the services sector in TT and the wider Caribbean region by addressing the gaps in trade in services statistics – what gets measured and what gets done.

"So it is important for us to track the contribution of services to GDP," explained Guyadeen. "This is the mechanism whereby we can gain traction for the sector."

On her personal function, she said, "I am a firm believer that you have the opportunity to shape your role in an organisation – this is the mechanism through which you become an asset to the company. Be a disruptor and do the hard things that no one else wants to do!"

"My job involves helping services associations to become resilient and developing services providers and firms to become globally competitive so that they would be able to expand their businesses into

new markets and create jobs for nationals."

It's a large role with a lot of responsibilities, but that's not an issue for Guyadeen, since she loves what she does.

"I see my role as leading a transformative process whereby more and more decision-makers will realise the importance of developing services in the country.

"As a country with high levels of tertiary participation, we have the foundation blocks to build a knowledge-based economy, and the TTCSI is the nexus of this transformation."

Just under a month ago, a colleague from Jamaica asked her to enrol in a corporate leadership course at the Pan African Institute (PALI) in Accra, Ghana, and since then, her outlook on leadership has changed considerably.

Asked what this journey of leadership means to her, she explained, "I view it as a path towards self-realisation, application of emotional intelligence to build strong teams. Leadership, in a nutshell, means motivating people and transforming lives."

So back when she was just a student, did she ever envision herself in such a position?

"It was never on my radar, but one of my colleagues/friend who worked at the TTCSI was adamant that I must apply for the position. She nagged me into applying, telling me that they needed me.

"So I had no choice but to listen to Florence Louis-Eduoard and apply. I guess Flo saw something that I didn't.

"I envisioned myself in an international/regional position doing what I am currently, but at a larger scale. I am still hopeful."

With great responsibility, great challenges are inevitable and Guyadeen admits she is no stranger to difficulty.

"There definitely are substantial challenges. The role involves organising diverse sectors and advocating on their behalf. In most instances, we will do everything that we can, and nothing changes, but we have to keep at it, hoping for a breakthrough. The foremost challenge (is) the lack of recognition for services, but I grew up with a father who drilled into me at a young age that if you do good work, everything falls into place. So this

has been my modus operandi."

Discrimination is another speed bump in Guyadeen's path. Asked if she has ever experienced it, she said, "Yes, I have encountered several levels of discrimination, some of which encompassed a high degree of criticism.

"But I view this as part of the process. I have two choices: either sit in self-pity, or view the criticism as constructive, evaluate, assess myself and resolve to do better where possible."

BE A DISRUPTOR: continues on Page 13



Vashti Gaitri Guyadeen, CEO of the Trinidad and Tobago Coalition of Services Industries (TTCSI).

PHOTO COURTESY VASHTI GAITRI GUYADEEN



Valued Woman

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Equity is a right which should be afforded to all and needs to be embedded in every aspect of our society.

We continue to embrace equality and work towards creating an inclusive environment for our women and encourage our colleagues, business partners and family members to do the same. This is a collective task, so this International Women's Day, we challenge our men to stand as allies in the fight for equity and the advancement of women in Trinidad and Tobago and across the globe.

Together, we all play a part in achieving this goal.

#EmbraceEquality

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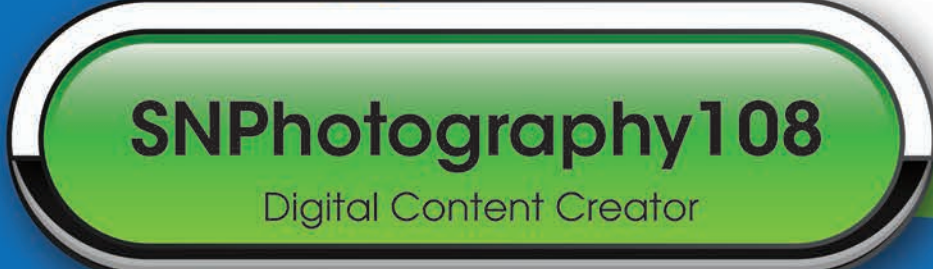
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International Women's Day

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'We are building a legacy'

BE A DISRUPTOR: from Page 11

One of Guyadeen's most recent challenges is the covid19 pandemic, since more than 50 per cent of services were heavily affected – personal-care providers (beauticians, hairdressers etcetera), tourism services and more.

But Guyadeen advocated on members' behalf to ensure they had access to grants. Standing firm with members, the CEO and her team accelerated training and focus on export of services, thereby providing them with tools to transform their businesses using technology.

During the pandemic two export accelerator programmes were started – Services Go Global, with support from Caribbean Export, and Gateway to Trade, which was funded through the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP).

Although there have been challenges, they did not come without their fair share of triumphs. Guyadeen feels rewarded by seeing the successes of the micro and small firms under the Gateway to Trade Export Accelerator programme.

"These are firms that will shape the future of our country. I am certain of this," she said with a smile. "Another triumph is our growth path: within three to four years the work of the TTCSI (has been) recognised regionally. We are doing work that no other business support organisation is doing. We are building a legacy."

What is the TTCSI doing to empower women? She said the organisation is providing female entrepreneurs with the tools to develop world-class businesses, thereby building an exporter's mindset and providing them with financial sustainability.

Over the past year and a half, the TTCSI, through its Gateway to Trade Programme, has managed to strengthen the export capacity of female-owned businesses across four subsectors in TT. These are business and events tourism, professional services, ICT and energy services.

Asked where she sees the TTCSI and its women in the future, Guyadeen said, "The TTCSI will be globally

recognised as a think tank that was instrumental in leading the charge in the collection of trade in services data and building a cadre of globally competitive services providers and firms – a substantial number of firms that are female-owned and operated."

With its focus on growing services, just ahead of International Women's Day, the TTCSI's monthly Eye on Services featured three successful female entrepreneurs – Roxanne Pantin, Simone Sant and Lisa Shandilya.

"Building capacity is not just a day's activity for us, it is integrated into our work plan throughout the year."

"Building capacity is not just a day's activity for us, it is integrated into our work plan throughout the year," Guyadeen pointed out.

One may wonder who is the role model of such a determined and strong woman.

When asked who is the woman she admires the most, she named several women "that I admire for different characteristics, the first being my mother, Doolin Guyadeen. She has been my pillar. Through her actions I learnt how to be independent. "The second person is my form 4 and 5 form mistress when I was at Naps, Mrs Yvonne Duncan. She was truly one of the best teachers that I have had.

"Joan Ferreira, my first female boss and my CEO when I was at the TT Chamber. She redefined my image of a CEO and she was motherly, nurturing and a person that I have really come to admire.

"Since coming to the TTCSI, I met the powerhouse that is Angela Lee Loy. She has been my mentor and I have learnt a considerable amount from her – no matter how busy she is, she finds time to share insights."



Florence Murray-Joseph, founder of Flo Joe's makes a line of healthy products using pigeon peas, including ice cream, cakes, bread and wines. The TTCSI's plans include working with women-led businesses.



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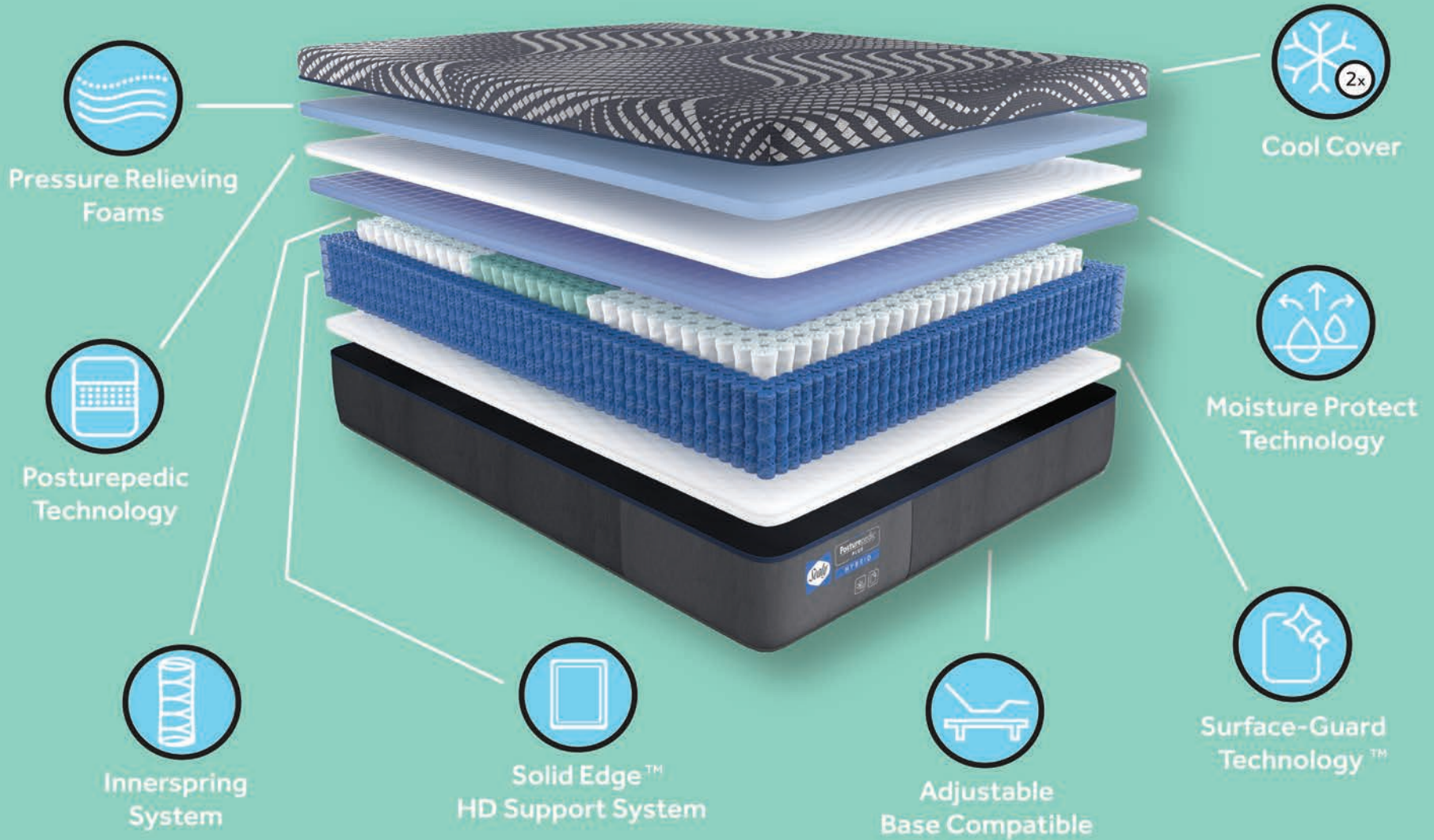
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International Women's Day

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The Naparima Girls' High School (NGHS) Non Nobis Foundation included close to 100 women in an empowerment seminar on March 4 at the school's auditorium to celebrate International Women's Day (IWD).

The session, Surviving and Thriving: DigitAll Technology Strategies for Women, addressed the 2023 UN's IWD theme, DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equality.

The event included female hosts and presenters, and some Naps alumnae, with the programme led by MC Lara Quentrall-Thomas, chair and founder of Regency Recruitment and Resources.

In her opening remarks, Quentrall-Thomas revealed several thought-provoking facts about women and technology.

According to a 2022 IDB report, she said, only 17 per cent of women started careers in software and programming, while another report covering 51 countries highlighted that almost 40 per cent of women had been harassed online and 85 per cent had witnessed some form of online violence.

Quentrall-Thomas commented, "Although advancements in digital technology offer immense

Naps Girls' foundation works for women's empowerment via technology



MC Lara Quentrall-Thomas, standing, top left, looks on as Naparima Girls' High School Non Nobis Foundation chairperson Camille Ramdial-Cumberbatch addresses close to 100 women at an empowerment seminar on March 4

opportunities, growing inequalities are becoming increasingly evident in the context of digital skills and access to technologies, with women being left behind as the result of this digital gender divide. The need for inclusive and transformative technology and digital education is therefore crucial for a sustainable future."

Engaging with the seminar digitally from overseas was foundation chairperson Camille Ramdial-

Cumberbatch, who explained the genesis of the fundraiser: "We wanted to align ourselves with the UN's international theme, which focused on digital technology for women, helping women keep themselves safe, while at the same time empowering them with insights as to how to maximise the use of digital technology in helping them become their best."

The session had two main topic

related to the local context: ICT Skills Necessary to Excel as a Female Entrepreneur and Leader in a Digital World, presented by Vernisha Ahyoung, a digital technology expert with over 25 years' experience in ICT; and Using Technology to Safeguard Women, presented by Michelle Aquing-Bissoo of the Andrea Project team.

Our introductory speaker, Simone Sant-Ghuran, founder of TrinidadWeddings.com, set the context for the seminar by also giving insight into leveraging technology for business success.

Those attending were women of all ages, including secondary school students, representatives of women's groups and past pupils of the all-girls institution. The Right Rev Joy Abdul-Mohan, moderator of the Presbyterian Church, offered the opening prayer.

The foundation was established on the 100th anniversary of the school in 2012 by past student, teacher and chair of the NGHS Centenary Committee Dr Jennifer

Yamin-Ali, who shared at the event how the foundation was birthed: "I felt that after 100 years, we must do something truly meaningful to ensure that the true philosophical legacy of the school is perpetuated. The motto of the school is Non Nobis Solum Sed Omnibus (Latin for "Not for ourselves alone, but for all"). That motto translates into service to others, in keeping with the Presbyterian ethic on which this school was founded."

The Non Nobis Foundation has hosted volunteer activities over the past 11 years, which included a shoe drive for primary-school students, starting a volunteer club at the school, beach cleanup by Naps girls, visits to senior care homes, work with orphanages and an Easter egg hunt with the Autism Society.

The foundation has also established an annual educational grant to support a student who is transitioning into sixth form.

The foundation hopes to make its empowerment seminar an annual event for IWD, recognised annually on March 8.



National Union of Government and Federated Workers

National Union of Government and Federated Workers Commemorate International Women's Day



Women Officers of the National Union of Government and Federated Workers meet to discuss International Women's Day project and make strategic plans for the Union's Membership.

This year, as we commemorate International Women's Day, the globe is focused on the influences and implications of innovation and technology on gender equality. There is no doubt that despite technological advancements and digital transformation, there remains a need for digital education and inclusivity. In light of this, the United Nations International Women's Day 2023 campaign explores the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities and spotlights the importance of protecting the rights of women and girls in digital spaces.

National Union of Government and Federated Workers has recognized that as key stakeholders in the global move towards Sustainable Development, Trade Unions must be a part of digital transition and transformation and must lead their members into an integrated digital era where gender inclusivity is priority. NUGFW has always placed precedence on training and education, while encouraging and providing the opportunities for women to upskill. As a result, the Union has seen many of the women who form both a part of the membership and staff, emerge to assume managerial positions within the Union and within other organisations.

Through the Union, many women have been equipped with laptops, tablets, phones and other tools that they would need to conduct virtual meetings and to digitize their workspace, while working mothers on our staff have the full support of Administration, enabling them to work at the office, on-the-go and from home when necessary. NUGFW is a strong advocate for the acceptance of the opportunities of the digital revolution, where managers must understand that the dynamics of the world of work has changed and productivity cannot always be measured by time or location and technology has given workers the ability to get the job done, whenever and wherever they can, while meeting deadlines and maintaining efficient and quality service.

We live in an era where connectivity and technology have become intertwined in our daily lives and if we were dragging our feet before, the COVID-19 pandemic has nudged us into an updated reality, where information and technology are not only fundamental but critical to survival. As the virus took center stage, the world was constantly educated on its impact on the global economy, public health and policy-making and meanwhile, in the background, devastating effects were being felt socially and racially and gender inequality worsened. According to the International Labour Organization, globally the working poverty rate increased in 2020 for the first time in two decades and unemployment is now above its pre-pandemic level. Regrettably, the labour market groups that were most affected by the crisis were women and young people and these groups are recovering at the slowest rate.

Undoubtedly, women's economic and social empowerment would address this crisis and today's digital transformation opens the avenue for this and when strategically used, it can also help to boost gender equality. Digitalization has the potential to support women in

innumerable ways and that stems from earning income and growing employment and networking prospects, to accessing knowledge and information. Investing in digitalization and promoting digital education and inclusion is crucial to provide remote support and access to services to professionals and customers and has a positive impact, particularly for women workers and entrepreneurs. Investing in women pioneers, entrepreneurs, tech leaders and innovators could inspire and pave the way for other girls and women to fulfil their potential and generate the opportunity for many women to navigate the shift from informal work to formal work.

However, while we continue to support tech innovation, the gender digital divide must be bridged, in order to build resilient and inclusive realities. The world and the future of work need women's skills and perspectives, talent and leadership, as much as those of men and so we must all make intensive, intentional strides to close the gender digital gap. Only then will we leverage the power of technology to advance girls' and women's education and opportunities to achieve an equal future as we travel the road to the 2030 Agenda of achieving gender equality, decent work and economic growth and reduced inequalities.



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Health

2023
International
Women's Day

I Choose Me

Greater Access, Better Health... for ALL women

Today, the voices of advocates around the world will drown out the inequities that women face in accessing Universal Healthcare Coverage (UHC). International Women's Day provides the ideal platform to bring to the fore all issues related to women's ability to access healthcare services equally and equitably throughout the world. This year's theme, 'I Choose Me'; Greater Access, Better Health for ALL women; amplifies the prioritisation by the Ministry of Health Trinidad and Tobago, in the provision of unencumbered access to critical screening services geared towards early detection of illnesses such as cervical and breast cancers by all women.

As a further measure in ensuring the provision of the highest quality of women's health services, the Ministry of Health established the Women's Health Directorate in 2017. The main function of the Directorate is to ensure that any deficiencies occurring in the provision of services related to women's healthcare are efficiently improved and that much needed Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) procedures are affordable and accessible in both urban and rural areas. In advancing the objectives of the Ministry of Health towards the importance of better Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) for all women, the Ministry will host a series of events which includes Cervical and Breast Cancer screening. Additionally, the Ministry of Health will engage in a national campaign aimed at educating the public on women's health issues for the entire month of March.

The Ministry of Health, through its Directorate of Women's Health, will use this occasion dedicated to promoting better standards for all women internationally, to highlight the work that is currently being done in Trinidad and Tobago to end Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which affects one (1) in three (3) women globally. Thus far, the Directorate has developed National Clinical Guidelines on Intimate Partner Violence; trained health care workers in safe identification and referral of gender-based violence survivors; and conducted online sessions and communication activities to support training institutions in implementing family violence human resource capacity building.

The Ministry of Health, through its progressive stance on universal equity and equality for all women, has maintained its commitments made by Trinidad and Tobago at the 2018 session of the United Nations (UN) Commission on the Status of Women. Through the steadfast guidance and support of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT), the Ministry of Health has been deemed a 'regional leader' by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) as a result of its great achievements in the provision of services related to women's health.

In recognition of International Women's Day, the Ministry of Health pledges its commitment to greater access and better health for all women through its continued prioritization of the delivery of quality women's healthcare services in Trinidad and Tobago.



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 International Women's Day

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Health Ministry wants you to choose you

Stories by BAVINA SOOKDEO

This year's International Women's Day theme, as established by the UN, is DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality, but the Ministry of Health, to promote this country's specific needs, has selected the theme: I Choose Me: Greater access, better health for all women.

In observance of the occasion, the ministry is doing a national screening and women's health education drive, which began on March 6. It will be hosted through all regional health authorities (RHAs) in TT.

Director of the Directorate of Women's Health at the Ministry of Health Dr Adesh Sirjusingh explained that this is to raise awareness of the importance of screening for breast and cervical cancer for all women between 21 and 65.

He said the core services on offer will be Pap smears, breast-cancer-risk assessment, and mammogram referrals. Other services available will be HIV testing, covid19, HPV and influenza vaccinations, blood-sugar testing, blood-pressure testing and health education.

Why is the major focus on breast and cervical cancer? He explained, "The objective is to educate and influence changed behaviour among women and the health-related issues affecting them. The major health issues are breast and cervical cancer."

Sirjusingh said breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. In TT, about one in nine women over their lifetime will develop breast cancer. Data from the National Cancer Registry, for January 2016-December 2020 there were 2,323 diagnosed cases of breast cancer and 1,256 deaths.

One woman is diagnosed with breast cancer every day; one woman dies from breast cancer every 1.5 days, or two women every three days. For all women, the incidence is 69 per 100,000 per year, while for women 15 and above, it is 87 per 100,000 per year.

In comparison, in the US from 2015-2019 the incidence was 128 per 100,000 women per year.

One woman is diagnosed with cervical cancer every three days and one woman dies from cervical cancer every five days.

The statistics are alarming and Sirjusingh is committed to improving the health of women. He says the Ministry of Health can only build on its current success when it comes to its care of women.

"We hope to eliminate cervical cancer in the next 20 years."

The Ministry of Health will also focus on women's mental wellness during the campaign. Mental health professionals will be available at selected RHA facilities so that women will have access to mental health services.

Asked how he thinks this campaign will help in achieving access for women, Sirjusingh said, "We all acknowledge that women are at the centre of our society. The RHAs will be visiting communities to



A woman carries her daughter as she takes part in a breast cancer 5k at Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain in 2017.

encourage positive and proactive action by women to take charge of their health and get screened. There will be virtual webinars, lectures, radio messages and posts on social media.

"Detailed resources are available at the Directorate of Women's Health web page, Mental Health and Findcarett.com pages."

What about women seeking healthcare?

Sirjusingh pointed out, "(Our) maternal mortality rate is under 30 per 100,000 live births since 2018, in keeping with international (UN) SDG 2030 targets. (The) neonatal mortality rate is less than seven per 1,000 live births – same SDG 2030 targets."

As for digital transformation, one of the focuses of this year's IWD, Sirjusingh boasted, "We are one of the first countries in our region to have a digital clinical information system that includes patient records and access to records by healthcare staff, since 2018. We are continuously improving this product, known as the perinatal information system.

"We have just added a new digital module for the management of intimate partner violence – the only country in the region to do so."

Today, March 8, the Ministry of Health will launch the National Clinical and Policy Guidelines on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and Sexual Violence (SV), considered of paramount importance to TT owing to its prevalence within communities across the country.

The launch of these guidelines is the end result of collaborations by the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Spotlight initiative and the Directorate of Women's Health.

Centres for activities:

- The ministry's main events will culminate on March 11 and 12 from 10 am at:
- Queen's Park Savannah, Port of Spain
- San Fernando Teaching Hospital
- Mt Hope Women's Hospital and
- Rio Claro Health Centre
- Tobago will also offer screenings in Scarborough, Canaan, Roxborough and Tobago Health Promotion Clinic.



Clerks Venetia Prieto, Florence Ghany and Rochelle Langford at the NCRHA's Great Pap smear initiative at Mt Hope Women's Hospital on December 3, 2022.

Creating a positive change to save your life

Dianne S Hinneh, general manager, nursing services at the North Central Regional Health Authority (NCRHA) is advising women to "make positive health choices, they may very well save your life."

Employed with the NCRHA for 20 years, Hinneh's motto is to "create a positive change because without change there cannot be improvement."

The Health Ministry's national screening programme has been heavily focused on breast and cervical cancer. In an interview, Hinneh spoke to Newsday about such cancers, prevention and access to health-care services.

Asked how such cancers can be prevented, Hinneh stated women should get routine general-health checks and get screened as these are important in early detection and preventative care. She also advised having Pap smears and mammograms done, doing personal self-breast exams, keeping a healthy weight, staying physically active and maintaining a healthy diet. She also advises people should get HPV vaccines.

Hinneh explained that "HPV (Human papillomavirus) is a large group of viruses that affects the skin and moist membranes of the body. Within the group of viruses, approximately 40 affect the genital area. If untreated, some strains of the virus may cause genital warts as well as cancer of the cervix. It may also cause cancer of the mouth, throat, vulva, vagina, penis and the anus.

"HPV is highly contagious and is spread during sexual intercourse as well as skin-to-skin contact of the genital area. Therefore, one can contract the virus without actually having sexual intercourse.

"HPV vaccines were tested in extensive clinical trials before being licensed by the US FDA and CDC in 2006. Since then, more than 270 million doses of HPV vaccines have been given in 74 countries. It is recommended that this vaccine can be administered to boys and girls from age nine to 26.

"This vaccine has been recommended by the World Health Organization and is in use in many countries worldwide. In nations which have a high uptake of the vaccine, there has been a dramatic decline in the incidence of cervical cancer as well as precancerous changes."

As for who should have Pap smears, for higher-risk cases, more frequent tests may be necessary as guided by the health-care team. The current recommendation for testing in the general population, approved by the Ministry of Health, is as follows:

AGE	RECOMMENDED SCREENING
Under 21 years	Not recommended. However, sexually-active women with abnormal bleeding should have a clinical exam.
21-29 years	A minimum of every year for three years. If normal tests are spaced.
30-65 years	A minimum of every three years. Every five years if HPV testing is negative.
Over 65 years	Not recommended for women who have had regular screening and are not otherwise at risk for HPV and cervical cancer.

Pap smears are offered free of charge at all district health facilities and at the Mt Hope Colposcopy Unit based in the Women's Centre. Some health centres operate based on appointments but walk-in services are also welcomed. You should contact your local health centre by telephone for further information.

"We also encourage women to discuss having a Pap smear if you are already accessing another service, for example, a patient in a gynaecology out-patient clinic," said Hinneh.

When it comes to breast cancer, are there treatments available in the public health system?

Hinneh assured, "Yes, in all major hospitals across the country breast surgeries are performed. Chemotherapy administration units are functional in San Fernando General Hospital, Sangre Grande Hospital and the National Radiotherapy Centre (NRC), St James. Radiotherapy services are available at the NRC, St James."

For breast-cancer screening, members of the public can contact their local health centre for more information.



International Women's Day

#EmbraceEquity

Less than 30 per cent of researchers worldwide are women and Unesco data shows that only about 30 per cent of all female students choose science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields at a tertiary level. Four African women scientists share their experiences in forging STEM careers.

■ Dr DAYO AKANDE, Nigeria

I can't forget my experience as a secondary school student: after qualifying for a science competition at state level in 1989, I was asked to stay back and let my male schoolmate go, because there was only sponsorship for one person to attend the presentation. He was the only one recognised when they returned. I felt bad, as if it was a crime to be a girl.

There is also the bias of being seen as not capable, not being given an equal chance to show what you are capable of. I was once dropped for a scholarship because I was pregnant – a decision made not by the funders but by a committee chaired by a female professor.

Such biases have consequences for the STEM sector. It stands the chance of losing the best hands. And women will get discouraged from participating fully in the sector, being recognised and meeting their potential.

The entire populace must be made aware of the need to allow women to compete and show their capabilities in STEM. Everyone is responsible: parents, teachers, policy makers and women too.

My parents, for instance, have always said, "You are not inferior (intellectually) compared to any male." I'm also married to a man who spurs me on and helps to make the journey easier.

The most effective intervention, I think, is to let women step on the stage and show what they are capable of.

■ PROF EKANEM IKPI BRAIDE, Nigeria

STEM appeals to me because it pervades all aspects of life. Most problems in nation building can be solved by applying STEM. The problem-solving attitude required of scientists makes life very exciting.

Personally, I have not experienced any bias (in my career) but I have seen many women experience bias. In most instances, particularly among elites, it is subtle and not direct. No one would say, "I cannot employ you because you are a woman," or "I cannot promote you because you are a woman" – though the reason is actually gender. Among parents, particularly in the rural areas, it is more direct. Many parents would say, "Let your brother go to school first, because we do not have money."

Culturally, in most societies, girls are regarded as inferior to boys. Somehow this belief has permeated all aspects of life in Nigeria and discrimination continues.

The starting point for removing discrimination against girls is education, which is not affordable for many households because of poverty. Early marriages and unwanted pregnancies hinder girls' education.

But when girls are educated, there is a multiplier effect: there is an improvement in literacy, family income, family health, credentials for employment and occupational aspirations.

One of the ways Nigeria could make a



When women do science, society benefits in myriad ways.

SOURCE:
IISD.ORG

Against the odds: four women share how they forged careers in science

positive change is by enforcing the 2004 Universal Basic Education Act. It mandates every government in Nigeria to provide compulsory and free basic education for every child from primary school to junior secondary school. If enforced, it would make it possible for girls to acquire basic education.

There are other policies, including the Strategy for Acceleration of Girls' Education. These policies exist but are not fully enforced as fees are still being charged in many schools.

■ PROF AINA ADEOGUN, Nigeria

The key ingredients to career progression are opportunity, availability and focus.

For Nigerian women scientists, appreciable time is lost to childbearing and family care. Because of the expectation that women are the partners to sacrifice for the family, a lot of otherwise excellent female scientists in Nigeria have not been able to attain the peak. By the time they are ready to progress in their careers, there are no special integration programmes to assist them.

Perceptions will take time to change. Education about the role of the girl child in nation-building is key. We can initiate this by having groups that interact with secondary schools through parent and teacher association platforms.

Such engagements should feature female scientists as speakers.

Female scientists who are starting their careers must be involved too, for mentoring and to "pass the baton."

Effective interventions do exist. Universities like Oxford and Cambridge have recognised

the peculiarities and pressures on female scientists. They have programmes that include providing reintegration grants of up to £10,000 to hire a postdoctoral student for female academics returning after maternity care.

This type of targeted approach to bridging the gap between female and male scientists is non-existent in Nigeria.

My personal principle is: "If there is one reason why a particular concept will work, then pursue that one reason and leave out the 50 reasons why it won't work."

I have my great-grandmother, grandparents and parents to thank for this. They made me realise that I can do whatever I set my heart on doing. We need to reorient parents' perceptions on how to give all children equal opportunities to flourish from the early stages.

This can-do approach to life will ensure that we position our intuitive and highly resourceful girl children to become trailblazers in STEM.

■ PROF REBECCA ACKERMANN, South Africa

I've always been interested in figuring out how things work, and really that's at the core of what scientists do. Notice something interesting. Try to explain it.

I've always been careful to do science on my own terms, though. That includes healthy work hours and an equal focus on family and friends, so as not to burn out. Academia is not a sprint, it's a marathon.

I've encountered bias in my career. It has ranged from overt sexual harassment to

bullying and verbal abuse, to more subtle things like my work being overlooked. It has happened to me and others I know, including my students.

It reflects overt but also systemic bias that is so pervasive and ingrained that people don't even realise they are biased. Women simply aren't taken as seriously as men in society.

This dynamic is magnified in STEM fields, where women are often underrepresented. Bias pushes women out of STEM fields, which is a detriment to science. All science is shaped by the people doing it, and it is well known that diversity produces better science.

Diversity brings more backgrounds, experiences, worldviews and angles to considering a problem, which shapes which questions are asked and how evidence is interpreted. This removes the bias that comes from homogeneity of thought, giving us more scientific certainty that we're getting the correct answer.

Many people think that if we each do our small part to promote diversity in science, including gender diversity, we will move towards equity and justice.

In my view this slow, gradual approach has been largely unsuccessful. STEM fields need to be pushed towards justice. This includes, among other things, educating ourselves on the importance of diversity in science, doing bias training, advocating for employment equity and making it happen, creating inclusive spaces and practices.

I see predominantly women and people of colour in the transformation space, which tells me that not everyone is putting in the work to move us in the right direction.

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EMBRACING EQUITY

Imagine a world that truly embraces gender equality... a world that willingly accepts and promotes fairness in opportunities for both genders. Achieving and embracing equity is essential to building an inclusive society that can truly reap the value of diversity. At Shell, we also understand the importance of the male role in promoting gender equity, as gender equality cannot be achieved without the active involvement and support of men. Let's truly #EmbraceEquity for Trinidad and Tobago as we continue to build an inclusive society.

Happy International Women's Day.

**VANDANA SINGH**

**Professor of Information Science,
University of Tennessee**

By 2029, there will be 3.6 million computing jobs in the US, but there will only be enough college graduates with computing degrees to fill 24 per cent of these jobs. For decades, the US has poured resources into improving gender representation in the tech industry.

However, the numbers are not improving proportionately. Instead, they have remained stagnant, and initiatives are failing.

Women make up 57 per cent of the overall workforce.

Comparatively, women make up only 27 per cent of the workforce in the technology industry. Of the 27 per cent that join the technology industry, more than 50 per cent are likely to quit before the age of 35, and 56 per cent are likely to quit by midcareer.

So, questions arise: Why does the technology industry have a retention problem? Why are women who are employed by the technology industry quitting in such high volumes? What factors contribute to this low retention of women in the technology industry, and what kind of support do women need to stay and succeed in it?

I'm an information science researcher who studies gender and information technology, women in STEM – science, technology, engineering and math – online communities and open source software.

My team at the University of Tennessee conducted research to address these questions. We found that retention plays a large role in the gender disparity in the tech field and that online and physical spaces that support women can boost retention.

Women quitting the tech industry

Research shows that women face many challenges in the tech industry. The gender pay gap is severe. Women do not get the same opportunities as men; for example, only 18 per cent of the chief information officers/chief technology officers are women. And women receive unfair treatment.

My research team focused on the experiences of women in the tech industry with a particular focus on the treatment they receive in the workplace and the nature of support systems for women who succeed.

We studied open-source software communities because open-source software communities are an extreme example of gender inequity. Seventy per cent of all the software that supports technology infrastructure is open source, which makes open-source software integral to the future of the tech workforce. Yet women make up only 9.8 per cent of the people who contribute to open-source software projects.

In seeking answers to this retention problem of the tech industry, our research found that women's negative experiences range from minor to severe harassment, sexism, discrimination and misogyny to explicit death threats. Their expertise is challenged, their contributions are not well received and their roles are diminished.

They face constant harassment and deal with normalised abuse, often hearing that "guys will be guys," and they deal with isolation because they are often severely outnumbered by men.

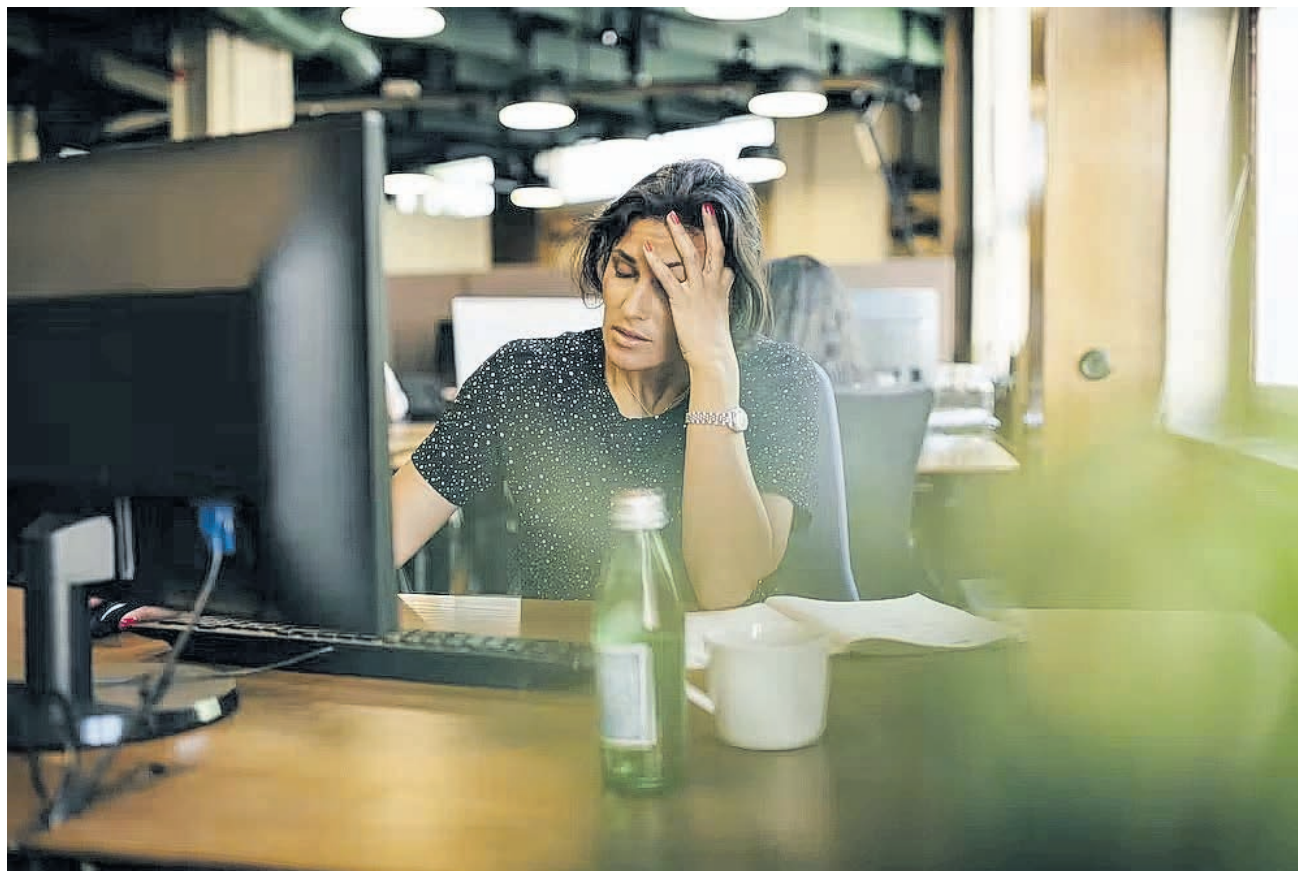
The impact of these negative experiences shows evidence of multiple levels of harm. For example, the individual harm that a woman faces leads to incidental harm of other women being discouraged from participation, resulting in further collective harm for the open-source software community in the form of fewer women participating.

Overall, these negative experiences are detrimental to the retention of women in open-source software and the tech industry in general.

The culture problem

Mainstream media often reports on open-source software's toxic "tech bro" culture. In recent years, high-profile leaders in open-source software have been exposed for their abusive behaviour.

Open-source software icon Linus Torvalds stepped aside from the Linux kernel after his toxic, abusive e-mails to other



Women often have to deal with sexism, harassment and outright misogyny in tech workplaces.

SOURCE: THECONVERSATION.COM

The retention problem:

Women going into tech – but also being driven out

developers were highlighted in the media. His decision to step down came as a result of questions about his abusive behaviour in discouraging women from working as Linux kernel programmers.

Another towering figure in this field, Richard Stallman, was pushed into resigning from the Free Software Foundation and MIT after a very successful career in open-source software because of his views on paedophilia, as well as a multitude of sexual-harassment cases from students and faculty at MIT over the course of 30 years.

These types of public incidents of unprofessional behaviour from tech industry leaders have a chilling effect on the participation of women and perpetuate toxic behaviour.

Support systems for women

In our research about the support systems for women in tech, we observed and documented the value of online spaces that focus on women in the form of social, emotional, technical and networking support.

Based on our results, key to supporting women in open-source software are online spaces that are focused on female participants and are readily accessible through the websites of open-source software organisations. The spaces help because they provide a sense of community for women working in open-source software.

These spaces are mainly but not exclusively for women. Examples include Fedora Women and Debian Women. When

women face discrimination and misogyny, these spaces allow them to reach out to other women and seek social and emotional support. Women guide and mentor each other to navigate the toxicity of the tech industry and find avenues to advocate for gender equality.

Additionally, we found that women flourish when supported by community guidelines, such as the codes of conduct for online spaces, in-person events and professional organisations. We found that codes of conduct often become advocacy tools for women's equal treatment in open-source software online communities. They serve as tools for women and allies alike.

When women are supported by mentors and allies and can network in their communities, and when they see role models who look like them succeeding in tech communities, they are less likely to quit.

The retention problem can be addressed by tackling the gender disparities of the technology industry with online and physical spaces that focus on women, policies and practices to ensure equal treatment of women, and female mentors and role models.

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