



# International Women's Day

Titian-Rose Whittle, a gender-based violence specialist at the United Nations Population Fund, subregional office of the Caribbean, TT Liaison Office, celebrates International Women's Day. This year's theme is, inspire inclusion.

PHOTO BY  
JEFF K MAYERS

March 8  
2024  
#Inspireinclusion



TRINIDAD and TOBAGO  
**NEWSDAY**

**SUPPLEMENT**

FRIDAY 8 MARCH, 2024

Today we build a  
more inclusive world.



# A NEW DAY TO CELEBRATE OUR SISTERS

*"Every woman's success should be an inspiration to another.  
We're strongest when we cheer each other on."*

*- Serena Williams*



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**Republic Bank**



# International Women's Day



Dr Diva Amon, Trinidad-born, world-renowned marine biologist. PHOTO COURTESY TEGWEN RAJNAUTH

## BAVINA SOOKDEO

**D**iva Amon, 36, a world-renowned Trinidadian marine biologist, had some advice to share with young women worldwide on International Women's Day.

"Don't compromise on those values that you hold dear. Stand by them. Preserving your self-integrity will allow you to believe in your actions and live with joy and a peace of mind."

Amon, who recently completed *Welcome to Earth*, a Disney+ National Geographic series with US actor Will Smith, comes from Maraval and is an alumna of St Joseph's Convent, Port of Spain. She has a PhD in ocean and earth science, and her journey into marine biology was deeply influenced by her upbringing in TT.

"I feel so grateful to have grown up in TT and the Caribbean, where hours were spent playing on the beach, snorkelling, and sailing. Often I would look out to sea and wish I could pull away that dark water to reveal what was living down in the depths." Amon reminisces. "The Caribbean was where my love for the ocean blossomed, but it wasn't until years later, while at university, that I realised there was so much more about the ocean to love than what meets the eye in the shallows."

"Many of my earliest memories include ocean life. Growing up, the ocean was my playmate, but now the ocean has become like a family member – a place that I want to understand, to protect and to respect."

Amon's passion for deep-sea exploration was ignited during a university module when her professor highlighted that far less than one per cent of the ocean had ever been explored.

"And who doesn't want to be an explorer?"

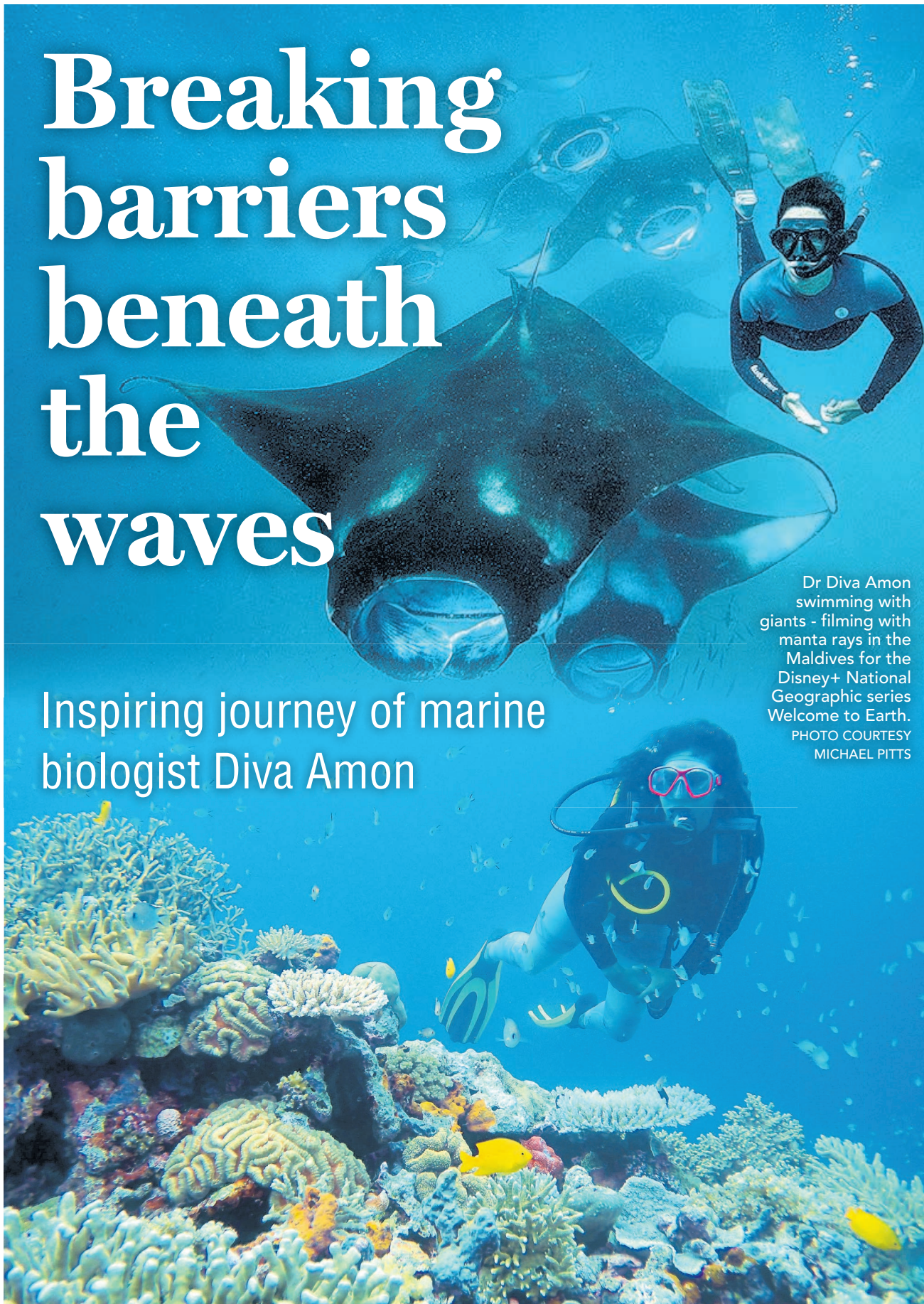
"Now my desire to explore has evolved away from exploration for exploring's sake, into exploration to better understand and conserve."

Amon's work often takes her to remote marine environments worldwide, spanning 45 countries, all continents and all ocean basins. From the Arctic to the Antarctic, from the Mariana Trench to the Cayman Trenches, to St Paul and Peter's Archipelago, the Seychelles and most of the Caribbean, Amon has traversed the globe in pursuit of oceanic knowledge.

However, she admits, "Despite this, I am still happiest sitting in my back garden in Trinidad."

As a marine scientist from Trinidad, Amon brings a unique perspective to her field. She emphasises the lack of diversity, equity and inclusion in deep-ocean exploration, noting the disproportionate representation of wealthy nations in marine science.

"Deep-ocean science is incredibly resource-intensive – you need expensive ships and equipment. This means



# Breaking barriers beneath the waves

## Inspiring journey of marine biologist Diva Amon

Dr Diva Amon swimming with giants - filming with manta rays in the Maldives for the Disney+ National Geographic series *Welcome to Earth*. PHOTO COURTESY MICHAEL PITTS

Scuba diving in the Solomon Islands. PHOTO COURTESY DIVA AMON

that most deep-sea exploration and science has been done by wealthy countries or individuals, and most countries, like TT and other Caribbean islands, are not able to participate.

"This is linked to deep-ocean exploration and science hugely lacking in diversity, equity and inclusion. We don't all have a seat at the table, even though we all have a stake. This lack of perspectives leads to poorer science."

She pointed out that the ocean is truly global, so all of humankind, not just an elite few, should know enough to inform the decisions that are taken, because ultimately that's how it will be preserved for generations to come.

"I know and understand what a privilege it is to work in the deep ocean, especially in the Caribbean. When you don't get many opportunities to work there, you must make those chances count for the greater good."

"So I'm taking steps to answer the most relevant questions, for example, what is in the deep ocean? How can we be better stewards of it? How can we have more underrepresented groups participating, so that we can work together to make the best effort to ensure it is here for many more to experience?"

"As an intersectional individual (a woman of colour from a less economically developed country), the challenges have certainly existed – spending many weeks to months at a time on research ships out in the ocean is such an incredible privilege, but sometimes these remote experiences can be places of discrimination, bullying, harassment and assault."

# Leading by example

## Inspiring inclusion

On this day, we celebrate the women in leadership at FLOW for their role in forging women's economic empowerment in the Caribbean. Their demonstrations of integrity, dedication, innovative decision-making, and problem solving continue to create space for young girls to reach their full economic potential by encouraging a sense of belonging, relevance, and empowerment.



"Inspire inclusion" means I stand in support of women and girls to have inclusion and equal opportunity to become the best version of themselves in all fields of endeavour. We belong; we have a voice; and we are empowered. "Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance" - Verna Myers, Activist.

**Gwyneth K. Sutherland,**  
Supervisor – Customer Care, Call Centre



"Inspire Inclusion" is about empowering women and girls to realize their potential. It's about women having the financial freedom to make decisions about their future, closing gender gaps in key areas and supporting women in leadership roles.

**Laura Maharaj Ramlal,**  
Financial Reporting Manager – Finance



"Inspire Inclusion" to me means promoting diversity, equity, and belonging, acknowledging, and appreciating differences among individuals. The goal is to create or inspire a sense of unity, collaboration, and mutual respect among individuals, regardless of their differences. Be good and do good Always!!!

**Lorilee Madeira,**  
Senior Manager, Media Operations



"Inspire Inclusion" resonates deeply with the concept of power. It represents women's empowerment to utilize their accomplishments and achievements to inspire other women to embrace risks and overcome challenges on their path to success. Additionally, it's the importance of including women in initiatives by providing support, resources, and opportunities for their advancement.

**Sharrel Ross-Pierre,**  
Associate Manager, Customer Loyalty



To me, "Inspire Inclusion" speaks to allowing opportunity for all. We can do all things. It should be that anyone who is qualified and ready, be allowed opportunities, and not refused due to colour, age or gender.

**Stacey Telesford,**  
Senior B2C Sales Coordinator

**To these – and all – women,  
we commend you on this  
International Women's Day**

# International Women's Day



Dr Diva Amon and Will Smith preparing to dive into the deep. PHOTO COURTESY DIVA AMON



Dr Diva Amon on her way to meet actor Will Smith in The Bahamas during filming for Disney+ National Geographic's series, Welcome to Earth. PHOTO COURTESY ALICE JONES



Diva Amon during filming for the Disney+ National Geographic series Welcome to Earth in the Maldives. PHOTO COURTESY TIM BROWNING

## 'Create more roles for women'

● BREAKING BARRIERS from page 3

"A lot more needs to be done to ensure that being at sea is a safe working experience for all. I feel very grateful to have had so many allies, supporters and mentors along the way, and I feel fortunate to now be in a position where I can help to make changes to make the road less rocky for budding marine scientists."

Asked, based on her experience, what are some of the main obstacles preventing greater representation of Caribbean women in marine science, especially in areas such as deep-sea exploration, she said, "In my opinion, one of the main issues is retaining (not producing) female marine scientists regionally."

"There are so many brilliant women who study marine science but are unable to get jobs locally, and that is largely because there aren't enough resources or importance allocated to this field. We must create more roles and then when we do, we need to support them adequately, allowing women to have better work-life balance (including maternity leave), and working spaces safe from discrimination, bullying and harassment."

SpeSeas is a diverse group of TT scientists, conservationists and communicators who wish to make positive changes to the way the ocean is used and managed in the country, the region and the world.

As the founder and director of SpeSeas and an official National Geographic explorer, Amon leads initiatives to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in marine science.

"SpeSeas knows that the more people there are that understand and value the absolute majesty of the ocean, the better."

"So education and empowerment is one of our three pillars. We provide opportunities to get experience in the field, we mentor in research, education and advocacy, we do a lot of outreach events, where we share our experiences and try to grow ocean literacy."

Also, Amon, with National Geographic's help via television, speaking tours and social media, tries to share her experiences



Dr Diva Amon intervening at the negotiations on deep-sea mining at the International Seabed Authority. PHOTO COURTESY INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY



Taking deep-sea coral samples off the remotely operated vehicle Deep Discoverer in the Marianas Islands. PHOTO COURTESY NOAA'S OFFICE OF OCEAN EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH

to keeping our planet healthy and keeping us alive by providing key ecosystem services and resources. For instance, it regulates our climate and supports fisheries and could help to solve some of biggest challenges facing humanity.

"But it is out of sight and out of mind, but not out of our reach. Deep sea does not deal well with impacts from our activities."

"Most of the time, damage is irreversible on human timescales. Once we break it, we can't fix it. There is so much to do locally and globally. I have immense privilege of actually going down there to experience it, and having one of the best understandings of it, including its vulnerabilities, so I have a moral imperative to work to preserve it."

Amon advocates for top-down conservation measures and urges a moratorium on deep-sea mining to prevent irreversible damage to marine ecosystems.

"We need a moratorium now on deep-sea mining, and it would be great to see TT and other Caribbean nations join the 24 countries that have already called for it," she said.

As International Women's Day is celebrated, Amon's additional message to young girls and women aspiring to careers in marine science is clear: "Do it! There is no time in history when we have needed scientists and conservationists more. It's a challenging road but one that is so incredibly rewarding."

In recognition of her groundbreaking work, Amon recently received the Anthony N Sabga Award for Caribbean Excellence, which she cherishes deeply.

"It is such an honour to be following in the footsteps of so many incredible Caribbean changemakers. I am so thankful to Ansa for creating one of the few awards that allows recognition of Caribbean individuals including scientists. There is no higher honour than being recognised in your own home country and region, and I hope this is a step towards marine science being seen more as a critical career path."

"I am also extremely grateful to the many people who have lifted me into this position: family, especially my mum, friends and colleagues."

As Diva Amon continues her pioneering journey in marine biology, she remains committed to inspiring inclusion and paving the way for future generations of ocean explorers, especially women and underrepresented groups, to make their mark in the field.

and knowledge of the ocean with as many people as possible.

National Geographic made her an Emerging Explorer in 2020 after seeing not just her deep-sea research, but also how much effort she put into communicating on it with decision-makers and the public.

"Filming Welcome to Earth was blow-mind! Will Smith was lovely, and working with him were some of the easiest days of my career – but being in the ocean surrounded by sperm whales in the Azores and hundreds of mantas in the Maldives was the icing on the cake."

Reflecting on this recent collaboration with Smith, Amon expressed gratitude for the overwhelmingly positive response, particularly from fellow Caribbean people.

"Nothing can compare to how wonderful it was to receive messages from West Indians, hearing how proud it made them to see a Trini in this position, or someone that looked like them and represented them, has been the best part of what I do."

Looking ahead, Amon's goals include advancing the understanding and stewardship of the deep ocean, both locally and globally.

"The deep ocean is absolutely essential



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
Gender and Child Affairs



A MESSAGE FROM **THE HONOURABLE AYANNA WEBSTER-ROY**  
MINISTER IN THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR GENDER AND CHILD AFFAIRS

# IN COMMEMORATION OF International Women's Day

Fellow Citizens,

Today, March 8, 2024, Trinidad and Tobago joins the global village in commemorating **International Women's Day (IWD)** reminding us all of the incredible strength, resilience, and unity that define the essence of womanhood.

As a Trinbagonian woman, I am proud to contribute to the global movement to amplify the voices of women, address their challenges, advocate for gender equality, and recognize their social, economic, cultural and political achievements.

In Trinidad and Tobago, we continue progress on women's rights through improved legislation and support services. The President of our great Republic is a woman, the Speaker of the House of Representatives is a woman, our Opposition

Leader is a woman, the Presiding Officer of the Tobago House of Assembly is a woman and so too is our Commissioner of Police.

Notwithstanding these developments, gender gaps still exist in the national landscape. To address these gaps, our nation must consistently live this year's international theme, **"Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress"**. By investing in women's education, health, and economic empowerment, we not only unlock their full potential but also pave the way for a more prosperous and inclusive future for all.

The Government is advancing gender equity and justice through gender mainstreaming in Government Policies, Programmes and Projects in

collaboration with civil society organisations, regional and international partners, academia and the private sector.

But as citizens, we **ALL** have a responsibility to invest in our girls and women. Let us join minds, hearts, and hands to improve the quality of life of every citizen, at all levels of society through the promotion of gender equity and equality. Together, we can create a better community and nation for everyone.

**Happy International Women's Day 2024.**

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY Activities 2024



### LAUNCH OF THE NSAP-GBV&SV 2023-2027

The fruit of multiple rounds of multi-stakeholder consultations with governmental, civil, public, academic and international development partners, the **National Strategic Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence (NSAP-GBV&SV)** was launched on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre. The Plan is the largest financial and political national investment by Government to date to effectively combat GBV and SV. It is an evidence-based, comprehensive plan that addresses the Prevention of GBV and SV; Protection for survivors; Prosecution; Penalties; and Provision of Redress and reparations.



### LAUNCH OF STEP

The Gender and Child Affairs Division launched the **Survivors Transformation and Empowerment Programme (STEP)** on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at the Office of the Prime Minister's St. Clair Office. The STEP is designed to provide economic empowerment to victims and survivors of GBV. The Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Gender and Child Affairs affirmed that 'STEP provides an opportunity for victims to turn their backs on abusive relationships and create independence and financial freedom through business opportunities for which they have a passion for and a purpose'.



### HAND OVER OF DIGNITY KITS

The Gender and Child Affairs Division (GCA) in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) handed over **DIGNITY KITS** and hosted the required **TRAINING SESSION** on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at the Office of the Prime Minister's St. Clair Office as part of activities being hosted in commemoration of International Women's Day. The Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Gender and Child Affairs handed over the Kits to Ms. Desdra Bascombe Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government (MRDLG) and Mr. Jerry David, Senior Disaster Management Coordinator, MRDLG.

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genderandchildaffairs

# International Women's Day



Through the Girls with Grace initiative, girls are taught to tie-dye T-shirts as part of dress etiquette and self-expression.



Girls with Grace participants learn about peace and are taught to spread peace through gardening and caring for the environment.



During their vacation camp, Girls with Grace participants had a bookmark making activity with Miss Corissa. The programme encourages reading every day.

**BAVINA SOOKDEO**

## Blessin Mitchell empowers girls with grace

**B**lessin Anika Mitchell is truly a blessing to many. The 27-year-old from Carapichaima, has a simple yet profound goal, and Girls with Grace, her brainchild, serves as a testament to her dedication to moulding a generation of self-assured and resilient women.

“What motivated me to start Girls with Grace was my desire to create employment for myself while being able to do what I love.”

“I was unhappy at the school that I was teaching at, because of the management, but I loved being in the classroom and around the children.”

Mitchell found solace in the classroom but yearned for a more fulfilling path.

“Every teaching opportunity I got, I found the young girls always gravitated towards me,” she said. Her connection with her students as a driving force behind her venture.

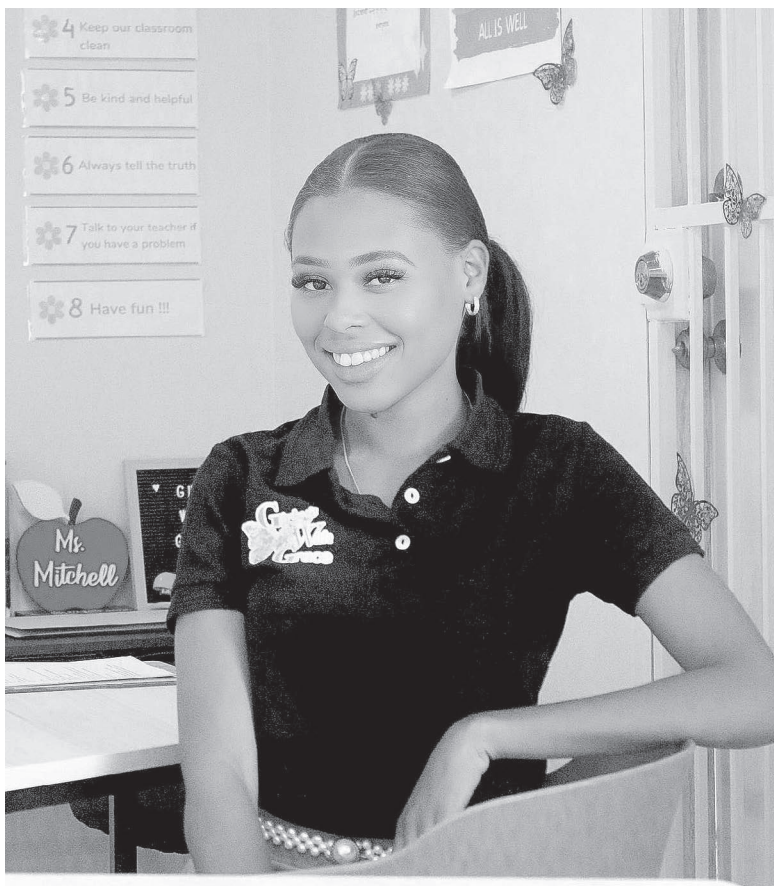
“I struggled for a long time, trying to figure out how I can use my talents to create employment for myself.”

“I did not want to open a school or do private tutoring, I wanted to find something fun and different to do.”

“I put a lot of trust in God, because I really did not want to give up on my passion of educating children, and what I like most about working with children is making them happy.”

“With Girls with Grace, I get to do just that. I found a way to still be able to teach important morals and values to children while also exposing them to a variety of different fun activities.”

Launched in September 2023, Girls with Grace was strategically timed to align with the start of the academic year, offering young girls a familiar structure reminiscent of school. “So when school is open we are open, and



Girls With Grace founder Blessin Mitchell. PHOTOS COURTESY BLESSIN MITCHELL

when school is closed, we host camp during the week” Mitchell said.

The organisation primarily caters to girls aged four-12, providing a range of activities and programmes for various interests and needs. From beauty and health to sports, caring for the environment and career exploration, Girls with Grace offers a holistic approach to education, and aims to nurture both the minds and spirits of its participants.

“The primary focus is on imparting important morals and values to girls, such as perseverance, responsibility, courage and love, among others, which they can carry into adulthood.”

“The activities are designed around these teachings and cover a wide range. Field trips are also a part of the programme, and other activities include yoga, gardening, tie-dyeing T-shirts, diaper-changing lessons, and much more.”

“We also organised a career day where various special guests came in to speak to the girls about different professions.”

“The programme also involves crafting various projects, adding to the variety of experiences offered to the girls.”

“The mission” she emphasised, “is to empower young women through community service, life skills, leadership development and building self-confidence while fostering lifelong connections. This is achieved through providing a comfortable and safe environment, engaging activities and impactful teachings that support their growth and development.”

Despite its success, Girls with Grace faced challenges in raising awareness of its programmes. Mitchell leveraged social media, parental engagement and media outreach to expand the organisation’s reach and attract more participants.

Looking ahead, Mitchell envisions expanding Girls with Grace to new locations and introducing programmes for older age groups – 13-15. She also expressed interest in launching initiatives for women.

In line with this year’s IWD theme of Inspiring Inclusion, Mitchell elaborated on how Girls with Grace promotes inclusivity and diversity in its organisation and activities.

“By providing a broad spectrum of experiences such as yoga, sports, cooking and career exploration, the programme ensures that girls from various backgrounds can find activities that resonate with them.”

“Field trips to places like the gymnastics explorers club and the fire station, along with initiatives like career days and crafting projects, offer opportunities for girls to engage with different professions and skills.”

On similar programmes for boys, Mitchell remains open to the idea, recognising the demand for initiatives that instil positive values in young boys.

“Since its inception, Girls with Grace has received outstanding feedback from the public, with numerous queries about the possibility of hosting a similar programme for boys.”

“While I believe that the best leader for a programme tailored for boys would be a male figure, I am open to supporting and assisting any male individual who is willing to take on this initiative. This interest from the public showcases a clear demand for programmes that promote positive values and skills in young boys as well.”

As the world celebrates IWD, Mitchell sends a message of self-belief and solidarity to women everywhere.

“I wish to impart the same message we instil in our girls: Believe in yourself to achieve anything you set your mind to.”

“Let’s empower each other as women, recognising our individual power, uniqueness, and purpose. Together, we can uplift and inspire each other to reach new heights.”

*Girls with Grace is at LP 93 Main Rd, St Thomas Village, Chaguanas. For more information, check them out on Facebook and Instagram.*



# International Women's Day

**BAVINA SOOKDEO**

Inspired by the stories of both her grandmothers' struggles against a patriarchal society and her own experiences of facing discrimination, Anu M Bissessar became actively involved in advocacy initiatives.

Bissessar is a mindfulness psychologist, with a master's in psychology and the neuroscience of mental health.

Her upbringing played a pivotal role in shaping her values and aspirations. Raised in a family where education was highly valued, with a psychiatrist father, a high-school-teacher mother, and an obstetrician/gynaecologist sister, Bissessar was immersed in discussions on various topics from politics to sports.

She attributes her sense of purpose to her family's influence, particularly her father's academic guidance and her mother's nurturing nature. Bissessar's sister served as a role model for integrity and determination.

"I became actively involved in psychology by volunteering in the Rape Crisis Society and the Domestic Violence Coalition" she said. "I thought that reinforcing women's mindsets and cognitive capabilities is the key to an overall healthier lifestyle being achieved."

Currently, Bissessar is in establishing an NGO focused on promoting mental strength, peace and safety among women and girls through mindfulness practices. Men can also join the cause.

Additionally, she is a director of CrownHerTT, the NGO led by Dr Nadira Rambocas. "Our mission is to educate young girls and women on menstrual hygiene and period poverty that is prevalent in TT, in a nutshell."

She prioritises inclusion and diversity.

"This is not hard to do in Trinidad, in my opinion," she noted. "We have many races, ages, abilities, faiths, body images and identifications in our country."

"As such, whenever events are held, I make sure that all activities are easily accessible and friendly. I disclaim before every event that discrimination of any kind will not be tolerated, and persons with such an agenda will be asked to leave. I also hold online mindfulness sessions that anyone can join in on."

Despite facing scepticism from some quarters, particularly men, Bissessar remained undeterred.

"I have encountered men



Psychologist Anu Bissessar

## A mindful approach to women's empowerment

Anu Bissessar's advocacy

trying to discourage my drive to bring mindfulness mainstream to Trinidad, as I was told that my profession was not feasible nor logical. I just ignored their verbal comments, and pressed on to create something that I knew was needed here."

Bissessar's personal motto, "Kindness and respect, always," guides her approach to life and advocacy work. She envisions a world where mindfulness is embraced by all genders,

leading to increased awareness, improved cognitive capabilities and greater inclusion of women and girls. Through peace within oneself and the environment, she believes meaningful change can be achieved.

Asked to share her most significant accomplishments or milestones, Bissessar said, "Checking in on my clients and hearing that they have improved and are thriving because of my analysis and encouragement.

For example, there are many clients I see with high amounts of anxiety and fear of standing up for themselves due to their family situations, which is common in Trinidad.

"Since starting my mindfulness sessions full-time, I was elated to hear that person does not have this problem any more! As a psychologist, hearing that someone is doing well because of your help is the best achievement."

Asked what role she thinks IWD plays in advancing gender equality and celebrating the achievements of women globally, Bissessar said, "Of course, IWD is such a significant event because media presence highlights the plights and accomplishments of women. So both men and women become more and more sensitised to the inequities and injustices that women face daily.

"The shift from a male-dominated society that believes that women are less rational than they are is gradually changing, and the power and substantial use of women's emotionally-charged logical prowess is being realised."

So how does Bissessar envision a more inclusive and equitable world for women and girls, and what steps does she believe are necessary to achieve this vision?

"My personal goal in achieving this is through the power of mindfulness, practised by all genders, as I do not only adhere to one sex. Mindfulness's mission is to create awareness of yourself and your physical, mental and spiritual surroundings in a non-judgemental manner.

"Therefore, with constant practice of non-judgement and connecting more with your environment, your cognitive capabilities will significantly improve. So your listening and reasoning skills can increase, as well as your rationality toward heavy topics.

"Topics involving women and girls thus would be more easily heard and taken seriously, and both women and men will become more active in increasing inclusivity and equitability for women and girls."

On IWD, Bissessar urges women and girls worldwide to cultivate inner peace as a catalyst for positive change.

"The main way you can achieve inclusivity and equitability is through peace: peace within yourself, within your environment. This radiates and can cause a positive ripple effect that changes your world view, and the view of others.

"So let's try our best to become as peaceful as we possibly can to create a meaningful change."

Individuals and organisations can support Bissessar's advocacy efforts through partnerships, sponsorships, and volunteering in mindfulness initiatives. By coming together, they can contribute to the empowerment of women and girls in their communities and beyond.





# Celebrating Female Technicians in the Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (RAC) Sector

The National Ozone Unit, Environmental Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Planning and Development wishes to congratulate and showcase our Female Professionally Certified Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (RAC) Technicians



Haivel-Ann Boodram

Professionally Certified Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technician

As a female Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (RAC) technician for over ten years, I will advise all the other female RAC technicians, and male technicians, in the industry to be hardworking and consistent in everything that you apply yourself to do. It may be servicing, troubleshooting, or even repairs. Persistence is one of the many keys to success. Educate yourself in all areas of the field. Be open to every vital piece of information you receive from the knowledgeable leaders in the industry. Always try to further your ability to learn something new by continuously asking questions and researching the solutions to problems. Whenever you feel like it's becoming overwhelming, just remember why you became a RAC technician and know that anything is possible if you have the mindset and desire to succeed, put in the work and the results will always be rewarding!





## Professional Certification Scheme for Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (RAC) Industry

**#BreaktheBias**

- 1** Are you a female Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technician?  
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To sign up visit: [nou-tt.blogspot.com](http://nou-tt.blogspot.com)






#InspireInclusion



# International Women's Day

A message from UN Secretary General António Guterres on the occasion of International Women's Day

The fight for women's rights over the past 50 years is a story of progress.

Women and girls have demolished barriers, dismantled stereotypes and driven progress towards a more just and equal world. Women's rights were finally recognised as fundamental and universal human rights. Hundreds of millions more girls are in classrooms around the world. And pioneering leaders have smashed glass ceilings across the globe.

But progress is under threat. And full equality remains light years away.

Billions of women and girls face marginalisation, injustice and discrimination, as millennia of male domination continue to shape societies. The persistent epidemic of gender-based violence disgraces humanity.

## Invest in women: accelerate progress

Over four million girls are estimated to be at risk of female genital mutilation each year. Discrimination against women and girls remains perfectly legal in much of the world. In some places, that makes it difficult for women to own property; in others, it allows men to rape their wives with impunity.

Meanwhile, global crises are hitting women and girls hardest. Wherever there's conflict, climate disaster, poverty or hunger, women and girls suffer most. In every region of the world, more women than men go hungry. In both developed and developing countries, a backlash against women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive rights, is stalling and even reversing progress.

New technologies – which have such potential to dismantle inequalities – too often make matters worse. That can be because of unequal access, algorithms with

baked-in bias, or misogynistic violence – from deep fakes to targeted harassment of specific women.

At our current speed, full legal equality for women is some 300 years away; so is the end of child marriage.

This rate of change is frankly insulting. Half of humanity can't wait centuries for their rights. We need equality now. That means accelerating the pace of progress. And that relies on political ambition, and on investment – the theme of this year's International Women's Day.

We need public and private investment in programmes to end violence against women, ensure decent work, and drive women's inclusion and leadership in digital technologies, peacebuilding, climate action and across all sectors of the economy.

We must also urgently support

women's rights organisations fighting against stereotypes, battling to make women's and girls' voices heard, and challenging traditions and cultural norms. Currently they receive a paltry 0.1 per cent of international development spending. That must change.

Investment may sound far removed from women's everyday lives. But it takes investment to give schoolgirls the same opportunities as schoolboys. It takes investment to provide digital education and develop skills. It takes investment to provide the childcare that enables caregivers, who are mainly mothers, to do paid work outside the home. And it takes investment to build inclusive communities and societies with the full participation of women and girls of all backgrounds.

Putting money behind equality is the right thing to do, but it also makes financial sense. Supporting women to enter formal labour markets grows economies, boosts tax revenues and expands opportunities for all.

Securing the investment we need in women and girls requires three things. First, increasing the availability of affordable, long-term finance for sustainable development, and tackling the debt crisis strangling many developing economies. Otherwise, countries simply won't have the funds to invest in women and girls. We need

immediate action to provide breathing space for countries with unbearable debt repayments looming, and to encourage multilateral development banks to leverage far more private finance at affordable costs. Over the long term, we must reform the international financial architecture and make it far more responsive to the needs of developing countries.

Second, countries must prioritise equality for women and girls – recognising that equality is not only a matter of rights but the bedrock of peaceful, prosperous societies. That means governments actively addressing discrimination, spending on programmes to support women and girls, and ensuring policies, budgets and investments respond to their needs.

Third, we need to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Having women in positions of power can help to drive investment in policies and programmes that respond to women and girls' realities.

I am particularly proud that since early in my tenure – and for the first time in history – we have equal numbers of women and men in senior management across the entire UN system.

Equality is overdue. Ending the patriarchy requires money on the table – it's time to cough up.

## I wish to inspire and include you

DIANNE JOSEPH

Today, it gives me a pure and distinct pleasure to wish every girl and woman from every echelon of our society a happy International Women's Day!

The theme, Inspire inclusion, in itself is both timely and significant. Everyone wants to be included. Inspiring inclusion may appear simple or may in fact be very simple if we dedicate ourselves to celebrate our diversity and empower our women and girls, not only today but beyond.

To do this, one must recognise our social, economic, cultural and political achievements.

As a long-standing professional within the financial services sector, I am of the opinion that our women continue to make steady strides and have risen to competently hold and manage leadership positions of all types in equal dimensions to our male counterpart. Such examples include labourers, mechanics, merchandisers, electricians, postal workers, media professionals, construction managers, teachers, CEOs, attorneys, doctors, scientists, prime ministers – and the list cannot be easily truncated. And importantly, we do so with a high level of excellence.

In today's world, when we call for a service, there is little "picking and choosing" with whom we would interact to get what we require. Women have been included in the vast majority of roles.

Nevertheless, there is much work to be done in some jurisdictions to guarantee that we enjoy global recognition and inclusion. In this regard, countries may

be best advised to design and build infrastructure meeting the needs of women and girls which may allow the goal of inclusion to flourish to the point at which all women are valued and respected.

And it takes me to the fact that for us to be valued and respected, we must also put emphasis on respecting ourselves and our fellow women. We must lift up, not pull down each other; we must exude pride and confidence; we must remember that we are women and we have the capacity to professionally challenge the status quo and hold our position in the social, political and cultural arena which was once male-dominated.

We must organise ourselves and lean towards continuous personal development and to mould our daughters to do the same. We must develop our talent, decision-making capacity, mental and general health, sporting and cultural abilities and seek to further elevate ourselves in this competitive world.

We must never lose sight of the fact that "we can do this, we can make that desired change to remain included and to protect the future generation of all women!"

I wish to invite you to join my train, that will always be fuelled and ready to inspire and include you on my journey – my professional women, my daughter, my sister, my mother.

You are included!

Dianne Joseph is the chief operating officer of the TT Co-operative Credit Union League.



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Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
Ministry of Health

Message from The Honourable Terrence Deyalsingh,  
Minister of Health, in recognition of:

# 2024

## International Women's Day

### *Inspire Inclusion*

The Ministry of Health, Trinidad and Tobago, joins the global community in paying homage to all women, in recognition of International Women's Day 2024. The invaluable contributions of women, past and present, continue to play a pivotal role in our country's vast development. This year, International Women's Day is being celebrated around the globe under two pertinent themes which are **#InspireInclusion** and **#InvestInWomen**. These themes, highlight the importance of gender equality and reinforces the call for all communities, to ensure that women are afforded the same rights and opportunities.

In commemoration of International Women's Day 2024, the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities (RHAs), will host a week-long series of initiatives and activities during the period March 3rd - 9th, 2024 dedicated to women's health issues. The Ministry's objective, is to motivate women in Trinidad and Tobago to make informed decisions about their health through education and outreach. During this week of planned activities, we will be providing information on key physiological changes and health conditions that women experience across their lifetime such as ***exclusive breastfeeding, the menstruation cycle and menopause.***

Focus will also be placed on vaccination efforts against HPV in our drive to eliminate ***cervical cancer*** by the year 2030 and to create awareness about critical screening services for early detection of ***cervical cancer*** and ***breast cancer*** in women. Through these comprehensive efforts in the advancement of women's health issues, the Ministry of Health is answering the call to **#InspireInclusion** and urges all women to invest in themselves, by joining with us during this week of enlightenment and empowerment.



[www.health.gov.tt](http://www.health.gov.tt)



Ministry of Health-Trinidad and Tobago



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# International Women's Day

## Women leading the way

### Insights from TTCSI women presidents

**BAVINA SOOKDEO**

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we turn our attention to the TT Coalition of Services Industries (TTCSI), an alliance comprising professional services associations and organisations.

At the forefront of advocating for trade in services issues and advancing the

Services Industries, TTCSI holds a pivotal position in both the global and national spheres. Acknowledging the services sector as a significant employer of women, let's focus on the dynamic female presidents leading services associations within TTCSI.

With a vast network of 65 associations and affiliate companies, the TTCSI represents over 600,000 firms and individuals.

Among them, a substantial number are led by visionary women. As we mark International Women's Day, we asked these women three questions:

1: Reflecting on your journey to becoming the president of your association, could you share some of the unique challenges you faced as a woman in leadership?

2: How have these experiences shaped your approach to promoting

gender equality and inspiring inclusion within your organisation and the broader business community.

3: In your view, what are the most significant impacts female leaders are making in the business world today, and how do you envision the role of business support organisations in furthering this progress?

Here is what they had to say:

#### Cavelle Joseph-St Omer, Human Resource Management Association:

1: As president of a professional association that is not for profit, I am expected to concurrently provide leadership to the board and community, possess administrative and financial acumen, fundraising ability, political deftness, exemplify institutional values, as well as shape the policies within the organisation.

This is while committing to my full-time job as an executive and managing family life.

Keeping a strong team with sincere intentions focused on the organisation's mandate for altruistic purposes is a challenge. The team and I must be resilient innovators that can make strategic long-term decisions, take measured risks and thrive on turning



challenges or moments of crisis into opportunities and sustain progress. I have had to try and conquer

perfectionism and recognise that no manager/executive/leader knows the precise, correct decision to make every time.

2: Being a leader means not simply having a seat at the table, but having the determination to own your voice and express yourself at whatever stage you are in your career. Your thoughts and suggestions may influence company policy, employee collaboration, and business development.

The saying "rising tide lifts all boats" is an appropriate one. I therefore bring other women along the journey with me. I openly and willingly share power and information rather than guard it.

I firmly believe when we all work together, cultivating relationships and empowering the women around us, we build a mutually beneficial environment that enables each of us to succeed.

3: Women are able to make bold and wise decisions as leaders; this helps make the team environment less authoritative and more co-

operative, bringing a family-like feel to the team. We have seen this boost teamwork across the organisation and help implement a new culture within businesses, and it is another reason to embed equality and diversity in the workplace.

When we consider the next generation of employees and leaders, the power of role models cannot be overlooked. Regardless of a person's gender, all people need someone who will guide them to progress in their careers.

Women can harness their talents in this area, specifically, for mentoring and coaching young talent, and when we factor that women are strong communicators, women leaders are great mentors.

We are also seeing women leaders bringing skills, different perspectives and innovative ideas to the table, and these, combined, will help create innovative perspectives that lead to better decision-making as a whole for the business.



#### Cheresse Fleming, Afflatus Software and Consultancy Services

1: Even though the IT industry is mainly male-dominated, I have not faced too many challenges as a young female thus far. In fact, many of my male associates and family have been very supportive of me, starting with my father, who is well versed in the IT field, and at a young age I observed everything he did with computers, which helped me to know this was a career I wanted to pursue.

However, at times when meeting with

different potential clients, there have been a few instances where some seemed a bit shocked that I am the CEO of a software company and also a software engineer.

2: Based on a few instances where it was assumed that I was the sales representative of my company, I think we as a community should encourage our younger women to pursue careers in IT and software development so that hopefully it becomes a less male-centric field and more gender neutral.

One way we can do this is to ensure that younger women are surrounded by people who encourage them to pursue

careers in IT.

3: In my view, I believe the impact of female leadership starts from young and within your own household.

I can say with certainty that my mother is a very intelligent, hardworking and independent woman. The way in which she balanced her career and also being a mother and wife has inspired me a lot.

And in today's world we see how successful so many women are in their respective fields (not only in IT but in business, energy, medicine and engineering). I hope that we can continue to see this, as it helps inspire other women.

#### Lorraine Pouchet, TT Incoming Tour Operators Association (TTITOA):

1: Being involved in the tourism sector as director of marketing in my husband's business, I attended many tourism-related and developmental courses to ensure that I did not only acquire knowledge of the tourism product but also to develop my people skills.

I have been told that I have a strong



personality and that I lead by example; therefore I am not easily intimidated by male counterparts, and as a result did not meet any challenges within the association.

The challenges came when dealing with the public-sector agencies with males at the helm. However, as a certified counselling therapist, I have been able to navigate those situations to effect outcomes that benefit the membership of TTITOA.

2: Simply by empowering all members of the association through ensuring that their voices were heard and treating their suggestions and recommendations

with the respect deserved.

I would like to note that in the 30-plus years of my involvement in TTITOA and serving in other capacities such as PRO, for example, I have to date not encountered any issues with gender equality.

3: Women generally have a strong work ethic and good managerial skills, and more female leaders and entrepreneurs are emerging.

Business support organisations can make available access to funding and educational courses to assist women to achieve their full potential, as well as facilitating mentorship programmes.



# International Women's Day

## Cindy Guevara, TT Chapter of International Facility Management Association

1: My journey towards becoming president started in 2022, when I was approached by the then (male) president to offer myself for the position of vice president. The following year I was elected chapter president.

The unique challenges I saw was really gaining the support and confidence of the members while leading a predominantly male chapter, in what could be considered a male profession.



I was filling some big shoes, as the previous president had been on the executive since the formation of the

chapter and is widely recognised and respected in the industry.

No one really knew who I was, so I believed I had to make my own path to gain membership support and confidence, that I could lead the chapter. However, playing a larger role in the chapter was a goal of mine, so I was confident in taking up the challenge.

2: My experiences have given me the opportunity to reach out to more female professionals to encourage and prepare them to achieve their goals. Having the ability to mentor and provide avenues for growth and development are helpful elements towards promoting gender equality. Organisations will benefit if they create and put measures in place to sustain inclusive environments.

3: Women, I believe, contribute significantly towards a balanced and collaborative approach to business. We know what it is like to have to break the glass ceiling on gender equality and stereotyping, so we have a better appreciation of how biases influence the business activities and are better positioned to better manage diversity in an organisation. The resources and support provided by business support organisations and how these inputs are developed and disseminated can have a direct impact on organisations' success and competitiveness. Through their support of the industry, they can provide advice on industry trends and provide representation and a collective voice for organisations. Their contribution in shaping business practice is valuable.

## Corene Procope, TT Group of Professionals Association

1: In my journey to presidency, a unique challenge to me was overcoming self-doubt. I doubted my ability to achieve the goals set forth with the position and whether the respect deserved and earned would be given as a woman in authority. In my unique case, I am the youngest president of the association, thus feeling the need to prove myself.

Fortunately, I was welcomed with open arms by all members of the executive and council, thus alleviating this feeling of doubt.

2: Gender equality and inclusion play a major role to me personally and professionally. I incorporate it as a point in my mentor sessions if I speak on a platform sharing my career journey or through hiring practices.

Therefore, being a part of an association which also supports gender

equality and inclusion was key to my desire to serve in the association.

Our administrative manager is a female and, in my view, she is the glue of this association since my joining.

Our executive and council members are a great balance of males and females whose views are respected and accepted without bias.

With this, the organisation approaches gender equality through our support to the community by providing representatives within the association to attend speaking engagements with IWD themes.

Additionally, we support through action and representation.

The association's council members are represented by a balance of male and female members.

3: In my view, the most significant impact female leaders are making in the business world today will be our receptiveness to taking the seat at the table, thus opening the doors to more female leadership. With more women



holding these titles, a female leader should become a norm.

I envision that business organisations can support this progress by removing the ratios or numbers attached to gender equality. Female representation in leadership roles should not be a check box.

## Lynette Headley Atherley, fashion entrepreneur

1: Being a president is a lot of work, determination, being respectful and showing motivation. Along this road there are a lot of challenges you face having to deal with people who put you down and do not value or even take the time to listen. It is a tough road.

2: My experiences have made me stronger in my belief that I am equal to the opposite gender and can reach my goal and take my organisation to the next level.

3: We are standing firmly in our beliefs and getting the job done. Yes, business support organisations are a great resource in making this happen.



## Sally Singh, Association of Real Estate Agents (AREA)

1: Whilst the demands of running my own business and being a team leader at AREA could, at times, be challenging, it is crucial to have balance.

Women are always thinking ahead and planning timely actions, as they

have to balance being a partner, parent, daughter, friend, business head and colleague all at the same time. With experience, meditation, yoga, family encouragement and the support of my colleagues, it is now a bit easier to face challenges as they come by breaking them down into bite-size pieces.

It's always exciting to implement changes in our industry that are beneficial to both our members and the public.

2: The real-estate industry in TT comprises significantly women.

I am also very fortunate to be surrounded by my strong sisters, Lisa and Rhea, and the women and men who foster empowerment at AREA, both in the past and at present. Nothing is more inspiring than having good role models. My mom was a savvy businesswoman, and my dad was an educator. This combination, together with a strong academic background, spurred my desire to dive into the private sector.

As a result, I am an advocate for anyone interested in becoming a real-estate professional to pursue the entry level AREA/ UWI Roytec Principles of Real Estate Sales course, and after

working for some time in the industry, the brokerage diploma would provide advanced tuition.

At AREA we conduct continuing professional development (CPD) workshops to raise the bar of professionalism in the real estate industry.

My personal beliefs are in sync with those of AREA: education and conducting oneself ethically are critical components to level the playing field of life.

3: In TT, we have many women executives.

However, there is a lot of room for improvement as many boards are still male-dominated. Increasing women in the workplace leads to a notable increase in productivity, fairness, organisational dedication and enhanced collaboration.

All of these positive qualities we see at TTCSI where both the president and CEO and their team have been actively encouraging all service organisations to have an equal input in policy-making not only to improve their sectors but the experiences of their stakeholders in TT.





# International Women's Day



First Citizens group CEO Karen Darbasie (second from left) poses with participants in the company's Girls First Festival.



The inaugural First Citizens Girls First Festival attracted close to 300 participants and it has been sold out ever since. **PHOTOS COURTESY FIRST CITIZENS**

## First Citizens' Girls First Festival empowers young women to dream big

**BAVINA SOOKDEO**

**T**he First Citizens Girls First Festival, slated for August 2024 in both Trinidad and Tobago, and extending to Barbados

for the first time, is poised to inspire and support girls to realise their full potential.

This groundbreaking conference, founded by group CEO Karen Darbasie, aims to provide a platform for girls between 13 and 18, from diverse backgrounds, to foster personal growth, leadership development and meaningful connections.

Said Darbasie, "We do this through engaging workshops, mentorship opportunities, and interactive activities that can drive knowledge-sharing and networking."

Girls are encouraged to "embrace their unique strengths and talents and are equipped with the tools they need to navigate challenges as they pursue their goals."

Darbasie said Girls First aims to inspire the next generation to dream big, break barriers and make a difference in the world.

"We wanted to create a space where adolescent girls could come together to support and empower each other in the spirit of sisterhood. By providing mentorship, guidance and opportunities for personal and professional growth, we envision supporting and stimulating a community where girls could feel confident, valued, and empowered..."

"I'm really proud that at First Citizens we continue to pioneer initiatives that continue to be a celebration of the incredible potential and boundless possibilities that lie within each and every young woman."

Reflecting on past editions, Darbasie highlights the success of Girls First.

"In terms of impact, the feedback derived from our post-event surveys has overwhelmingly confirmed the success of Girls First in achieving its mission..."



First Citizens group CEO Karen Darbasie.

"We have also received kudos from teachers, principals and parents who see the positive changes taking place in the lives of attendees as they gain confidence, develop new skills, and form strong friendships."

She said when Girls First started in 2017, it attracted almost 300 attendees.

"That demand has been constant ever since and our annual events have been sold out. During the pandemic, when we took the festival online, free of charge, registration was closed within days...the reach has been phenomenal."

This "sisterhood" has been taken

onlinethrough the Girls First Instagram page.

"We are excited to build upon this momentum and expand our reach."

In alignment with this year's IWD theme, Inspire Inclusion, Girls First prioritises diversity and inclusivity. The event features speakers and workshops tailored to different interests and backgrounds.

It aims to drive the point home "that they deserve the space to pursue their diverse dreams, whether that's in technology, business, agriculture, sports, the arts, or otherwise, so the message is always one of inclusion."

This thrust, she explained, is supported with a career fair that provides details of a range of options.

"We have also zeroed in some areas. For instance...we have consistently done sessions on financial management and entrepreneurship."

"Our speakers at events are diverse but selected to ensure that our girls can identify with their life experiences and can learn from their challenges and journeys."

For example, one speaker, born with severe physical disadvantages, gave a moving address that showed those with physical disabilities can "grow, dream and achieve..."

"There is something for everybody... there are activities that drive interaction and creativity for those who enjoy being active, and others that are more conversational for those a bit more reserved."

Darbasie and her team have made every effort to ensure there is ample opportunity to take part. They keep the cost "very minimal" and ensure there are sessions in both Trinidad and Tobago. They partner with other entities to ensure the underprivileged can attend free of charge.

Girls First includes sessions on mental health awareness, personal safety, financial literacy and etiquette. Networking opportunities, group

discussions and interactive activities foster connections and support, promoting a sense of belonging.

Asked what message First Citizens Bank would like to convey on International Women's Day, Darbasie said, "Everyone can play a part to drive empowerment and inclusion."

"For us the key is standing collectively alongside women and girls and ensuring that their unique goals and contributions are considered and valued."

Last year, the event was revamped with new workshops, "such as the Mind Matters workshop...for young women to delve into mental health and enhance coping strategies. We added networking opportunities."

This year, in addition, it will also focus on encouraging girls to "dream big without limitations, overcome obstacles courageously, and empower them to take concrete steps towards realising their unique dreams."

"Participant feedback has pointed to interest in an entrepreneurship workshop."

"We are also working on an amazing line-up of female speakers...The talks delivered by successful females will serve as powerful examples and sources of inspiration, showing girls what is possible when they believe in themselves and pursue their dreams," she said. "Girls First 2024 is a transformative experience that equips girls with the skills, knowledge, and confidence needed to thrive in all aspects of their lives. By being part of this empowering programme, girls can expect to grow personally, develop their leadership abilities and feel empowered to create positive change in the world around them."

*Interested girls and their families can stay updated on Girls First 2024 by following @FCGirlsFirst on Instagram. Registration details will be shared once finalised, and the Girls First team is available to address any questions or concerns.*



# International Women's Day

Roberta Rose-Collins, certified health and wellness coach and founder of Yes She Can.

PHOTO COURTESY ROBERTA ROSE-COLLINS



Roberta Rose-Collins

## Yes, she can... and she did!

BAVINA SOOKDEO

At 50, Rose-Collins has dedicated herself to transforming lives through her organisation, Yes She Can, pioneering initiatives that promote health, wellness and community empowerment. Recently, she became one of only two National Board Certified Health and Wellness coaches (NBC-HWC) in TT. Only 10,000 health coaches globally are NBC-HWC.

### A journey of transformation

Rose-Collins's journey to becoming a health and wellness advocate was deeply personal. The mother of one, grandmother of two, and happily married for 30 years, Rose-Collins was born in Mon Repos, San Fernando.

In 2013, after years of misdiagnosis, she discovered she had coeliac disease (a genetic autoimmune disorder in which gluten triggers your white blood cells to attack the villi that line your small intestines). This, coupled with a history of poor health and surgery, propelled her towards a path of self-discovery and transformation.

Rose-Collins embraced dietary changes and introduced exercise into her routine, starting with walking, and witnessed positive changes in her health and physique. Rose-Collins transitioned

from a sedentary lifestyle to running a half-marathon within nine months, embodying the principles of resilience and perseverance.

Her journey didn't end with personal transformation; it blossomed into a movement. Through social media, she shared her experiences, inspiring others to embark on their wellness journeys.

As people witnessed her physical changes, "They became motivated to try new things, to join me in working out and trying new recipes. As a result, Yes She Can was born, as a space to share and motivate others," Rose-Collins related.

On her decision to become a wellness coach, she said it came from "a nagging feeling that there was more that I could bring to the table than just my transformation story...that I could make a more meaningful difference in the lives of others."

"I completed my certificate with the Institute for Integrative Nutrition (IIN) in 2019 and then went on to obtain my credentials as a National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach (NBC-HWC). This certification requires rigorous training and testing, equipping coaches with the knowledge, skills and techniques needed to effectively support clients in achieving their health and wellness goals."

ROBERTA ROSE-COLLINS continues on page 19

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# Women's Day

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# International Women's Day

**BAVINA SOOKDEO**

In the landscape of sports, TT stands out with its innovative approach to promoting gender equality through the Pink Reign Campaign. Launched by the Ministry of Sport and Community Development (MSCD), this initiative has garnered attention for its comprehensive strategies aimed at fostering inclusivity and promoting active participation by women and girls.

The Pink Reign Campaign traces its roots back to TT's commitment to the Brighton Declaration on Women and Girls in Sport, signed in 1994. This commitment emphasised the need to increase female participation in sports across all levels and roles, aligning with global efforts to achieve gender equality in sports.

Aligned with the objectives of the National Sport Policy, the MSCD launched the Pink Reign Campaign with the aim of enriching citizens' lives through widespread participation, quality training and sporting excellence.

The ministry says, "The primary goal of the Pink Reign Campaign is to foster the growth of women and girls in communities by offering opportunities to enhance awareness and participation in sports and physical activities.

"Its specific objectives include raising awareness about the significance of physical activity and sports in the lives of women and girls, promoting their participation, providing them with opportunities through sports, and highlighting the various roles they can play in sports, including as athletes, coaches, administrators, and more.

"Furthermore, the campaign targets working women, encouraging them to engage in physical activity to combat non-communicable diseases and reduce stress. It seeks to positively impact women and girls physically, emotionally, and psychologically through sports and physical activities, while also addressing stigmas that may hinder their participation."

The Pink Reign Campaign also introduces unconventional sports and physical activities like martial arts, cheerleading, dance, badminton and jump-rope. This initiative aims to showcase that sports can be both enjoyable and transformative, leading to positive lifestyle changes.

Ultimately, the campaign seeks to unearth new talent, cultivate aspiring leaders, and cultivate a nurturing environment for women and girls in the realm of sports.

The campaign targets girls and women (aged seven and older), focusing on those interested in sports and physical activities but lacking information or motivation.



Minister of Sport and Community Development, Shamfa Cudjoe-Lewis (centre) and Minister of Planning and Development, Penelope Beckles (second from right), with #GirlsRunTT Challenge participants at the launch of Pink Reign 2024 at the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre in January. **FILE PHOTO**

## Inspiring women and girls through sport

### A closer look at the Pink Reign Campaign

Additionally, the campaign aims to reach individuals with disabilities, ensuring inclusivity across all its initiatives.

Since its inception, the Pink Reign Campaign has implemented various initiatives and activities to achieve its objectives. These include:

- **You Go Girl panel discussions:** offering firsthand accounts of the triumphs and challenges experienced by girls and women who excel in sports in TT, these discussions aspire to ignite inspiration among others to embark on similar paths of achievement.

- **#GirlsRunTT Challenge:** dedicated to the memory of the late Lynette "Granny" Luces, this sponsors 300 women and girls, encompassing those with disabilities, to engage in both virtual and in-person races. Additionally, it features pop-up events spanning five districts, climaxing in a Pink Reign 5K race.

- **Let Her Play Programme:** this comprises several components. One involves dance collaborations with national governing bodies, while another offers basic self-defence courses in partnership with the TT Karate Union. Additionally, there are sessions on aerobics, zumba, and for the first time this year, an introduction to archery called Bullseye to engage women and girls in new sporting activities.

- **Life skills workshops,** covering topics essential for sports career development, such as career planning, self-

marketing, networking, etiquette and public speaking.

The campaign has had a direct impact on over 18,000 women and girls through their active participation in various programmes. Feedback from participants highlights the positive effects of the initiative, including improvements in physical and mental health, increased confidence and empowerment to tackle challenges.

Despite the difficulties posed by the covid19 pandemic, the Pink Reign Campaign swiftly adapted its strategies to ensure continuity. Virtual platforms were used for activities and efforts were made to enhance media coverage, showcasing female athletes and administrators to foster a sense of community and inspire future generations.

In 2021, to mark International Women's Day, the ministry orchestrated the relaunch of the campaign in a virtual format. Sponsored by the MSCD, 340 women and girls were enlisted to take part in virtual road races spanning 70 miles from March-September 2021.

The Ministry commented, "These virtual races were facilitated by Bafasports, leveraging their existing platform. The primary aim was to promote healthy, safe, and active movement amidst the lockdown phase imposed by the pandemic.

"In subsequent years, namely 2023 and 2024, the MSCD expanded its approach by introducing community pop-up

races. These initiatives were aimed at assisting participants in reaching their mileage targets and fostering a sense of community engagement alongside the virtual movements."

On how the Pink Reign Campaign aims to foster a culture shift and promote life skills among women and girls participating in sports and physical activity, the ministry explained that it aims to do so through several strategies.

By actively involving women and girls in sports and physical activities, the campaign empowers them to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, fostering a culture where participation in sports is seen as normal and desirable for females.

The campaign also organises workshops focused on life skills which equip participants with practical skills that are valuable not only in sports but also in various aspects of their personal and professional lives.

The ministry noted, "Additionally, by showcasing successful female athletes and providing mentorship opportunities, the campaign offers women and girls tangible examples of achievement in sports. This helps to inspire them and build their confidence, encouraging them to pursue their own sporting goals and develop essential life skills along the way. The campaign also promotes inclusivity by providing opportunities for women and girls from diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities, to

participate in sports and physical activities...

"Overall, the Pink Reign Campaign recognises the transformative power of sports in the lives of women and girls, not only in terms of physical health but also in building essential life skills and promoting positive social change. Through its various initiatives and approaches, the campaign seeks to create a supportive and inclusive environment where women and girls can thrive both on and off the field."

Through the campaign, the ministry plans to hold the fourth edition of the #GirlsRunTT Challenge and expand its community engagement. It aims once again to sponsor 300 women and girls to take part in a series of virtual and in-person races, ensuring inclusivity by accommodating those with disabilities. Additionally, the campaign plans to organise pop-up events across five districts, leading up to the grand finale: a Pink Reign 5K race.

Asked how the ministry is celebrating IWD 2024, and how the Pink Reign Campaign contributes to these celebrations, it said it was "promoting inclusivity for women in line with this year's theme, #InspireInclusion. We are highlighting our female staff through various forms of recognition and encouraging all staff to share ideas for creating a more inclusive world for women.

"Furthermore, we invite staff participation in the #GirlsRunTT Challenge, a pivotal component of the Pink Reign Campaign.

"This two-pronged approach acknowledges women's contributions to our ministry and supports the broader objectives of empowering women and fostering inclusivity in sports through the Pink Reign Campaign. By actively engaging staff in the #GirlsRunTT Challenge, we demonstrate our commitment to encouraging women's involvement in physical activities and cultivating a culture of gender equality within our organisation."

As for the message it would like to convey to the public on the importance of supporting initiatives like the Pink Reign Campaign, it said, "The Pink Reign Campaign is a beacon of gender equality and inclusivity in sports and physical activities, fostering healthier communities and empowering women and girls to unlock their full potential.

"Supporting initiatives like Pink Reign sends a powerful message that everyone, regardless of gender, deserves equal opportunities to participate and excel in sports. By breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes, we create a more inclusive society where every individual can thrive."

# International Women's Day

## Men can empower women through support

ROBERTA ROSE-COLLINS from page 15

Yes She Can, launched on International Women's Day in 2015, encapsulates Rose-Collins's vision of inclusivity, empowerment, and community support.

"The idea of Yes She Can came to me after completing the UWI half-marathon in 2014, and I thought about how far along my journey I came and how much joy completing this event gave me."

Living more healthily, she said, "gave me a type of freedom and happiness that I had not experienced before."

"I have a loving and supportive family and have always enjoyed my life, but this was different. I think that for the first time in my life, I was doing something for me! This was too good to keep to myself, and I wanted to share with others."

Launched with three local motivational videos of women sharing their journey to living healthier lives, their challenges and their victories, since then, Yes She Can has been responsible for many inspirational transformation experiences locally and abroad and actively celebrate the achievement of its core members both in TT and Hong Kong.

Central to Yes She Can's ethos is the belief that every woman, regardless of background or circumstance, can make positive choices to enhance her quality of life. Through local and international initiatives, Yes She Can celebrates the achievements of women and fosters a culture of self-care and resilience.

In the realm of health and wellness, Yes She Can stands as a champion of inclusion and diversity. Recognising that each woman's journey is unique, the organisation supports women from all walks of life.

Men are also integral to Yes She Can's mission, with several actively participating in its activities and initiatives.

"Men also empower women through support," Rose-Collins said. When she first started to work towards living more healthily, her husband "supported my journey all the way. This allowed me to explore without reservation."

"Both directly and indirectly we have encouraged and included men to be a part of our movement. We proudly have a few guys who not only support us through training for events but are also right there alongside us, sporting their Yes She Can-branded apparel. Our triathlon group included four men, and our dragon-boat team as well."

By providing a range of activities and teaching, Yes She Can ensures women from various backgrounds can find support in the organisation. Through collaborations and partnerships, Yes She Can extends its reach and impact, bridging gaps and fostering a sense of unity in communities.

Like any organisation, Yes She Can has faced its share of challenges, with funding being a significant hurdle. However, Rose-Collins's resilience and commitment to the cause have enabled her to navigate these obstacles.

Rose-Collins's journey with Yes She Can has been marked by numerous milestones and achievements. These include:

Training for and completing the Trinidad Triathlon at Store Bay, Tobago, October 2015

Entering two relay teams for the TT International Marathon, January 2016

The Yes She Can Hong Kong team training for and competing in the Stanley International Dragon Boat Race held in Stanley, Hong Kong, June 2016, and every year since

The Yes She Can TT team training for and competing in the Annual Chinese Bicentennial Dragon Boat Regatta at the Chaguaramas Boardwalk and Paragon Sports Club, October 2016  
Blessing Bag Campaign – Collecting and

distributing handbags filled with toiletries and personal items for homeless women or women in need. This was done in support of the efforts of the San Fernando City Corporation and the mayor's office and they were distributed for the Day of Caring.

Share Happiness – With the support of a local flower importer, they distributed flowers randomly to commuters in San Fernando, Port of Spain and Chaguanas, on a busy Friday morning. Each recipient

got two flowers and was tasked with paying it forward by keeping one flower and sharing happiness by giving the other to someone else.

Hosting an international women's conference

Managing Royalty for a Night since 2017 (which enables students who cannot afford to attend their graduation to do so through donations of clothes and more)

Completed her coaching certification

Using social media to encourage and support lifestyle changes through: 30 Mile 30 Day Challenge, Eat Local Food Challenge and 31 Ways to Self-Care Challenge.

Looking ahead, Rose-Collins envisions expanding Yes She Can's reach throughout the Caribbean, empowering women through community programmes and partnerships and fostering a culture of wellness and resilience across the region.



**This International Women's Day, we celebrate the power, resilience, and brilliance of women. At UWI, we are committed to empowering women to reach their full potential to make a difference in the world.**

Join us in creating a community where women's voices are heard, valued, and amplified. Our campus is a place where you can thrive, learn, and grow into the woman you were meant to be.

Your journey starts here. Be part of something extraordinary. Applications are open for academic year 2024/2025.

**Application Deadline: 31 July, 2024**



**APPLY NOW**  
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# Safeguarding Futures. Enriching Lives.



## Greer Quan

CEO, Caribbean

*As the CEO of Pan-American Life in the Caribbean, I am proud to reaffirm our commitment to the International Women's Day theme, 'Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress.'*

*With women comprising 80% of our workforce in the Caribbean, including 56% in executive roles and 67% in managerial or supervisory positions and a field force where 69% are female, we understand the transformative impact of empowering women in the workplace.*

*Featured here are our C-Suite female executives – a team of talented professionals whose contributions to Pan-American Life and the industry at large are applauded.*



**Marsha McCarthy, FCCA, MBA**  
Vice President Finance,  
Regional Chief Financial  
Officer



**Karyn Dasent, MBA, SPHR**  
Vice President,  
Regional Chief  
Operations Officer



**Kristi-Marie Weston, BBA, MBA**  
Assistant Vice  
President, Regional  
Corporate Business



**Rachael Sudan, BA, AMABE**  
Assistant Vice  
President, Regional  
Human Resources

**As author, *Thais Compoint*, stated**

***"Inclusive leadership is not a destination. It's a journey that requires humility, curiosity, and courage."***

*The campaign, 'Inspire Inclusion,' is not just a truth that we, at PALIG stand by, but a guiding principle. We believe that by investing in the development and advancement of women, we not only accelerate our own progress but also contribute to the broader goal of gender equality and inclusive growth.*

*This International Women's Day, let us all commit to investing in women and accelerating progress for a more inclusive and prosperous future for all.*



At Pan-American Life\*, we have an unwavering commitment to deliver on our promises. For more than 110 years we've demonstrated that we are

**People you can trust**  
*for life*

by bringing trusted financial security and peace of mind to more than 7.1 million covered lives. Our promise is to protect what matters most to our policyholders – **their families, their business, and their futures.**

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\*Pan-American Life operates locally as Pan-American Life Insurance Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited