



Key outcomes from the 2018 Caribbean sub-regional women’s committee (SUBWOC) meeting

Thirty-one women trade union activists, nine of them young workers, attended the 2018 SUBWOC in Castries, St Lucia. They represented fifteen affiliates. The SUBWOC held discussions under the theme, “*There can be no social justice without gender justice*”.



Women activists from public services unions in the Caribbean sharing information at the 2018 SUBWOC, Castries, St Lucia (Photo: Jillian Bartlett)

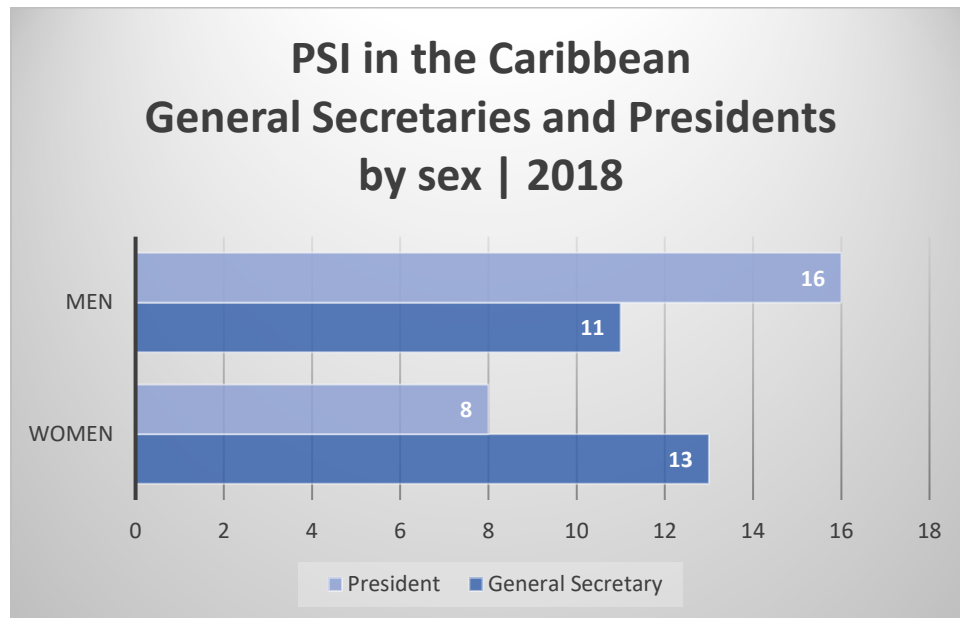
The meeting **noted** a report published by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) in January 2016, that revealed “*the Caribbean region continues to battle with persistent gender inequalities*”. While we have had many advancements in Caribbean society, women are still not treated equally and are not all afforded the same opportunities. It would appear that in some cases it is a situation of “two steps forward, one step back.” There is quite a lot of push-back in response to the many advances that have been made.

Trade union women in leadership and decision-making

The meeting also **noted** that there are more women in leadership positions among the affiliates. Committee members especially welcomed Sis Dareth Obermayer-Cayetano, president of the Public Service Union of Belize); Sis Techa Clarke-Griffiths, 1st vice president of the Jamaica CSA; Sis Josephine Farrell, 1st vice president of the St Luca CSA; and Sis Shani Willie, 2nd vice president of the St Lucia. The committee also welcomed Sis Joy-Ann Inniss, women’s coordinator and Sis Kimberley Agard, young workers’ coordinator, of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados (CTUSAB), PSI’s newest affiliate in the sub-region.

There has always been a tradition of women in leadership positions in Caribbean public services unions. In recent years the numbers have increased and they are at even higher levels of leadership. In addition, more and more women are now on executive committees; and are in some cases the majority on the national councils and general councils of their unions – the second highest decision-making bodies in the unions.

A sex-disaggregated analysis of presidents and general secretaries, shows that in 2013, among the 23 affiliates, there were 11 female general secretaries, and 8 female presidents. In 2018, among 24 affiliates, there are 13 female general secretaries and 8 female presidents. In 2013, there were 12 male general secretaries and 15 male presidents, compared with 11 male general secretaries and 16 male presidents in 2018.



Source: PSI in the Caribbean

SUBWOC members **noted and discussed** the varying and sometimes seemingly changing roles of the president and general secretary as a consequence of the sex of the person in the respective positions.

SUBWOC members **emphasised** that leadership roles require new and enhanced skills. This means that in addition to the trade union education and training opportunities offered by unions at the local, and regional and international levels, leaders must become lifelong learners and must constantly work at enhancing their skills and re-inventing themselves in order to be effective in a rapidly changing world.

“Leadership and learning
are indispensable to each
other.”

- John F. Kennedy

Promoting social justice and gender justice

The SUBWOC **reaffirmed** the role of PSI to make a strong stand for affirmative public policies, and connect with the implementation of the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) and its inclusive development goal of leaving no one behind. Recognising that gender justice and women's rights, are central in transforming the lives of women, families, and communities, SUBWOC members agreed wholeheartedly that strengthening the capacity and ability of women to function effectively in society is “an essential precursor” to achieving gender equality. Gender Justice is therefore necessary in achieving “growth of economies, sustainable food security and in some cases political stability”.



Role of women’s committees – taking the lead on gender mainstreaming

The SUBWOC took careful note of the mandate from the 2017 World Congress:

“The PSI Women’s Committee will take responsibility for leading the process of gender mainstreaming in PSI.”

SUBWOC also noted:

“... that the fight for gender equality requires the active participation of both men and women. Gender will be a focus in all areas of PSI action.”

The SUBWOC **reaffirmed and emphasised** the critical role that women’s committees and networks at the national and (sub) regional levels can and must play in monitoring the implementation of the SDGs, focusing on the central theme of [gender equality \(Goal 5\)](#).

The SUBWOC **requested the assistance** of the PSI to effectively carry out these roles at the various levels.

Committee members **reiterated** the importance of educating members about gender equality and gender equity. They agreed that bureaux of gender/women’s affairs and organisations promoting equality of opportunities are important allies in helping to build greater understanding and raising awareness among women and men in the union on gender equality and gender equity issues.

The meeting **urged affiliates** to seek guidance from and coordinate training modules with the gender/women’s bureaux and equal opportunities organisations in their respective countries.

Building alliances at all levels ... transforming lives

The meeting **especially noted** the central role played by [UN Women](#), the UN organisation dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The meeting **applauded** the affiliates from the sub-region who play an active and highly visible role at the [United Nations Commission on the Status of Women](#) (UNCSW). The meeting **reflected on** the special focus on public services for [UNCSW63](#).

SUBWOC members **highlighted** examples of the alliances built over the past year with local and national civil society groups that support gender equality and gender equity.

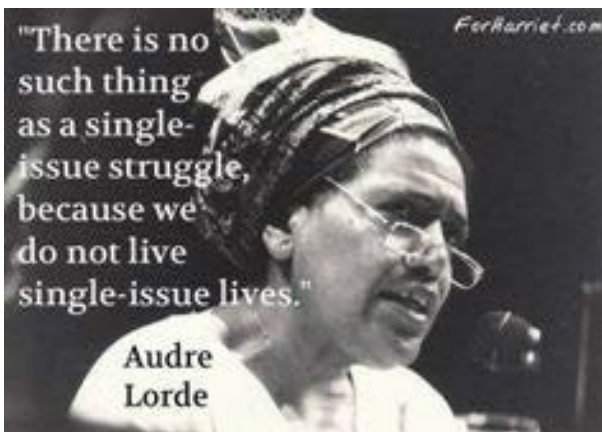
- The women’s network of the PSU of St Vincent & the Grenadines collaborated with the National Organisation of Women to call for an [end to the silence](#) about gender-based violence in that state;
- The Women’s Executive Committee of the NUGFW (WEC:NUGFW) is a member of the [CEDAW Committee of Trinidad & Tobago](#);
- The WEC:NUGFW works with the [Equal Opportunity Commission \(EOC\)](#) in Trinidad & Tobago and has participated in the latter’s activities on developing and promoting guidelines on dealing with and ending sexual harassment in the workplace;

- The WEC:NUGFW, in collaboration with the National Trade Union Centre of Trinidad & Tobago, coordinated a national symposium on [Sexual Harassment in the world of work](#);
- The CTUSAB and NUPW Barbados collaborated with the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS), Nita Barrow Unit to conduct research on gender-based violence in the health and social services sector;
- The Jamaica CSA collaborated with Bureau of Women’s Affairs in Jamaica in preparation for the UNCSW 62;



Photos: WEC:NUGFW

Intersectional analysis, gender equality and trade unions



Committee members were introduced to the intersectional approach to gender equality. This approach acknowledges the fact that women have different experiences based on aspects of their identity including race, social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age as well as other forms of identity.

Through discussion, members of the SUBWOC noted the tendencies in industrial relations to see things through ‘male norms’ or to refer to ‘women’, “with little attention paid to the impact of ethnicity or class on their positionings, experiences and actions”.

Intersectionality provides a means of conceptualising, analysing and articulating the manner in which women’s lives are shaped by gender, class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and age.”



Sis Linda Mienzer, (Bermuda PSU) **welcomed** the discussion on this issue and **supported** the inclusion of this topic in PSI's work. Committee members also **requested more information and the assistance of PSI** in incorporating it in their work in women's groups/networks as well as in the entire union.

Gender Responsive Public Services

Some committee members commented that they had done a lot of work on raising awareness about gender equality and gender equity and that they saw a need to move on to another phase. The meeting **noted** that the work of gender sensitisation is never done. At the same time, members said that there is a need to do more to create change; that there needed to be a transformation.



Sis Linda Mienzer, Bermuda PSU, LGBTQI+ representative (Photo: PSI in the Caribbean)

A key aspect in moving forward and advancing gender equality and gender equity is for trade union activists to use their collective power through unions to articulate and influence policies and initiatives that address the different needs, aspirations, capacities and contributions of women and men. The policies and actions that trade union activists promote must be implemented and must be such that they challenge existing discriminatory policies and/or practices and make changes for the improvement of quality of life for all – they must be **gender transformative**.

The meeting discussed the critical role that quality public services play in achieving and maintaining just and sustainable societies. Members also agreed that to truly implement gender mainstreaming and gender responsiveness, states must be able to design policies and identify gender gaps. Using sex-disaggregated data will inform planning and policy discussions. Moreover public programmes must be developed that respond to the different needs and aspirations of women and girls and men and boys. The meeting **agreed** that this is a focus that can add new life into their work in unions. The SUBWOC **requested that PSI provides more information on GRPS and assists affiliates** in developing their campaigns.

Plans for 2018/19

The SUBWOC **noted** and **endorsed** the following planned activities:

- Pilot research on Gender-based violence in the Health and Social Services sector in Barbados, in collaboration with the Institute of Gender and Development Studies, Nita Barrow Unit, Cave Hill Campus, University of the West Indies to commence beginning September 2018
- Pay equity pilot in the Health and Social Services sector in Barbados, in collaboration with ILO ACTRAV – to commence mid-September 2018
- Campaign for the ratification of Convention 151 in St Vincent & the Grenadines, ILO SECTOR – to commence late September 2018
- 3-year Inter-American regional project with DGB Germany, “... *strengthening unions in the promotion of equal opportunities, and combating discrimination*”, focusing on young workers, workers fighting racism and xenophobia, and LGBTQI+ workers
- Monitoring the implementation of C151 in Antigua & Barbuda, ILO SECTOR – to commence in 2019