



2014 Caribbean SUBWOC Summary report

Twenty-four women trade union leaders and activists (5 of them under the age of 35) participated in the 2014 [Caribbean SUBWOC](#) held in Dominica on March 7. They represented 17 of the sub-region's 24 affiliates. The meeting was held at the headquarters of the Dominica Public Service Union which is celebrating its 75th anniversary. The SUBWOC reviewed activities and work in the sub-region during the past year, making recommendations on the achievement of gender equality and equity. Equally important, the committee used its gender lens to examine and articulate its perspectives on the wide range of issues facing the sub-region. Women's titular, Jillian Bartlett, general secretary of the National Union of Government of Federated Workers of Trinidad & Tobago (NUGFW TT), chaired the meeting.

Implementing a [gender mainstreaming policy](#): SUBWOC applauded the positive results arising from efforts to infuse gender mainstreaming in unions, while recognising that there was still a lot more to be done. Having more women in decision-making positions in unions is an essential part of the work. But this must be matched with empowerment, capacity building and support. SUBWOC therefore **reiterated its call** for women's groups/committees to take the lead in using the resources and expertise in ministries and departments responsible for [gender equality](#) to organise training sessions for all trade union leaders and activists. This training is essential in helping to implement gender mainstreaming policies in unions.

Influencing national development agendas The number and scope of public sector boards (quasi-government or statutory boards) in Caribbean countries is increasing. These boards are charged with developing policy at the sectoral and national levels. And there are countless examples of policies developed in one country being quickly adopted and implemented in another – sometimes with no modification at all. In promoting worker participation, trade unions in a number of countries have bargained for and have representation on these national boards. This also extends to the [Caribbean Community](#) (CARICOM), the centre of the regional integration movement and other sub-regional organs and institutions. SUBWOC has started to examine the gender composition of national/public boards as well as the gender composition of trade union representation on these boards. Moreover, committee members have started to question the impact of trade union representation on these boards, the role of representatives in promoting quality public services, how gender is mainstreamed in the boards and how unions can have greater influence on policy decisions. SUBWOC agreed to continue the work started and **called on PSI** to offer technical assistance in carrying out the study, identifying (re-) training needs and developing necessary tools and guidelines for those serving on public boards.

Equity and diversity: SUBWOC especially noted the needs of other equity seeking groups – [LGBTQ](#) workers, persons with disabilities. SUBWOC **called on affiliates** to make more use of PSI's policies and guidelines.

The fight against [precarious work](#): The committee carefully noted the research carried out by young women worker representatives from affiliates in Jamaica and Barbados. The briefing notes/research papers used a gender lens to examine precarious working conditions in the public service in these two countries. The researchers also examined the impact on [young workers](#). SUBWOC welcomed the detailed information on the specific situations in Jamaica and Barbados, noting that precarious work exists in almost all categories of work in the public service. The committee **endorsed [the recommendations](#)** that call for organisation and bargaining for precarious workers, as well as campaigning for an end to precarious work in the public service. PSI will publish the studies. SUBWOC also **called on PSI** to support affiliates with training and campaign tools.

Organising and mobilising young women workers: Ginou Jean-Baptiste, young workers' secretary of the Confédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses des Secteurs Public et Privé (CTSP) of Haïti, brought members up-to-date on the struggles of workers in Haïti, especially those who provide public services. She provided some details on the firing of workers in local government institutions and **called on affiliates** to support solidarity calls. Having attended the ITUC's [women's assembly](#) in Senegal in late 2013, Sis Ginou noted the linkages between those discussions and PSI's [Quality Public Services campaign](#) (QPS) and PSI's work with young women leaders. She **requested the support and**

solidarity of sisters and the PSI in organising and mobilising young women and in using and adapting the ITUC's [Decisions for Life](#) campaign in the CTSP. (See also the sub-region's framework guidelines on [mentoring young women workers](#))

Sectoral work: SUBWOC recalled its discussion and recommendations in early 2013 on [sectoral work in the sub-region](#). In most countries in the sub-region, affiliates represent workers in all sectors and in all categories of work within those sectors. SUBWOC also recognised that there are opportunities for affiliates to increase members and extend membership reach in some (sub)sectors. In 2013, the sub-region noted the increasing challenges facing emergency medical technicians/ambulance workers, firefighters, correctional officers and border control and protection officers (immigration, customs, coast guard). Some affiliates have requested assistance (training and tools) in dealing with the issues in these (sub)sectors. A significant number of these workers are women and are under the age of 35 years. Five affiliates **agreed** to participate in a pilot mapping exercise to help further define the current situation and identify potential and future action.

SUBWOC members also considered the proposed new sector focus on education, culture and media, noting that while the majority of teachers' unions in the Caribbean are affiliated to Education International (EI), teachers at all levels and other education workers are also members of current PSI affiliates. Worthy of note is the fact that, in a number of cases, the teachers separated from public sector unions to form their own unions because they felt that their specific interests were not being served. Workers in culture ministries, departments and institutions are not all unionised. In the Caribbean, some governments are proposing culture as an income-generating industry, in some cases seeking increased investment from private individuals and institutions. The committee received a briefing note prepared by the Jamaica Civil Service Association on ways the sub-region could embrace the new sector focus especially in early childhood education and culture. SUBWOC **recommended** an analysis across the sub-region, with 4 affiliates **agreeing** to pilot a mapping exercise in the new sector focus.

The fight to end [violence against women and girls and gender-based violence](#): Jillian Bartlett (NUGFW TT) reported on the work of the union's women's executive council (WEC) and its Arts in Action project. Starting with the 16 days of activism in 2013, the WEC raised awareness of the alarming number of cases of domestic violence and child abuse in Trinidad & Tobago. Deciding that it had to do more, the union developed the idea of changing the status quo by targeting the next generation of citizens – children - through art and culture. Partnering with the Trinidad & Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TUTTA), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, other government entities and corporate citizens, the NUGFW TT has launched a slogan, poetry, essay and short video competition in 100 plus primary and secondary schools throughout Trinidad & Tobago. Winning entries will be exhibited at the National Library and published in a booklet. Members of the WEC will also engage in outreach activities by visiting schools and interacting with students and teachers to raise awareness and promote action.

SUBWOC **congratulated** the NUGFW TT on the tremendous work done, noting the success in engaging government and other social partners. SUBWOC also **called on PSI** to provide technical assistance and support to the NUGFW TT in responding to the call from the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development to a partnership, especially in stimulating research on the elimination of violence against women and girls and gender-based violence.

Next steps

The Caribbean SUBRAC **approved** SUBWOC's report and recommendations. The recommendations and commitments made by SUBWOC constitute part of the sub-region's proposed workplan for 2014/2015.

Details and further information on the 2014 SUBWOC are available from the [Caribbean sub-regional office](#).