

**Question 1:**

**In what ways do women experience the impact of business-related human rights abuses differently and disproportionately? Please provide concrete examples in the context of both generic and sector or region-specific experiences of women.**

**Answer:**

No cases of abuses in connection with business-related human rights have been reported to the Ministry, but some difficulties which are normally encountered by most women entrepreneurs are

- Financial constraints, which are mainly due to lack of support in terms of collateral.
- Market Access
- Feeling of insecurity to Start up a business.

**Question 2:**

**Please share any good practices on how to deal with increased marginalisation or vulnerabilities faced by women due to intersectionally, feminisation of work, informal economy and conflicts.**

**Answer:**

Regular sensitisation campaigns are carried out to encourage women to form part of the formal sector. Several courses are being provided and various schemes have also been launched inviting prospective and willing women entrepreneurs to enroll accordingly. Please see website of SME Mauritius (<https://smemu.org/>) for the various schemes being implemented.

**Question 3:**

**How to address sexual harassment and sexual or physical violence suffered by women in the business-related context, including at the workplace, in supply chains and in surrounding communities? Please share any good practices which have proved to be effective in dealing with sexual harassment and violence against women.**

**Answer:**

The Equal opportunities Act provides for equal access to opportunities as it incorporates all the different grounds of discrimination covered under section 3 and 16 of the Constitution as well as age, caste, colour, creed, ethnic origin, impairment, marital status, place of origin, political opinion, race, sex and sexual orientation in areas dealing with employment, education, the provision of accommodation, goods, services and other facilities, sports, the disposal of immovable property, admission to private clubs and premises open to the public.

**Question 4:**

**Which State laws and policies or social, cultural and religious norms continue to impede women's integration into economic activities and public life generally?**

**Answer:**

The Small and Medium Enterprises Act 2017 makes provision for any person who is willing to do business to register as an SME and if the enterprise meets the criteria to be considered as a micro enterprise, small enterprise or medium enterprise, he/she will be issued with a Registration certificate. This policy has not caused any impediment to women entrepreneurs

**Question 5:**

**Are there any good practices of integrating a gender perspective into States' economic sphere (e.g state-owned enterprises, public procurement agencies, trade missions, export credit agencies, privatization of public services, public-private partnerships, and trade and investment agreements)?**

**Answer:**

In light of the National Gender Policy Framework 2008 and International Conventions to which Mauritius is a signatory party, this Ministry constituted its Gender Cell Committee in June 2016 and came up with its Gender Policy Statement in January 2017, as a framework for accountability and appropriate actions so as to contribute to the achievement of gender policy and women's empowerment. This Ministry is mainstreaming gender in line with this Policy framework as far as it is possible and practicable.

**Question 6:**

**How could policy coherence be improved between different government ministries or departments dealing with women issues and business-related matters?**

**Answer:**

The Ministry works in close collaboration with the National Women Entrepreneurship Council (NWECE), the Association Mauriciennes des Femmes Entreprises (AMFCE) and representatives from various SMEs to ensure policy coherence and achieve the desired result.

We are also represented as member at the National Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming (NSCGM) headed by the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare that works towards the achievement of gender policy and women's empowerment and monitor the implementation of the National Gender Policy Framework in all sectoral Ministries. Effectiveness of such meetings should be fully monitored, evaluated and reported at higher quarters for any corrective actions.

**Question 7:**

**What is the extent to which businesses currently apply a gender lens in conducting human rights due diligence, including social or environmental impact assessment?**

**Answer:**

Numerous studies done by the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and other academic and corporate institutions, have concluded that investing in women is enormously profitable.

There are several factors which have contributed in encouraging more women to become entrepreneurs in Mauritius which include favourable schemes and facilities tailor-made for women, good institutional support, stable political environment and a strong entrepreneurial set up. Research reflects many women are becoming entrepreneurs due to challenges/attractions of entrepreneurship, self-determination, family concerns and lack of career advancement. The participation of women in social and economic activities has already been firmly established in the Mauritian culture.

Mauritius is moving towards a gender parity era, courtesy of free education and many incentives are available to women. Although opportunities exist for women to hold top positions, they are not supported enough on other fronts which would ultimately help and enable them to shoulder higher responsibilities at work, managing their own businesses including social or environmental impact assessment.

As per the report entitled “The African Gender and Development Index (2017)”, Mauritius ranking on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) stood at 82 out of 155 countries, which demonstrates that gender inequalities, namely when it concerns issues pertaining to health, education and command over economic resources, are still prevalent within our society. There has been a flurry of measures that have been taken to ensure that gender and more specifically gender equality is a central feature of public governance. To that effect, there was the setting up of the National Gender Policy Framework, the National Steering Committee in Gender Mainstreaming as well the creation of Gender Focal Points in the different ministries.

Women are just as capable as men and should be given opportunities to occupy leadership positions. However, women remain vastly underrepresented at the senior management level but opportunities should be created to support women.

The policies and programmes of the Gender Unit are aligned to international and regional commitments pertaining to women’s empowerment and gender equality. As per Gender Statistics 2017, the following facts are revealing:

- More women than men are enrolled in tertiary institutions, but there are fewer women in research (PhD, MPhil and Doctor of Business Administration);

- Working women are more likely than men to be employees and contributing family workers, but less likely to be heading a business;
- Unemployed women are generally more qualified than their male counterparts;
- Average income tends to be lower for women than men Rs16,800 against Rs22,300 monthly in 2017;
- The proportion of women in the most senior positions in government services (Senior Chief Executive, Permanent Secretary, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Director, Manager, Judge and Magistrate) increased from 20% in 1997 to 37% in 2017;
- Women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence than men;
- Between 2016 and 2017, Mauritius improved its ranking to 112, out of 144 countries worldwide with regard to Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) of the World Economic Forum. GGI seeks to measure gender equality across four key areas, namely: (a) economic participation and opportunity, (b) educational attainment, (c) health and survival and (d) political empowerment; and
- During the period 2005 to 2017, male activity rate was consistently higher than female activity rate. However, the gap has been narrowing over time as the activity rate for men has been decreasing over the years, while that of females has been generally increasing.

Mauritius is also represented on various Human Rights Treaty Bodies, namely the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), who serve as independent experts.

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare is adopting a Gender concept to educate women at different levels, including police and prison officers, young women.

They held a Dialogue in 2016 in the context of the International Women's Year with the public-private sector and parastatal bodies with a view to achieving the targets set in gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

The Australian Embassy's community grants program has supported a Coaching and Mentoring Programme for Women Entrepreneurs in Mauritius (Rodrigues), Madagascar, Comoros and Seychelles, launched during the IORA Women's Economic Empowerment Conference held in Seychelles in 2016. They have also worked closely with the Gender Ministry, the police, emergency services, the judiciary and local NGOs on the issue of gender based violence.

The majority of Mauritian women are more likely to choose their personal responsibilities over long hours at work, which are routinely required in top leading positions. This change is happening already in a few households though and many women are successfully balancing their personal and work lives.

There is no doubt that there have been a number of concrete outcomes but there is still a lot of room for improvement and it should be ensured that all the spheres of Mauritian society become gender equal and inclusive.

**Question 8:**

**Are there any good practices of business enterprises adopting a gender perspective in making human rights policy commitments, addressing the gender wage gap and under-representation of women in boards and senior positions, or involving affected women in meaningful consultations and remediation processes?**

**Answer:**

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) has published guidelines and codes of conduct for all employers, both from the public and private sectors, in view of the implementation of an equal opportunity policy by all employers, which is a mandatory requirement under the Equal Opportunity Act. The EOC has the duty to attempt resolving matters through conciliation, in line with its commitments to the promotion of good relations between persons of different status.

**Question 9:**

**What is the role of businesses in dealing with domestic laws, policies and societal practices which are discriminatory to women?**

**Answer:**

Varying across countries, the lack of government support in terms of policy, laws and services has been identified as a barrier for women entrepreneurs. Even though this varies greatly across countries, most research indicates that regulations, taxation, and legal barriers can pose serious obstacles for running and starting a business.

Mauritius has been actively working towards the reduction of this gap. As a result, there are now more laws and legislations tackling the issues of gender parity. Several women holding top positions in leading institutions, in both the public and private sectors and there is need to have this change on a bigger scale to empower more women.

No specific legal barriers exist that affect women's enterprises in Mauritius. They are entitled to the same benefits which men entrepreneurs can avail. Consequently, the National Women Entrepreneur Council (NWECC), a parastatal body operating under the aegis of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare was set up in 1999. It is the main organisation that provides support and assistance to both potential and existing women entrepreneurs in Mauritius. Women can also benefit from schemes, facilities and fiscal incentives to launch their business from SME Mauritius, SME Registration Unit and from DBM Ltd. The DBM Ltd has launched specific start-ups and women entrepreneurs schemes to assist women implement their business.

Amendments has been brought to the Employment Rights Act with a view to extending maternity leave from 12 to 14 weeks to better support working mothers to fulfil their family obligations.

Moreover, the Equal Opportunities Commission, under Section 27(3) (f) of the Equal Opportunities Act 2008, has issued Guidelines and Codes for the avoidance of discrimination notably in the field of employment. The purpose of the Equal Opportunity Policy is to ensure that:

- No one receive less favourable treatment, by reason of his or her age, caste, colour, creed, ethnic origin, impairment, marital status, place of origin, political opinion, race, sex or sexual orientation, or is disadvantaged by any conditions, requirements, provisions, criteria, procedures or practices that cannot be justified on any or more of the above-mentioned grounds, or victimised for taking action against the employer for discrimination or for assisting a fellow employee in taking such as action;
- Opportunities for employment, training and promotion are open to all candidates irrespective of their status, that is, their age, caste, colour, creed, ethnic origin, impairment, marital status, place of origin, political opinion, race, sex or sexual orientation; and
- Selection for employment, promotion, transfer and training and access to benefits, facilities and services, will be fair and equitable and based solely on merit and not on the status of the employees or prospective employees, namely, age, caste, colour, creed, ethnic origin, impairment, marital status, place of origin, political opinion, race, sex or sexual orientation

It should also be ensured that private companies and entrepreneurs consider the following:

- Gender composition of the workforce to be addressed and recruitment strategies to provide equal opportunity for men and women;
- Gender equity goals or objectives to be included in organisational plans, program, project or service design (e.g. a statement of what we will do to increase access or safety for women);
- Barriers to access related to gender (e.g. health information provided in different ways, lack of child care) should be investigated;
- Mechanisms are in place to ensure both men and women are able to participate in community consultation;
- Gender equity training and human resources are available;
- Both male and female staff should be engaged in gender equity structures within the organisation;
- Senior managers should be engaged in gender equity structures within the organisation; and
- Sex-disaggregated data to be collected and used for planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects, programs and services. Staff will ensure they collect all relevant data. Whenever possible, sex-disaggregated data should be collected for better planning, monitoring and

evaluation of projects, programs and services in order to support the organisation's gender sensitivity and equity goals.

Sex disaggregated data represents an important tool for measuring women's access to finance. It can provide an accurate image about the magnitude of the difference and at the same time facilitate in monitoring improvements in case any programs or action are implemented. Sex disaggregated data is a crucial element in designing policies, in offering solutions for improvement and setting targets.

In order for women to attain entrepreneurship development skills easily, efficiently and successfully it requires policy analyst to structure policies to facilitate easy acquisition of the skills.

**Question 10:**

**How could media and advertising industries fight against gender stereotyping and disempowerment of women?**

**Answer:**

The adverse effects of gender stereotyping on young girls and women are becoming increasingly clear and will become more prevalent with rapid technological advances. To fight gender stereotyping and disempowerment of women, advertisers must act responsively and be proactive in ensuring that the content they are creating for their clients fairly reflects the world and the society we live in. Building teams with more women as creative decision makers to produce work that reflects the actual status of society is vital.

In addition, brands must also keep pace with societal and cultural changes and consider such factors as likes, dislikes, age, location, etc instead of emphasizing more on gender and sex.

**Question 11:**

**What additional or specific barriers do women (women human rights defenders) face in accessing effective remedies for business-related human rights abuses?**

**Answer:**

The Ministry is coming up with the National Entrepreneurship Campaign to address the issue. We are also underlining the importance of using "gender-disaggregated data" where relevant and give adequate attention to the various impacts of business-related human rights abuses would be considered and appropriate actions would be taken.

**Question 12:**

**How could all types of remedial mechanisms, processes and outcomes be made more gender-sensitive?**

**Answer:**

All our projects and policies are gender sensitive. Gender sensitivity in relation to the business and enterprise sectors is concerned with the promotion of gender-balanced development in terms of social equity, economic efficiency and efforts to foster sustainable society.

However, a rational Steering Committee on Gender Mainstreaming (NSCGM) has been set up in June 2010 under the Chairpersonship of the Honourable Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare with a view to monitoring the implementation of the National Gender Policy Framework in all sectoral Ministries.

This Committee provides a platform for representatives of Ministries to give feedback on the status of their gender policies as well as learn and share best practices on gender related issues. In the same vein, Cabinet approved the setting up of Gender Cells in July 2010 in line Ministries to institutionalize a structure that is sustainable overtime whilst ensuring that the concept of gender permeates in all policies and programmes of Government.

**Question 13:**

**How to overcome power imbalances and discriminatory practices that might undermine the effectiveness of remedies obtained by women?**

**Answer:**

The Equal Opportunities Act was amended in 2011 to enable the setting up of an Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) in April 2012 to eliminate discrimination in all sectors as well as to promote good relations between people of different status.

In addition, the Equal Opportunities Act was amended in November 2017 to make provision for the prohibition of discrimination in employment on the grounds of a person's criminal record both at recruitment and promotion level. Last but not the least, the new Code of Corporate Governance (2016) – launched in February 2017 – includes in its **“Principle 3: Director Appointment procedures”** that “the search for Board Candidates should be conducted and appointments made, on merit, against objective criteria (to include skills, knowledge, experience and independence and with due regard for the benefits of diversity on the Board, including gender)”.

**Question 14:**

**Please provide any additional comments, suggestions or information which you think may be relevant for the Working Group's forthcoming report on the gender lens to the UNGPs.**

**Answer:**

A seed capital of Rs 500,000 in each Ministry and Department for gender mainstreaming; and Posting of a Gender Specialist in each Ministry for a two-year period.



