

DAWN DISCUSSION PAPER #43

POLICY TRANSFORMATIONS



BARBADOS

SOCIAL POLICIES IN TIMES OF COVID-19: ANALYSIS
OF THE ADOPT OUR FAMILIES PROGRAMME AND
THE INCREASE OF MINIMUM WAGE

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DRAFT for discussion

POLICY
TRANSFORMATIONS

REGION:	POLICY AREA:
CARIBBEAN	CARE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION
	MACROECONOMICS

Using a feminist intersectional and interlinkages approach, this project closely examines policy changes that have taken place during the period of exceptionality produced by the pandemic, exploring how they may impact the future in four policy areas: macroeconomics; labour policies and workers’ rights; migration and human mobilities, care and social protection.

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ACRONYMS

BBD	Barbados Dollar
BEST	Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation
BERT	Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,
NIS	Queer
	National Insurance Scheme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAT	Value Added Tax

ABSTRACT

In 2018, Barbados entered an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, operating under the framework of The Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation (BERT) Plan, which falls under the Extended Fund Facility of the IMF. In previous IMF Programmes, structural adjustment programmes reinforced and drew on the unequal relations of power, leaving women solely responsible for their families (Antrobus, 2004; Barriteau, 1996). It is therefore imperative that we assess how a small island like Barbados navigated these stipulations in 2018 and how they grasped the opportunity provided by the COVID-19 pandemic to implement transformational and progressive policies. The study seeks to address the central question: what provisions did the government make in social programmes between the initial IMF negotiations and the pandemic? This question is central in determining *whether or not* Barbados grasped the opportunity provided by the COVID-19 pandemic to implement transformational and progressive policies. Thus, particular attention is given to Barbados' debt restructuring process since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The case study delves into two key policy responses in a post-COVID environment: the *Adopt Our Families* Programme and the decision to increase the minimum wage. They were chosen as they present an interesting case in how the Government attempted to provide a social safety net for working class citizens. We adopt an intersectional feminist lens to capture the multiple relations of power at the macro and micro levels.

INTRODUCTION

Using Barbados as a case study, we provide an analysis, using an intersectional feminist lens, of the effects of socio-economic policies on livelihoods and care systems. The objective of this project is to evaluate Barbados' policy changes during the pandemic and make meaning of their impacts. By examining the hypotheses proposed by DAWN's analytical framework (Llavaneras Blanco and Cuervo, 2021) we hypothesise that Barbados' social protection response is path-dependent and potentially transformative, with avenues for gender and socially-just policies in the future. We will deploy the tools of intersectional feminist research to interrogate the gendered impacts of the *Adopt-Our-Families programme* and the decision to increase minimum wage while the island battled with the socio-economic impacts of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). Additionally, a multivariate analysis will account for the intersectionality in lives at the margins, allowing one to evaluate impact and future potential.

METHODOLOGY

Secondary data was used predominantly to build the case study. It examines the macro-economic and social policies developed and undertaken by the government of Barbados, the global political and economic environment in which a small country like Barbados operates, and the economic and social reports submitted by Barbados to international organisations through newspaper reports, press releases, and documents produced by the International Monetary Fund. In addition, speeches, manifestos, and statements delivered by the Prime Minister and other Ministers of the State were reviewed. An interview with a social protection/poverty alleviation specialist working with the Adopt Our Families programme to gain further insight about the initiative. The analysis is underpinned by Caribbean feminist theorising that focuses on the intersectionalities and interlinkages of policy and livelihoods and the power relations that inform and implement policy (Wilson et al., 2019).

Analytically, an intersectional feminist lens is adopted to capture the multiple relations of power at the macro and micro levels. This approach positions the subject as a material embodied one that is the site of intersection between the socio-economic and gendered relations of power. It therefore allows us to expose and account for the multiple imbrications of class, gender, family and economics.

Over a period of four months, researchers engaged in desk research to analyse policies implemented during the pandemic. The study locates the policies within the broader socio-economic and political context of the country. We engage a gendered analysis approach using the tools of feminist research such as feminist discourse analysis, which allowed us to assess language and the underlying assumptions and ideologies that guide policy development. Additionally, a multivariate analysis accounts for the intersectionality in lives allowing one to assess the policies implemented during this period. evaluate impact and future potential. The study seeks to address the central question: what provisions did the government make in social programmes between the initial IMF negotiations and the pandemic? The analysis will demonstrate how structured ideologies are institutionalised into systems and policies, and *how or if* they can be disrupted.

We hypothesise that Barbados' social protection response is simultaneously path-dependent and transformative, with avenues for gender and socially-just policies in the future.

CONTEXT - BARBADOS ECONOMY

The Caribbean's colonial history of enslavement and resource extraction by imperial countries have left Caribbean states without the fiscal space, economic policy autonomy and resilient domestic revenue streams to finance domestic growth and investment, leading them to increasingly rely on international loans. While this has assisted in sustaining economies, it has led to a debt crisis. Natural disasters, global economic recessions, infrastructural needs, have dented the economic fabric of small island states like Barbados. Barbados, the most easterly of the Caribbean islands in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies, is home to 287,724 people. Barbados is a high-income service economy of mainly tourism (World Bank, 2021). Like most small island developing states, the country remains vulnerable, as it depends primarily on tourism (seventeen per cent of GDP) and has significant exposure to climate change specifically changes in weather pattern, sea level rise and increases in atmospheric pressure (CDB, 2018) (e.g., Barbados was significantly damaged by La Soufriere's explosive volcanic eruption in April 2021, and Hurricane Elsa in July 2021). Contributors to the main economic sectors – tourism, financial services and construction – were already negatively affected by the 2009 global financial crisis, culminating in the country's 2018 economic

recession. Public debt increased from just over fifty-five per cent of GDP in 2008 to 158 per cent in 2017, leading to a slowdown in economic growth and prompting downgrades in credit ratings (World Bank, 2021).

In 2016, the economy expanded by only one point six per cent, as weak growth figures “further strained Barbados’ public debt, putting pressure on foreign exchange reserves and helping to spark repeated downgrades of the island’s credit rating,” (Deutsche Welle, 2018). According to the World Bank, the total economic output of Barbados in 2016 was just over €3.9 billion (BDS \$4.5 billion). In 2018, Barbados was said to have the fourth highest debt-to-GDP ratio at 175 percent (Deutsche Welle, 2018). This increasing debt led to citizens paying higher taxes as well as being laid off. According to the Ministry of Economic Affairs’ 2018 Investment Economic & Social Report, there was a decline of real output by 0.6 per cent by the end of 2018. This was due to local and global factors. The fiscal measures implemented around mid-2017 had severe negative effects and were accompanied by the contraction of the construction and manufacturing sub-sectors. Additionally on the global scene there was low growth as a result of the challenges with the BREXIT framework and the slowdown in the US economy.

Continuing its adjustments, the country embarked on a restructuring programme titled BERT - The **Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation (BERT) Plan**. The BERT Plan outlines *“the policies that reflect the Government’s alignment of its anti-poverty and sectoral strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in the areas of fiscal policy to achieve greater equality; increased social protection access and social spending floors; improved financial innovation, regulation and inclusion and climate-resilient, carbon neutral and marine conscious public and private investment for growth,”* (CDB, 2018). These adjustments were intended to be transformative. Several initiatives meant to strengthen the social safety net in the face of impending austerity were included in the programme, such as a five per cent wage increase for public servants, an increase in the minimum non-contributory pension from BDS 155. 00 (USD 77.50) to BDS 225 (USD 112. 50) per week as well as a temporary increase in the funding for welfare and poverty alleviation programming to the tune of BDS five million dollars (USD 2.5 million).

However, while they were financially beneficial to the country, they pulled more from the people than they gave (as will be discussed later in the paper). The pressure of the increased taxes is intensified because of the COVID-19 pandemic which resulted in significant job losses and salary cuts leading to loss of homes (inability to pay mortgages), expunging of savings, inability to provide basic needs for families, and mental unwellness.

In Barbados' fiscal debt restructuring, 'loans, treasury bills, treasury notes and debentures of the central government, and loans and bonds of eligible State-owned enterprises were exchanged for a new series of amortizing bonds (ECLAC, 2019). The result was lower interest rates, an extension of the government's debt maturity profile, and thus the creation of much-needed fiscal space in the short to medium term. External debt payments to commercial creditors were also suspended (ECLAC, 2019). The transformative nature of the BERT plan aided the economic stability witnessed in Barbados during the first nine months of the pandemic. For example, even as exports of goods fell by 6.7 percent in the first three quarters of 2020, Barbados was able to resume the interest payments on external debts that were restructured in 2018/2019. Additionally, Barbados' international reserves increased from BBD 1.2 billion (US\$ 613.5 million) – 15.7 weeks of import – in September 2019 to BBD 2034.8 million (US\$ 1017.4 million) (28.1 weeks of import) in September 2020 well above the 12-week benchmark, (UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women, 2020).

PARADISE LOST: COVID-19 & TOURISM

Tourism is one of the three main sectors (tourism, financial services and construction) of the Barbados economy, as such it is pivotal to the discussion. This economic sector is privileged in the analysis as it was the most affected by the pandemic, but also because of the gendered implications at play as outlined below:

- The percentage of women employed in this industry;
- The gender pay gap;
- The informality in the sector;
- The high number of job losses women experienced in the field;
- Their position in the industry (accommodation and food services).

Tourism took some of the greatest financial losses as a result of COVID-19. Tourism accounts for thirteen per cent of women's employment in the Caribbean, (ECLAC, 2020) and more than 6,000 women working in tourism were displaced by job losses in Barbados, as compared to just over 4,000 men (Barbados Statistical Service, 2020).

A decline in tourist arrivals had a significant negative impact on retail and business activities. Barbados's GDP contracted by approximately 17.3 per cent in 2020, with the deficit expected to have increased to 7.8 per cent of GDP. Unemployment rate increased from 10.1 per cent in 2019 to 12.79 per cent in 2020 as approximately twenty-four per cent (over 33, 000 people) of the Barbados workforce submitted unemployment claims to the National insurance scheme (NIS) by June 2020 (Statista, 2021). As of March 3, 2021, the Barbados National Insurance Office received over 50,000 unemployment claims since March 2020. This only represented persons who qualified for unemployment, as approximately an additional 4,000 persons did not qualify. The Barbados Country Living Conditions report states that women make up the majority of poor and are located quite heavily in the informal sector. This means there is no significant savings to rely on to absorb the financial shock of job loss/salary cuts. In Barbados, approximately seventeen per cent of economic activity and thirteen per cent of total employment is from the accommodation and food services sector, with women constituting approximately sixty-two per cent of employment in this sector (UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women, 2020).

The halt in the tourism and construction sectors translated into severe job losses, particularly among the vulnerable population. In a June 2020 rapid assessment survey, almost half of respondents that were employed before the pandemic reported losing their job (IADB, 2020). The shock affected low-income households more harshly (fifty-one percent reported job losses) compared to middle and high-income ones (forty and twenty-eight per cent, respectively) (World Bank, 2020). A key fact is that most low-income households are primarily single-parent, women- headed homes with dependents. Thus, poverty is expected to have increased and impacted women-headed households, as reflected in the job losses, business closures, and decline in remittances caused by the pandemic (World Bank, 2020).

SOCIAL CARE AND PROTECTION LANDSCAPE IN BARBADOS

Social care and protection have been a central concern of policymakers for more than seven decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, the newly independent countries in the Caribbean – Barbados included – experimented with a liberal blend of social welfare policies as they came into a sense of what it would “take” to create a new and free nation. These included heavy state investments in health care, national insurance and education. The National Insurance Scheme was created in 1967 as a way for everyday Barbadians to receive pensions, sickness benefits and maternity cover (National Insurance Scheme, 2021). These policies, some which still exist to this day, proved instrumental in expanding the social welfare functions of these postcolonial states and in creating a new black middle class (Barriteau, 1996).

Social protection has also been an integral component in politics. Party manifestos often try to appeal to the ‘person in the street’ through pronouncements of strong social policy and welfare protection measures which target the poor.

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POLICY RESPONSES

The government of Barbados introduced several measures to offset the prolonged economic toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, announcing an economic stimulus package for a total of BBD 500 million (US\$ one billion). One important initiative is the Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation (BEST) plan, aimed at safeguarding jobs in the tourism sector, minimizing bankruptcies, and strengthening the competitiveness of the sector until normalcy returns. The programme also provides financing for green initiatives, digitisation of processes and systems for lower cost and improved service, and investment in local suppliers of food, furniture and other supplies (IMF, 2021).

Yet, it is clear that government’s policies do not incorporate a gender analysis and even as it benefits some vulnerable groups, it often fails to account for the gendered impacts. In other words, while some programmes targeted vulnerable groups, this was in a general sense (e.g., poor households, elderly) and did not specifically account for the vulnerability of women and children as well as LGBTQ persons. Thus, while there is an attempt to interlink social and economic gains to create transformation, the impacts do little to change the imbalances in the

social relations of gender. In fact, the social projects appear more as a one-off, temporary measure, rather than a sustainable initiative which is long term, and are propelled by the ultimate goal being economic and fiscal growth. According to United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2017), transformative policies should “fundamentally change social institutions and relations to make them more inclusive and equitable, and that redistribute power and economic resources” (Ibid, p. 1). While the policies examined here have a “universal and human rights-based approach; a new take on policy integration; ... and the empowered participation of all social actors in the decision-making processes,” (ibid, p. 1), the social and environmental objectives of the policies are not put ahead of economic ones. In fact, the fundamental objective of the policies appears economically driven as they seek to ensure the circulation of money within the economy via monetary transfers. This case study focuses on two main government initiatives: *Adopt our Families* Programme and *increase in minimum wage*.

ANALYSIS OF THE MINIMUM WAGE INITIATIVE

In Barbados, only certain categories of workers (shop assistants, domestics, agricultural workers) have been covered by minimum wage legislation over the years (Downes, 2008).

In March 2020, Minister of Labour Colin Jordan announced intentions to implement a government mandated national minimum wage. After a series of discussions with the social partnership – a tripartite group comprised of government, labour and the private sector – Barbados’ new minimum wage took effect on April 1, 2021. This was amidst the private sector’s concern about the timing being wrong as a result of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and asking for a delay until 2022. This minimum wage of BBD 8.50 (USD 4.25) is the lowest amount a worker can be legally paid for their work, but remains below the inflated living cost of BBD 12.00 (USD 6.00) (Barbados Underground, 2021). The previous minimum wage was BBD 6.26 (USD 3.13) and only applied to shop assistants. This new national and sectoral minimum wage includes more categories of workers.

There are many objectives of minimum wage including the protection of workers from exploitation, increase spending power of persons, and aid in the reduction of poverty. These objectives cannot be achieved solely by implementing minimum wage as there are multiple factors involved, but it is believed that in association with other initiatives, it can be very positive. Nonetheless, it remains beneficial to businesses as it increases the spending potential of people, thus stimulating the economy. At face value, the increase in minimum wage at this time is bold and especially important due to the increase in the number of persons living in poverty and will especially benefit persons working in the retail sector, at gas stations and as domestic workers. This initiative presents as transformative not only because of the timing (during the pandemic) but also as Prime Minister Mottley noted, that “the last minimum payment for shop assistants was introduced almost a decade or more ago, in a world that has seen price increases of more than forty percent” (Caribbean National Weekly, 2021). This suggests an official recognition by the government that wages are not commensurate to living costs, and that this disparity results in an economic depression. There is an assumption that the interest is in the quality of life of those in the lower wage category. However, at the same time the Prime Minister notes that ‘history has shown that those benefiting contributed more to the economic activity in the country’ (Caribbean National Weekly, 2021). Thus, this initiative is driven by the need for economic stimulation which weakens the opportunity to create transformative change. In fact, and not the planned enhancement of livelihoods, any direct benefit to workers appears coincidental which appears to be a ‘by the way’ gain that can give but projects the image of a ‘caring’ government.

However, the lack of a coherent gender analysis produces a policy framework that does not have the intended effect nor the accompanying social development principles of a transformative policy as defined by the UNRISD. Still, it is a progressive initiative. Barbados’ introduction of minimum wage must be examined within the context of the global economic environment, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the nation’s restructuring measures. Even more important is a reflection of the intention and direction of this policy. In other words, who are the intended beneficiaries (e.g., domestic workers, gas station attendants, security guards)? What are the benefits for the state, the implications on businesses (small, medium and large scale) and vulnerable groups?

Pertinent to the discussion is the status of employees eligible for minimum wage, that is, who they are and where they are sectorally located in the labour force. Barbados general minimum wage rates and the sectoral minimum rate of pay for security guards are outlined in the tables below:

Table No. 1 General Minimum Wage Rates

Minimum Time Rates	National Minimum Rate of Pay USD
The minimum rate of wages payable weekly for forty hours of work.	USD 170.00 (BDS 340.00) per week
The minimum rate of wages payable daily, for an eight-hour workday, where an employee is not employed on a weekly basis.	USD 34.00 (BDS 68.00) per day
The minimum rate of wages payable hourly where an employee is not employed on a weekly or daily basis.	USD 4.35 (BDS 8.50) per hour
Minimum Overtime Rates	
The minimum overtime rate of wages payable for ordinary working days.	USD 6.37 (BDS 12.75) per hour or part thereof
The minimum overtime rate of wages for Public Holidays.	USD 8.50 (BDS 17.00) per hour or part thereof

Source: Government of Barbados Ministry of Labour, 2021

Table No. 2: Sectoral Minimum Rate of Pay for Security Guards

Minimum Time Rates	National Minimum Rate of Pay USD
The minimum rate of wages payable weekly for forty hours of work.	USD 185.00 (BDS 370.00) per week
The minimum rate of wages payable daily, for an eight-hour workday where a security guard is not employed on a weekly basis.	USD 37.00 (BDS 74.00) per day
The minimum rate of wages payable hourly where a security guard is not employed on a weekly or daily basis.	USD 4.63 (BDS 9.25) per hour
Minimum Overtime Rates	
The minimum overtime rate of wages payable for ordinary working days.	USD 6.94 (BDS 13.88) per hour or part thereof
The minimum overtime rate of wages for Public Holidays.	USD 9.25 (BDS 18.50) per hour or part thereof

Source: Government of Barbados Ministry of Labour, 2021

The tables above detail the minimum wage at the hourly, weekly, monthly and overtime rates (on ordinary days and public holidays). This accounts for the different contractual type of workers. Raising the general minimum wage would especially be beneficial for women who make up the majority of low wage workers and who are the primary supporters for their families. Given that women head most single parent households, the increase in minimum wage will have a welfare-positive and economically stimulative ripple effect on families and communities (UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women, 2020). This is an example of how, although there was no gender analysis, the policy choice recognised the fact that women were the majority of low wage workers and primarily responsible for the support of their families. However, increasing the minimum wage of security guards, a primarily male dominated occupation, also increases the gender wage gap as men working in security services in Barbados earn seven per cent more than women (Salary explorer, 2021; see tables 1 and 2). This gender inequality was not addressed by the government, even though closing the gender pay gap was a stated manifesto goal of the government's political party.

The increase in minimum wage will not address the increased unemployment rate. Women have been more impacted by unemployment than men (36 percent of women report losing

their job versus thirty-two percent of men (Garavito et al., 2020). The government responded by expanding social assistance and implementing the BEST programme where they will invest in “tourism businesses to re-engage all of the workers and transform their properties and services” that subsidises continued employment in the tourism sector (BEST Employee Guide, 2020).

It is also important to note that minimum wage is primarily for certain jobs. The valuing of work continues to guide the wages of certain professions. This solely economic focus is harmful and does not adequately account for the skills, energy and labour needed to perform the tasks. The valuing of jobs based on who does them (women, uneducated, working class) and not in relation to importance, skills, or energy required, destabilises the foundation of societies. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated how this care work (paid and unpaid) done primarily by women and often devalued, invisible and in the category of lower paid jobs, was essential to sustaining our societies. Care work remains under paid even as the pandemic shows that it is essential, hazardous and requires unique skills. Nonetheless, this is a transformative initiative as having a minimum wage ensures that those exploitable and underpaid profession sectors such as domestic workers have a degree of wage protection under the law. Thus, the minimum wage increase implemented in Barbados brings to the forefront the importance of jobs we label as care work and menial. While the timing may not be perceived as financially “right” by the private sector (even after they benefited from the reduction in corporate tax rates in 2019/2020), it is certainly path dependent because it follows a pre-established historical pattern. Since 1938, there has been a Labour (Minimum Wage) Act in Barbados. The country has a history of implementing minimum wages that are sector specific such as agricultural and industrial workers, shop assistants, domestic workers (Downes, 2008).

The increase in the minimum wage during the COVID-19 pandemic paves the way for transformation as the government recognises and accounts for the lowest-paid workers in the country. While it is admirable that the Barbados government implemented such a mandate during a pandemic, global recession, and its own restructuring process (BERT), the economic motivation is glaring. Keynes’ theory of fiscal stimulus purports that government investment in business activity promotes spending as it boosts output and generates more income. The government of Barbados appears to subscribe to this theory as it is expected that the minimum wage increase will result in more taxes for the government and more consumer

spending to stimulate the economy. It is important to note that the impact of a minimum wage policy depends largely on the characteristics of the labour market. However, while some informal workers such as domestic workers who are often paid on an hourly basis may benefit from minimum wage, they are not obligated to pay taxes as most are considered independent contractors and responsible for their income tax payments. This category of workers comprises residents and undocumented immigrant workers, thus the social benefits such as free healthcare and other social services afforded to resident domestic workers are not available to the latter. In fact, a worker's undocumented migrant status also means they do not contribute to income tax even as they make indirect tax contributions through VAT. Another shortfall of this minimum wage is that it does not state the number of hours a person must work in a day thus it permits a loophole for employers. In fact, some workers have complained that their hours have been reduced since the implementation of the national minimum wage.

Nonetheless, this increase in minimum wage when examined within the context of the government's Reverse Tax Credit is even more beneficial to the worker. A Reverse Tax Credit is an initiative implemented by the government of Barbados in which employed persons who earn less than BBD 18, 000 (USD 9,000) per annum receive a tax credit at the end of the financial year (ECLAC, 2019). This means persons who benefit from the government-mandated minimum wage will remain in this bracket. Since this category of persons consists primarily of women, it stands to reason that mainly women will benefit.

THE ADOPT OUR FAMILIES PROGRAMME (INITIALLY CALLED ADOPT A FAMILY PROGRAMME)

The Adopt Our Families programme began in April 2020 as a way to support families that were hardest hit by the pandemic and formed part of an ecosystem of social care policies meant to care for the most vulnerable. In an interview with a social welfare specialist, the classification of the ‘vulnerable’ was operationalised as outlined below:

1. Self-identification as being in need;
2. Being an existing recipient of welfare;
3. Living in a low-income household and households with no ‘essential workers’;
4. Households with no income at all, which was further tiered. Importantly, high priority households that were considered “large”, comprised people living with noncommunicable diseases; had babies or the elderly within the family; or lived with other ailments, were amputees or living with a disability. Some exceptions were provided for those who were still working part-time, or those in minimum-wage jobs such as gas station attendants but had to support large households.

While the programme has been halted for several reasons, mainly for financial review, the programme continued as of November 2021. The main social care initiatives pursued by the government also consisted of food hamper distributions within targeted communities, and a forty per cent increase in welfare payments. Over 18,000 Barbadians applied for assistance.

The Government of Barbados started the Adopt Our Families fund with a BBD 2.5 million (USD 5 million) dollar injection. The programme generated funds through private sources and allocations in national budgets. Citizens earning over BBD 100, 000 (USD 50, 000) per year – along with private entities, were encouraged to donate. Payments were facilitated through bank e-transfers as well as through large public donations from companies who wrote cheques to the Government. As at March 2021, corporate Barbados and individuals had donated BBD 2.5 million (USD 5 million), while the Government contributed BBD five million (USD ten million) in total (Austin, 2021). The money was requested from the Committee of Supply in the House of Assembly (Barbados Today, 2020). The partial use of public donations speaks to a wider state rhetoric of community care in times of crisis. This does not run counter to the fact that there was a lack of systematic reporting on funds received and remitted over the life of the initiative.

At the onset, the programme was meant to serve 1,500 families that were made vulnerable by the pandemic, however, that number ballooned to 5,000. Families became eligible for a monthly transfer of BBD 600 (USD 300) after an application and subsequent assessment process. The monetary value of the assistance was set by the government and was to be dispensed regardless of the public donations received. In order to be eligible for assistance, households had to meet at least one of following criteria:

- Ineligible for other forms of financial assistance, such as National Insurance;
- Registered with the Household Mitigation Unit. This outfit was created by the Government to support people who would have lost their jobs in the public sector in the 2018 and 2019 retrenchment exercises as part of the IMF restructuring Programme. The retrenchment component of the BERT programme saw around 1,100 women out of a total of 1,500 lost their jobs, mainly as stenographer-clerks and clerk-typists (administrative support roles). Sixty-two per cent of these women were the breadwinners in their family. Additionally, families identified by social service agencies and constituency representatives and households that have more than four children under twenty-one years old and would otherwise not qualify were considered.

The government made provisions for people who requested assistance to social service agencies. The PM casted ‘a wide net to ensure that no one is left behind or no one falls through the social safety nets or cracks’ (Barbados Government Information Service, 2021). This led to people holding mid-range and managerial positions within industries such as hospitality, the airline industry and cultural practitioners that were adversely impacted by the pandemic to also seek government help. Final recipients were then reviewed after three months to see whether household situations had changed (i.e., someone in the household was hired). In an interview with a social care specialist, it was noted that more women than men were programme recipients and were overwhelmingly women who headed households. The programme’s beneficiaries also tended to live in central and urban centres and were mainly between the ages of forty-one to sixty-five years old.

As stated before, unpaid care work has long been defined as “women’s work.” The reality has remained throughout the pandemic, as women were twice as likely as men (2.7 per cent men and 8.2 per cent women) in recent labour force surveys to indicate that they were unemployed and not seeking work because they were “keeping the house”ⁱ (Barbados Statistical Service Labour Force Survey, 2020).

And even amid a healthcare crisis, women’s reliance on the state puts their choices at risk for ridicule and pathologised as irresponsible if women, in their role as mothers, do not sacrifice themselves in the name of virtuous motherhood. This has been illustrated by a statement made by Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs, The Hon. Cynthia Forde as she addressed a workshop on ‘Budgeting During Covid-19’ which was hosted by the Bureau of Gender Affairs. She stated:

“Some people come [up to] and say ‘Ma’am have you got any vouchers (to buy food) ...and I say ‘I have a few but there are restrictions. When you get these vouchers, I expect you to buy food and toiletries. Some of them get their welfare cheque and then the next morning you see them with false eyelashes, gold earrings and fancy expensive shoes...” [10/17/2020].

Virtuous motherhood was also pinned on the ability to “make sacrifices” for their children by staying home and making “reasoned” financial choices.

“ When I give you the \$100 [voucher/cheque], because you come and tell me you need the money because someone has fallen sick and you go in Chefette [a Barbadian fast food restaurant] and spend \$50 of the \$100, do not come back (to me to ask for more money) because you could have bought a whole chicken, pack of rice and [a] can of peas, two cucumbers and you could have gotten a meal to serve you two or three times (ibid)”. [10/17/2020]

Here, we see how the State perpetuated gendered and classed ideologies about working-class women to reinforce ideals about the ideal ‘woman’/mother/citizen. While there are good arguments to be made about making wise financial choices in time of lack, the Minister not

only made assumptions about what may drive consumption choices, but also pinned these decisions as markers of proper motherhood which is then worthy of state support.

These statements can be read alongside the realisation that in a pre-pandemic policymaking context, the Minister, who also holds overall responsibility for the Bureau of Gender Affairs, advocated for state programming that was informed by a “women as dominant” while “men are in crisis” approach to ‘gender’. In this way, policy is driven from the top-down by a patriarchal view of men as authorities in the home and the society.

On Monday, 16 March 2020, at a Sitting of Estimates Debates, Hon. Minister Cynthia Forde, Minister of People Empowerment and Elder Affairs, was asked by Minister of Labour and Social Partnership Relations, Hon. Colin Forde, about the work being done to advance gender equality in Barbados.

Director of the Bureau of Gender Affairs, Patricia Boyce answered by outlining three initiatives that spoke directly to “empowering men” through sports, workshops and community visits and two activities which addressed the “needs of men and women” as it related to HIV and AIDS and both being perpetrators of Domestic Violence. Plans before the onset of the pandemic in Barbados included group sessions on why men were not entering tertiary education (even though men are disproportionately located at technical and vocational tertiary institutions and tended to evenly attend general education institutions such as the Barbados Community College (CDB, 2015); a National Committee on Gender-Based Violence and working with the Ministry of the Environment to integrate climate change in the long-awaited National Action Plan on Gender. In times of austerity when posts traditionally held by women were the ones most targeted for retrenchment by the State, women were not a central policy concern outside of their experiences as survivors of gender-based violence. Even then, they were being asked to share resources despite being the disproportionate victims.

Overall, the government’s demonstrated commitment to social care and protection supports the hypothesis that there was a willingness to move towards progressive (even if not) feminist policies as opposed to simply maintaining the status quo. The commitment to social care is illustrated in how the social protection and poverty alleviation personnel constructed the category of ‘the vulnerable’ in the cash transfer programme which accounted for age, health

status and disability. However, policy design and implementation that have not paid attention to who is located where within the economy could mean that the programmes are not as effective as they have the potential to be. As a result, while women tended to be the bulk of recipients in the Adopt Our Families programme, policymakers did not design the initiative informed by research and evidence on women's economic realities. For this to be realised at the state planning level, it is critical to engage with national gender machinery to understand how gender-differential impacts can bear out on daily lives in times of austerity, compounded by climate crisis.

Furthermore, the policymaker interviewed stated that the Bureau of Gender Affairs was not part of the interagency consultative group tasked with management and oversight of the Adopt Our Families programme. This is even though the Bureau falls under the Ministry with overall oversight for social care initiatives. However, in acknowledging this lack of inclusion, it is worth noting that the Bureau may have little technical and advisory support to provide due to understaffing. It is a deficiency that was lamented by Boyce at the Estimates session. She said then that there are three technical officers at the Bureau who are to serve as the focal point for gender for the Government. "The amount of work that we need to do, or we are required to do, it is difficult, and it is challenging if there is only one person. If one person is out and no one comes to replace that person, then the other officer now [their] work doubles," Boyce stated. The limited resources provided to the Bureau by the State has been flagged consistently in regional and international reports, along with the fact that the Bureau is "not systematically involved in national policy debates relating to the economy and the environment" (Caroline Allen, 2016).

CONCLUSION

At the end of August 2021, the number of recorded positive cases of COVID-19 skyrocketed to unprecedented levels. As the year drew to a close, cases remained in the triple digits and deaths as a result of the pandemic topped 200 and continued to climb. In the spectre of death and rising infection rates, leaders also decided to relax requirements for quarantine and second testing of fully vaccinated travellers at the end of October 2021. The curfew was also extended from 9 p.m. to 12 midnight. It has been speculated by opposition leaders and critics of the government that these measures were implemented to encourage a rebound of the tourist economy at a time when millions would be coming to the island's shores to escape the winter (Barbados Today, November 2021). Additionally, Barbados recorded a six per cent increase in the cost of living between April when minimum wage was introduced and November 2021, thereby absolving any impact of the increased paycheques (Barbados Statistical Survey, 2020).

The COVID-19 global pandemic has severely impacted every aspect of Barbadian lives and livelihoods. This case study assesses Barbados' policy changes during the pandemic and the impacts on care systems and livelihoods. Barbados' economic and social policy documents, reports and agreements during 2018-2021 were reviewed. Specifically, the focus was on two policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic: the *Adopt Our Families Programme* and the decision to increase the minimum wage. We demonstrated that gender was not positioned as pivotal in the development of the policy/programme and thus issues such as reach, effectiveness, efficiency, and access emerged. Going forward, a gender analysis would help produce more targeted and effective social justice outcomes e.g., day care centres for working class mothers, and a universal minimum income. Although the intent of the policies under review appears to have some degree of transformational potential, they also simultaneously reproduce inequalities among vulnerable groups, offering micro level, short-term gains for the benefit of the larger economy. We argue that these shortfalls can be addressed in part by incorporating a gendered and intersectional analysis of all intended and present programmes as there are possibilities for future policy responses that are truly transformative, 'feminist and expand democracy and social justice'.

It is important to note that the minimum wage does not account for the effects of women's unpaid care work and their ability to engage in paid work especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Women, being the primary caregiver in homes, are forced to choose between childcare and their jobs as schools were online and day cares were closed. A basic universal care wage for unpaid care work will greatly improve the financial position of women who are given no other social assistance to allow their engagement in the labour force. This need was echoed in a UN Women brief on the use of cash transfers and gender equality in the context of COVID-19. It noted that public investment in childcare services would “constitute an important complement to universal child benefits, especially from a gender equality perspective” (Sevilla and Smith 2020, p.5).

We also believe that the strongest indication of the government's commitment to gender equality would be to inject human and financial resources into the national gender machinery. For decades, those in charge of mainstreaming gender in State policymaking have not been given the human, technical and financial resources they need to carry out their work effectively. This is impeded by some state actors' own investment in patriarchal norms and values in relation to men as the 'rightful' heads of the households. Classed dynamics are also at work in the allocation of welfare resources, as the ideas of who makes a 'good and dutiful' mother are intricately linked to increasing women's work in the home.

The dynamism of the pandemic in Barbados is also an instructive indicator that these policies, as well as other social protection measures undertaken by the state could be revisited, perhaps when the current IMF programme ends in 2022, to fully make sense of their impacts on the country.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ a Barbadian expression which means the person is taking care of domestic duties required to maintain the household.

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