



## International Women's Day: Women and AIDS

### *Message from the Commonwealth Secretary-General*

A few months ago I met a HIV positive young woman from Chennai, India. She was visiting London to talk about her work as a Young Ambassador for Positive Living, providing support to other HIV sufferers and running prevention campaigns. She told me about her experience with the programme and how it helped her take control over her own life: "As long as I can help others and prevent them getting infected, I know my life is not wasted."

I found this young woman's courage and determination very inspiring, particularly in the face of the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS.

Commonwealth developing countries account for 60% of the 42 million people living with HIV. The 9 most seriously affected countries are all Commonwealth members. Half of all people living with HIV in the world are female, and in some regions this figure is greater.

It is therefore relevant that this year's International Women's Day 2004 focuses on the role of women, their rights, contributions and responsibilities in addressing the global challenge of HIV/AIDS.

The Commonwealth's partnership with UNAIDS and other organizations to launch the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, in February 2004, demonstrates its commitment to addressing the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS. We will work tirelessly to raise public awareness, undertake advocacy and continue to strengthen policy and programme level action in member countries. We are working with member governments toward the introduction and more effective implementation of national policies on HIV/AIDS and gender as these are vital in the fight against the pandemic.

AIDS intensifies poverty, and women bear the brunt of social and economic impact. In high prevalence countries, girls' enrolment in school has decreased in the past decade because girls are the first to be pulled

out of school to care for sick relatives or to look after younger siblings. This has implications, not least because there is increasing evidence that education is one of the key defences against the spread of the virus, and the ability to deal with its impact.

Women living with HIV are often stigmatised and discriminated against. They face the loss of property, land, even access to their children, as a result of their HIV status, and many face violence and abuse. Yet despite the widespread recognition of these factors, women's voices in decision-making – even around HIV/AIDS policies, programmes and the allocation of resources – are rarely heard.

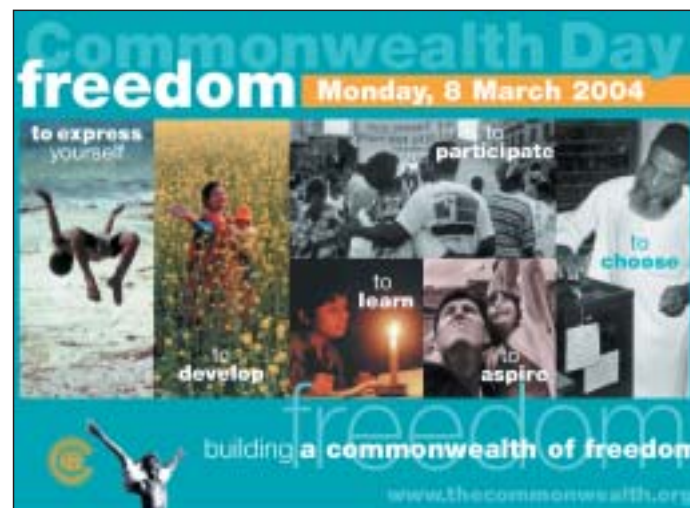
The Commonwealth HIV/AIDS Programme adopts a multi-sectoral approach, focusing on effecting specific changes in areas that have

a direct impact on the lives of women and girls. The linkages it creates between groups of activists, government representatives, community workers and celebrities help to catalyse action and facilitate collaboration and support for innovative efforts benefiting women and girls.

The Youth Ambassadors for Positive Living is a flagship programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Working out of the Commonwealth's Regional Youth Centres, the programme mobilises young people who are HIV positive to fight the pandemic through peer education and other awareness programmes which do a great deal to address stigma and discrimination about the disease.

In marking International Women's Day 2004, I urge all Commonwealth Governments, associations, civil society organisations and citizens to address the gender dimension of the HIV/AIDS menace, so we can deal more effectively with the pandemic which is sapping this generation of its most valuable asset: human beings.

## Commonwealth Day, 8 March 2004



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## From the Director's Desk

We celebrate International Women's Day 2004 with the realisation that much of the international legislation and many of the global agreements designed to advance women in the world have not yet been implemented. However, we remain positive that our collective contributions can assist in this process and look forward to our new Commonwealth Plan of Action in Gender and Development, which will lead the process in the Commonwealth to the year 2015. Recent success in the acceptance of gender mainstreaming and the importance of the role of women in development were underscored at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Abuja, Nigeria in 2003. In addition, our new corporate Strategic Plan accepts gender mainstreaming in 11 programme areas throughout the Secretariat.

Our own efforts in the Social Transformation Programme Division look promising as we develop our next four-year plans. We have ambitious programmes to assist Commonwealth countries to achieve the targets related to the Millennium Development Goals. In this way, we are trying to assist in the advancement of women in celebrating International Women's Day.

Our Gender section will be addressing the empowerment of women through its areas of comparative advantage, namely in developing transformative

programmes in Democracy, Peace and Good Governance, Human Rights and HIV/AIDS, and through economic and social empowerment which will focus on culture in a new way. Our work on gender budgets and trade will continue to forge support with Commonwealth countries and our partners.

Our Education section will look at ways of assisting government, through best practice, to achieve the parity and equality goals of girl's education. Our Health section will address women's health issues, focusing particularly on maternal health, maternal mortality and sexual and reproductive rights. The devastating impact of HIV/AIDS on women will be supported by both our Gender and Health sections.

We hope that our continued work in these areas will bring much-needed support to the women of the Commonwealth in 2004, and with them we salute International Women's Day.



**Nancy Spence**  
Director, STPD  
March 2004



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# World AIDS Campaign 2004

## Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS

UNAIDS has released a strategy note to introduce the World AIDS Campaign for 2004 with the theme: *Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS*. It is intended to provide an overview to help inform those planning a campaign in 2004. It describes how the theme was decided and suggests key partners, messages and sub-themes.



(Left to right) Ludfine Anyango, A Person Living With AIDS; Dominique De Santis, UN press officer, Emma Thompson, actress and Ambassador for Action Aid and Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS, at The Global Coalition on Women and AIDS launch, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, UK.

## New Directions in Partnership with Civil Society

UNAIDS now seeks to change that through an increased emphasis on the role of civil society – in particular through the stronger leadership and involvement of HIV and AIDS-related NGOs at national level.

To date, civil society has not yet organised itself at a global level around any comprehensive blueprint to fight AIDS. The World AIDS Campaign is positioned to become the key mechanism to help civil society realise its potential globally through supporting a network of complementary national campaigns.

In June 2001, the United Nations General Assembly held a Special Session on HIV/AIDS where governments agreed to a set of targets and goals to fight AIDS in a Declaration of Commitment. Following the session, UN agencies and governments started to organise themselves around the promises outlined in the Declaration. Now, civil society is also seeking to ensure its campaigning and advocacy efforts

are similarly co-ordinated through a strengthened World AIDS Campaign.

The year 2004 sees the campaign entering an exciting transition phase. At the same time as delivering a thematic focus on *Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS*, it is moving to bolster the role of civil society by shifting the governance of the Campaign from UNAIDS to NGOs.

The strengthening of the Campaign's civil society element is manifested in the Campaign's management through a new Global Steering Committee of representatives from NGOs from each continental region.

UNAIDS is also supporting the creation of a Secretariat to co-ordinate campaign activity. This Secretariat seeks to encourage national campaigns where appropriate, to focus on mobilising resources for the response in accordance with targets within the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment. Where resource mobilisation is neither appropriate nor a priority, national campaigns are encouraged to pursue political and

awareness-raising objectives that move their national agendas towards the goals contained in the Declaration of Commitment.

The 2004 transition period seeks to be less prescriptive and more flexible to allow ownership by civil society at national level where campaigns can be more responsive, relevant and effective.

The World AIDS Campaign aims to be the Campaign of nationally-driven HIV and AIDS campaigns – bringing them all together under a global umbrella united by the UNGASS Declaration.

A guide on *Developing a Campaign* is also available from the Secretariat or by emailing [wac@unaids.org](mailto:wac@unaids.org)

## Men Can Make A Difference In Women's Health: Reducing the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS through constructive involvement of men

There is no doubt that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is driven by men. Men make the key decisions in heterosexual relationships. Generally, they determine how and when sex takes place and sometimes they use violence against women to achieve their sexual desires. In many cultures men are expected to marry younger women, have extra-marital relationships and very often resist the use of condoms. As a result, men have a high risk of contracting and spreading HIV from multiple partnering and other risky behaviours.

On the other hand, it is estimated that almost 50 per cent of those living with HIV/AIDS are now women. Women are the main carers when family or community members fall sick. They support AIDS orphans and are the pillar of strength for the most vulnerable by their efforts to raise awareness and change behaviour. Women bear the brunt of HIV/AIDS but do not have adequate resources to support themselves and the family. They struggle with minimal support from men.

# Global Coalition on Women and HIV/AIDS Launched



The first meeting of the Steering Committee and the launch of the **Global Coalition on Women and AIDS** took place on 2 February 2004 at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, UK. In view of the priority accorded to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Secretariat was proud to host the meeting and to work in closer partnership with UNAIDS.

Mr Winston Cox, Commonwealth Secretariat Deputy Secretary-General, presided at the opening of the launch of the Coalition. Dr Mary Robinson (Director, Ethical Globalization Initiative), Peter Piot (Executive Director, UNAIDS), H.E. Dr Libertina Amathila, Minister of Health and Social Services for Namibia, and Ms Emma Thompson, internationally acclaimed actress, were a few of the distinguished members of the Coalition attending the meeting. The Commonwealth Secretariat team participating in the deliberations included Ms Nancy Spence, STDP Director, and Ms Cindy Berman, Senior Programme Officer of STPD.



The Global Coalition is an informal grouping of organisations and partners that seeks to catalyse action, facilitate collaboration and support the scaling up of innovative efforts that involve and/or benefit women and girls. The Coalition seeks to create unprecedented global awareness and commitment—in effect, a global movement—to mitigate the impact of AIDS on women's daily lives.

## Rationale

First, the latest figures indicate an increasing impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on women and girls and have highlighted the inadequacy of efforts to date. Secondly, the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001, provides a

series of progressive, measurable targets related to the ability of women and girls to protect themselves from infection, obtain access to care and treatment, and mitigate the impact of the epidemic on their daily lives. Most of these targets should be reached by 2005. Thirdly, because of the devastating impact of the epidemic on women and girls, progress in other areas of the response to HIV/AIDS depends on what is done for women and girls today.

## Approach

The Global Coalition recognises that the vulnerability of women and girls to HIV infection is integrally linked to underlying gender inequalities and societal norms. Sustained changes in this vulnerability will require fundamental shifts in the relationships

between men and women and in the way that societies view women and value their work and contributions.

The Global Coalition will operate on the following principles:

- Women are not victims and their vulnerability does not stem from inherent physical or psychological weaknesses.
- Girls and young women are at particular risk. They need to be provided with information, skills and resources that will allow them to avoid infection and live full and productive lives.
- Many women who are infected with HIV – or at great risk of becoming infected – do not practise high-risk behaviours.

- The factors making women and girls vulnerable to HIV infection are amenable to change, given sufficient commitment, attention and resources.
- Women living with HIV/AIDS have a unique contribution to make in strengthening responses to the epidemic at all levels and in all sectors. Special efforts must be made to ensure that they are fully involved from the outset, not only in the implementation (or as beneficiaries) of programmes.
- Men and boys must also serve as positive forces for change in improving the situation of women and girls. It is important to involve them fully in efforts to foster more equitable and respectful gender relations and to promote models of masculinity among young men that support this fundamental goal.

### Focus

The Global Coalition seeks to:

- prevent HIV infection among girls and young women;
- reduce violence against women (promote 'zero tolerance');
- protect the property and inheritance rights of women and girls;
- ensure equal access by women and girls to care and treatment;
- support improved community-based care, with a special focus on women and girls;
- promote access to new prevention options for women, including microbicides; and
- support on-going efforts towards universal education for girls.

### Funding

The Coalition will help to mobilise resources for the activities in each area. These resources will go directly to the respective organisations implementing the activities, rather than to a central fund.

For more information on the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, please contact UNAIDS in Geneva at [unaids@unaids.org](mailto:unaids@unaids.org) or +41-22-791-3666.



## Commonwealth Secretariat inter-divisional steering committee on HIV/AIDS



Globally, 24.8 million people have died of AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic. That is the equivalent of the TOTAL POPULATION OF MALAYSIA.

The world currently spends about \$2 billion annually on HIV/AIDS prevention and care in developing countries. That is equivalent to TWO THIRDS of the UK's BUDGET for the recent WAR IN IRAQ.

14 million children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS, and the number could reach 44 million by 2010. That would be TWICE THE SIZE of AUSTRALIA or SRI LANKA's current populations.

24 buckets of water per day are needed to clean and care for a person living with AIDS. That's equal to 8 or more trips to the nearest water source.

In Botswana, life expectancy is projected to decrease to 27 by 2010, a net decrease of 47 years due to HIV/AIDS.

By providing free ARVs, Brazil has kept 146,000 patients out of the nation's hospital and saved the country \$472 million.

Recent surveys in seventeen countries on three continents showed that more than half the adolescents questioned could not name a single method of protecting themselves against HIV/AIDS.

A community-based study in Zimbabwe revealed that 76% of young girls were being taken out of school to care for PLWAs and their dependents.

### PREVENTION WORKS!

- In the Ugandan capital, Kampala, determined efforts sent HIV prevalence rates among teenage women plummeting from 28% in 1991 to 6% in 1998.
- Thailand's 100% condom programme helped the country hold an epidemic in check in the 1990s.

## Gender, Peace, and Conflict Transformation – a Collaborative Programme by Elsie Onubogu

Despite international, regional, and national legal instruments created for the protection of human rights during armed conflicts, we have witnessed increased inter/intra-state conflicts in the Commonwealth and globally. Studies and statistics reveal that these conflicts target civilians, especially women and children. A recent UNDP report noted that:

*Failing to analyse the gender dimensions of a conflict situation and to take concrete action to address women's vulnerabilities and reinforce their strengths before, during and after crises is not a theoretical problem; it is a concrete, tangible problem with grim consequences for women and girls.*

Unfortunately, the impact and challenges created by these conflicts for women and children have profound implications for all of humanity, especially in the area of peace, democracy, and development. For instance, there is a nexus between gender, HIV/AIDS, and conflict in ways which dislocate the society, with women and girls the most vulnerable.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified the impact of armed conflict and other deep-rooted conflicts as one of the critical areas of concern. Similarly, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has now been ratified by 174 countries, reiterated the need to ensure that women's rights are protected, especially during conflicts. The disproportionate effect of these conflicts on civilians, particularly women and children, has been on the global agenda since the last decade. Women and children, especially girls, have been victims of rape, sex slavery, trafficking, forced prostitution, torture, abduction, and other crimes against humanity. Against this background, the 1993 conference on Human Rights focused

on women as victims of conflicts and called for the protection of their rights. Hitherto, this is how women have been viewed within given analyses of the impact of conflict, peace-building, and transformation.

Recently however, there has been a shift in paradigm on the impact of armed conflict and the different roles that men, women and children are faced with and/or play during and after conflicts. Increasingly, gender analyses now concede that women are not only victims but have made important contributions in areas including conflict prevention, resolution, peace negotiations/agreements (both formal and informal), and post-conflict reconstruction. This shift on the discourse of the impact of conflict on women becomes necessary, as evidence indicates that in marginalising women's efforts, societies fail to maximise their skills, experiences and contributions, which help to promote peace and mitigate the negative impacts of war.

In apparent recognition of this shift in perception, Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, was unanimously adopted in October 2000 by the United Nations Security

Council. Among other things, UNSC Resolution 1325 reaffirmed the: *important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building, and also stressed the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.*

Additionally, the Security Council mandated studies on the impact of armed conflict on women, a review and assessment of the impact of war and women's role in peace-building. These mandates culminated in the following international reports, declarations, and conferences:

- Graca Machel's report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children;
- Women, Peace and Security (2002);
- Women, Peace and War (2002);
- The Brahimi Report (2000);
- The Namibian Plan of Action (The Windhoek Declaration 2001);
- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs-2000);



- The Arria Formula (the role/contributions of Civil Society Organisations-2000);
- The G8 Rome Foreign Ministers Initiatives on Conflict Prevention-2001);

Notable efforts, positive roles and contributions made by women around the world towards conflict resolution, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction, include:

- Sierra Leone women's participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction;
- Sri Lanka's Sub-Committee on Gender Issues, with women representing the Government and the LTTE, which was set up by the peace talks;
- Burundi Women's Peace negotiations;
- Northern Ireland Women's Peace Initiatives;
- The Bonn Agreement (Afghan Women).

The Commonwealth Secretariat has been at the forefront of some of these efforts within the framework of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender, 1995-2000, and its update, 2000-2005. Some of its activities and contributions, albeit collaboratively, have resulted in the following:

- Four Regional Symposia on Gender, Politics, and Conflict/Peace for Africa, Asia, Caribbean and the Pacific;
- Sierra Leone's National Consultation on Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction, which resulted in women's increased representation in Parliament from 8 to 15 per cent;
- "Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction", a publication on efforts to rebuilding peace and democracy in Sierra Leone;
- A Pan-Commonwealth Workshop on Gender, Youth and Conflict Transformation, soon to be published.



In advancing the mission of the Commonwealth Secretariat, it is critical that we collaborate with member states, civil society, and other organisations that work to protect human rights, promote peace, democracy, law and order. In reviewing the implementation of 6WAMM mandates and implementation (2000-2003), the Secretary-General's report, "Building on Achievements", paragraphs 8-10, reiterated Ministers' requests, commitments and support from member states to comply with international human rights obligations and to take specific actions to promote women's economic and social rights.

The Commonwealth Ministers, in particular, recommended that member states take action in collaboration with other international organisations and civil society to include women at the highest levels in peace-building, peace-keeping, conflict mediation, resolution, and post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction activities. Additionally, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), in its Aso Rock Declaration (December 2003, Abuja-Nigeria), reaffirmed their

commitments to democracy, gender equality, human rights, and building partnership for peace. The declaration also recognised the critical role which women play in development and resolved to ensure full participation of women (para. 10), including the 30% critical mass adopted in Beijing, signed and ratified by most Commonwealth nations, thereby giving it force of law at national levels.

As these conflicts have profound implications for all of humanity, the need for collaboration, partnerships, and building synergies cannot be over-emphasised. Recently, such collaboration was implemented by the United Nations, the Government of Canada and civil society organisations, resulting in an expert group meeting in Ottawa, Canada in November 2003. The theme of the meeting was "Peace agreements as a means for promoting gender equality and ensuring participation of women – a framework for model provisions".

The renewed call for collaboration, partnership, and ensuring the participation of men, women and young persons is imperative, as it is evident that global peace is inextricably linked to equality between men and women in all areas of development.

Our approach to issues of peace, conflict, and transformation must be inclusive, multi-sectoral, and holistic. Such an inclusive approach demands the full participation of all, including civil society organisations, a by-product of the Arria Formula. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), in adopting this trend, will hold its forty-eighth session from 1-13 March 2004 in New York with a focus on two thematic issues:

- The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality; and
- Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution, and in post-conflict peace-building.

Similarly, advocates have reiterated the absence of gender analyses in early warning assessments and mechanisms. It is essential to integrate gender considerations into early warning assessments and mechanisms to conflicts, as this "will help to identify previously overlooked signs of instability, ensure that discriminatory policies (approaches) are not perpetuated in post-conflict situations, and ensure that responses at all levels address the vulnerabilities specific to women and men".

In November 1999, the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, urged the international community to move from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. The OSCE, African Union, the G8, and civil society organisations have taken steps to establish systems of early warning (G8 Foreign Initiatives on Conflict Prevention 2001). The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD-2001) is a non-governmental organisation specialising in conflict prevention.

In the wake of recurring and sustained conflicts such as Uganda, there is an urgent call from the international community for a reduction in the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (General Assembly Resolution GA/58/241). It is essential to limit and eradicate the influx of small arms and weapons because when they remain in circulation, there is an increase in crime, poverty, domestic, sexual, and political violence. As one official stated in Sierra Leone, if disarmed ex-combatants become restless, the peace is fragile at best. For instance, after the civil war in Mozambique, it was reported that women were raped at gunpoint; homes were robbed by armed thieves due to small weapons left in circulation.

The United Nations have also embarked on disarmament initiatives, integrating the gender dimensions of disarmament and demobilisation. This is known as disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes. Regional initiatives have also been recorded. For example, in

- Albanian women's door to door collection of weapons titled "One Less Weapon, One More Life"; in Elbasan women collected 2,332 weapons and 1801 tons of ammunition; in Diber 65 women collected 2407 weapons and 855 tons of ammunition.
- Liberian women organised a weapons collection and destruction campaign before elections in 1997.
- Operation Essential Harvest, a NATO campaign to disarm was co-ordinated with the media including television, radio with a focus on women and home safety;
- In East Timor, male Fialintil fighters were offered service with the Timor Defence Force or \$100 pay with language and computer training. However, it is important

to mention that no reintegration was offered to women who occupied support functions during the struggle in East Timor.

Other emerging global themes include Trade, Globalisation, Sustainable Environment, Debt Management, ICT/Media, Terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction, etc.

In tandem, the Social Transformation Programmes Division in its preparation for the PrepCom to the 7WAMM, will discuss and monitor progress on some of these issues, including that of "Peace, Democracy, and Conflict Transformation". In February, the Division will also launch the Gender Management System (GMS) Toolkit in New York, as a Commonwealth approach to gender mainstreaming, on gender, politics, peace, and conflict transformation. While progress has been made in integrating gender considerations in the area of peace, conflict and transformation, much work remains to be done. Renewed efforts must be made to ensure women's increased representation and participation in the processes of peace-building, conflict resolution, reconstruction, and transformation.

**As a way forward, the Social Transformation Programmes Division should intensify efforts to mainstream gender into the area of peace, conflict, and transformation. As a panacea for sustainable development, our strategy will be to promote a culture of peace, democracy, encourage full participation of men, women, and young persons, and create functional systems of early warning mechanisms to prevent conflicts. It is important that we move from mere rhetoric to action.**

# Gender Mainstreaming the Sierra Leonean PRSP

Working closely with the Gender Section of STPD, the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) of the Commonwealth Secretariat, has provided for the services of a Gender Specialist to develop a framework for mainstreaming gender in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The following initiatives have been undertaken:

- Poverty reduction sector working committees were established to provide technical backstopping in the various sectors, and to draft the sectoral/thematic sections of the PRSP. The committees comprise representatives of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs as well as women's groups and women NGOs.
- A series of three-day workshops were organised for members of sector working groups, stakeholders at the three provincial districts of Bo, Makeni and Kenema, and line Ministries' gender focal points, with the overall objective of enhancing the capacity building of key stakeholders in the gender-responsive planning skills necessary for gender mainstreaming the Sierra Leone PRSP.
- A three-day training workshop was conducted to enhance the capacity of The National Strategic Planning and Action Process (SPP) Technical

Committee in gender-sensitive FDGS (Focus Group discussions), Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) and Risk and Vulnerability Assessments.

- A series of sensitisation programmes was organised to create awareness of policy-makers, political leaders, the local and community groups, NGOs, civil society and private sector of gender issues.

## Challenges

Gender and Development is a fairly new concept in Sierra Leone. The low status of women is deeply steeped in cultural tradition. Sierra Leone operates under a Common Law System which includes a constitution, statutes and unwritten customary law. As a result of this pluralistic system, women are denied equal opportunities.

## Way forward

Because disparities persist in men's and women's access to and control of human, economic and social assets, engendering the PRSP will increase economic growth and increases the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts of Sierra Leone.



The Commonwealth Secretariat and UNDP (Sierra Leone Office) supported the 'Engendering' process of the PRSP in Sierra Leone: Focus Group Discussion and practical field gender analysis facilitated by Ms S.R. Canakiah, CFTC Gender Consultant, Kpetema Community, Kenema.



Engendering the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in Sierra Leone: Opening of the Gender Lens Training Workshop on 27 October 2003 at YWCA, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Left to right: Mrs K. Koroma, Development Secretary, Mr M.B. Daramy, Hon. Minister of Development and Economic Planning, and Mrs M. Koroma, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

## Poverty in Sierra Leone

The 2003 Human Development Report ranks Sierra Leone as the poorest of the world with about 80% of the population living in abject poverty. Women represent 51.3% of the population. The literacy rate for women is 20% and 40% for men (Extract: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Paper, September 2003). Primary school enrolment for girls is 40% as against 44% for boys. Sierra Leone has the highest maternal mortality rate (1,800 per 100,000 live births), infant mortality rate (170 per 1,000 live births) and the under-five mortality rate (286 per 1,000 live births) in 1998. Only fifty-four per cent of women of child-bearing age are aware of HIV/AIDS. (*The 2000 Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-2 (MICS2)*)

## Workshop for Female Parliamentarians and Entrepreneurs

Abuja, Nigeria 27 – 28 November, 2003

Nigeria organised a two-day workshop for Female Parliamentarians and Entrepreneurs, with assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Youth Development (FMWAYD). Female parliamentarians and businesswomen took part and included representatives from the National Traders and Market Leaders Council of Nigeria; the Nigeria Association of Women Entrepreneurs (NAWE); the Network for Widows and Children (NEWOCHIN); and the National Association of Small-scale Industrialists (NASSI). Participants were also drawn from the FMWAYD and the National Planning Commission.

The meeting objectives were to:

- Sensitise participants on New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), its focus, opportunities and benefits;
- Provide opportunities for them to articulate their views, identify problems and solutions to issues relating to the implementation of NEPAD;
- Strategise the way forward for increased participation of women in politics and decision-making processes;
- Sensitise parliamentarians and entrepreneurs to gender mainstreaming; and
- Prepare them for active participation in international fora, including the CHOGM Parliamentarians' Workshop and the Commonwealth Business Women's Network.

## Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN)

**"Increasing the participation of women in entrepreneurship is critical to long-term economic prosperity...the relative under-representation of women constitutes a latent economic resource of real significance to most nations"** (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, 2000).

The Commonwealth Business Women's Network (CBWN), in partnership with the Gender Section, hosted a seminar on 1 December 2003, on 'Promoting Women in Business – Key to Sustainable Development'. Endorsing the recommendations of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, the CBWN urges the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC) to request Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to encourage all member countries to:

- Ensure national statistics are disaggregated by sex;
- Provide an enabling investment climate for private sector growth, including the specific needs of businesswomen;

- Review all policies and laws with an aim to attaining gender equity (especially relating to cultural/traditional practices of inheritance, land ownership and tenure, male consents for business activities);
- Ensure that national trade policy and regulations do not negatively impact women;
- Support women's economic empowerment through appropriate mechanisms such as infrastructure and advisory services for income-generating clusters;
- Create support structures for women to use ICTs.

The CBWN endorsed the recent initiatives of 2003 UK and Canadian Governments to address specific investment climate issues affecting women entrepreneurs (UK Strategic Framework for Women's Entrepreneurship, May; and the Canadian Prime Minister's Task Force on Women Entrepreneurs Report, October) and urges other governments to follow suit.

## A Commonwealth Workshop on EnGENDERing Development and Democracy

The Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the British Council and the Commonwealth Foundation, hosted a workshop on EnGENDERing Development and Democracy in Abuja, Nigeria, from 3 to 5 December 2003, in the wings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

The overall theme, 'Engendering Development and Democracy', was considered through detailed deliberations of the following sub-themes: Women in Decision-Making, Conflict and Peace; Poverty and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); HIV/AIDS; National Budgets and their Impact on Women; and Trade and Globalisation. In particular, the workshop recognised the efforts made towards achieving the MDGs and acknowledged that women are the most disadvantaged group in society. The MDGs are the most important

response to the plight of the vulnerable in our societies. Governments must provide adequate resources for the achievement of these priorities.

The Workshop applauded the development of New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the vehicle for achieving the MDGs in Africa and urges African Governments to give practical effect to the conditions for successful implementation of NEPAD programmes. In conclusion, the Workshop called on Heads of Government to promote gender equality and equity as a central principle in the achievement of development and democracy for all Commonwealth peoples, recognising the crucial part Parliamentarians must play in partnership with civil society organisations and the private sector. The full text of the Communiqué is available on the gender website: [www.thecommonwealth.org/gender](http://www.thecommonwealth.org/gender)

## Interview with the Secretary of State for Education of The Gambia, H.E. Ms Ann Therese Ndong Jatta



H. E. Ms Ndong Jatta, Secretary of State for Education for The Gambia since 1999, began her career as a teacher and rose to the levels of Chief Education Officer and Director of Secondary and Tertiary Education. She was the Co-ordinator of the Education Sector Policy Review and Formulation of the Master Plan for The Gambia for seven years. Before entering politics, Ms Ndong Jatta was the Chairperson of the West African Examinations Council National Committee from 1996 to 1999.

**Dr Goel:** As you are aware, the Commonwealth Education Ministers have mandated the Secretariat to assist member countries in their efforts to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Education. What do you think is needed for the MDGs to be better met in Africa?

**Minister:** Let me say at the outset that one of the MDGs deals with the achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015, but what Africa needs for its economic and social development is Education for All beyond primary. As far as achieving UPE is concerned I am confident that most African states will achieve the goal with continued support from its partners and initiatives such as the Fast Track Initiative. In a recent meeting of Education Ministers of ECOWAS, it was resolved that each country should accelerate its effort to achieve Education for All. I believe that some of the countries in Africa are close to achieving the goal, while others are making efforts and will soon achieve it. I think achieving the UPE goal is no longer an issue.

As regards the other MDG of gender parity and equality, we in the Gambia have achieved gender parity because of a number of initiatives such as the introduction of free education. It is not only that girls don't have to pay school fees, they also get free textbooks, a mid-day meal, school uniform and so on. Secondly, in our society, because of the opportunity costs associated with girls, they are considered as 'property'. We used to have 'Girls' Clubs' but recently we have started 'Mothers' Clubs' which are linked to Girls' Clubs. We have introduced water, sanitation and nutrition programmes and have sown the seed of income-generation activities for mothers. This has the impact of mothers freeing their daughters from daily chores and allowing them to attend school.

**Dr Goel:** Talking about girls' education, we know that you have been most involved with the Forum for African

Women Educationalists (FAWE). Can this serve as a good model for countries in Africa and elsewhere?

**Minister:** The work of FAWE has been very focused since the JOMTIEN World Conference on Education for All (1991). African women educationalists, women Rectors, Vice Chancellors and ministers have worked very closely with male ministers to improve gender equality, not only in education but in other areas too. FAWE chapters in 33 countries are working closely with governments. They have introduced innovative programmes such as Centres of Excellence, Bursaries, Girls' Clubs, Mothers' Clubs etc. FAWE has the support of a number of agencies and its work is regarded highly by agencies and governments alike. To accelerate its agenda of gender equality, FAWE is now working with communities.

As a result of the success of FAWE, model linkages have been established with other regions. UNESCO recently supported a number of Asian women to visit FAWE. I believe that the FAWE model is replicable elsewhere and is a useful model for achieving gender equality.

**Dr Goel:** As you are aware there is a push to achieve gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015. How do these two goals differ and what is required to achieve them?

**Minister:** Gender parity deals with numbers only. The goal is that by 2005 there must be gender parity in school enrolment. Equality, however, goes beyond numbers. To address equality we must look at other indicators which are very cultural. We must look at the belief systems in our society and deconstruct some of them. These relate to marrying off girls at early age, sacrificing their education for the sake of attending to the sick and taking care of junior siblings. I realise that poverty is the main cause, but there is a need to change attitudes, values and beliefs in our society with regard to the role of girls in the family, if we have to achieve gender equality by 2015.

We must also examine education systems, which tend to be very gender-biased. These systems had become norms. Those norms require change. We must look at teacher recruitment, teacher training, school curriculum, methods of teaching, leadership in schools and management of education with a gender lens to address issues of gender equality.

**Dr Goel:** How can the Association for Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) assist in achieving MDGs in Africa?

**Minister:** ADEA can add value to what is going on in schools by addressing issues of curriculum, teacher education, etc. It has been documenting and sharing some good practices, which have been found very useful and we would like it to continue sharing those good practices.

**Dr Goel:** Finally, may I ask you what your personal goals are for this decade?

I believe that in order to change the *status quo*, we must go beyond MDGs to ensure that there are provisions for the continuation of education beyond primary level. For example, primary education is not enough to prepare our children to control risk behaviour if we have to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa. My efforts will therefore be on making provisions for the continuation of education beyond primary and literacy for all. It is only when everybody is educated shall we be able to re-socialise people to understand cultural barriers in our society. Further, I, as a minister, would like to see the introduction of Life Skills in schools to prepare our children for life beyond schools. We have to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS which may become barriers to achieving MDGs and the spread of poverty. I would like to get further support for the expansion of tertiary education in The Gambia which is essential for generating knowledge and for the growth of the economy.

Interview by Dr Ved Goel

## Seventh Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women/Gender Affairs (7-WAMM)



The 7th Commonwealth Women/Gender Affairs Ministers' Meeting (7WAMM) will take place on 30 May to 2 June 2004 in Nadi, Fiji Islands. The Commonwealth Meeting will be preceded by the Pacific Triennial Ministerial Meeting. Civil society and youth representatives and other delegates from special-interest groups like the Commonwealth Foundation,

Commonwealth Parliamentary and the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Associations are expected to participate in the 7WAMM as well as hold separate focus activities.

The Gender Section of the Commonwealth Secretariat is holding a Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries in New York from 28-29 February 2004, in the wings of the 48th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The aim of this Preparatory Meeting is to discuss the draft Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action (2005-2025) which will be presented to Ministers in Fiji. The Plan will provide the guidelines on implementation and action in member countries.

A Partners' Forum comprising delegates from civil society organisations and other Commonwealth bodies will participate in the deliberations and have an opportunity to contribute to the draft Plan of Action. Representatives of the UN Division for the advancement of Women (UNDAW) and other agencies, including regional bodies, are expected to attend to share their experiences.

These consultations will provide member countries and their partners with opportunities for enhanced dialogue and consultations. This vibrant sharing of ideas and experiences, and re-positioning of their work is important to promote gender equality as one of the pillars of development and democracy, good governance and the rule of law, and economic growth and peace.



## Regional Monitoring of Commonwealth GRBs Begins

A review of Commonwealth Finance Ministry experiences with gender-responsive budgeting should be available in a few months. Consultants have been appointed to conduct regional monitoring studies of Commonwealth Finance Ministries which will document what stage countries are at in their gender-responsive budgeting processes.



From left: Commonwealth Secretary-General, Rt Hon Don McKinnon, H.E. President Olusegun Obasanjo, Dr. Charles Soludo.

At last year's Commonwealth Finance Ministers' Meeting (FMM), ministers pledged to implement gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) of their portfolios by 2005, the date of the next FMM.

GRB in Finance Ministries is of crucial importance to the economic empowerment of women as it is usually the government department which sets government policy, including how government will tax or spend, for the entire economy each year. Nigeria's Special Adviser on Programme and Policy Monitoring, Professor Julius Ihonvbere, also expressed interest in the experience of GRM implementation in Finance ministries throughout the Commonwealth.

On a visit to the Commonwealth Secretariat by a delegation from the Nigerian government, headed by President Obasanjo, Nigeria's Chief Economic Adviser, Dr Charles Soludo said that the government was committed to gender equality and expressed interest in the results of the regional monitoring study.

# FAWE: Creating an enabling environment for girls' education



The success of the Forum for African Women Educationalist (FAWE) with girls' education is now well known, not just across Africa, but globally. It is a challenge that FAWE has taken seriously but also imaginatively and creatively. Professor Penina Mlama, Executive Director, shared FAWE's experience regarding girls' education in Africa with Commonwealth Education Ministers at their recent Conference in Edinburgh.

FAWE's programme implementation is undertaken through four strategic objectives – Policy, Advocacy, Interventions, Replication and Mainstreaming. FAWE Secretariat oversees and facilitates regional programmes, disseminates information on best practices and strategies to promote Girls' Education and co-ordinates the efforts of the 33 National Chapters. The FAWE Secretariat is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

One major project undertaken by FAWE is the creation of Centres of Excellence. The overall objective of these Centres of Excellence is to provide an intervention package of effective strategies to address girls concerns in education. Centres

have been established in three Commonwealth countries: Kenya, Namibia, and Tanzania, as well as in Rwanda and Senegal.

The Centres of Excellence provide, among other things, the following:

#### **Adequate physical facilities:**

These include boarding facilities for girls to enable them to participate fully in education activities. Emphasis is placed on providing adequate sanitation facilities, science, computer, and library resource centres.

#### **Adequate learning materials:**

Books are provided on a ratio of 1:1. Other resources such as library books are provided under the programme.

**Bursaries:** Disadvantaged girls have access to bursaries that cover their education costs and other personal needs.

**Teachers:** The centres have enough teachers who are professionally well-supported and gender-trained.

**Curriculum:** A gender-responsive curriculum is offered in the Centres.

**Community support:** Local communities are mobilised and sensitised to gain their support for the Centres. Parent/Teacher Association are therefore active components of the centres.

**Empowerment:** Girls are offered a range of empowerment activities to build their self-esteem and confidence, and developing leadership qualities. Other areas covered are, guidance and counselling, management and information systems.

**Country Experiences:** Current indications from FAWE schools show that the girls and boys enrolled in these schools are performing well, especially the girls. Full country reports presented at the 2003 ADEA biennial conference in Mauritius were full of praise for the schools and the conducive environment for girls' education.

**More information on FAWE's Centres of Excellence can be obtained from: [www.fawe.org](http://www.fawe.org)**



## Pratchi Trust closes the gap

A keynote address on **Humanity, Security and Educational Gaps** was delivered by Prof Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel prize winner in economics, at the 15th Triennial Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, held in Edinburgh from 27 to 30 October 2003. ‘Access, Inclusion and Achievement – Closing the Gap’ was the conference theme, and according to Prof Sen one of the reasons for closing educational gaps is to make the world more secure as well as more fair. **Improving access and effectiveness of basic education can help reduce human insecurity since illiteracy and innumeracy are in themselves forms of insecurity.**

Amartya Sen set up the Pratchi Trust, a charitable non-governmental organisation, named after his family home in Santiniketan, a university town in West Bengal, India. The Pratchi (India) Trust was instituted in 1999, along with Pratchi (Bangladesh) Trust, using part of the Noble prize money. The general aim is to work towards the removal of illiteracy and ignorance, and to tackle the lack of basic health-care and the special

disadvantages from which women, particularly young girls, suffer. Sen has identified inadequate government support, structural inefficiency, the reluctance of families to send children, particularly girls, to school, and the lack of interaction between parents and teachers, as some of the problems of Indian Education. The Pratchi Trust is functioning as a properly constituted centre of “research for action”.

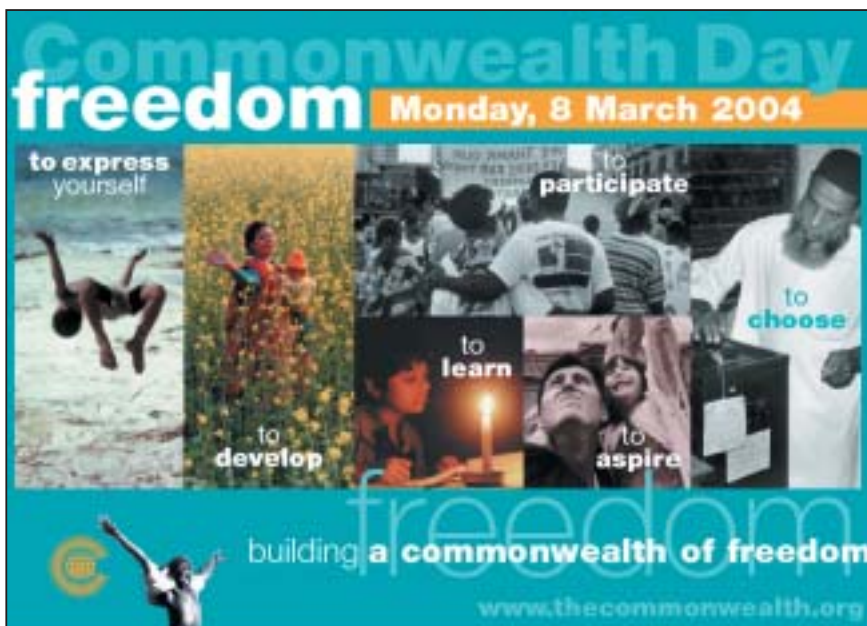
The research conducted by the Pratchi Trust in West Bengal has revealed that there have been several imaginative moves by the government of West Bengal to spread the net of school education. One of the major issues emerging from the research is that the class barriers that deeply divide the society impair the delivery of school education to the less privileged of society. Unless particular care is taken to address the divide through class-sensitive policies, this could be exacerbated by an increase in the economic and social distance between teachers and the children from poorer, less-privileged families.

The research has revealed some very positive features of parental

interests, progress and innovations. Contrary to the common belief that the parents from poor and illiterate families have low aspirations, the research has revealed that the value of school education is widely appreciated across the board. More education for children, both for girls and boys, is sought by poor and illiterate parents, not only for economic reasons, but also as a part of necessary social change. The bottleneck is almost entirely on the supply rather than the demand side. The research has further revealed that 96% of children in the 6-11 age group were enrolled in schools.

The real problems arise from low attendance and the poor quality of education. Women teachers very often treat young children as members of their own family which provides a caring and supportive learning atmosphere. Little involvement and representation of parents from poor families was found in parent-teacher meetings and on Village Education Committees. Thus, it is the voices of those who really need to be heard since they need education, that most lack power.

## Commonwealth Day, 8 March 2004



‘Building a Commonwealth of Freedom’ is the special theme for 2004. This theme reflects the Commonwealth’s commitment to democratic freedoms. People use the day to promote understanding about global issues, international co-operation and the work of the modern Commonwealth.

# Follow-Up to Mandates from Commonwealth Education Ministers

Following the successful 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM) held in Edinburgh, Scotland in October 2003, the Education Section has taken forward the mandate from Ministers to work not only with Ministries but also with civil society organisations in the delivery of education in six key action areas:

- Universal Primary Education;
- Gender Disparities in Education;
- Improving Quality in Education;
- Using Distance Learning to Overcome Geographical Barriers;
- Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances; and
- Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education Systems.

Ministers requested that staff in Education address not only the two education-related MDGs (Achieving Universal Primary Education and Eliminating Gender Disparities) but also improving quality in education, supporting education in difficult circumstances, using distance learning to overcome barriers, and mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS on education.



A collaborative partners' meeting in Edinburgh, 26 January 2004

The first round of collaborative partners meetings has begun and the Education Section is delighted with the response from civil society. Staff from the Education Section is planning to meet with collaborative partners in all countries of the Commonwealth as they continue their work with Ministries of Education in the delivery of the mandates of 15CCEM.

## Expert Group meeting on Gender and Human Rights

**An Expert Group meeting on Gender and Human Rights will take place on 17-19 February 2004 at Marlborough House, the Secretariat's Headquarters in London.**

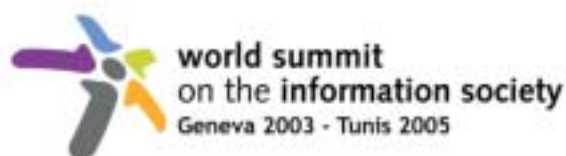
The purpose of the meeting is to discuss a number of key gender and human rights issues with a view to developing proposals for a new Commonwealth 10-year Plan of Action on Gender and Development, which will be adopted in June 2004 by Ministers of Women's Affairs.

The experts will be asked to reflect on progress and achievements on gender and human rights in the Commonwealth, and make recommendations for new areas of work, in light of our mandate, comparative advantages, and limited human and financial resource constraints.

The key human rights issues to be discussed at the Expert Group meeting will be:

- CEDAW – implementation of policies and legislation
- Gender and human rights in the life cycle (including the girl-child, working age and older women)
- Gender-Based Violence
- Trafficking of Women and Children
- Culture, the Law and Gender – (addressing the constraints and opportunities to implementation of laws and policies on gender equality – which are embedded in cultural/traditional beliefs, laws and practices)
- Land and property rights (also linked with CEDAW, culture)
- Indigenous Peoples' rights, especially women and girls.

The meeting will include around 25 experts from all four regions of the Commonwealth – Asia and the Pacific; Africa; Caribbean and the ABCNZ countries, and will represent various constituencies: government (including the judiciary); civil society partners and practitioners; academics and the UN/multilateral system.



Ms Maryse Roberts of the Gender Section of STPD participated at the WSIS Gender Caucus Orientation Session in Geneva for gender advocates. This was organised under the capacity building programme of the Caucus with the goal of increasing effectiveness of structured interventions by gender advocates at national, regional and global levels. The overall goal of the Caucus is to integrate gender equality and women's rights into the WSIS Declaration, Action Plan and outcome processes. For more details on the WSIS Gender Caucus, see [www.genderwsis.org](http://www.genderwsis.org).

The WSIS Gender Caucus is a multi-stakeholder group of women and men from national governments, civil society and non-governmental organisations, the private sector and the United Nations system. It takes as a starting point the importance of aligning the WSIS process and outcomes with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It urges governments to acknowledge gender equality and women's rights as fundamental principles in an Information Society, enabling increased availability of information and communication applications and networking tools.

## Recommendations for Action

The following are key recommendations for inclusion in the WSIS Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action.

### Gender must be a fundamental principle for action

The WSIS Declaration and Plan of Action should acknowledge existing gender divides and recommend action to eliminate them. Action must be taken to help individuals and communities overcome the persisting social and cultural obstacles that limit their contributions, and promote full inclusion for all women.

### Equitable participation in decisions shaping the Information Society

Women are agents of development and must be active in defining and leading development in the Information Society.

### New and old ICTs in a multimodal approach

A multimodal approach is needed to increase access to new and traditional ICTs. This will ensure that traditional modes of communication and information sharing, and new technologies are provided equitably. This is crucial for poor women in developing countries who are making effective use of simple and affordable communication tools for development: their efforts must be acknowledged and strengthened.

### Designing ICTs to serve people

ICTs are not gender-neutral. Women and under-represented groups should be equitably represented in technology research, design and development and encouraged through appropriate, targeted education in this area.

### Empowerment for full participation

Targeted and ongoing action is needed at all levels to strengthen women's and girls' capacities to be effective users of ICTs, and developers and shapers of technology, the problems it addresses, and the manner in which it is integrated into society.

### Research analysis and evaluation to guide action

Governments and other stakeholders must apply creative research and evaluation techniques to measure and monitor impacts – intended and unintended – on women generally, and subgroups of women. On the basis of these data, and applying a gender perspective, we should intervene and be proactive in ensuring that the impacts of ICTs are beneficial to all people.

## Information technology for women entrepreneurs

# Women entrepreneurs in Cameroon

Gisele Yitamben, executive director of ASAFE, says, “Many African countries are still suspicious of information technology. The solution to poverty among the womenfolk and their children is in information. There is no limit to our future.”

The Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) embarked on a collaborative project to enhance the business prospects of women entrepreneurs in Cameroon through the use of information and communications technologies.

CSAP's contribution to the project focuses mainly on three areas: transferring technologies in the areas of portal design and development, website design and development, and the computerisation of ASAFE's micro-credit operations. ITC is providing e-commerce training and also meeting infrastructural support costs.



Woman entrepreneur and Solar Panel Technology

*“CSAP is an excellent and timely programme, and will strengthen civil society organisations in developing countries especially as the value of ‘social enterprises’ becomes more appreciated. The use of diasporic knowledge resources is genuine and visionary. This contributes squarely to the goals of certain NEPAD and African Union initiatives. Its partnership approach is ‘the way forward’ in a multi-stakeholder world ...confirms development as a multi-dimensional undertaking in a world where the transfer of information has increased, but not necessarily communication”*

(Chris, Chairman of the Cameroon Forum, 2004).

The Commonwealth Secretariat established the CSAP volunteer scheme in 1995 to enhance its capacity to meet the short-term technical assistance needs of member governments by deploying highly qualified volunteers to support existing technical assistance programmes. Since its restructuring in 2001, the programme now focuses on bringing the application of new technologies, new ideas and innovative practices to people-centred projects that are designed to impact on large numbers of people.

## Contact

Commonwealth Services Abroad Programme (CSAP)  
Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX, UK  
Tel: (44) 20 7747 6355; Fax: (44) 20 7747 6515  
E-mail: [j.kaberere@commonwealth.int](mailto:j.kaberere@commonwealth.int)  
<http://www.thecommonwealth.org/whoware/cftc/csap/csap.html>

CSAP's partners in the project include the International Trade Centre (ITC), based in Geneva, and the Association de Soutien et d'Appui a la Femme Entrepreneur (ASAFE), a non-governmental organisation (NGO) which provides business development services to some 3,000 women entrepreneurs in Cameroon.

Funding for the project is provided by l'Agence Inter-gouvernementale de la Francophonie, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, the Commonwealth's development arm. Wireless connectivity and computers have been provided by the International Telecommunications Union.

“This was an innovative project for ITC, as we have not in the past done much collaborative work with NGOs,” said Lilia Hachem Naas, a senior trade promotion officer with ITC.

The rapid pace of change in information and communications technology and the political, economic and social changes facing the Commonwealth makes it an imperative that women leaders, policy-makers and practitioners maximise the opportunities to advance women's socio-economic empowerment at all levels. Maryse Roberts of the Gender Section, said: “The Commonwealth Secretariat fully supports such initiatives as the Cameroon project and the East Africa Enterprise Development Facility Centre based in Uganda.” The latter was launched on 16 May 2003 and is supported by the Government of Uganda (Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry; Ugandan Investment Authority, the National Chambers of Commerce and Industries; and the Uganda Women Entrepreneurs Association. Other donors include the UN Economic Commission of Africa (ECA) and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

## Information technology for women entrepreneurs

# Commonwealth Secretariat: Helping to bridge the digital divide

In many rural towns and villages in the Commonwealth, citizens have no access to computers. For some, who do not even know what a computer looks like, the Internet is merely an abstract concept. This lack of access to what many consider a basic technological tool is a major impediment to development.

In an attempt to bridge the digital divide, more than 60 women entrepreneurs in Kenya's Eastern and North Eastern Provinces are getting a chance to join in the technological revolution through exposure to computers. A two-week computer appreciation course was completed on 25 August 2003, in Embu, Eastern Province, and a similar course has been started in Garissa, North Eastern Province. The courses have been designed to spread computer literacy at a grassroots level in the rural and remote areas of the country.

**Web-based delivery of primary/secondary education:** In Jamaica and St Lucia, this has resulted in the design of a multi-nodal delivery system for providing secondary

education to those who have not completed their schooling, with computer nodes in such places as community centres, church halls and prisons. The education modules developed are being imparted through nodal points on a pilot basis. To date, Jamaican students have completed one semester and the project is now being replicated countrywide.

**Internet technologies for small businesses and institutions:** This programme has been undertaken for Grenada and Sri Lanka to date. In Grenada, 28 participants were fully trained in web design and 21 businesses and other institutions have designed their web sites as a result of the training.

**Computerised databases and information systems for small business agencies:** In St Vincent and the Grenadines, a computerised database has been developed for the Small Enterprise Development Unit (SEDU) to inform any small entrepreneur of the legislative and regulatory framework as well as other relevant information.

## UNCTAD Taskforce Meeting and Parallel Event

The Gender Section participated in an impressive line-up of speakers at the second meeting of the Inter-Agency Taskforce on Gender and Trade. Deputy Director, Rawwida Baksh, and Consultant, Donna St. Hill, attended the meeting to determine the terms of reference for the taskforce on which the Secretariat is the only non-UN member.

One of the outputs of the Taskforce will be a book on gender and trade to which the Gender Section will be contributing two chapters and an activity at this year UNCTAD 11 meeting.

A parallel event was organised on the occasion of the fiftieth session of the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board on the theme of "Gender and Trade", at the Palais des Nations. A paper was presented on the Secretariat's experience in gender and trade, and recommendations for mainstreaming gender at the national, regional and international levels.

The event allowed for a forum for interactive debate between Geneva-based women Ambassadors, including representatives from Canada, Gabon and Malaysia, as well as other UN agencies and Geneva-based NGOs working on this issue.

## Gift of the GAB

The Gender, Science and Technology Gateway is a web portal set up by the Gender Advisory Board of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD). It is a clearinghouse of information, resources and activities in the seven focus areas of the Gender Advisory Board:

- Ensuring gender equity in science and technology education;
- Removing obstacles to women in scientific and technological careers;
- Making science responsive to the needs of society, including agriculture and food production, energy, natural resources management and water;
- Making the science and technology decision-making process more "gender-aware";
- Relating better with local knowledge systems;
- Addressing ethical issues in science and technology, including biotechnology and health systems;
- Improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data for policy-makers.

**Contact:** Gender Advisory Board, UNCSTD, 204 Ventress Road, Brighton, Ontario, Canada K0K 1H0.  
Tel: (1-905) 355-5124; Fax: (1-905) 355-3229;  
shuyer@wigsat.org, <http://GSTGateway.wigsat.org>

## The Hidden Tragedy of Motherhood

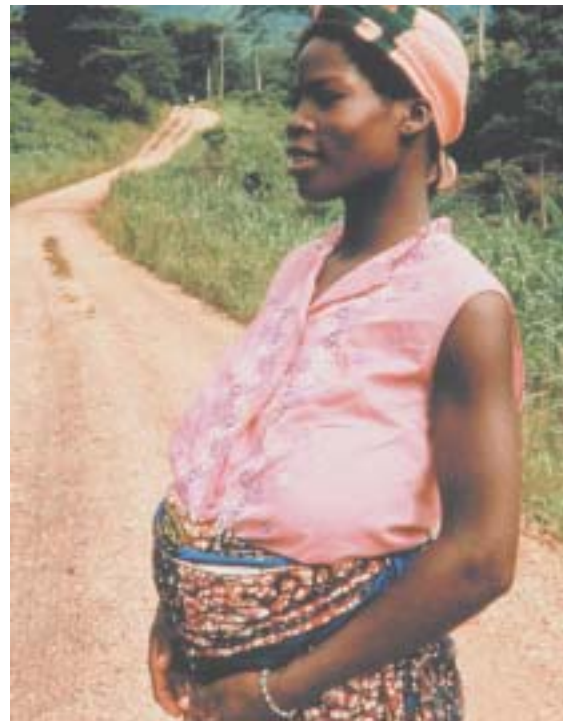
Why is that 1,600 women die every day as a result of pregnancy and childbirth – the equivalent of a Titanic of pregnant women sinking each and every day? These stark statistics drive forward the new charity, **Safehands for Mothers**, which has been formed to reduce maternal mortality in some of the poorest countries of the world.

The tragedy is that many of these deaths are preventable. The answer, Safehands believes, lies in improving training and it will work in partnership with local organisations such as FGAE (The Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia) to produce visual educational packages which help to improve the training of skilled care attendants.

The challenge for Safehands is to ensure that all women have access to safe hands before, during and after birth.



Visit the website [www.safehands.org](http://www.safehands.org) and find out more about how you can help women and newborns.



## Maternal Mortality

The health of mothers has long been acknowledged to be a cornerstone of public health. The fifth UN Millennium Development Goal (MDG) is to improve maternal health – measured by the reduction of the maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015. Yet maternal mortality in many developing countries has barely improved over the past decade. Seven of the countries with the highest maternal mortality ratios are Commonwealth member states.

The statistics are distressing. A woman in the poorest country has more than 100 times greater risk of dying in pregnancy and childbirth than her counterpart in a developed

country. This difference in the risks of death represents the widest disparity of all human development indicators.

Women risk death and disability each time they become pregnant.

Many of these complications can neither be predicted nor prevented, but many can be readily treated and managed with inexpensive medical and surgical interventions. Six hundred thousand (600,000) women die unnecessarily each year as a result of complications of pregnancy and childbirth. In the context of maternal health, these deaths are the tip of the iceberg since for every woman who dies many more will survive but suffer from life-long disabilities.

The death of a mother has a far-reaching impact. It not only causes disruption to the immediate family by depriving the members of the main carer and nurturer, but also, in many cases, deprives that family of a source of income and economic stability. This could have detrimental effects on the health of all, not least the children, and on their education.

The majority of women die because they do not receive the health care they need, either because the basic health services are lacking or are inadequate or inaccessible for a number of reasons.



## New Publications

### Gender Management System Toolkit Launch

The Commonwealth Secretariat has launched a 'Gender Management System Toolkit' to assist Commonwealth governments in ensuring that an awareness of gender issues informs mainstream decision-making at all levels. Dato' Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of Women and Family Development of Malaysia, delivered the address note at the launch in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 26 January 2004. The launch was attended by some 300 representatives of the Government of



Malaysia, the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), and representatives of the diplomatic corps, universities and non-governmental organisations.

The toolkit is a co-publication of the Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning. Dr Rawwida Baksh, Deputy Director and Head of the Gender Section, co-ordinator of the GMS series explains: 'this toolkit brings together the GMS series of manuals into a user-friendly, learner-centred, training-oriented package' to facilitate individual learning, a Training Manual for gender trainers, and a Change Management Briefing for anyone committed to effecting gender equality through institutional change'.

**2004 Price: £40 ISBN: 0-85092-768-4**



#### Building on Achievements

Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development and its Update (2000-2005)

**2003**



#### Gender Mainstreaming Series:

Integrated Approaches to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence

**2003**



#### Gender Mainstreaming Series:

Engendering Budgets, A Practitioners' Guide to Understanding and Implementing Gender-responsive Budgets

**2003**

**Price: £10.99**

**ISBN: 0-85092-735-8**

## Staff News

### Welcome to Elsie Onubogu!



Elsie has been a member of the Gender Section of STPD since January 2004. As Senior Programme Officer, she is responsible for the Gender, Peace, Conflict and Reconstruction programme. Before joining the Secretariat, Elsie served with the UN headquarters in New York working on issues related to development and gender. She has also worked with the UNDP/UNICTR and other agencies on areas such as the investigation of war crimes, violence against women, peace-building, and post-conflict reconstruction. Elsie is from Nigeria.

### Promotion

Last December, Dr Henry Kaluba was confirmed as Deputy Director and Head of the Education Section in STPD. Heartfelt congratulations to Henry!

#### Commonwealth Secretariat sale publications

Selected lists of Commonwealth Secretariat publications, including gender policy and training materials, can be viewed on the Commonwealth website: [www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org) Orders may be placed through: York Publishing Services, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO317ZQ, UNITED KINGDOM. Tel: +44 (0)1904 431 213, Fax: +44 (0)1904 430 868, Email: [enqs@yps.ymn.co.uk](mailto:enqs@yps.ymn.co.uk) Payment must accompany orders. Post and packaging charges should be added to every order in the following way: For UK orders, 15% of order value of order with £2.00 minimum charge; Non-UK orders, 25% of value of order with GB£3.50 minimum charge.