



First Meeting of the Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action Monitoring Group

Helmsley Hotel, 212 East 42nd Street, New York

25 February 2006

Background Paper

Introduction

Gender equality is one of the fundamental principles of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 (PoA) provides the framework within which the Commonwealth will contribute to advancing gender equality in the current decade. The PoA reinforces the Commonwealth's commitment to CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It focuses on four critical areas for Commonwealth action to advance women's rights and gender equality:

1. Gender, democracy, peace and conflict
2. Gender, human rights and law
3. Gender, poverty eradication and economic empowerment
4. Gender and HIV/AIDS

Within these critical areas, the Commonwealth aims to deepen its gender mainstreaming approach, particularly in addressing persistent and emerging challenges such as violence against women, women's political representation, women's participation in peace processes, trafficking in women and girls, and HIV/AIDS.

Based on information obtained from governments the Secretary-General is required to report on the implementation of the PoA to Heads of Government at their biennial summits and to senior officials' meetings. The first report will be to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Uganda in 2007. Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers will also meet periodically to review progress made and constraints encountered by governments and the Secretariat in implementing the PoA. They will make recommendations to the Heads of Government to improve implementation of the PoA.

At their Beijing+10 Meeting held on 27 February 2005, Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers set up the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group to assist the Secretariat with monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the PoA. The responsibilities of the PoA Monitoring Group, as set out in their Terms of Reference (please find attached) are:

1. To provide advice to the Commonwealth Secretariat on the development of PoA indicators;
2. To identify the most appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework to: (a) harmonise the Secretariat's reporting on the PoA with CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the MDGs and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, in order to reduce the burden of reporting on national women's machineries and to avoid duplication; and (b) ensure effective implementation of the PoA;

3. To provide advice to the Commonwealth Secretariat on the mid-term review of the PoA in 2010 and updates as required, as well as the next steps beyond the current tenure of the PoA which ends in 2015; and
4. To consider any issue that may be referred to it by Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs related to the implementation of the PoA, and work with the Secretariat, as necessary, to develop additional Terms of Reference, including membership, for the Commonwealth Working Group on UNSCR 1325.

First Meeting of the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group – 25 February 2006

The Commonwealth Secretariat is organising the first meeting of the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group meeting, to be held in New York on Saturday 25 February 2006 from 0830 to 1700. The main objective of the meeting is to brainstorm on the following issues:

- A Monitoring & Evaluation framework for the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015, which facilitates the harmonisation of Commonwealth and international priorities, workplans and reporting;
- A process for developing gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring the implementation of the PoA.
- The modalities for the functioning of the PoA Monitoring Group; and
- The rotation of membership of the PoA Monitoring Group.

The proposed programme for the day will cover:

A panel discussion on “Developing a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework for the Commonwealth PoA for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015”: Panellists will include: the Head of a National Women's Machinery (NWM), and representatives from international and regional organisations. The discussion will focus on existing M&E frameworks (CEDAW, Beijing PfA and MDGs). Speakers will also share experiences on developing and using gender-sensitive indicators at the national and regional levels.

The *second session* will break into working groups to brainstorm on harmonising Commonwealth and international priorities, workplans and reporting on gender equality. The working groups will also explore the process for developing gender-sensitive indicators for monitoring implementation of the PoA, and modalities for the functioning of the PoA Monitoring Group.

The working groups will report back in the *final plenary session* and the meeting will agree on:

- Harmonisation of Commonwealth and international priorities, workplans and reporting on gender equality
- Process for developing Gender-sensitive Indicators for monitoring PoA implementation
- Modalities for the functioning of the PoA Monitoring Group

According to the ToR of the PoA Monitoring Group, membership will be rotated biennially, with one member per region rotating out after the first year. Thus, the final session of the meeting will also decide on which members are to be rotated out of the PoA Monitoring Group.

Volunteers for this rotation in advance of the meeting would be welcome.

A representative of the PoA Monitoring Group will report on the outcomes of the meeting to the Consultation of Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers being held on 26 February 2006, on the eve of the 50th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

Developing a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework for the PoA

Monitoring and evaluating the PoA will offer an opportunity for Commonwealth countries and the Secretariat to assess the impact of their work on gender equality. To support and guide this work, the Commonwealth needs a coherent M&E framework that sets out:

- The gender-sensitive indicators to be used in measuring progress in achieving PoA goals;
- Data needed to measure progress made in implementing the PoA against the indicators;
- The levels at which the PoA will be monitored and evaluated – national, regional or pan-Commonwealth;
- Roles of different partners in monitoring and evaluating implementation of the PoA; and
- How reporting on the PoA would be harmonised with other reporting obligations.

Existing Gender-sensitive Indicators and M&E Frameworks for Measuring Gender Equality

International organisations, particularly the UN and its agencies, have developed M&E frameworks and gender-sensitive indicators that have helped to map the progress in gender and development made by countries:

✚ **The Gender-related Development Index (GDI)** reflects inequalities between women and men in the following areas:

- A long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth;
- Knowledge, as measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio;
- A decent standard of living, as measured by estimated earned income.

✚ **The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)** focuses on women's opportunities rather than their capabilities, assessing gender equality in three key areas:

- Political participation and decision-making power, as measured by women's and men's percentage share of parliamentary seats;
- Economic participation and decision-making power, as measured by two indicators – women's and men's percentage in employment such as legislators, senior officials and managers; and women's and men's percentage share of professional and technical positions;
- Power over economic resources, as measured by women's and men's estimated earned income.

✚ **The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** present strategic tools to advance gender equality, economic justice and peace. A framework of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators has been agreed to ensure comparability across countries and facilitate tracking of progress at global, regional and national levels. Countries are periodically required to produce MDG national reports highlighting where they are on track to meet the Goals, where urgent effort is needed and how money is spent. This is providing impetus for countries to report on gender equality and is producing useful investments in the capacities of countries to collect disaggregated data (ACFID, 2005).

Goal 3, "Promote gender equality and the empowerment of women", represents a global reaffirmation of women's rights and gender equality as core values of development. The indicators to measure this goal are:

- Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education;
- Ratio of literate females to males 15-24 years old;
- Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector;
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

The 2005 Millennium Review Outcome Document has broadened MDG #3 to include women's right to own and inherit property; equal access to productive assets and resources including land, credit and technology; eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and the girl child; increased representation of women in government decision-making bodies; and universal access to reproductive health.

- ✚ Countries that have ratified or acceded to the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** are committed to submitting national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with treaty obligations. All Commonwealth Countries have ratified CEDAW and therefore should be reporting. Reporting on CEDAW offers governments an excellent opportunity to synthesise available gender-related data, to measure advancements in the status of women and to identify and fill data gaps. CEDAW enables governments to produce gender-sensitive indicators on empowerment, violence against women, cultural issues and women's rights (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1999).
- ✚ The UN reviews of the implementation of the **Beijing Platform for Action** (mid-term review & Beijing+10) have motivated the production of significant regional and national reports on the situation of women's rights and gender equality. The reports have mapped major trends, achievements, obstacles and challenges in relation to the 12 critical areas of concern articulated in the BPfA.
- ✚ **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR1325)**, adopted in 2000, emphasises the importance of women's role in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, conflict resolution and peace-building. The UN system-wide action plan for implementation of UNSCR1325, calls for a systematic incorporation of gender perspectives into all country reports to the Security Council.

Although these international instruments present significant opportunities for governments to review gender inequalities, they also place different demands on government and particularly national women's machineries to report on gender equality: The Commonwealth has therefore committed to harmonise reporting on the PoA with CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals, and UNSCR 1325. The aim is to reduce the burden of reporting on governments and to avoid duplication.

In developing the M&E Framework for the PoA, it is important to bear in mind that data availability and reliability varies considerable amongst Commonwealth Countries. Availability of quality data continues to be a major concern and has limited many governments' accountability. The time lag on data available in some countries e.g. census data and household surveys has meant relying on dated information to produce reports. The lack of sex-disaggregated data makes it difficult to understand the situation of women and men and how this is changing.

Key Questions

What are the reporting commonalities amongst the different international agreements on gender?

How can harmonisation be achieved and what challenges would be encountered?

Do the internationally agreed indicators capture the aspirations of the Commonwealth PoA or do we need other indicators?

In your own country or regional experience, what other indicators have proved most useful?

Is reliable data available to measure progress on implementation of the PoA?

References

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Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group

This Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group was developed through the following process:

- A Draft Terms of Reference for a Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group was tabled by the Commonwealth Secretariat at the Commonwealth Beijing+10 Meeting, which was referred by Ministers to a specially convened meeting of the Gender Reference Group held in New York on 1 March 2005;
- A Revised Draft Terms of Reference for a Commonwealth PoA Monitoring Group, prepared by the Gender Reference Group on 1 March, was circulated to all Ministers for feedback by 20 May 2005;
- This final Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group includes feedback received from Ministers.

Background

The Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries (NWMs), held in New York on 1-2 March 2003 established a Commonwealth Gender Reference Group (CGRG) to work with the Secretariat to contribute to the development of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015. The Group comprised two to three senior officials and one civil society representative from each of the five Commonwealth regions. The Terms of Reference for the original Commonwealth Gender Reference Group is included below. The Group was co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat as a virtual network, and has now discharged its full responsibilities.

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 states in para. 4.22 (page 57) that "A Commonwealth Gender Reference Group, consisting of a rotating core of NWMs and representatives of CSOs from all the regions, will be established to assist with monitoring, evaluation and reviewing the PoA".

The Beijing+10 Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers, Senior Officials, Civil Society Organisations and Partners held in New York on 27 February 2005 agreed that the Revised Draft Terms of Reference for the new Commonwealth Gender Reference Group mandated by the PoA 2005-2015 (henceforth to be called the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group (CGPMG)), should be developed by a specially convened meeting (1 March 2005) of the members of the original Commonwealth Gender Reference Group and be sent to member countries for feedback within 30 days.

Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth PoA Monitoring Group (CGPMG)

1. The responsibilities of the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group are as follows:

- (i) To provide advice to the Commonwealth Secretariat on the development of PoA indicators;
- (ii) To identify the most appropriate monitoring and evaluation framework to: (a) meet the requirements of para. 4.19 of the PoA in harmonising the Secretariat's report on the PoA with CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action processes, the MDGs and targets, and UNSCR1325 in order to reduce the burden of reporting on NWMs and to avoid duplication; and (b) ensure effective implementation of the Plan of Action;
- (iii) To provide advice to the Commonwealth Secretariat on the mid-term review of the PoA in 2010 and updates as required, as well as the next steps beyond the current tenure of the PoA which ends in 2015; and

- (iv) To consider any issue that may be referred to it by Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, related to the implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 and, work with the Secretariat, as necessary to develop Terms of Reference, including membership, for the Commonwealth Working Group on UNSCR 1325.
2. The CPMG will be a virtual group, but will meet in conjunction with meetings of Commonwealth Heads of NWMs in the wings of CSW in New York, as required. The CGPMG will be co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat.
 3. The members of the CGPMG will initially comprise members of the original Commonwealth Gender Reference Group, as well as Australia:
 - **Africa:** The Gambia, Uganda, South Africa;
 - **Asia:** India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka;
 - **Caribbean/Canada:** Canada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis;
 - **Europe:** Malta, United Kingdom;
 - **Pacific:** Australia, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand;
 - **Civil Society:** Commonwealth Foundation and one civil society representative from each region (Africa, Asia, Caribbean/Canada, Europe and Pacific).
 4. Membership of the Commonwealth PoA Monitoring Group will be rotated biennially, with one member per region rotating out after the first year. The decision as to which member from each region would be rotated out after the first year will be taken at the first meeting of the CGPMG to be held in the wings of the 50th Session of the CSW in New York in February/March 2006. Volunteers for this rotation in advance of the meeting would be welcomed.

TO R OF ORIGINAL COMMONWEALTH GENDER REFERENCE GROUP

(This ToR of the original Commonwealth Gender Reference Group was published as Annex 1 in the *Report of the Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries*, New York, 1-2 March 2003. London: Commonwealth Secretariat).

Background

The Commonwealth 7WAMM Preparatory Meeting of Heads of National Women's Machineries, held in New York from 1-2 March 2003, established a Commonwealth Gender Reference Group with representatives from all Commonwealth regions to prepare for the 7th Commonwealth Women's/Gender Affairs Ministers Meeting (7WAMM) being held in the Fiji Islands on 30 May – 2 June 2004.

The Commonwealth Gender Reference Group emerged from the need for co-ordination in planning 7WAMM and developing a new Commonwealth Plan of Action. Member governments and civil society partners must be at the centre of the Commonwealth's consultative process.

Such a strategic and cost-effective consultative mechanism will maximise the use of electronic communications technologies, including e-list-serves and websites.

The following countries were nominated by those present or their representatives:

- Africa: The Gambia (West), Uganda (East), South Africa (Southern);
- Asia: India (as host country of 6WAMM, to be confirmed), Malaysia, Sri Lanka (to be confirmed);
- Caribbean/Canada: Canada, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis;

- Europe: Malta (to be confirmed), United Kingdom (to be confirmed);
- Pacific: Fiji Islands, Kiribati, New Zealand (to be confirmed)
- Civil Society: Commonwealth Foundation and one civil society representative from each region (Africa, Asia, Caribbean/Canada, Europe, Pacific).

Terms of Reference for the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group

Each region will be represented by two/three countries' Heads of the National Women's Machineries. The regional representatives will make strategic recommendations to the Commonwealth Secretariat based on feedback from member governments and key partners in their respective regions. The Commonwealth Foundation will coordinate the regional civil society inputs into the consultative process. Regional agencies such as ECOWAS, CARICOM, NEPAD, Pacific Forum and SAARC will be consulted.

Members of the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group will be selected on a rotational basis at Women's/Gender Affairs Ministers Meetings.

The Commonwealth Gender Reference Group will be co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Reference Group will play a consultative role in the following activities:

- Formulation of the 7WAMM agenda and format;
- Preparation of the Commonwealth Women's/Gender Ministers Reference Book, which will be drafted by Commonwealth Secretariat staff and a consultant based on questionnaire responses;
- Development of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action (2005-2015).

All exchanges will be by electronic means. It may be necessary for the members of the Commonwealth Gender Reference Group to meet in the wings of the 48th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in February/March 2004 in New York.

Immediate Follow-Up

NWMs of nominated countries not present at the New York meeting will need to confirm their representation of their respective regions. The Commonwealth Foundation will also advise regarding the civil society regional representatives and planned civil society-government consultations during May/June of 2003.