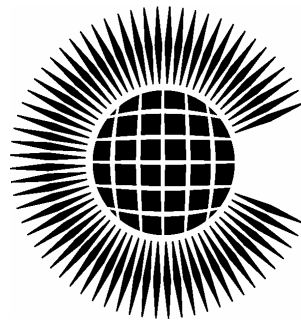


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***Gender-sensitizing Parliaments in the Commonwealth***

Background Paper prepared by  
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# ***Gender-sensitizing Parliaments in the Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>***

## **1. Introduction**

Much international and Commonwealth attention has been focused on increasing women's representation in parliament. Commonwealth Heads of Government (Durban, 1999) and Women's Affairs Ministers (Port of Spain, 1996; and Delhi, 2000) set a target of no less than 30 per cent of women in decision-making by the year 2005. Countries already close to achieving the target were encouraged to strive for parity.

The question of why we should strive for parity in politics has been the subject of major debate internationally, key aspects of which include the *normative* argument that there is no true democracy without equal representation of women and men; the *pragmatic* argument that women introduce policy changes that are grounded in a greater knowledge of women's realities and experiences; and the *difference* argument that women bring particular skills and perspectives to politics including a more constructive and less adversarial style (Lovenduski, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1998).

In an IPU survey of 187 women parliamentarians from 65 countries (Marilyn Waring et al, *Politics: Women's Insight*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000), 86 per cent indicated that their participation in politics had brought about positive changes in form, political behaviour, traditional attitudes, substance, processes and outcomes.

This paper focuses attention on the kinds of changes that women, acting in partnership with men, have made to public policy in the Commonwealth through the political and parliamentary process. Agencies involved include governments, opposition parties, non-governmental and community-based organisations, academic institutions, the media, civil society in its broadest sense, the private sector and international organisations, among others.

## **2. Gender-sensitizing public policy in the Commonwealth**

Participants at the Commonwealth's Gender and Democracy workshop (Windhoek, 2000) identified the importance of a *gender agenda* in promoting equality between women and men. In developing the *Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (1995)* and its *Update (2000-2005)*, Women Affairs Ministers aimed to integrate gender equality into the core principles of the Commonwealth's Harare Declaration:

- Democracy and good governance;
- Human rights and the rule of law; and
- Economic and social development.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has recently completed a comprehensive survey of recent advances made towards gender equality by 37 member countries in these areas. The findings of this survey will be presented to Commonwealth Heads of Government in October 2001 as the Secretary-General's Report on the

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<sup>1</sup> The Gender and Youth Affairs Division (GYAD) of the Commonwealth Secretariat congratulates the CPA Study Group on Gender-Sensitizing Commonwealth Parliaments on its excellent Report tabled at the 47<sup>th</sup> CPA Annual Conference. This paper seeks to complement the CPA Study Group Report by focusing on **gender-sensitizing Commonwealth public policy**. It also needs to be read in conjunction with the other Commonwealth Secretariat paper circulated at the conference on "Globalisation and the Feminisation of Poverty".

Implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development. The following sections highlight some of the successes and challenges.

### **3. Democracy and Good Governance**

#### **3.1 Increasing Women's Representation in Political Decision-Making**

By the end of 2000, the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Commonwealth Foundation, had completed a series of four regional symposia on Gender, Politics and Conflict/Peace covering the African, Asian/European, Caribbean and Pacific regions. Countries reported on a wide variety of good practices, such as quotas, affirmative action, leadership training, and strategic actions by political parties, governments, regional and non-governmental organisations. However, these meetings underlined the urgent work still required to achieve the Commonwealth's 30 per cent target of women.

Despite considerable regional variations, Commonwealth countries continue to report an increase in women's representation at the highest level of decision-making, especially at the political level. Of 8,180 parliamentary seats in the national parliaments of the Commonwealth, women hold 14.1 per cent – a figure slightly higher than the global figure of 13.8 per cent. Whilst the three women Commonwealth Heads of State are in Asia and the Pacific, women in general in the two regions (excluding **Australia and New Zealand**) hold only 8.9 per cent and 8.6 per cent of all parliamentary seats, respectively.

**Mozambique, New Zealand, and South Africa** have achieved 30 per cent representation of women in parliament, while six other countries have over 20 per cent female representation (**Australia, Canada, Grenada, Namibia, Seychelles, and Trinidad & Tobago**). Female membership of the Commonwealth's upper Chambers is 17.0 per cent compared to the global figure of 13.4 per cent. However, a few countries are way ahead, e.g., **Barbados** (33.3 per cent), **Bahamas** (31.3 per cent) and **Belize** (44.4 per cent). Only seven Commonwealth countries reported attaining 20 per cent of female representation at Cabinet level.

Five countries, **Canada, India, Seychelles, Tanzania and Uganda**, have achieved 30 per cent of women in local government. **Seychelles** stands out, having achieved 58 per cent women's representation at local government since the last elections in 1997. **Seychelles** also has high levels of women's representation in cabinet (24%), parliament (24%), public sector management (37%), and private sector management (27%). Two of **South Africa's** provincial legislatures achieved the 30 per cent target: Gauteng (31.4%) and North-West Province (33.3%).

#### **Measuring Progress in the Commonwealth**

Following the **United Kingdom's** General Election in June 2001, female representation in the House of Commons stands at 18 per cent (118 women MPs); Cabinet Ministers at 30 per cent (seven women out of a total of 23 members); Government Ministers at 33 per cent. Thirty-seven per cent of members of the **Scottish and Welsh** Assemblies are women. In **New Zealand**, women hold the top four constitutional positions: Governor-General, Prime Minister, Chief Justice and Attorney General as well as the post of Leader of Opposition. The proportion of women Crown Ministers and Members of Statutory Boards stands at 35 and 37 per cent respectively, with the country's first Maori woman government Chief Executive Officer appointed in 2000. The 1999 Election in **Barbados** saw an increase in the number of women in politics. Currently, the Deputy Prime Minister is a woman; she also holds the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs. **Barbados** also has four women heading its overseas Missions. Women also hold key posts such as Governor of the Barbados Central Bank, Head of the Civil Service and Auditor-General. **Cyprus's** May 2001 Election saw an increase in women's representation in Parliament from three to six MPs. The number of women candidates put forward also increased from 55 in 1996 to 85 in 2001 as a

direct result of an intensive mass media campaign to encourage women to enter political life and training programme for political parties organised by the NWM.

*Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Inter-Parliamentary Union, June 2001*

Increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making is a major priority for **Australia**. In 2000, women in Australia comprised 25.4 per cent of Federal parliamentarians – almost double the international average – and 32.8 per cent of positions on Federal government boards. Since 1999, measures such as the Executive Search Pilot Programme and Early Warning System were implemented for women on Federal Government boards. An evaluation of these measures undertaken in November 2000 identified a number of factors for success including: organisational commitment from participating agencies and Ministers' Offices; strong networks; partnerships with industry and community leaders; ensuring the maintenance of a high-quality database; and a comprehensive information strategy. Building on these initiatives, a new national leadership strategy is being implemented, a key feature of which is the importance of reframing concepts of leadership to adequately recognise women's contribution to all spheres of social, political and economic life including working as leaders at the community level.

In 1997 **Bangladesh** recorded a huge boost to women's empowerment and political participation when 12,228 women were elected at the local level, as opposed to only 176 women in the previous Union Parishad Election. Since then, the government has issued 12 Executive Orders providing more authority and decision-making power to elected women. The Parliamentary Bill of April 2001 seeks to further increase women's participation in decision-making committees at the local level. **Bangladesh** has a provision whereby the President can appoint 10 per cent of women to senior posts, including senior diplomats and Joint Secretaries. A quota system is also in place for the public sector: 10 to 15 per cent of gazetted and non-gazetted posts are reserved for women. Women are now being recruited into the army, challenging their traditional roles.

The Directorate of Women's Affairs in **Antigua and Barbuda** held a Women's Constitutional Workshop on 8 March 2001 to educate women on the country's constitution and ensure that they will play a part in the constitutional reform process presently underway. Women were mobilised to submit proposals to the Constitution Review Committee. Through such strategies, women are encouraged to participate more fully in the political process.

#### ***Is Target Setting Enough?***

**Ghana**'s Affirmative Action Policy calls for 40 per cent representation of women in policy-making bodies and 30 per cent representation in District Assemblies. The National Electoral Commission urged all political parties to put up more women as parliamentary candidates in order to achieve the 40 per cent target. The NGO, Women, Media and Change, ran a workshop on the effective use of the media for 80 female parliamentary candidates. The results of the last national elections in December 2000 indicated marginal increases: women parliamentarians stood at 10 per cent, Cabinet Ministers at just over 33 per cent and Council of State members at 25 per cent. This suggests that there is still a lot of work to be done for women to achieve the targets set.

### **3.2 Promoting Women's Participation in Peace Building**

Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers pointed out that only in situations of peace and stability, can women and men achieve full equality (Delhi, 2000). They set a Commonwealth target of 30 per cent of women in all peace processes by the year 2005, including conflict mediation, resolution, peace keeping and post-conflict

reconstruction. Collaboration with UN and other development agencies is seen as strategic to ensuring more coherent results.

Women in Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America, and the Pacific are already at the forefront of many peace efforts. In the Commonwealth, women are proving themselves as active agents of change during conflicts in **Guyana, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Solomon Islands and South Africa**. Women's contribution to democracy, governance, rule of law and peace making should be encouraged and supported.

#### ***Protecting Women's Rights in Armed Conflict***

**The United Kingdom** supported the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (31 October 2000) on women and armed conflict. The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Conflict Prevention Fund has supported a number of projects involving women in conflict and peace building. One such project, set up in collaboration with the Women's Studies and Development Centre of the University of Delhi and Ulster University focuses on strengthening women's role in peace building in North India. The United Kingdom has also taken a leading role in preparing a Draft Document on Small Arms for the International Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in New York (July 2001). The increase in illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons is adding fuel to the problem of armed conflict. The international community is faced with challenges in areas such as export control policy, prevention of illicit trafficking, law enforcement and crime prevention, demobilisation and reintegration, post-conflict reconstruction and security sector reform.

**Canada** supported the UN Security Council's recent amendment of the Statute of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to allow for a pool of *ad litem* (non-permanent) judges. Canada successfully pressed for the inclusion of two references to female judges: first, States must consider 'the importance of a fair representation of female and male candidates' when nominating *ad litem* judges, and second, the President of the Court must consider the fair representation of female judges when selecting *ad litem* judges to serve on a particular trial.

Sierra Leone's Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Hon. Shirley Gbujama, said "Women have worked hard to defend democracy, particularly in the last three years. They suffered extremely during the war, but in spite of this, have been at the forefront of efforts for peace building and peace-making. As the country has now embarked on reconstruction, their full participation is an inalienable right".

#### ***Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Sierra Leone: Window of Opportunity for Women and Men as Equal Partners***

There is a new window of opportunity for women and men to participate equally in the political, legal, economic and social post-war reconstruction process. A national consultation on 'Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction', was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 21-24 May 2001, organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's, UNDP, British Council and UNICEF.

The consultation focused attention on the fact that ten years of civil war and political unrest in the country have affected women, men, boys and girls in different ways. Some 250 representatives participated in the workshop. They included representatives of government, among them Ministers of key ministries, chiefs, members of parliament, local government officials, and representatives of academic institutions, the media, NGOs, CBOs, the private sector, as well as international agencies. Approximately a third of national participants were from the provinces. The consultation provided a forum for the healing dialogue that Sierra Leone must undergo in order to begin to work for sustainable peace, gender equality and development.

The consultation focused on how women and men can contribute to and benefit equally in the reconstruction of Sierra Leone. Plenaries and working groups focused on gender-related issues in the key areas: political and public decision-making; human rights and legal reform; violence, sexual abuse and crimes against women; resettlement of displaced civilians and resettlement/rehabilitation of ex-combatants; poverty, economic recovery and empowerment; health, HIV/AIDS and STIs; education, training and employment; and the role of young women and men in the post-conflict reconstruction process.

Recommendations include the following: implement measures that will give force to the Commonwealth and United Nations target of 30 per cent women in parliament and local government; set up an independent Gender Commission to promote gender equality; give greater opportunities for employment to women and girls; adopt a national health policy that is gender-sensitive and responsive to the special health needs of women; adopt a programme of 'zero tolerance' to violence against women; and a special programme on HIV/AIDS; as well as improve access to education and training, affordable health and shelter, law and security; and give greater representation for young women and men.

#### **4. Human Rights and the Rule of Law**

##### **4.1 Women's rights as human rights**

*It is time to recognise that social justice and social change requires more than just laws and policies. True social justice requires a change in what is considered acceptable behaviour toward women, and between women and men. The shift to an emphasis on the universal rights of women and men must begin with every one of us (Graça Machel, Commonwealth Foundation, 2001).*

Protection of the human rights of women and the elimination of violence against women remains a challenge in the Commonwealth. The Secretariat works with governments to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in order to:

- incorporate the principle of equality between men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt laws prohibiting discrimination against women;
- establish tribunals and other public institutions to protect women against discrimination; and
- eliminate all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organisations or enterprises.

The Convention provides the basis for realising equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to political and public life, education, health and employment. It is the only human rights treaty that affirms the reproductive rights of women, and targets culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. It affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and that of their children. States also agree to take appropriate measures against all forms of trafficking in and exploitation of women. CEDAW sets out an agenda for national action. Country reporting, every four years, on progress in the implementation of CEDAW, is an invaluable monitoring tool.

##### **Recent Good Practices in the Commonwealth**

**Belize** has passed two new laws, the Administration of Estates (Amendment) Act and the Supreme Court of Judicature (Amendment) Act, 2000, which recognise common-law union as a union between a man and a woman, whether or not they are married to each other. They provide guidelines for the apportionment of property in cases of separation, divorce and inheritance. Non-financial contributions to a union or marriage will also be taken into account.

**Kenya** has amended a number of laws, and also drafted the following bills based on the findings of a Task Force set up in 1993 to review national laws relating to women and taking CEDAW into account: Domestic Violence (Family Protection) Bill, 2000; Gender Equality Bill, 2000; the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, 2000; and the Public Service (Code of Conduct and Ethics) Bill, 2000. The draft National Action Plan on Combating Violence is presently being discussed by a broad-based coalition of stakeholders before presentation to Parliament.

**Seychelles** has established a Family Tribunal to deal with family law issues such as maintenance payments to women and children. It meets twice a week, thus providing an effective, informal and low-cost system of handling cases.

**Canada** became the 14th state to ratify the International Criminal Court (ICC) Statute on 7 July 2000, and subsequently the first country in the world to adopt comprehensive legislation implementing the ICC Statute into domestic law under its Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act. Other complementary laws include the amendments to the Extradition Act that facilitate the extradition of persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes (including rape) to international criminal courts and tribunals. Two UN Security Council Resolutions (1265 and 1296), initiated by **Canada** on the protection of civilians in armed conflict have been adopted.

## 4.2 Violence Against Women

Commonwealth efforts to end violence against women continue with a number of countries adopting multi-disciplinary approaches. **Belize, Canada, Dominica, Grenada, Malta, Trinidad & Tobago**, and the **United Kingdom** have adopted a 'zero tolerance' policy. **Brunei** established a Domestic Violence Unit in the Police Force. **Dominica** will soon enact a Domestic Violence Act, and is implementing a programme for the Empowerment of Socio-economically Disadvantaged and Abused Women, as well as undertaking research on the issue of domestic violence.

Overall, there has been a marked increase in the number of countries that have enacted legislation to address sexual harassment. Other countries have enacted or revised laws to address rape in marriage. A revised Women and Child Oppression Restraint Act of 1995, covering issues such as sexual harassment and rape under police custody, is now in force in **Bangladesh**. A Sexual Offences Bill was presented for approval to parliament in **Uganda** and training for police and other law enforcement officers carried out.

### Progress in Combating Gender-Based Violence

**Botswana** completed a study on the Socio-Economic Implications of Violence Against Women in March 1999, which served as a basis for the National Action Plan on the Integrated Approach to Combating Violence Against Women and Children. The 1999 Botswana Police Service Study on Rape was launched in March 2001. The Public Service Act amended in 2000 includes sexual harassment as misconduct. Presently, the University of Botswana's sexual harassment policy is being considered for inclusion in the Botswana Public Service Act.

**New Zealand** has undertaken a comprehensive review of its programme on family violence prevention. The results should inform policy directions, future funding and delivery of services. The anticipated outcome of the review is the development of a plan for future action. It will identify priorities, including resource implications for current and future family violence initiatives. Assessment of the impacts of the Domestic Violence Act confirms that programmes for perpetrators of violence have been successful in reducing the frequency of violent and abusive behaviour. New Zealand's Human Rights Commission held its first Sexual Harassment Week in October 2000. The report, Unwelcome and Offensive: A Study of Sexual Harassment Complaints to the Human Rights Commission 1995–2000, was launched. A national research survey revealed that 31 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men have experienced sexual harassment. A national network of sexual harassment prevention trainers has been set up to run workshops for businesses and organisations.

**Namibia** enacted the Combating of Rape Law (Act 8 of 2000) that stipulates the minimum sentences for rape and provides for the amendment of the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1997 that caters for the rights of a complainant of rape in bail proceedings. A draft Child Care and Protection Act presented to Parliament will equalise the age of consent to sexual activity at 15 for both boys and girls. It will extend the protection of the Combating of Immoral Practices Act to young boys as well as young girls, and removes the special defence for boys under 21 relating to prostitution. Namibia has a media programme covering 'public' hearings of victims of violence.

**Australia's** Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Programme is a collaborative effort between the government and the States and Territories, as well as the business sector, NGOs and the community. Key projects include: community education campaigns; national competency standards for workers

dealing with domestic violence; prevention workshops for young people; a clearing house for information and best practices; and perpetrators' programmes. A range of events nationwide has allowed local, regional and national dissemination of knowledge about new findings in domestic violence research, policy and programmes. Current work includes addressing the impact of domestic violence on children; strengthening perpetrators' programmes; and community education for mainstream, indigenous, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

An increasing number of countries are putting the family at the centre of strategies for combating gender-based violence. The recent International Conference on Family Violence held in Nicosia, **Cyprus**, 26–30 November 2001, endorsed the need for such an approach. **Belize** is establishing Family Violence Committees in each district. An increasing number of men are also taking a proactive role to eliminate violence against women. 'Namibian Men for Change' is a new organisation working on gender-based violence.

The **Singapore** government, working closely with women's groups and NGOs, reinforces the concept of 'shared responsibility' in the family life education programmes implemented nationwide including a national family violence networking system; a mandatory counselling programme to rehabilitate perpetrators, provide support for the victims and ensure their safety and protection; a male perpetrators programme; and a family violence dialogue group. The Family Violence Dialogue Group is an inter-agency group established in February 2001 for policy review and formulation, co-ordination of public education and capacity building efforts regarding combating family violence for strategic development and planning purposes. Other services include Family Court counselling; Crisis Shelters; financial and casework assistance. In addition, the programme 'Promoting Alternatives to Violence'; has 'one-stop' Family Service Centres with counselling and group work for women, men and children.

**SADC: Adopting the Commonwealth's  
Integrated Approach to Combating Violence Against Women**

The model framework for an integrated approach to combating violence against women developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1998 has been promoted in the SADC region, through capacity building and the provision of technical assistance to requesting countries. **Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe** have all developed draft national plans of action on violence against women. This has been a collaborative effort involving governments, the SADC Secretariat and the Commonwealth Secretariat, supporting the implementation of the SADC Gender and Development Declaration and its Addendum on Prevention and Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children.

## **5. Economic and Social Development**

*Countries with smaller gender gaps have less poverty. Countries with smaller gaps between women and men in areas such as education, employment, and property rights not only have lower child malnutrition and mortality, they also have more transparent business and government and faster economic growth.*

Global wealth, technology and knowledge have never been greater. Yet almost half the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day and 1.2 billion live on the very margins of life, on less than \$1 a day. Making globalisation work for the poor is a challenge for the Commonwealth with its population of more than 1.7 billion people. Commonwealth members include 15 of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and 32 small states. It is being recognised that the new wealth created through globalisation can lift millions of the world's poorest people out of poverty.

Promoting trade and investment and helping member countries compete in the global economy are key objectives for the Commonwealth. However, Commonwealth Heads of Government expressed concern that although globalisation is creating unprecedented opportunities for wealth creation and for sustainable development, its benefits are not shared equally. Macroeconomic and social policies and programmes have different and unequal impacts on women and men. Heads of Government recognised that the greatest challenge is “how to channel the forces of globalisation for the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of human beings to lead to fulfilling lives” (*Fancourt Declaration on Globalisation and People-Centred Development*, Durban, 1999).

## **5.1 Gender and Poverty**

The Commonwealth PoA and the UN Beijing Platform for Action recognise that gender sensitising all policies and programmes aimed at combating poverty is crucial. This approach promotes equity in the distribution of resources and addresses the particular situation of women who constitute the majority of people living in poverty. Opportunities could be created through access to knowledge, technology, goods and services, capital and markets. There should be a ‘balanced’ mix of private sector-led initiatives, and political and social commitment to the elimination of poverty and achievement of international development targets such as gender equality in education by 2005, reduction by half in the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and national strategies for sustainable development by 2005.

In many countries, expenditure on education, health and employment programmes has been cut as a result of economic recession. Privatisation has also led to cuts in the provision of basic services. The erosion of public services often has harsher implications for women than men. In countries with a high rate of HIV/AIDS infections, the situation is compounded further.

### ***Impacts of Macroeconomic Programmes on Gender Equality***

**Grenada** reports that its Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) resulted in greater negative impacts on women than men in some areas. The government slashed its budget in the areas of supplies and services, producing a lack of essential health services and supplies in schools. More women than men in unclassified fields or at the lower end of the employment spectrum lost jobs or were not appointed. However, the SAP enabled the country to adopt more prudent fiscal management and to access international development resources, including funding for women-specific activities.

**Kenya** indicates that despite liberalisation and linkages with regional and international markets, numerous challenges remain. These include the lack of a regulatory framework and poor infrastructure, intellectual property rights issues, weak product design, packaging and export marketing, lack of access to new or appropriate technology and stiffer global competition for local products, affecting mainly small scale enterprises in which women predominate.

Many governments recognise that reducing poverty is possible but achieving this will require a more comprehensive approach that directly addresses the needs of the poor in three important areas: opportunity, empowerment and security. Gender issues need to be addressed in a more systematic manner. Policy-makers should take into account women’s multiple roles, ensure their access to critical resources such as education, health, land, and credit, and address the barriers to women’s empowerment.

### ***Gender and Poverty Reduction Programmes***

**Botswana** has adopted a series of poverty reduction strategies involving the informal sector, e.g., the Self Help Housing Agency, Arable Lands Development Programme and Services to Livestock Owners in Communal Areas. Through its safety nets, Botswana was able to cope with the worst drought crisis ever

experienced by the country. It has performed admirably in reducing poverty, yet these gains will be severely tested under the onslaught of HIV/AIDS.

**Kenya** has developed a *Poverty Eradication Plan (1999–2015)* that addresses the gender issues relating to poverty in different sectors. The preparation of the Plan involved a broad range of partners, including National Women's Machineries, women's organisations, community based organisations, NGOs, as well as sector ministries. The Plan is being implemented under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which also has a special *Gender Thematic Group* to ensure that gender issues are addressed and funded within the mid-term expenditure framework. Sensitisation and training activities for women's groups, credit facilities and grants, and training for rural women in agricultural production are essential components.

**Grenada** has conducted a series of focus group discussions identifying issues affecting women. They have involved government ministries, the HIV/AIDS Taskforce, youth and women's organisations, farmers, urban and rural organisations, as well as the private sector. A national training programme was undertaken to prepare people to move into non-traditional jobs or new areas to overcome poverty.

**St Lucia** is implementing a Social Recovery Programme to cushion the effects of the decline in the banana industry. Rural women, children and older persons are the most vulnerable. The James Belgrave Fund provides financing for micro-enterprises in depressed communities. Human Development Centres provide training in technical and vocational skills as well as child day-care facilities to increase women's access to better opportunities to overcome poverty. A National Skills Development Centre provides skills assessment, career counselling and job placement services. An innovative Programme for the Regularisation of Unplanned Development allows public squatters the opportunity to own their homes.

Debt relief contributes to poverty alleviation. In December 2000, **Canada** announced a debt moratorium on debt service payments from Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPCs). As of 1 January 2001, Canada stopped receiving debt service payments from HIPCs that are committed to poverty reduction and good governance. The freed-up resources can be used to pursue growth and poverty reduction strategies. As each country reaches its completion point under the Enhanced HIPC Initiative, its debts will be officially written off. Canada has also written off all ODA debts to HIPC countries and has provided all of its ODA in grant form since 1986. The federal budget of February 2000 made available \$175 million for grants to the debt relief trust funds at the IMF and World Bank, bringing Canada's total contributions to about \$215 million.

## **5.2 Gender, Trade and Globalisation**

The social and economic structure of countries is changing with the advance of globalisation. There is increased participation of women in the labour market leading to greater economic autonomy. There is growing awareness of the need to reconcile employment and family responsibilities and introduce measures such as maternity and paternity leave, child and family care services and benefits. However, the barriers to economic empowerment faced by women, including remunerated and unremunerated work, still persist.

Women form a vital part of the labour force in sectors directly or indirectly linked to the global economy, in industries like offshore banking and processing of food and textiles. In **Australia**, women currently account for 35 percent of the country's 1.3 million small business operators – an important sector of the productive economy. The prestigious 'Telstra' Business Women's Awards scheme, sponsored by the government and private sector, recognises the outstanding achievements of women from all sectors and levels of enterprise.

New forms of employment are being created. However, these are sometimes achieved at the price of job security. The distinction between working, non-working and unemployed people is no longer clear. This leaves groups vulnerable to

exploitation in the workplace without adequate coverage in existing social safety nets.

**Bangladesh** enjoys export quotas from two main trading partners, the USA and Canada. In addition, it has preferential access at zero tariffs under the European Union Generalised System of Preference (GSP). Bangladesh now faces stiff challenges with the phasing out of the Multi-Fibre Arrangement quota system in 2004. The garment sector is a major employer of women. The implications of globalisation will hit the garment sector hard and, as a consequence, will impact on the estimated 1.6 to 1.8 million workforce, 80 per cent of whom are women. Women working in the garment industry are usually young and unmarried, have low skills and literacy levels, and are often recent migrants from the rural regions with the majority from the landless class. They have a higher unemployment and turnover rate than men. Women also form a significant portion of the large informal labour force. The percentage of female-headed households has increased from 7.6 to 9.7 per cent: over 14.4 per cent are landless and 13.9 per cent have less than 0.01 to 0.04 of an acre (Household Expenditure Surveys, 1991–92 and 1995–96, BBS).

The Commonwealth Secretariat took part in an Asian regional policy seminar (Kathmandu, 2000), focused on issues of 'invisibility' and 'exploitation' faced by 50 million home-based workers in South Asia, 80 per cent of whom are women. The *Kathmandu Declaration* prioritises the need for specific national policies and Plans of Action by governments to ensure the basic rights of home-based workers. These cover basic standards in protection and remuneration, skills development and literacy programmes, social security assistance funds, access to markets, and the collection of statistics and data necessary for policy development. The Secretariat, in line with the mandate of the Sixth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers of Women's Affairs, will work with Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Networking (WIEGO) to develop information packs and provide policy support regarding the informal sector.

#### **Women Entrepreneurs**

*Talking Beads* was launched in 1997 in **South Africa**. The business enterprise was the brainchild of one woman who saw the need to mobilise rural women – the majority of whom were poor and live below the poverty line - to create products using the traditional African 'beading' art form and make a success of it. Two thousand women are now involved in making beaded cultural artefacts for sale in South Africa and for export. The enterprise has enabled women to acquire business skills, as well as provide links between South Africa's diverse and rich cultures. The income has helped many women build homes, educate children and provide a better quality of life for their families.

*'I knew how to sew curtains and clothes – but this trade gave me no returns. I cannot read or write. I have been in training for 6 months ... through beading I have money for my children's food and clothes every month. I don't have to beg anymore' (Agnes Malukela)*

#### **350 Cypriot Women set up a Women's Co-Operative Bank**

350 Cypriot women recently established the Women's Co-operative Bank, with a vision of improving women's living standards. The Bank, a first for **Cyprus**, aims: (i) to enhance the creation and promotion of women-owned businesses; (ii) to co-operate with the government as well as other institutions in **Cyprus** and abroad to access funds for project activities; (iii) to carry out research on women-related issues such as 'Entrepreneurial activities undertaken by women in Cyprus' and 'Start-ups created by women'; (iv) to create a business 'incubator' for companies launched by women; and (v) to organise seminars and workshops to support and promote economic advancement of women in business.

As a member of the Co-operative Movement, WCB is linked to the system's computerised network. The Bank has also developed extensive links with policy-makers in the public and private sectors, relevant institutions, professional bodies, European Commission Programmes and the National Women's Machinery. As a non-profit institution, the Bank does not seek to compete with other credit institutions but plans to use members' deposits and other capital to provide an 'enabling' environment, 'fill the gaps' for women in

business and support them in various ways such as strategic business counselling and know-how, marketing intelligence, seminars and training, as well as provide loan subsidies.

### **5.3 Education as a cornerstone of gender equality**

The PoA recognises that education and building a human resource base are central to sustained national development. Education, poverty and the empowerment of women are intrinsically linked. Education enables women to take advantage of economic opportunities and resources. Without education, women cannot play a full part in development, and effectively contribute to political decision-making and peace building processes to transform their lives in the long term.

The theme of the 14th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 2000 was 'Education for Our Common Future'. **The Halifax Statement on Education in the Commonwealth** agreed by Education Ministers states "all people have a right of access to lifelong learning". It recognised that "education empowers the poor, safeguards the vulnerable, promotes economic growth and social justice, promotes the value of democracy and human rights, good governance, and tolerance". It pointed to the fact that "110 million school-age children, of which two-thirds are girls, do not have access to education, and that over 800 million adults, of which 60 per cent are women, remain illiterate" and that "4 of the 9 high population nations with the lowest education enrolment and literacy levels are Commonwealth countries".

#### ***Focusing on Strategic Aspects of the Education Process***

Open and distance learning methodologies offer opportunities to redress women and girls' lack of educational opportunities. By making learning available at times and places suitable to the particular needs of the student, distance education can overcome many of the obstacles faced by girls and women trying to access conventional education systems, especially in the small states. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) focuses its distance-education activities on open schooling, non-formal education and teacher education.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has published two manuals on *Gender Mainstreaming in Education*, and *Gender Mainstreaming in Science and Technology*, as part of the Gender Management System Series, which examine the major gender issues in Education, and Science and Technology (for example the 'leaky S & T pipeline') and provide examples of good practice and tools.

Education Ministers renewed their call for enhanced educational access for girl-children and women and promotion of gender equity and technical education. They also recognised the need to continue addressing gender concerns in educational systems, paying attention to both girls and boys. **Trinidad and Tobago** has set up a Male Support Unit within the Gender Affairs Division, which engages in a series of gender training activities with students, particularly young men. **Belize's** Women's Department held numerous workshops and courses covering topics such as sexual harassment, conflict resolution, gender awareness, self-esteem, HIV/AIDS and other health issues, as well as basic counselling. Workshops were held on 'Masculinity and Gender'. A public education and awareness campaign mostly using radio and television programmes and a study on discriminatory practices in the education system are being undertaken.

### **5.4 Progress in Health**

Health is a critical sector for the empowerment of women. In some countries, women's access to health services has declined through cuts in public spending. In addition, the current global HIV/AIDS pandemic affected an estimated 36.1 million

people by the end of 2000, most of them at the peak of their reproductive and productive years, with some 25 million in sub-Saharan Africa (*UNAIDS/WHO data, December 2000*). A new challenge reported by countries is the brain drain of health workers. Health sectors in developing countries are losing trained nurses, whom they so desperately need, to developed countries.

#### ***Gender Equality in the Health Sector***

**Bangladesh** recognises that a more holistic approach is required at various stages of the life cycle of women and men. It has taken major steps to ensure that primary health care is available for poor and disadvantaged communities, especially targeting women and children. Its Gender Equity Strategy for the Health Sector will be an integral part of the Health Population Sector Programme Strategy Phase 2 (2003–2007). It puts special emphasis on sex-disaggregated health data and engendering the budgetary process of the health sector. A National Nutrition Project emphasises women's special nutritional needs. It still faces challenges, for example in ensuring that critical maternal care services are accessed in order to reduce maternal mortality rates. Raising awareness about HIV/AIDS will be a major challenge for the future. A Gender Strategy for Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) has already been finalised. This will form a key aspect of the national programme.

### **5.5 Gender and HIV/AIDS**

HIV/AIDS is a major challenge, which severely affects women's dignity and lives. It impacts negatively on national development particularly through the loss of human resources, and the disruption of social and economic systems. To date, the gender dimensions have been largely ignored with grave consequences for society. HIV/AIDS is an issue that should be addressed in terms of how and why it affects women and men differently. The full impact of the pandemic must therefore take into account the quantitative and qualitative impacts on households, communities and productive sectors.

Country reports suggest that while most national HIV/AIDS Plans incorporate gender issues and recognise the differential impacts on women and men, many agencies continue to address HIV/AIDS without sufficient analysis of its gender implications. Problems still to be overcome include social, cultural and traditional practices and attitudes, higher levels of poverty among women and lack of economic independence. The issue is not just that in many countries, more of those affected are women and that the rate of infection for teenage girls is four to five times higher than that for their male counterparts, but that the existing gender relations between men and women is actually fuelling the spread of the disease.

#### ***Addressing Gender and HIV/AIDS***

**Belize's** National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS prioritises the following three areas: attitudes and practices, intersectoral co-ordination and social services, as well as gender issues. The programme identifies prevention and intervention services, public education and awareness campaigns, a National Committee for HIV/AIDS as well as subcommittees in districts, and an outreach programme for people living with AIDS and their families. HIV/AIDS is a central component in all Domestic Violence Workshops.

**Cameroon** reports that one out of every nine sexually active Cameroonians carries the virus and that women are more vulnerable than men with a ratio of 3:2 contracting the virus. The Ministry of Women's Affairs is currently drafting a sector-based Strategic Plan. During 5–7 March 2001, to mark International Women's Day, a series of sensitisation programmes, as part of the three-year Awareness Campaign, were undertaken in all Women Empowerment Centres and most secondary and high schools in Yaoundé. The National Strategic Plan Against AIDS was launched in September 2000.

**Ghana's** media sensitisation and awareness raising programme profiles people living with HIV/AIDS, and important personalities such as chiefs and sport leaders. This method has brought the reality of the disease to the general public. A strong decentralised mechanism for combating HIV/AIDS will be established through

mainstreaming the HIV/AIDS programme into the plans of Ministries, Departments and Agencies and the 'scaling up' of the District Response Initiative currently being implemented in ten districts.

**Kenya's** National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan (2000–2005) uses a multisectoral approach, addressing the roles and responsibilities of a broad array of stakeholders, privatising some activities and linking the Plan with the government budget. Stakeholders include NGOs, community-based organisations, the private sector, learning institutions, parents and religious organisations. The Poverty Eradication Plan and the National Development Plan also recognise gender and HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Education has developed a special programme on HIV/AIDS and the girl child.

**Seychelles**, with 121 HIV cases, including 6 children, echoes the extreme vulnerability, constraints and challenges facing small states. The national HIV/AIDS programme places emphasis on the critical role of men and the need for continuous education. Its health system provides tests and distribution of condoms free of charge.

At their meeting in New Delhi (2000), Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs stressed that HIV/AIDS prevention policies, programmes and strategies should be culturally and gender responsive as well as target 'risk' groups. Such HIV/AIDS programmes will prove to be a cost-effective method and will produce significant long-term cost savings in terms of productive capacity.

*Gender Mainstreaming in Health and HIV/AIDS*, a Gender Management System (GMS) manual, aims at developing a multisectoral gender-sensitive approach for addressing HIV/AIDS as a development issue. It will demonstrate ways of addressing the epidemic holistically, involving all stakeholders at government and community levels, as well as promoting the sharing of good practices. Another Commonwealth Secretariat publication, *From Tragedy to Hope*, documents the positive strategies used by women in their daily lives to deal with HIV/AIDS. The 'Positive Living Ambassadors Initiative' launched as part of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, is a good example of empowering young people living with HIV/AIDS to become powerful agents for change. Another Commonwealth publication, *The Global HIV/AIDS Emergency*, examines large-scale issues, including blood vaccine research, governmental strategies to contain the epidemic, media influence over the public and how the epidemic can undermine societies economically and socially. It gives special consideration to how communities living with the highest HIV incidence can be organised to combat HIV/AIDS.

## **6. The Way Ahead**

The universal goal of economic development is inexorably tied to the social, political and economic empowerment of women. The Commonwealth, as a global association of 54 countries, brings a diversity of voices, experiences and strategies in setting the agenda for gender equality. It has the potential to mobilise the necessary political will and resources to contribute to a world in which women and men are respected and valued as equal partners in establishing common values of social justice, equity, democracy and respect for human rights. Within such a framework of values, women and men will work in collaboration and partnership to ensure people-centred sustainable development and peace for all nations.

Initiatives undertaken by Commonwealth member countries presented in this paper demonstrate clearly that governments, opposition parties, non-governmental and community-based organisations, the media, civil society in its broadest sense, the private sector and international agencies hold the 'keys' to the attainment of gender equality.

The Commonwealth Secretariat itself has made significant progress in implementing the PoA. Its development work, undertaken in collaboration with member governments, seeks to accelerate progress and maximise efforts for the achievement of gender-sensitive governance, policy-making and development programming in the new millennium.