

## Gender Integration



Commonwealth commitment to true equality through gender integration has deepened with the implementation of the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development. This Plan was first unveiled at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, and subsequently endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government.

At the Plan of Action's core is empowerment and the vision of a time when men and women will have equal opportunities at all stages of their lives. It outlines a gender development policy and strategy to the year 2000 which governments can adapt to their national requirements, and it emphasises monitoring of gender concerns in all areas and at all levels.

The Plan of Action specified 15 areas for priority action for governments. These include the establishment of Gender Management Systems, the mainstreaming of gender issues in all national policies, action for women's participation in decision-making, and support for women's organisations.

### Putting the Plan into Action

The Commonwealth underlined the importance it placed on the Plan of Action by calling a special meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs on the eve of the world conference in Beijing in September 1995, to discuss a common strategy which included the presentation of the Plan of Action. The meeting was attended by representatives from 41 member governments, and observers from the UN, regional and other Commonwealth organisations.

The ministers agreed to use the Commonwealth's consensual approach and its core values of democracy, good governance, human rights and sustainable development to advance international consensus on the UN Platform for Action which the world conference was to discuss. The Plan of Action was presented by the Commonwealth Secretary-General as the Commonwealth's special contribution to the Beijing conference, and it contributed towards the eventual approval of the UN Platform for Action. The Secretariat also organised, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association, a colloquium at the Non-Governmental Organisations' Forum which ran parallel to the Beijing conference, on the domestic application of international norms relevant to women's human rights.

Two months after the world conference, Commonwealth Heads of Government, meeting in Auckland, endorsed the Plan of Action, and called on governments to implement its recommendations. In November 1996, the Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, suggested further strategies for accelerating the rate of implementation, and discussed Commonwealth priorities within the international agenda set out at Beijing.

#### AN ENGENDERED SECRETARIAT

The Secretariat continues to mainstream gender concerns into its own operations, as required under the Plan of Action. A Gender Steering Committee, set up in 1995 and chaired by a Deputy Secretary-General, oversees the process of integration, and Gender Focal Points in every division monitor implementation. Changes in organisation and attitude are backed by a sustained review of practices and procedures to make them more gender-sensitive. A new Equal Employment Opportunities policy incorporates gender concerns, among others. The special measures the Secretariat is required to put in place cut across all its activities, and aim to ensure that its programme staff, consultants and experts have the capacity for gender analysis and gender planning, and that all Secretariat activities are engendered.

The ministers also discussed Gender Management Systems, gender integration in politics and conflict resolution, integration of gender concerns into macroeconomic policies, and the human rights of women and the girl-child. Their recommendations defined the issues to be addressed in the next three years.

### **Gender Management Systems**

At the centre of the Plan of Action is the concept of member governments instituting and implementing Gender Management Systems (GMS) which will, among other things, enable countries to identify policies, mechanisms and procedures for integrating gender at every level of planning, implementation and evaluation. The ministers said such systems would promote a more equitable distribution of resources and power-sharing between men and women.

A draft GMS Module has been developed, comprising a handbook and resource kit which includes guidelines for engendering governments' sectoral policies and programmes. This was put before the ministers in 1996; they requested that the Secretariat provide technical assistance to governments to establish GMS by developing or updating national gender policies and programmes for action, managing these plans and introducing appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

A number of countries have already requested assistance in setting up GMS – Antigua and Barbuda, and St Kitts and Nevis in the Caribbean; Ghana, Sierra Leone and Uganda in Africa; and Cyprus in the Mediterranean. After the GMS Module has been tested, it will be revised and finalised, taking care to ensure that while the principle of mainstreaming gender across national policies is preserved, any unique national circumstances will be respected, and special needs and concerns of individual countries responded to.

*Skills for women ... a factory worker in Malaysia*





*Credit for women ... the Secretariat, through the CFTC, sponsored training on the management of credit schemes for rural women in Africa. One of the success stories was the Njangi credit and saving scheme for women in Cameroon*

## Women's Human Rights

The promotion and protection of the human rights of women and the girl-child has continued to be of great concern to the Commonwealth – at their 1996 meeting in Port of Spain, ministers called on the Secretariat to strengthen the judiciary's capacity to respond to violence against women and girls.

To support governments in their implementation of international human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Secretariat has organised a series of judicial colloquia on the application, at national level, of international human rights conventions which have special relevance to women's rights.

In 1996, Chief Justices and senior judges from Asia and the South Pacific met in Hong Kong to consider this issue. They paid particular attention to judicial attitudes and responses to violence against women, and endorsed the Victoria Falls Declaration on Principles for the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women, adopted at the African Judicial Colloquium held in Zimbabwe in 1994. At the last colloquium of the series, held for the Caribbean in Guyana in 1997, judges agreed on the Georgetown Recommendations and Strategies for Action on the Human Rights of Women and the Girl-Child through the Judiciary.

Included among the 22 Georgetown Recommendations were the following: states that become parties to international human rights treaties should publicise the fact widely and ensure that copies of the treaties and other relevant documentation are available; gender sensitive training and information about women's human rights should be provided to the judiciary, lawyers, law-enforcement agencies, and community leaders; states should establish specially trained units in the police force for the investigation of offences by and against women and girls, the functions of which should include counselling for those who have been victims of abuse.

To follow-up on the implementation of these Recommendations, the judges formed a Commonwealth Reference Group comprising eight Chief Justices and senior judges from all regions of the Commonwealth.

These colloquia have helped the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association in the formation of a network of judges who are sensitive to the rights of women and the girl-child.

### **Macroeconomic Policies**

In early 1996, the Secretariat initiated a programme to assist governments in integrating gender concerns into national budgetary policies and procedures in the course of economic reform. A multi-pronged approach is being used to provide technical assistance to policy-makers in ministries of finance, economic planning, women's affairs and other key ministries on how to integrate gender concerns into national budgetary processes using policy options developed by the Secretariat.

The policy options include gender-aware policy evaluation of public expenditure, and gender-disaggregated analysis of the impact of the budget on time use, which looks at the relationship between the national budget and the way time is used in households for unpaid work such as caring for the family, the sick and community members, cooking, cleaning, teaching children and so on.



*Rural women, such as this one in Bangladesh, have benefited from Secretariat-supported schemes in computer-based agriculture management*

### **Politics and Conflict Resolution**

Women are much less well-represented than men in national parliaments and government cabinets. Enhancing women's role in politics and all decision-making processes and the engendering of the political agenda were therefore regarded as critical issues by the Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs meeting in 1996. At their meeting, they proposed a number of interrelated strategies to achieve gender balance – including aiming for a Commonwealth target of women forming 30 per cent of people at decision-making levels in the political, public and private sectors by the year 2005.

The ministers also stressed the importance of increasing the participation of women in the ministries concerned with war, peace and refugee matters, as well as ensuring that women envoys are included in peace initiatives.

The Secretariat organised two regional symposia in Southern Africa and the Caribbean for Women in Local Government in May 1996 and June 1997. Participants identified strategies and mechanisms for



increasing women's role in local government as well as the process of establishing networks among women in local government. The strategies focused on information exchange between women's organisations and councillors, participating in regional and international symposia, and documenting and sharing cases of good practice.

*Engendering local government ... a workshop in St Lucia in 1997 made recommendations on increasing women's participation in local government, helping women to progress from local to national politics, and integrating issues of importance to women in local government policies and planning*