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GENDER INTEGRATION: TOWARDS TRUE EQUALITY

Although some progress has been made towards achieving gender equality, the reality for most women still falls considerably short of the vision expressed by Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1993 of 'a world in which women enjoyed their full rights and were equal partners in shaping the economic, political and social development of their countries'.

In early 1995, a new Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development was formulated, drafted first by an Expert Group set up in 1993 by the Secretary-General, then circulated to Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, and agreed in principle in June 1995 by heads of women's bureaux at a pan-Commonwealth meeting. This Plan is the Commonwealth's special contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in September 1995.

The 1995 Plan of Action goes beyond requiring equal opportunities for women. At its core is the determination to accelerate women's empowerment.

It presents a vision in which 'the Commonwealth works towards a world in which women and men have equal rights and opportunities at all stages of their lives to express their creativity in all fields of human endeavour, and in which women are respected and valued as equal and able partners in establishing values of social justice, equity, democracy and respect for human rights'.

The Plan formulates a gender and development policy and strategy to the year 2000 as a major step forward to put the Commonwealth at the forefront of international efforts to achieve gender equality. It provides a package of interrelated objectives and actions in both the political and socio-economic spheres from which governments can choose the approach that best suits their national requirements.

Most significantly, the plan shifts the emphasis of action from 'Women and Development' to 'Gender and Development', setting gender integration as a new direction, to include advocacy, planning and



Training women trainers in resource development in Dhaka, Bangladesh

monitoring of gender concerns in all areas and at all levels of government. The Plan aims to strengthen institutional arrangements and processes that are necessary for both governments and the Secretariat to implement it, setting out interrelated priority issues of special concern to the Commonwealth. The aim is equality and equity of outcomes for women.

The Plan's success will depend both on the commitment of member governments and on the effectiveness of gender management systems in each country. The Plan requires governments to put in place national strategies for implementation and urges the strengthening of national women's machineries—be they women's bureaux, ministries responsible for women's affairs, or dedicated units or officers responsible for mainstreaming gender.

The Secretariat will provide a range of technical assistance to help governments establish gender management systems and facilitate the initial stages of gender mainstreaming and management. The Plan also requires that the Secretariat adopt special measures to strengthen its capacity to provide gender-inclusive and women-specific functional and technical assistance to governments. It is also required to become itself an example of good practice. The Plan will be monitored through the Commonwealth's special reporting and consultative processes.

The Secretariat has already begun implementing sections of the 1995 Plan by ensuring that gender issues are incorporated into all divisional programmes and activities. These are described elsewhere in this Report. Gender-planning workshops for senior staff designated as divisional gender focal points have also been carried out.

Women's Rights as Human Rights

The Secretariat promotes the implementation of international legal instruments which contribute to equality of women's human rights, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on

Elimination of Violence against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In collaboration with the Government of Zimbabwe, an Africa Regional Judicial Colloquium was organised in August 1994 at Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, where senior judges considered the domestic application of international and regional human rights norms as they specifically relate to women. This was the first Commonwealth meeting of judges devoted to the human rights of women. At its conclusion, participants issued the Victoria Falls Declaration of Principles on the Promotion of the Human Rights of Women.

The Secretariat also helped the Government of Namibia organise in June 1995 in Windhoek a national seminar for magistrates and judges on the domestic application of international legal instruments which promote women's rights as human rights. Gender issues were also incorporated into the agenda and final report of a pan-Commonwealth workshop on Democracy, Human Rights and Development held in June 1995 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Women in Democracy, Decision-making and Politics

At the Cyprus CHOGM, Heads of Government reiterated their belief that the Commonwealth should work towards a world in which women enjoyed their full rights. At their meeting earlier in 1993, Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs had agreed that Cabinet and party members should be sensitised to women's democratic rights and to the barriers which needed to be removed.

Among the Secretariat responses are the development of a handbook on *Women in Politics: Issues, Problems and Strategies for Action*, focusing on the experiences of successful women politicians at parliament and Cabinet level. Case studies have been drawn from 11 Commonwealth developing and developed countries on obstacles encountered by women as they tried to enter politics, and the strategies and mechanisms which enabled more women to enter parliament or to improve their contribution in parliament.

Women as Environmental Managers

In many developing countries, women are directly dependent on the natural resource base and sustainable natural resources for the survival of their families. They are therefore the natural environmental managers of parts of the Earth.

In recognition of this, Heads of Government and Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs urged member governments in 1993 to implement Agenda 21, the Earth Summit Programme of Action on Environment and Development, particularly Chapter 24 which focuses on women.

Ministers emphasised that women needed to have access to education and training if they were to be effective as environmental managers.

In 1994/95, the Secretariat continued to develop training materials on women and the conservation of natural resources, a programme initiated in 1989. Trainers' manuals are being developed as a series for Commonwealth regions. *Women and Natural Resource Management: The Caribbean Experience* and two manuals for the Asia and South Pacific regions will be published. In addition, a video has been produced on the life of the Amerindian women in the Iwokrama Rainforest Programme area in Guyana.



Working towards a world in which women and men have equal rights