



The Commonwealth



Commonwealth Women's Forum 2018

Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London, 16 - 18 April 2018

OUTCOME STATEMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH WOMEN'S FORUM
(CWF)

“AN EMPOWERED FUTURE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS”

Preamble

The Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) was held in London, United Kingdom, from 16 to 18 April 2018, and focused on the theme ***An Empowered Future for Women and Girls*** with the ambition of finding ways to accelerate the advancement of gender equality for sustainable development, prosperity and peace for all women and girls in the Commonwealth.

Recognising that despite the concerted efforts to transform the subordinate position of women and girls in many societies and the progress made so far towards gender equality, the advancement of the status of women and girls has been slow and uneven; investment to address the inequalities between women and men in all areas of social, civic, and economic life, including in efforts to address the impact of climate change has been low. The Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) calls on the Commonwealth to lead the world by creating and strengthening an enabling environment for women's empowerment, for a sustainable, secure, prosperous, and fairer society – that is free from violence and coercion, focuses on actions to mainstreams gender in all government programmes, policies and initiatives including gender budgeting.

Acknowledging that women face bias along multiple identity dimensions, including gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and age, we must focus our efforts on those facing multiple disadvantage where progress is slowest. This is a pre-condition for the promotion of women's leadership, economic empowerment and equitable participation in all spheres, which will result in ***an Empowered Future for Women and Girls***.

The CWF congratulates the Government of the United Kingdom for successfully hosting the second Commonwealth Women's Forum, and applaud the Heads for establishing the CWF as a permanent feature preceding the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The CWF applaud the first ever Joint Forum Day held with all four forums – Women's, Youth, People's and Business – which enabled cross-learning and offered an opportunity to agree actions and share best practices that can be carried forward to CHOGM. The CWF requests that the following CHOGM meetings include more joint sessions, especially plenary sessions shared by the Business and Women's Forums.

This Outcome Statement captures the key messages and asks the Heads, the Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations, associated and accredited Commonwealth organisations, businesses, development partners and civil society that featured in Forum discussions. The CWF believes the Commonwealth should act decisively and call on Heads to implement the Outcome Statement of the 2018 CWF. The following recommendations and requests are to the Heads, and will be followed up at the next Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministerial Meeting and CWF.

The CWF requests the Heads to:

1. Accelerate actions to invest, implement and track progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 5, and other international, regional and national instruments

as, to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls in collaboration with strategic partners and the Chair of CHOGM.

2. Build on the global movement to accelerate progress to gender equity and empowerment and to use the Secretariat's convening power to bring together a high profile and visible taskforce of champions made up of both male and female leaders from political, public and private sectors at the national, regional and local levels to champion gender equality and promote women's access to leadership positions across the Commonwealth, and to hold governments and businesses accountable on reaching the global target of 50 per cent representation across all levels of decision-making.
3. Carry out a systemic review and repeal of discriminatory laws and ensure that new laws undergo a gender impact assessment on women's rights and participation in leadership and economy.
4. Invest and increase technical and financial resources for data collection and analysis on the implementation of the SDGs and other international instruments; research; knowledge creation and sharing; and capacity building for women's effective leadership at all levels, and implementation of measures to advance women's participation across sectors.

Women in Leadership

Women's power and decision-making in the political, public and private sectors are essential to achieving gender equality, and is therefore crucial for successful implementation of the SDGs. The absence of women in senior leadership positions and their lack of participation and representation restrict opportunities to create policies that will have a broader impact and greater benefit for the whole of society as a result of the increased gender equality between women and men.

5. The lack of economic security and resulting poverty and women's disproportionate role as care givers are some of the barriers to women's leadership and participation across sectors.
6. *Recommend* that Heads, drawing on Commonwealth good practice and experience, develop practical strategies and legislation that increases women's access to leadership from the grassroots to national and international levels, to enable meaningful political leadership, by women. Call on Heads to commit to working with all political parties and systems to increase the proportion of women candidates. This includes training, sponsorship, mentoring programmes, and access to networks and mentoring programmes such as the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network (ComWLG), with particular attention given to creating opportunities for young women and girls.
7. Violence Against Women in Politics and Elections: *Urge* Heads to promote gender equity in political parties and the selection of candidates, and ensure that models of campaign financing do not discriminate against women. Encourage Election Management Bodies to develop gender sensitive policies.
8. *Call* on Heads to commission an independent review of violence against women in political and public life and in the home and to establish a funded zero-tolerance national policy to prohibit and prevent the specific forms of election-related violence (both in the public and domestic settings, and including online violence) experienced by women voters, women candidates and their teams.

9. *Reiterate* the importance of involving men and boys in changing attitudes, social norms and behaviours to facilitate women's meaningful participation in the political, religious and private sector at all levels.

Women, Peace and Security

10. *Urge* Heads to support the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 through National and Regional Action Plans that incorporate strong accountability mechanisms, sustainable financing and strong disarmament provisions, and ensure stronger links and complementarity to National Counter Terrorism & Counter Violent Extremism strategies.
11. *Call* for more efforts to challenge gender norms and other injustices that contribute to women's oppression and perpetuate conflict and insecurity, and to sensitise and empower women to be actively involved in all stages of conflict mitigation and peace building, from conflict prevention to the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.
12. *Call* for financial support to women's rights organisations and movements including the establishment of a Women's Peace and Security standalone fund within the Commonwealth offering long-term grants to grassroots women's rights organisations to support their work on increasing women's participation in peace and security and in preventing and countering violent extremism, protecting women's rights in conflict, and undertaking relief and recovery processes that meet the needs of women and girls, including their physical and mental health.

Women's Economic Empowerment

Enhancing women's economic empowerment enables women to exercise power over their lives and results in sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The approach of gender-inclusive growth is multi-faceted and requires the ending of discriminatory norms, behaviours and legislation, and gender-based violence, provision of quality education and enabling legislation and regulations which recognise women's disproportionate role as care givers.

There is a role for all levels of government to create enabling environments for economic participation of women and implementing and monitoring actual change.

13. *Educate to Empower: welcome* the commitments made to ensure access to a minimum of 12 years of free quality primary and secondary education, encouraging all Heads to work towards that goal; and calls for extra support to marginalised girls, including girls with disabilities, girls who have dropped out of school, and ensure that they complete secondary education and training through the adoption of appropriate policies, advocacy and strategic partnerships.
14. *Call* on Heads to increase public spending on education in accordance with country context, and urge adherence to the international and regional benchmarks of allocating efficiently at least 4 - 6% of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15 - 20% of total public expenditure to education by all Commonwealth countries
15. *Endorse* the Girls' Education Framework and applaud the creation of the Girls' Education Policy Lab.
16. *Urge* Heads to commit to increasing women's access to and use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology; and ensure women are included in growing the digital economy.

17. *Call* on Heads to promote and support women in economic development from the local to the national level; the Commonwealth can play a key role in underpinning and promoting internal trade and investments, especially for women-owned enterprises, and Commonwealth members can drive economic growth, create jobs, and ensure the prosperity of their citizens.
18. *Call* on business leaders to promote a socially responsible and accountable private sector in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and implementing the UN 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, labour, environmental and health standards, and the Women's Empowerment Principle established by UN Women and the Global Compact; and to support the proposed ILO convention 'Ending Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work'. As change in the private sector is driven by transparency, we also call on business leaders to establish and implement reporting mechanisms to track the progress.
19. *Call* on Heads to create an enabling macroeconomic environment - including adoption of progressive tax regimes, gender responsive budgeting, investment in social infrastructure - promote decent and safe place for work; recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care work; address occupational segregation and the gender pay gap; promote protection against discrimination and a living wage for women in line with international agreements and human rights principles; and introduce and enforce existing legislations on women's access to, and control over land and other productive resources and services.
20. *Call* on Heads to lead global action on developing and implementing gender responsive trade policies and economic development in collaboration with women to ensure that women are able to benefit equally from the opportunities trade brings. Call on Heads to address the systematic barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy, both in the formal and informal sectors including women's access to land, finance and markets, and support investment in women owned businesses. The Commonwealth could harness trade and investment opportunities through initiatives such as the SheTrades and encourage governments and businesses to join the partnership.
21. *Commit* to extending employment regulations and social and legal protection to cover women workers in the formal and informal economy including, inter alia, introduction of universal coverage and access to social protection, not linked to employment contributions.
22. *Call* on Heads to recognise the economic value of unpaid care work.

Women and Climate Change

Recognising that women are instrumental in the solutions; and that women are at the greatest risk of death from climate events and the greatest long term impact on food security, sanitation, life and livelihoods from the slow burn of climate change.

23. *Urge* that the Commonwealth commit to establish a fully resourced Commission directly addressing climate change in the small states as a matter of priority and all other countries in the Commonwealth. Such commission should incorporate business, civil society, religious communities, academia, United Nations programmes, professional bodies, local governments, individuals and all stakeholders.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

While many countries have made progress in adopting legislation to end Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and harmful traditional practices including child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) and

female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), substantive challenges remain in preventing VAWG and in accessing justice and service provision. VAWG is one of the most pervasive human rights violations and has numerous damaging consequences for the welfare of women and girls preventing them from full participation in society. It also affects women and girls' families, their communities and states and, at two (2) per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product (UN Women, 2016), it has significant economic costs.

24. *Recognise* that intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of VAWG, in places and times of conflict; call on Heads to provide technical and financial resources to end VAWG, including through development and implementation of legal reforms and changing social attitudes and structures to ensure justice for survivors.
25. *Further call* on Heads to support the Commonwealth Secretariat to build a coalition of governments, businesses, civil society, human rights and faith-based institutions, communities and individuals to prevent VAWG through the development of multi-sectoral tools, identification of strategies and initiatives to address VAWG, increase obligations on states to adhere to international standards and domestic laws and enhance the accountability and rehabilitation of perpetrators.
26. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Right (SRHR): *Acknowledge* that SRHR for women and girls was featured at CHOGM 2018 for the first time. Note that SRHR are inextricably linked to other relevant universal human rights, ensuring women and adolescent girls are able to lead healthy, empowered and productive lives.
27. *Call* on Heads to implement and uphold comprehensive SRHR for women and young people and ensure that by 2030 they have universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes with relevant data collection, review and follow-up. Ensure adequate health service provision in accordance with WHO guidelines.
28. FGM/C: *Highlight* that 200 million women and girls globally are living with the impacts of FGM/C and a further 3.9 million girls are at risk of being cut every year. Recognise that with projected population growth, more girls will be at risk of FGM/C.
29. *Urge* Heads to take decisive actions to develop, resource and implement holistic national action plans in alignment with the SDGs in order to deliver on the international and Commonwealth commitments to eliminate CEFM and FGM/C. These should include work on education, access to community level resources, legislative and policy frameworks and better data to deliver on commitments to end both practices in alignment with the SDGs and the Kigali Declaration.
30. *Call* for more resources to support the Commonwealth Secretariat to collaborate with relevant stakeholders to consider the complex drivers and data of CEFM and FGM/C to inform strategies and actions, including supporting schemes for women of all ages, and to prioritise early programming to respond to and prevent CEFM and FGM/C, particularly in emergencies and armed conflicts.
31. Human Trafficking: *Highlight* that women and girls are also disproportionately affected by human trafficking, domestic slavery, servitude and child exploitation which is a human rights violation affecting close to 152 million children engaged in child labour, almost half of in its worst forms, while over 40 million people worldwide are trapped in slavery and forced labour; the majority of whom are women and girls.
32. *Urge* strengthening of gender sensitive collaboration and cooperation with governments, businesses, civil society and development partners at the national and international level to

end human trafficking and child exploitation. Encourage endorsement of the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

The CWF, call on Heads to consider the above recommendations, and to focus strongly on implementation, including taking forward actions to address gender and climate change in developing and small states towards realising the **Commonwealth Charter**, the **Commonwealth Blue Charter**, the **2030 Agenda** and achieving *an Empowered Future for Women and Girls*.

18 April 2018