

# Commonwealth Women's Forum

London

16–18 April 2018



The Commonwealth

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE

# Commonwealth Women's Forum

London

16–18 April 2018



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# Foreword



**The second Commonwealth Women’s Forum (CWF) convened in London, UK, from 16 to 18 April 2018 as one of the four forums leading up to the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) sent a strong message that the Commonwealth’s commitment to ensure the rights of women and girls remains high on the agenda of Heads. The Forum further responded to the values and principles set out in the 2013 Commonwealth Charter and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that the rights of half of humanity, including equitable access to opportunities for fulfilling potential, will not be denied.**

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The Commonwealth Women’s Forum, with its theme of ‘An Empowered Future for Women and Girls’, aspired to find ways to accelerate the advancement of gender equality for sustainable development, prosperity, and peace for all women and girls in the Commonwealth. The Forum recognised and applauded the significant trends and progress achieved by governments to advance women’s rights and equitable participation at all levels and across all sectors.

Despite these concerted efforts to transform the subordinate position of women and girls, in many societies changes in the status of women and girls has been slow and uneven. There has been insufficient investment in efforts to address the inequalities between women and men in all areas of social, civic and economic life, including the impact of climate change.

The report encompasses the new Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment 2017–2020 and beyond: 1) women’s economic empowerment 2) women in leadership 3) ending violence against women and girls and 4) gender and climate change. The Forum aimed to accelerate the sustainable development goals and formed the basis for engaging governments, enlightening stakeholders, strengthening partnerships and galvanising business and donors to support the delivery of policy mandates in the Commonwealth.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC  
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth



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# Acronyms

<b>AGM</b>	Annual General Meeting
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
<b>CEFM</b>	Child, early and forced marriage
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>COO</b>	Chief Operating Officer
<b>CPA</b>	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association
<b>CWP</b>	Commonwealth Women's Parliamentarians
<b>CHOGM</b>	Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting
<b>CLGF</b>	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
<b>COL</b>	Commonwealth of Learning
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil society organisations
<b>CSU</b>	Commonwealth Summit Unit (also known as UK – CHOGM Task Force)
<b>CWEIC</b>	Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council
<b>CWF</b>	Commonwealth Women's Forum
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK)
<b>DV</b>	Domestic violence
<b>EIGE</b>	European Institute for Gender Equality
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FGM/C</b>	Female genital mutilation / cutting
<b>FPTP</b>	First past the post
<b>FTSE</b>	Financial Times Stock Exchange
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>GEC-UK</b>	Girls' Education Challenge, UK
<b>GPE</b>	Global Partnership for Education
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Human immunodeficiency virus/Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>ITC</b>	International Trade Centre
<b>LGBTIQ</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersexual or Questioning
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NGO</b>	Non-government organisation



<b>NHRI</b>	National Human Rights Institution
<b>PAIMAN</b>	Pakistan Initiative for Mothers and Newborns
<b>P-CVE</b>	Prevention and countering violent extremism
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>PR</b>	Proportional representation
<b>QC</b>	Queen's Counsel
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SViC</b>	Sexual violence in conflict
<b>SG</b>	Secretary-General
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and medium enterprises
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
<b>SMSG</b>	Special Representative of the Secretary-General (UN)
<b>STDs / STIs</b>	Sexually transmitted diseases and sexually transmitted infections
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>VAWG</b>	Violence against women and girls
<b>VAWIE</b>	Violence against women in election

# Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Women's Forum

## 'An Empowered Future for Women and Girls'

### Preamble

The Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) held in London, United Kingdom, from 16 to 18 April 2018, and focused on the theme, **An Empowered Future for Women and Girls**. The ambition of the Forum was to find 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 has been low in efforts to address the inequalities between women and men in all areas of social, civic, and economic life, including the impact of climate change. The CWF calls on the Commonwealth to lead the world by creating and strengthening an enabling environment for women's empowerment to achieve a sustainable, secure, prosperous and fairer society that is free from violence and coercion and focuses on actions to mainstream 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 disadvantages, where progress is slowest. This is a pre-condition for the promotion of women's leadership, economic empowerment and equitable participation in all spheres.

The CWF congratulates the Government of the United Kingdom for successfully hosting the second Commonwealth Women's Forum, and applauds the Heads for establishing the CWF as a permanent feature preceding the Commonwealth

Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The CWF applauds 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 future CHOGM meetings include more joint sessions, especially plenary sessions shared by the Business and Women's Forums.

This Outcome Statement captures key messages and expectations from the Heads, 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 calls on Heads to implement the following recommendations and requests, which 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 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 on gender equity and empowerment. 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 for 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 the 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; 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 therefore crucial for successful implementation of the SDGs. The absence of women in senior leadership positions, and their lack of participation and representation, restricts 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 among 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 Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and 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, ensure that models of campaign financing do not discriminate against women, and 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, and 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 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 and 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 fund within the

Commonwealth. The proposed stand-alone fund would offer 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 governments at all levels to create enabling environments for economic participation of women and for implementing and monitoring actual change.

13. Educate to empower: *Welcome* the commitments made to ensure access to a minimum 12 years of free quality primary and secondary education, and encourage all Heads to work towards that goal. Calls for extra support to marginalised girls (for example, girls with disabilities and/or girls who have dropped out of school) – to ensure 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 per cent of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15-20 per cent 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 to 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 UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; to implement the **UN 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework**, the International Labour Organization (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 progress.
19. *Call on* Heads to create an enabling macroeconomic environment including adoption of progressive tax regimes, gender responsive budgeting and investment in social infrastructure. Further urge Heads to promote decent and safe work places; 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 legislation 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 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 and all other countries in the Commonwealth, as a matter of priority. Such a commission should incorporate all stakeholders including business, civil society, religious communities, academia, United Nations programmes, professional bodies, local governments and individuals.

## 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 fully participating in society. VAWG also affects the families of women and girls, their communities and states and, at 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 rights (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 programmes 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 child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and female genital mutilation/cutting (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, while over 40 million people worldwide, the majority of them women and girls, are trapped in slavery and forced labour.
  32. *Urge* strengthening of gender sensitive collaboration and co-operation with governments, businesses, civil society and development partners at the national and international levels 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 calls 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 countries and small states towards realising the **Commonwealth Charter**, the **Commonwealth Blue Charter**, and the **2030 Agenda**, and achieving **An Empowered Future for Women and Girls**.

18 April 2018

# Day One: Leadership and Empowerment

## 1.1 Upholding the SDGs

The Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2017–2020 and beyond are aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely: 1) women's economic empowerment 2) women in leadership 3) ending violence against women and girls and 4) gender and climate change. The Keynote Session highlighted the Commonwealth added value in achieving the SDGs gender equality targets by 2030, with a focus on the role of women in leadership in all spheres.

One third of Commonwealth countries has successfully achieved and surpassed the 30 per cent global target of representation in parliaments, cabinets, and provincial and local governments. More action must be taken to achieve parity for women's effective participation in politics, corporate and leadership roles. Towards achieving the Global Goals target of gender equality by 2030, delegates strongly recommended that the Commonwealth take action to increase the representation of women in leadership roles and decision-making positions in the political, public and private sectors.

**Moderator: Zeinab Badawi,**  
International Journalist

The **Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth (SG)**, in her opening remarks, stated that the strengths of the Commonwealth family should be used to empower women and girls. The strength of the Commonwealth lies in the ease with which it can work in each Commonwealth country, particularly because they all have similar systems and institutions, common legal processes and shared language. The 2030 Agenda provides an important platform and pathway to address gender equality, while the Commonwealth was well positioned to link up all the dots. In 2015, the Commonwealth Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to gender equality in line with the 2030 Agenda, highlighting the prevention and elimination of

child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), calling for co-operation across regions and concerted effort at the national level to address these issues. In addition, the SG outlined the Commonwealth Secretariat's four priority focus areas on women's economic empowerment, women in leadership, ending violence against women and girls, and addressing issues on gender and climate change, which were also central to the discussions at the Women's Forum. The SG highlighted the need to improve women's access to financial services (including equitable access to climate financing), recognising women's role in the informal sector and encouraging women entrepreneurs in micro-small and medium sized businesses. She also highlighted the importance of zero tolerance on human trafficking, and ensuring full participation of women and girls in education. The SG reported that there was a strong correlation between improving the capacity of women entrepreneurs and women in leadership, which were critical to gender equality. She also noted that women's leadership in the private sector in the Commonwealth was comparatively low, at below the 30 per cent benchmark.

**Rt Hon Amber Rudd, Home Secretary, UK**, outlined the working relationship between the British Government and the Commonwealth, focusing on promoting gender equality, gender mainstreaming and implementation of the SDGs. She addressed the need to promote women and get them more actively involved in politics, and pledged that the UK will continue striving for an equal society where all women - irrespective of race, religion, sexual orientation – are included in decision-making at all levels. She articulated the policy interventions pursued by the Government, which include new legislation to prevent domestic abuse and to protect women, and improvements for women at the work place among them gender pay gap enactment that impose obligations on employers with 250 or more employees to publish information on gender pay gap in their organisations. As the way forward, the UK Government launched strategic





I-r: Zeleca Julien-T&T, Zeinab Badawi-Int'l Journalist, Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC-Commonwealth SG, Rt Hon Amber Rudd-UK, and Amelia Kinahoi Siamomua-Commonwealth, at the Keynote Session of the 2018 Commonwealth Women's Forum, London. UK

vision for gender equality which encapsulates measures to invest in women and girls, decent education and rights to reproductive health. Hon Rudd strongly recommended that the outcome of the Women's Forum should be action oriented. The British Government intends to work in close collaboration with the Commonwealth in promoting gender equality.

**Amelia Kinahoi Siamomua, Head of Gender at the Commonwealth Secretariat** delivered the speech of **Hon Amina J Mohammed, Deputy Secretary General, United Nations**. Hon Mohammed reiterated the ties between the UN and Commonwealth, and their shared values of promoting peace, sustainable development and human rights. She commended the Commonwealth in its efforts to address gender inequality, but pointed out that many challenges remain. She highlighted some progress made in increasing primary education for girls and declining maternal mortality since the 1990s, and urged the Commonwealth to lead the way in promoting policy for universal parental care, quality childcare, and investment in accessible and affordable childhood education. She highlighted success stories in South Africa, Rwanda and some states in India,

and encouraged organisations and development partners to replicate good international practices. She also urged increased investment in gender equality and the promotion of zero tolerance in gender abuse. The UN remains committed to implementing the SDGs, particularly Goal 5, and will continue to work with the Commonwealth to promote gender equality.

**Zeleca Julien, Entrepreneur and Board Member from Trinidad and Tobago** shared her personal experience and upbringing, of how her abusive father modelled her choices as a feminist, having witnessed the suffering of her mother as a single parent. Black women are always under pressure to be recognised, especially in communities with limited opportunities that are not conducive for good upbringing. She urged governments, and business and civil society leaders to empower women irrespective of their race, religion and sexual orientation. She also called for increased support for women and girls, LGBT rights and enactment of cultural reforms for the promotion of gender equality.



## 1.2 Women in Leadership

Women's power and decision-making in the political, public and private sectors are essential to achieving gender equality, and are therefore crucial for successful implementation of the SDGs. The absence of women in senior leadership positions and their lack of participation and representation restricts opportunities to create policies that will have a broader benefit for the whole of society through increased gender equality for women and men. The latest research shows that in 2018:

- The percentage of women in leadership positions in the private sector of the Commonwealth has risen to 20 per cent from 14.5 per cent in 2015
- The percentage of women on boards has crept up from 23 per cent in 2015 to 25 per cent
- The percentage of women in cabinets has not changed since 2015 and stands at 17 per cent

To accelerate progress, the session centred on identifying strategies that have worked and lessons learned from the Commonwealth.

### Moderator: Dr Jo Cribb, Chief Executive, New Zealand Book Council

The session centred on reviewing what works, progress achieved and how to continue moving the agenda for women's leadership forward. In her address **Helen Clark, Former PM of New Zealand**, reflected on her political career, as well as the eight years she worked at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to support women around the world. Despite all the efforts, the number of women in leadership remains rueful at just 5.2 per cent of heads of government and 22.3 per cent of members of parliament. The annual gender gap report indicates it will take 99 years to reach gender parity in parliament. Women should continue to battle for independence and opportunities for women's access to quality and affordable reproductive and health services. The gender agenda should be included in all political summits, including CHOGM, and women should get the support they need to become leaders, in all Commonwealth countries. The importance of role models was showcased in the example of New Zealand having three female prime ministers in the last 20 years, which sends a strong message to young women. However, gender stereotypes



l-r: Advocate Mary-Ann Ooi Suan Kim-Malaysia, Rt Hon Helen Clark-New Zealand, Dr Jo Cribb-New Zealand, Brenda Trenowden-UK and Lady (Kitty) Chisholm-UK, at the Women in Leadership plenary session

and prejudices continue to hold women back. Every political office should support the tripartite roles of women. Prime Minister Jacinda Adern was subjected to inappropriate questioning during the political campaign about the likelihood of her having children while in office. Moreover, the 'first past the post' (FPTP) electoral system, which negatively impacts on women's participation, is the worst one for women trying to break into politics. It is also the most widely used electoral model in the Commonwealth. The big change for New Zealand was a reform of the electoral system to make it more collaborative, instead of quotas. This crucially assured gender parity for all women - migrant women, minorities, indigenous, LGBT.

**Lady (Kitty) Chisholm, FRSA, COO and Co-Founder Boardwalk Leadership, UK** highlighted the need for behavioural and cultural change to achieve gender parity in leadership positions. Reform should start with legislative changes, implementing women only shortlists, and public and personal commitments from top leadership. Accountability and building solidarity are of crucial importance to ensure women no longer feel like second-class citizens. Further, it is necessary to recognise and capitalise on the achievements of Rwandan women who hold 64 per cent of seats in the lower house making Rwanda the number one country for women in politics. The research project, 'Closing the Gender Leadership Gap: Benchmarking women's leadership across the Commonwealth', showed the Commonwealth is making progress, but at a slow pace. The research presented examples of innovative initiatives to advance women's representation and participation, such as the 30 percent Club. Sponsorship for young women and role models of women leaders are aspirations for women in the pipeline and interested in taking up leadership roles. Two New Zealand women were interviewed as part of the research, sharing the example and influence of Helen Clark's leadership resulted in their taking up leadership positions.

**Mary-Ann Ooi Suan Kim, Advocate of Malaysia**, shared the experience of women in positions of senior leadership in Malaysia, which stands at 19 per cent. The Prime minister of Malaysia is supportive of the voluntary 30 per cent target for women on

boards. To accelerate progress, the Malaysian government allocated resources to train women in leadership skills, and in 2012 over 1000 women received training. Often male employees feel threatened by female bosses. Overtime, with quality mentoring and new opportunities, women are moving forward and the old-boys' clubs are being slowly dismantled. Other initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality includes as a requirement, the provision of childcare facilities in new office buildings. Moreover, by the end of 2018, all government linked companies and statutory bodies should have a minimum of 30 per cent women on their boards. Strategies to advance change involve legislative reform and mandatory targets. Initiatives such as the 20 percent Club and the Malaysian code of corporate governance launched in 2016, mandates the top 100 companies on the Malaysian Stock Exchange to disclose their policies. Naming and shaming is another option being currently considered by the PM and the Minister for Women. Shareholder activism is gaining momentum and having an effect, for example— during annual general meetings (AGMs), shareholders now enquire how the companies are fulfilling the 30 per cent target.

**Brenda Trenowden, Global Chair of the 30 percent Club and Australia and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ)**, welcomed participation of men in this session. She highlighted that women's leadership is not a women's issue and that she hopes that during the next CHOGM discussions on this topic will be included in the programme of the Business Forum. The 30 percent Club is a global campaign to have 30 per cent women in senior leadership through targets. In 2010, a target of 30 per cent was set up for the FTSE 100 - the biggest companies in the UK by boards – and had leaders signing up to these voluntary/persuasive targets. The campaign focused on the business case of why it is better to have more women senior leaders including the positive impact on the economy and individual businesses. This resulted in an increase from 12.5 per cent to 26 per cent of women senior leaders and the goal of having 30 per cent of women in senior leadership positions by 2020. Although the 30 Per cent Club prefers to work constructively with companies, sometimes strong and mandatory measures are required to realise change. When the FTSE 350 companies were invited to sign-up, the

CEOs were also informed that the *Sunday Times* was to publish a list of companies that had and had not yet signed-up to the voluntary/persuasive targets. Evidently, this measure of open disclosure culminated in making companies understand the 'business case' for women business leaders. Currently, 36 FTSE-100 CEOs have signed up for the campaign. The 30 per cent Club is monitoring and measuring progress.

Importantly, it is necessary to recognise the role of the media in promoting gender equality. Recent coverage on the issues of women on boards, reporting on the gender pay gap, the '#metoo' campaign and others, have clearly promoted women's leadership as a prominent and important issue. Apart from CEOs and chairs of Boards, the 30 Per cent Club, has a 32-member investor group comprised of pension funds, big assets managers and others, worth more than £11 trillion in assets. Looking at the long-term financial perspective for companies, these investors clearly understand that leadership gender parity is better for business as a stewardship and governance issue. These investors have been known to challenge CEOs on why they have an all-male executive team, and in specific circumstances have voted against companies at the AGM that have not followed the ethos of gender parity. These methods have proved effective and powerful in putting companies under the spotlight. Therefore, relevant stakeholders, including the public, have a responsibility to hold companies to account and to track their progress. However, quotas may be imposed in situations where targets are not effective. Markedly, research has shown that women are often over mentored and under sponsored. Sponsors advocate on behalf of women ready to take up senior leadership positions and provide guidance as well. Moreover, women having the same sponsorship as men will really make a difference.

### 1.3 Promoting Women's Mediation Across the Commonwealth

**Moderator: Andre J Groenewald, Director, Mediation Support Unit, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa**

Women continue to be marginalised from high-level peace processes despite global normative frameworks such as UN Security

Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), and evidence that women's meaningful participation increases 'the credibility and quality of peacekeeping, the pace of economic recovery in post-conflict settings and the sustainability of peace agreements' (UNSC, 2015:4). For example, out of 31 peace processes surveyed between 1992 and 2011, only 9 per cent of negotiators were women. Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 the percentage of peace agreements that made references to women and girls has more than doubled from 11 per cent to 27 per cent. Thus, gender-blind peace agreements remain the norm even today. The session addressed the following key questions: What is mediation? In what ways does the involvement of women in a peace process increase the probability of a lasting resolution? What are the success stories across the Commonwealth and how can they inform future practice? What are the obstacles encountered and how were they overcome?

**Lord Ahmad, UK Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN**, stated that societies can only thrive if they allow every single citizen to fulfil their full potential; thus both men and women need to be equally engaged and work together in the mediation process at all levels of decision-making. It is important to recognise that the exclusion of women and girls disproportionately affected by conflict, results in their required skills, experiences and perspectives to achieve global peace remains untapped and ignored. All international forums should therefore work together to attain equality in the mediation process, and events such as CHOGM and the Women's Forum should serve as platforms to ensure women's voices are heard and included at the peace tables. In fact, there is evidence to show that peace agreements reached that had women mediators have proven to be 35 per cent more likely to last. This is one of the reasons behind the UK pledge of £1.6 million for a network of women mediators working across the Commonwealth. The UK Government is committed to advocate for women to be involved in these processes.

**Mme Bineta Diop, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, African Union Commission**, pointed out that women are the backbone of society when conflict erupts. Women are mostly seen on the ground taking care of their families and



l-r: Andre J Groenewald-South Africa, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon-UK, Mme Bineta Diop-AU, Hilde Frafjord Johnson-Norway and Mossarat Qadeem-Pakistan at the 'Promoting Women's Mediation Across the Commonwealth' plenary session

the community. Moreover, women's role begins long before conflict erupts. Bringing more women into governance and leadership recognises the important role women and girls play in conflict prevention. In the African Union, there is parity in leadership. With women in governments, gender sensitive budgeting has proved effective in allocating resources for social development (health and education). In the Democratic Republic of Congo's peace negotiations in Sun City, South Africa in 2003, President Masire, former President of Botswana, ensured 12 per cent of negotiators were women. In order to achieve lasting peace agreements, it should be mandatory to involve women, and peace-building efforts should be gender-responsive. Mme Diop concluded that mediation is about peace and justice, and restoring the dignity of women and girls.

**Hilde Frafjord Johnson, Nordic Women Mediators' Network, former Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (2011-2014)** noted the progress achieved against the impact of the UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions is dwindling. Women remain underrepresented at all levels in formal peace negotiations. In the three tracks of diplomacy, Track 1 involves governments only, Track

2 involves non-state actors and Track 3 involves people-to-people diplomacy. A combination of all tracks is known as 'multi-track diplomacy'. Women are particularly missing in Track 1' diplomacy, the highest and most impactful level of negotiations, which is a huge challenge. Governments should act to improve the conditions for women to participate at this level of negotiations. The more available and skilled women are, the harder it becomes for them to be passed over, and it is critical to increase the numbers of women leaders. There is a role for the UN in getting more women into senior positions, particularly in the military and peacekeeping missions. Frafjord Johnson recommended three ways to address this challenge. The first measure is to redefine the peace processes. Women play an important role in people-to-people diplomacy but are rarely invited to sit at the negotiating table. This makes it difficult to establish the root causes of conflict and negotiate a lasting agreement. Peace agreements are more likely to last when women are involved in advocacy and in the negotiations. Hence women should be involved in all three tracks of negotiations. Crucially, new methods are required to dismantle the strong influence of the 'old boys' clubs or introspective male networks.



Trends reveal a decrease in women's participation in mediation processes, and a decline of gender-sensitive provisions in peace accords. Individual countries and international organisations including the Commonwealth should re-intensify efforts to address this situation. Secondly, understanding the challenges and barriers to women's meaningful participation in peace negotiations, will determine the appropriate strategies for intervention. The constant need across gender barriers, security barriers and cultural barriers, is to disassociate male norms and machismo from conflict, and recognise and elevate women's perspectives, skills, influence and experience. This can be overcome by building a pipeline of mediators from early careers, and appreciate their experiences with key sectors outside government. Addressing gender bias and barriers that prevent women from effectively mediating conflicts, involves inviting women to the negotiating table even though they are not current or previous heads of state and even if they have rarely been involved in armed conflicts. Furthermore, the UN, Commonwealth and African Union (AU) should appoint more women as special envoys and special representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs). The appointment of co-ed pairs of mediators - one woman and one man - will help to ensure gender balance and encourage women to take a more active and leading role during mediation processes. Ms Johnson congratulated the UK for launching a network of women mediators to work across the Commonwealth and the required funds to effectively support an increase in the numbers of women in mediation processes and produce gender-sensitive peace accords.

**Mossarat Qadeem, Co-Founder and Executive Director of the PAIMAN Alumni Trust,**

recommended a multi-level, multi-layered approach to mediation that should not omit women. Historically in the northwest Frontier region of Pakistan, which borders Afghanistan, a woman would raise her white scarf in a conflict to stop hostilities. However, mediation and dialogue processes have been taken over by extremism. Mediation is now seen as an act of cowardice, but mediators in the region are trying to revive the tradition of negotiation and peace building. Women understand the history of a community and the underlying reasons for conflicts, and also provide support to extremist groups. Engaging women is key to battling extremism. However, it is important that mediators are equipped with negotiating and

influencing skills, and are supported so they can research the conflict and understand the points around which negotiations can be built. As an illustration Ms Qadeem shared a story of how she used her negotiation and dialogue skills to engage with a well-known extremist leader after two aid workers were abducted. The core of the dialogue was about relationships and was successful in getting the workers released. Furthermore, the leader agreed to support development work on education and health in the area.

## 1.4 Parallel Sessions: Leadership and Empowerment

### 1.4.1 Women's roles in preventing and countering violent extremism and mediating in volatile environments

Prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is increasingly becoming a priority for the Commonwealth. The importance of ensuring that women are actively participating in this space is crucial. As in traditional conflict resolution, women play a huge range of roles in P/CVE, mediation being a classic role. The workshop aimed to highlight the importance of recognising the full participation of women and girls at all levels of decision-making in the design, implementation and delivery of conflict resolution activities, fundamental for the sustainability of peace-building efforts.

**Moderator: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, UK Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN**

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon** recommended that for P/CVE approaches to be effective, women should be placed at the heart of all efforts. To achieve this, gender stereotypes surrounding women and girls involved in P/CVE, should be dispelled. Women should be involved in all parts and at all levels - from the collective efforts of working closely with all stakeholders, including civil society, youth and faith leaders - and ensure a **one-society** approach to tackling the issue of P/CVE. Women should be involved in the prevention strategy (tackling radicalisation) as well as in the hard elements (fighting terrorism). We must also effectively employ technology for change, and come together as a Commonwealth family to address the issue of extremism. Lord Ahmad further highlighted the importance of education, psychology and

health in the process of deradicalisation. Lord Ahmad applauded the assistance from the UK and Australian governments in the establishment of the CVE Unit at the Commonwealth Secretariat.

**Sanam Naraghi-Anderilini, Co-founder and Executive Director, International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)**, presented ways in which extremist movements such as Boko Haram, Hindu nationalists and white supremacists aim to divide and separate peoples. Gender is central to any extremist movement. Their core underlying ideology includes issues such as, 'What does it mean to be a man, particularly a man of faith?' Women are often portrayed as subservient. However, women are also becoming fighters and suicide bombers, because extremist movements need the bodies to fight. But despite these realities, women's peace rights activists mobilise and continue to stand up against those forces. Extremist movements understand the power that women have and are afraid of women's soft power of influence, so much so, that in certain countries they are assassinated. Ms Anderilini further highlighted a few initiatives of ICAN including dedicated support to women peace activists, and reconceptualisation of P/CVE to include questions such as, 'How to address the economic, social and political factors in order to turn people away from violent extremism?' The aim is to advance from CVE to PVE and then to PREP (promoting peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism).

**Mossarat Qadeem, Executive Director, PAIMAN**, shared her experience of working with radicalised families. She narrated an incident in which a son killed seven army personnel, and the mother believed him to be innocent. Permission was granted by male elders for Ms Qadeem to dialogue with the mother on a one-to-one basis, sensitising her and close relatives about the impact of radicalisation. Developing the women's critical thinking and revealing the truth behind the Taliban's interpretation of Jihad outside the Quran, resulted in the women recognising radical behaviour among other young people and developing an internal communication mechanism to address radicalisation. Ms Qadeem highlighted the importance of women's education and of safe spaces for sharing their experiences as crucial in efforts to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. Violent extremism is not just a security issue but also a social issue. Therefore, close attention should be given to address cultural issues

in the de-radicalisation process. The community should be provided with tools, skills and knowledge, but the ownership of the whole process should lie with the community. PAIMAN helped to develop the Inclusive Peace Curriculum to bridge the gap between two different streams of education – the elite and madrasahs. The curriculum includes the history of the sub-continent and of today's Pakistan, religion, and pluralism. Similar models should be applied in the Commonwealth, said Ms Qadeem and she encouraged sharing best practices and development of a Commonwealth framework to deal with this issue.

**Dr Fatima Akilu, Executive Director of Neem Foundation, Nigeria**, shared her experience of understanding the approaches employed by Boko Haram, in order to de-radicalise their members. Boko Haram has an abundance of audacity and ingenuity in using religion and psychology to divide families. The common thread is to create a sense of belonging within the ranks by ensuring the interests of members' matter. Separating recruits from their families – such as instructing radicalised members to carry out bad actions against family members – makes it difficult for them to return to their communities. In effect, this cements the creation of new communities by Boko Haram targeting girls and young women to perpetuate the movement. People assume Boko Haram is against education but their motive is to prevent the development of logical and critical thinking, to safeguard the authority and hold of Boko Haram leaders. Boko Haram is therefore, vehemently opposed to group sports, where camaraderie is formed outside their influence.

Understanding Boko Haram's approach and methodology, enabled the design for a deradicalisation programme that included a combination of critical thinking, sports, ethics, arts, history, dramas, etc. The approach to de-radicalisation of women, children and young adults, recognises the critical differences between those groups, and it encourages people of different faiths to talk to each other. Community based de-radicalisation programmes aimed at children have also provided learning for parents. Victims often become perpetrators: poor girls become easily radicalised and groups such as Boko Haram, offer a sense of belonging, health care and promise of a better future. Therefore, PVE efforts should address gender inequality and provide adequate support to girls and women

to have a voice in their communities. Societies should be sensitised to consider and accept changes to address socio-economic issues to enable women and girls to access education, celebrate pluralism and to be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to gain employment. Another important element is the provision of quality, affordable and comprehensive health care for both physical wounds and mental health support. Violent extremism thrives on separating people while fostering pluralism builds on cohesion and belonging, which addresses many of the problems associated with P/CVE. Multiple identities and differences should be recognised and acknowledged, across religion, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Rather than focusing on reductionism and labelling of the individual, it is key to understand the role secularism can play in promoting tolerance, inclusion and protection of minorities. The Commonwealth Foundation was commended for funding the first Film Festival that helps encourage the arts to address these issues.

Furthermore, for de-radicalisation and CVE efforts to be effective, investment in education and governance structures is very important. This involves the international community addressing structural, political and economic issues, which are some of the underlying reasons for radicalisation. Terrorist organisations are smart, but the international community should be smarter by building a culture of belonging through critical thinking, arts, culture, sport, and team activities. Moreover, the CVE discourse should be demilitarised to recognise the role women and women's rights organisations play in peace building and increase their representation in all P/CVE efforts. Importantly, women and girls are disproportionately affected by modern slavery and human trafficking which is one of the main source of revenue for extremist organisations, and becomes crucial to re-double efforts to stop this abhorrent practice.

#### 1.4.2 Women's political participation at all levels

There is a growing body of evidence that women make a positive difference to the quality of decision-making. Research shows that increased numbers of women in parliament contributes to the normalisation of a more women-friendly environment. This positive change contributes to a more conducive environment in which to discuss

women's issues that concern the internal workings of government. It therefore becomes easier for women to raise gender issues, and for men to become more aware of gender issues and start to accept women in decision-making roles. Although it is critical to sustain efforts at increasing the number of women in politics and public life, the presence of women in parliaments or local governments is not the only measure to progress gender equality. Gender sensitivity and awareness should be reflected equally in policies and infrastructure of all political institutions.

#### **Moderator: Helen Clark, Former New Zealand Prime Minister and UNDP Administrator, and the current Patron of Commonwealth Local Government (CLGF).**

Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) screened a series of short interviews discussing challenges, opportunities and the network's activities to promote women in parliament and in political leadership at all levels in the Commonwealth. The interviews pointed to the strategies and actions that have enabled and supported women in positions to influence change in their communities. Ms Clark urged the audience to write a personal pledge to support women and girls take on leadership roles in their communities. The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) recently piloted the local chapter of the network in Uganda in partnership with the Uganda Local Government Association (ULGA). Furthermore, CWP presented its new initiative, the 'Alumni Network', which aims to harness the skills, experience and knowledge of former women parliamentarians for the benefit of newly-elected or sitting women parliamentarians in the diverse CWP network. This initiative is unique in that there is currently no mechanism through which to tap into the enormous resource of retired women parliamentarians or women who have built a successful post-parliamentary career.

#### **Sunkarie Kabba-Kamara, Mayor of Makeni, Sierra Leone,** delivered the keynote speech.

Reflecting on her personal experience, she draws inspiration from the women in her community who experience similar challenges. Lack of funding is one of the biggest obstacles to women in politics and business. Frequently women have to fund their own political campaigns, which limits the chances of women's participation in politics. Mayor Kabba-Kamara highlighted the role of the 'all boys club/'

network' in supporting men's careers, calling for more mentoring programmes to encourage women to venture into male dominated roles/positions of leadership and build a political career.

**Hon Councillor Buumba Malambo Magoba, of Kafue District Ward, Zambia**, expounded on the strength and unity of women's movements. Women should acknowledge their strengths and support each other more in order to build confidence to speak up and engage in politics. Women should work in solidarity and gain support from their male counterparts to demystify politics as a bad occupation. Women should be encouraged to pursue their interests in politics, such as renewing and updating legal frameworks, providing childcare facilities and parental leave, and advocating gender equality initiatives. Political parties should introduce 'zebra' systems to ensure gender parity in parliaments and governments.

**Councillor Bev Esslinger Chair of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities Standing Committee on International Relations** highlighted specific barriers faced by younger women, including lack of education. A combination of sexism and ageism has painted a misleading picture of young women as unsuitable for political office or even political participation. Young women need female role models and mentors — they are not voiceless or inactive observers of political deliberations, but have the ability to contribute effectively in all democracies. Young women should be given seats at the table to discuss issues and be involved in decision-making that affects their lives, and not as spectators to the process. Councillor Esslinger reiterated the importance of providing women with the required technical and financial resources and mentorship to encourage participation in politics. The 2013 Uganda elections resulted in just one-woman councillor taking office after having more than a third in the previous election. To address this issue, a programme was initiated that supported 55 women to consider running for councillorships resulting in an increase of female candidates from 12 per cent in 2013 to 30 per cent in 2017.

**Hon Maria Browne MP, Minister of Housing, Lands and Urban Renewal, Government of Antigua and Barbuda**, reiterated the importance of mentoring. She was mentored from the age of 26, which was crucial to her success as a politician, and strengthened her ability to deal with the abuse and mistreatment women face in politics. Governments

should invest more in 'Mentoring Schools' and extracurricular activities such as leadership vacation camps to prepare girls to take on political roles. Furthermore, men and boys should be sensitised to see girls as leaders. Hon. Browne recognised the triple burden shift faced by women: family, work and community commitments, and the expected roles of women as caregivers to their children, parents and husbands. Therefore, to ensure women's participation in politics, especially in senior leadership roles, 'work and life' balance in politics should be redistributed equally to enable women to participate in politics. For example, ensuring party meetings are not held at anti-social hours for women.

**Professor Sarah Childs Professor of Politics and Gender at Birkbeck University and Director of the Centre for the Study of British Politics and Public Life** concluded the panel discussions by recognising women's potential for senior leadership in politics and how this can be achieved by provision of essential services such as childcare facilities, access to education, solidarity and mentorship. Political parties and their leaders must take responsibility for changing informal and formal rules that make it difficult for women to enter politics. Women should collaborate with key male allies to address violence against women in both their private and public lives.

Interventions from the floor: **George Mutabazi, President of Uganda's Local Government Association**, recommended that electoral reforms be fully democratic to enable a level playing field and thus encourage more women to join politics. A shift in male attitudes is necessary to change the electoral and political systems to accommodate, encourage and support women's political participation. When women get involved in politics, their contribution is evidenced by a fall in corrupt practices, effective management of public funds and increased productivity. **Lejeune Mbella Mbella, Foreign Minister, Cameroon**, reiterated the impact of unsocial working hours in politics as one of the main barriers for women with young children. More women equal better politics, beneficial for all women, children and men.

### 1.4.3 Violence against women in elections

Violence against women in elections (VAWIE) undermines free, fair and inclusive elections as it negatively impacts women's equal participation. Research has shown that women experience



different types of VAWIE ranging from harassment, through intimidation, physical harm or coercion, threats, financial pressures and even death. It may be committed in the home or other private and public spaces. These acts may be directed at women in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g. voters, media, political/state actors, community leaders, or electoral officials). Moreover, in specific circumstances institutional mechanisms aimed at curbing such acts have proven ineffective in preventing or enforcing laws to protect the rights of citizens. An increasing focus on women's political participation, and a critical mass of women's rights advocacy groups, have raised the visibility of VAWIE narratives at home, in political arenas and in public spaces. Addressing VAWIE remains a challenge due to the paucity and difficulty of obtaining relevant data and information. The session examined the successes and challenges around some of the current tools and initiatives utilised to address VAWIE. It also identified opportunities and the unique elements the Commonwealth could contribute to addressing this issue.

### Session 1 – Launching Commonwealth Publications on Women in Politics

**Moderator: Prof Attahiru Jega, former Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria**

The CHOGM 2018 theme, 'Towards a Common Future' inspires the call to end all forms of inequality and discrimination. The lack of inclusiveness and violence targeted at women prevents the building of an inclusive future. Prof Jega launched the following Commonwealth Secretariat publications, which focused on challenges and strategies to address Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWIE):

- *A Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Elections in Commonwealth: Africa Achieving 50:50 by 2030* – a well-researched, evidence based publication which reviews the systems, legislation and best practice necessary to get more women into politics and help to realise Goal 5 of the SDGs.
- *Women and political parties in five small states of the Commonwealth Caribbean* - aimed at strengthening political party governance in relation to participation of women and addresses discrimination and violence against

women. Discusses gender equality and issues of training and empowerment in the context of elections.

- *Political parties and women participation in Commonwealth Africa* - based on case studies of six Commonwealth countries, this publication shows how Commonwealth countries target and retain women in the political context. It also considers how to increase the number of women in political leadership positions, including specific roles of various stakeholders, civic education and awareness as a key mechanism for promoting women's participation in politics.

### Session 2 – Perspectives and Context: Experience Sharing

**Hon Rebecca Kadaga, MP and Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda**, shared several examples of how VAWIE intends to prevent women from taking part in democratic processes at various levels. At an individual level there is the example of a female candidate whose husband tried to prevent her from running in parliamentary elections by stealing her national ID. In the family if a wife supports different candidates than her husband, she may be forbidden to vote, it may cause the family to separate and in worse cases scenarios the wives are murdered. On the campaign trail mob violence forces a female candidate to abandon a campaign meeting, and mob violence at polling stations is used to stop women voters from casting their votes, mob violence. Even though sanctions may be brought against the perpetrators of these crimes, VAWIE should be prevented from occurring in the first instance, and that involves a lot of work in the home and communities.

**Hon Hazel Brandy-Williams, Junior Minister, Nevis Island Administration, St Kitts and Nevis**, reiterated that in many countries, women who enter politics and public life are met with intimidation and violence. It is widely acknowledged that VAWIE is a barrier to women's political participation and presents a threat to electoral processes and democracy. Examples include the murder of the British MP Jo Cox in 2016, and the shooting of a Mexican electoral candidate in broad daylight by a sitting municipal president whilst she was holding meetings with electorates. Hon Brandy-Williams also highlighted that VAWIE is not limited to physical violence, but includes online sexual



Parallel Session on Leadership and Empowerment on Day One of the Women's Forum

harassment, verbal attacks, trolls and stalking aimed at dissuading women from participating in politics. Furthermore, discriminatory party structures results in men considering women to be a threat rather than an asset. When such behaviours become normalised, female politicians face unique risks. Such acts should be abhorred, as they are callous, cruel and undemocratic. Essentially, creative energies should be employed to muster the might of the media, and seek ways to stem the tide of VAWIE. When a woman freely participates, the nation undoubtedly prospers.

**Dame Carol Kidu, former MP and Minister for Community Development, Papua New Guinea (PNG)**, has been very fortunate – unlike the majority of women in PNG, she has not experienced election-related violence. There is a reluctance to change the status quo, which favours men in politics. As of 2017, PNG was one of the few countries in the world that had no female MPs. Since gaining independence in 1975, only seven women have been involved in politics. Increasingly, women want to stand for elections but they face undisputed danger and very low chances of winning. To overcome this problem, PNG is implementing a multi-pronged approach: overcoming gender stereotypes, which limit the aspirations of girls;

sensitising men to change their attitudes towards inclusive politics; involving civil society in finding feasible solutions; and formulating intervening strategies to get more women into politics.

**Hon Zubaida Jalal, former MP and Minister of Education, Pakistan**, acknowledged the power of education as a gift to empower women. Hon Jalal was elected as Pakistan's Federal Minister of Education in 1999 and served a 3-year term. She was part of a government supportive of equality, achieving 33 per cent of women's participation at local government level and 17 per cent at provincial and national levels. Crucially, women in power are more attuned to the needs of other women and gender-responsive policies are implemented when women are in decision-making positions. In her previous role as Minister for Women's Development, Hon Jalal was the first to: recognise that honour killing in Pakistan is a crime; set up the Permanent National Commission on the Status of Women; ensure reserved seats for women became part of the Constitution; realised changes to legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace; and established a non-governmental organisation for Women in Parliamentary Politics. Often women who contest seats come from strong political families with political dynasties (a woman without

such support finds it very difficult to stand for a gendered seat). Hon Jalal was heavily pregnant when she stood for re-election in 2002, giving birth three days after the election. These are particular circumstances only women experience hence the need for political spaces to protect their special rights. Some women voters face the challenge of having to travel long distances with their children in order to reach a polling station and cast their vote. Parts of Pakistan have developed policies to bear the cost of transporting women and providing a meal for them and their families when they arrive at polling stations.

### Session 3 – VAWIE Tools and Best Practice

**Caroline Hubbard is the Senior Gender Advisor and Project Manager National Democratic Institute (NDI) in the US**, an organisation which devised a '**Votes without Violence**' toolkit aimed at raising awareness, collecting data and building capacity to address issues. Their website includes 50 tools to allow people to find talking points, and up skill in areas such as media monitoring. Ms Hubbard addressed the issue of backlash, whereby as more women enter into politics violence becomes more prevalent. VAWIE is any act of election violence aimed at women because they are women and aimed at subverting women's participation in the political process. This manifests itself in many different ways:

1. *Physical violence* – for example, the female German mayor who was stabbed one day before the election; the Honduras councillor who was attacked by her opponent; women in Côte d'Ivoire who in 2010/2011 were harmed by opposition parties because their husbands were out protesting.
2. *Sexual violence* – including threats of divorce and women voters being molested in line at polling stations, dissuading them from voting. In Kenya, women have called for separate voting queues.
3. *Online abuse/assault* - this is the most prevalent form of violence against women in elections, and the least visible. Examples include the online campaigns against Hillary Clinton in the US 2016 election.

4. *Threats and coercion* – in some cases opposition parties can convince husbands to threaten their wives with divorce in a bid to have them stand down from election.

However, the first step to address the problem is evidence that such problems exist. NDI's #NotTheCost Campaign is aimed at raising awareness, collecting data and building capacity to address VAWIE. The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has worked on VAWIE to try to understand the nature of the problem. The approaches used include documenting individual VAWIE cases (generate statistics), targeted training on VAWIE and addressing the root causes of VAWIE amongst others. The Forum noted the existing challenges to encourage national jurisdictions to develop frameworks aimed at addressing VAWIE, and made the following recommendations to:

- Encourage Election Management Bodies to develop gender sensitive policies;
- Establish an index on ratings of Commonwealth countries related to VAWIE;
- Research, strengthen capacities and work closely with political parties and CSOs;
- Establish partnerships to complement existing tools;
- Facilitate voter education clubs in schools; and
- Mobilise funds to promote participation of women in the political processes.

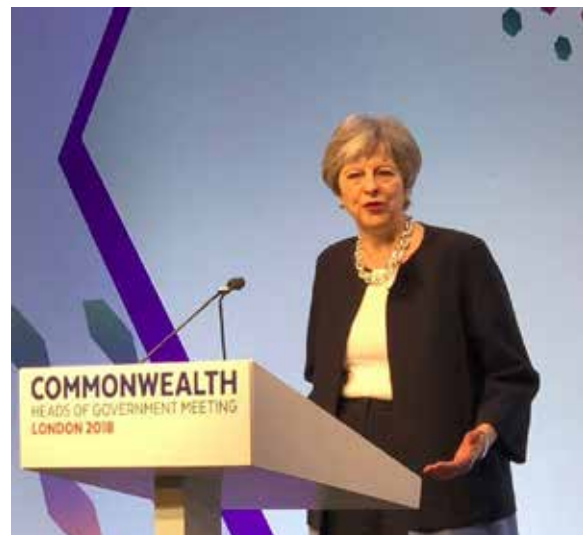
# Day Two: The Road to Empowerment

## 2.1 Towards a Common Future

More than 1,500 delegates from all over the world attended the first joint session of the Women's, Youth, People's and Business Forums. Speakers and delegates across business, civil society and government sectors gathered to synergise efforts and share insights, expertise and resources on how to better deliver a fairer, more prosperous, secure and sustainable future for everyone in the Commonwealth. The joint forum celebrated culture in the Commonwealth with a dazzling and energising 15-minute performance by 53 drummers from Commonwealth Resounds celebrating music and musicians from across the Commonwealth. The theme of unity and celebration ran through the opening remarks of **the Commonwealth Secretary-General (SG), Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC**. The SG declared like Martin Luther King, she and the Commonwealth 'have a dream' that can be turned into a reality due to the collective wisdom and aspirations of the 2.4 billion Commonwealth citizens who are united by common values and a vision to lead the way to a common future for everyone, ensuring no one is left behind.

**The Rt Hon Theresa May, Prime Minister of UK**, delivered the keynote address. The Commonwealth gathers strength from its geographical and cultural

diversity, and is uniquely placed to give all member states an equal voice. The Commonwealth should commit efforts to address the challenges confronting humanity in the twenty-first century such as trade protectionism, cyber security, climate change, use of chemical weapons and inequality. The Rt Hon May urged Leaders to agree on the landmark Blue Charter, and presented the co-operation between the UN and Vanuatu on the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance. She also announced investment in addressing the vulnerability and resilience of small states. In advancing equality, she called for a redoubling of efforts in tackling malaria, addressing youth unemployment, providing a 12-year quality education to all girls and boys, and reforming discriminatory laws that fail to protect women, girls and LGBTQI. Her speech noted '... colonial laws were often put in place by the British Empire, and were wrong then and they are wrong now. As a family of nations, the Commonwealth must respect cultures and traditions but it must be in line with the common values of fairness and equality. Nobody should face persecution or discrimination because of who she/he is or loves. The UK will support any country that wants to reform out dated legislation.' The Commonwealth recently accredited an organisation that promotes the rights of LGBTQI people but more needs to be done to attain equity.





**Bill Gates, Co-Chair of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**, delivered a keynote message applauding the Commonwealth for playing an important role in improving progress in the modern world. In almost all areas, Commonwealth countries are at the forefront of progress. Mr Gates urged all to look for positive outliers and adopt their approaches. In 2011, Commonwealth Heads of Government met in Perth, Australia and agreed to accelerate actions — such as improving routine immunisation — and provide financial support to eradicate polio. India was one of the countries that faced the biggest challenges to wipe out the disease, yet India has been polio-free since 2014. Mr Gates also highlighted Commonwealth efforts in driving down child mortality rates and cutting malaria deaths by half. The Commonwealth continues to be at the frontline to completely eliminate Malaria. Mr Gates quoted success stories including Singapore's education system, which has become a global role model, and lauded the efforts of Caribbean states and global campaigns to take climate change seriously: '**Commonwealth best practices, if adopted worldwide, would revolutionise the world and help us solve many problems.** Progress is not inevitable but Commonwealth countries' desire to progress and to co-operate means that we can all get ahead.'

**Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica**, focused his remarks on the sustainability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The Commonwealth shares a common language, common law, a belief in democratic governments and transparent institutions, shared principles, human rights and freedom, while acknowledging its diversity. Viewing the Commonwealth's collective challenges through the prism of fair and sustainable solutions, will lead to increased security and prosperity. PM Holness highlighted the threat of climate change as a current reality for SIDS, including Jamaica. Countries considered as middle-income countries lose their GDP growth rates overnight from events caused by climate change. The conversation around climate change, as an imperative, should be treated as an investment for the resilience of affected countries. Therefore, funding for resilience, adaptation and mitigation should not be treated as aid. Furthermore, PM Holness focused attention on emerging threats such as obesity and non-communicable diseases and should be addressed in both developed and developing countries. Enabling young people with

life skills to learn honesty, integrity and discipline — through sport and quality education — will translate into more equal and prosperous societies.

## 2.2 Educate to Empower

According to the Global Partnership for Education, women represent nearly two thirds of the world's illiterate. Sixty-one (61) million girls of primary and lower-secondary school age are out of school. Furthermore, girls are 1.5 times more likely than boys to be excluded from primary school. At the primary level, only 26 per cent of low-income countries show gender parity in enrolment; 58 per cent show disparity and 16 per cent do not have recent data available. The session highlighted successful work achieved and impact on learning outcomes for the most marginalised, supported and implemented by Commonwealth partners, CSOs, women's rights organisations, and in bilateral and multilateral partnerships (UN, business leaders, World Bank, GPE), foundations and business leaders in partnership with governments to ensure policy uptake and scalability.

**Moderator: Julia Gillard, Chair, Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and former Prime Minister of Australia**

Despite the profound changes achieved through the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which counts 20 Commonwealth countries among its members, more than 130 million girls have no opportunity to attend school. Quality education is so low that children exit school not able to read or write and girls continue to face violence when they try to get an education. Barriers and solutions, including breakthroughs that can accelerate progress for women and girls, was the main focus of the session. A copy of the Girls' Education Framework was presented to delegates for their endorsement, to take forward to Heads of Government. **Peace Ayo, Malala Fund Girl Ambassador**, said her main motivation for becoming an advocate for girls' education in Nigeria, was that the voices of schoolgirls were rarely heard. Of critical importance is the lack of adequate resources and support in schools. Several barriers to girls' education in Nigeria include extreme poverty, making it difficult to access menstrual products, thus forcing girls out of education and into early employment. Ms Ayo called for investment in 12 years of free, safe and quality education for all girls.



l-r: Rt Hon Julia Gillard-Australia, Farah Mohammed-Canada, Julia Lalla-Maharajh-UK and Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt-UK at the 'Educate to Empower' plenary session

**Penny Mordaunt, UK Secretary of State for International Development**, highlighted how critical education is to the achievement of the SDGs and for building a fairer and more prosperous future. Hon Mordaunt acknowledged the barriers that have confronted governments, which include limited funds, and families frequently prioritising boys' education over girls'. In response, DFID has supported over 2.1 million girls in 13 Commonwealth countries to gain a quality education and the UK Government is committed to continue its expertise with other Commonwealth countries and will deploy technical expertise to drive up the quality of teaching. Hon Mordaunt echoed commitments to unlocking 12 years of quality education by 2030 and shared the launch of the Girls' Education Policy Lab with support from Sri Lanka, Australia and New Zealand. The initiative will ensure one million girls across the Commonwealth can access 12 years of quality education and learning. The UK intends to partner with the Malala Fund and the United Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) to further support 53,000 girls who have never attended or dropped out of school, including young mothers and girls with disabilities, to enable them achieve their full potential.

**Farah Mohamed, CEO of the Malala Fund** corroborated the importance of partnership working. Innovative technological solutions allow for a more effective, efficient and fun approach to learning, evidenced in the partnership between the Malala Fund and Apple enabling expansion of efforts to provide all girls with 12 years of free, safe, and quality education. Ms Mohamed added that educating girls is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss, as integration of women in the labour market adds trillions of dollars to the economy. **Julia Lalla-Maharajh, CEO and Founder Orchid Project**, emphasised the role of education in ending FGM. Over 200 million girls are living in fear of being cut, a practice that robs girls of their capacity to chart a future. Education can help change decisions at individual, household and community levels. However, girls must be at the centre of the conversation and efforts to end FGM. **Hon Otiko Afisa-Djaba, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana**, spoke about the Ghanaian Government's educational efforts, which benefited 25,000 vulnerable girls. These efforts included keeping pregnant girls in education and enabling young mothers to continue their education. Minister Afisa-Djaba also announced the Ghanaian Government's



Rt Hon Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh at the Educate to Empower Session

commitment to provide free high school education, and to be part of this great programme aimed at promoting education for the girl-child.

**Rt Hon Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh**, in her keynote address, highlighted the work Bangladesh is doing towards a future where women and men, hand in hand, act as a cornerstone for a society free from poverty, discrimination and conflict. Gender equality is enshrined in the Bangladeshi Constitution, and according to the World Economic Forum, Bangladesh now ranks seventh in the world in the political empowerment of women. Gender equality and women's empowerment were two of the main areas of focus for Rt Hon Hasina when she became Prime Minister. Provision of free schooling up to grade 12, free school meals programme for up to 2.84 million children and the world's biggest free distribution of textbooks (started in 2010), account for the remarkable gains Bangladesh has made in the field of education over the past two decades, especially for women and girls. Similarly, positive change is observed in politics, with 50 seats reserved for women in the Jatiya Sangsad (national parliament) and Dr Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury becoming the first woman Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad. Special economic zones for women and market places for their products, and 190 women working in peacekeeping missions are further examples of Bangladesh's focus on education and empowerment. Moreover, education is making real change to the lives of all girls and women, as evidenced in rural women's improved quality of life, and in reduced gender-based violence and prevalence of child marriage. The UN recently

declared Bangladesh would graduate from a least developed country (LDC) to a developing country. 'Education for all' remains a key objective to achieving Bangladesh's policy vision of inclusive development. International plans and policies are geared towards achieving the SDGs.

**HE Ret Brigadier Julius Maada Wonie, President of Sierra Leone** made his first presentation since he assumed office on 4 April 2018. He promised a new direction for Sierra Leone, with free education as a flagship programme that aimed to make Sierra Leone a middle-income country (MIC). He committed Sierra Leone to delivering 12 years of free and good quality education by 2030, ensuring girls and children with disabilities would have equal opportunities to complete the full cycle of primary and secondary education. Education helps to lift people out of poverty. It creates new opportunities to address unfair income distribution. Education creates awareness and helps to sustain democracy and peace. Educating girls also delivers large health benefits as they have fewer and healthier children. However, education is a means to an end — achieving inclusive development where no one is left behind. President Wonie applauded the role women played in his life when his father died when he was young. Clearly he understands the needs of women and guaranteed his support to achieve development for women and girls in Sierra Leone.

**Professor Asha Kanwar, President and CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)**, outlined the COL contribution for open distance learning, which allows girls to study at their own convenience for a fraction of the cost. COL promotes learning for sustainable development recognising the central role of women's equality and empowerment in that process. However, COL recognised that children's schooling can constitute a substantial cost burden to families; while open schools adopt a flexible approach that allows learners to work to their own schedule. The Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) costs one fifth of what it would cost to put a student through a campus-based institution. Apart from financial obstacles, a lack of safe learning spaces and biases of stakeholders inhibit the enrolment of girls in the formal school system. COL implemented the child-friendly school environment in Nigeria, which focuses on safety and security, sanitation and child-centred teaching methodologies. Nigeria has a partnership with COL to mainstream this model for educating the girl-child. Political will is necessary to ensure



l-r: Arancha González-ITC, Hon Marie-Claude Bibeau-Canada, Hon Senator Kamina Johnson Smith-Jamaica, Rt Hon Dr Isatou Touray-Gambia, Olusegun Awolowo-Nigeria, Rebecca Marmot-UK, and Farhana A Rahman-Bangladesh at the Diversity and Women's Economic Empowerment plenary session.

programmes become mainstreamed — developing social capital, empowering mothers, and sensitising communities can be the most powerful ways to ensure the success of girls. COL's Lifelong Learning for Farmers initiative recognises these as key ingredients for success.

**Asyia Kazmi, Lead Girls' Education Challenge (GEC), UK**, focused on the transformative role of education and the importance of extra-curricular activities with an academic focus, complemented by family support and efficient and sustainable resource utilisation. Schooling helps to overcome economic barriers faced by women and girls. For education to fulfil its potential, qualified teachers are essential. Data collection plays a critical role in improving efforts to provide free and quality education for all. Accessible data enables assessment of the current situation, supports development of policy and other interventions, and measures progress. **Lucy Lake, CEO of the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) International, UK**, spoke about how CAMFED's work supports marginalised girls in schools to become the leaders of change. CAMFED has systems in place to track the support provided to every girl. These systems are designed to deal with power dynamics and entitlements. Focusing on good quality education for the most vulnerable is the most effective way of achieving gender equality and empowerment. **Muniratu Issifu, Founder and CEO, Varkey Foundation, India**, highlighted the importance of using technology for education. Mr Issifu spoke about the organisation's 'Teach to Reach Remote Classrooms' (TRC) project, which provides interactive distance learning to

deprived schools in Ghana. Broadcasting lessons can reach up to 26 classrooms and allows access for children who would otherwise not have a quality teacher. This programme is not only cost effective; it has improved the educational achievements of students who had been displaced by conflict, and enabled reintegration into host communities. Delivering teacher training and community engagement support the educational efforts, and the model can be replicated in many environments. **Richard Mukaga, Project Manager, Cheshire Services Uganda**, highlighted the need to change our approach to education for girls with disabilities. To be effective, such a change must involve creating a favourable environment within communities so that attitudes change in support of girls with a focus on improving conditions at schools so girls with disabilities are able to get an education and feel loved and appreciated. Moreover, the quality of teaching should be responsive to the learning needs of children with disabilities.

### 2.3 Diversity and Women's Economic Empowerment

While men and women are affected differently by trade policies and gender inequalities, they have different skills, face diverse challenges and have different access to productive resources. Nations have to develop gender responsive policies to ensure women are able to take advantage of all opportunities presented by global trade. The session – jointly delivered by the Commonwealth Business Forum - discussed opportunities



presented by global trade and how women can position themselves to enjoy the benefits and grow their businesses.

**Aranca González, Executive Director, International Trade Centre (ITC)**, opened the session and noted that despite the fact that trade has lifted millions out of poverty the benefits have not been evenly spread. In specific situations, trade has exacerbated or perpetuated inequalities. Only 1 in 5 exporting companies is a woman-owned business due to challenges such as discrimination in laws, lack of access to finance and networks, and women bearing disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid work. Ms González introduced the #SheTrades initiative supported by the ITC, DFID and UKAid, which aims to ensure trade becomes inclusive, and focuses on quality not quantity. The Commonwealth is now committed to take forward #SheTrades as part of its agenda. **Harriett Baldwin, Minister of State for Africa at the UK Department for International Development**, in her keynote speech focused on how women's economic development raises income, provides potential to drive growth and delivers better livelihoods. Despite the fact that women's access to markets and opportunities is essential to delivering growth to everyone, women entrepreneurs and producers face disproportional barriers such as poorer access to information and finance including difficulties in safe depositing of money. Due to the UK's current work in Nigeria and Tanzania over 500,000 women have been given access to better financial services, including a tailored saving service which allows women to deposit money safely. Ms Baldwin urged the Commonwealth to take concrete and collective actions to build on the Buenos Aires Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment. She also spoke about the launch of #SheTradesCommonwealth, which over the next two years, will develop an innovative global outlook on trade, compile data for countries to act on and to measure progress, and increased participation of women-owned businesses in international trade. The programme will also offer targeted assistance and develop gender-responsive future trade policies. Funding will also be provided to improve competitiveness for 2,500 female entrepreneurs.

**The Hon Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Canada**, presented Canada's feminist foreign policy agenda. Putting women at the heart of international assistance policy demonstrates

that empowering women is the best way to end poverty and inequalities. Canada's agenda places emphasis on supporting adolescent girls to obtain education, to make better choices and ensure effective participation in leadership and decision-making. Specific initiatives have been tailored to women's needs including 'Voice and Leadership', designed to support local women's civil society organisations to defend their rights, and include work on ending child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), improving access to finance and women's right to own property. Minister Bibeau emphasised that the Canadian government wants to work with local governments and grassroots organisations to enable implementation of the global value chain business model not only to boost competitiveness and profitability but also to ensure long-term sustainability. Canada's international trade minister is pushing the discussion on the remit of international trade, and Canada recently signed its first international trade agreement with Chile integrating a gender element. The Government also partnered with the World Bank on the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) to provide access to capital for entrepreneurs in developing markets. One of its main objectives is the provision of a dedicated Fund to support women entrepreneurs all over the world. Aranca Gonzalez added that the European Union is now following Canada's lead in integrating gender into trade agreements.

**The Hon Senator Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica**, focused on the impact of trade on Caribbean countries. Trade is central to economic growth in the Caribbean region. Even though close to 40 per cent of households in Jamaica are headed by women, integrating women in the formal economy presents a real challenge. The unemployment statistics in 2017 show that female unemployment has doubled to 17.5 per cent, compared to men at 9.3 per cent.<sup>1</sup> However, the good news is that women took up 70 per cent of new jobs created and Jamaica has the highest percentage of women managers globally.<sup>2</sup> Minister Johnson Smith highlighted the need to create an infrastructure to support single parent female entrepreneurs

1 <https://tradingeconomics.com/jamaica/unemployment-male-percent-of-male-labor-force-wb-data.html>

2 [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_334882.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_334882.pdf)

and the role government and businesses can play in this endeavour. The government is developing an action plan (2017-2022) for international trade policy that mainstreams gender throughout. This will complement the National Policy on Gender Equality, which ensures gender is mainstreamed across government processes. Furthermore, the 'Women Empowered Through Export (WE-XPORT)'<sup>3</sup> programme was designed to support Caribbean women in learning about trade and other aspects of business. Currently, 21 Jamaican companies are being supported through the programme to start or increase exports of their products and services. Minister Kamina Johnson further highlighted how GBV – including sexual harassment at work - affects women's voices, their ability to self-actualise, and in turn limits women's economic empowerment. Towards a meaningful progress for women's empowerment, a multi-pronged approach is necessary to eliminate VAWG.

**The Rt Hon Dr Isatou Touray, Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, The Gambia**, shared the opportunities and challenges that trade presents to Gambian women. Women's participation in the economy is not a new phenomenon, but we need to recognise it, own and leverage it. Women actively participate in key sectors including agriculture, fishing and trade. However, 63 per cent of medium and small enterprises (MSEs) and 90 per cent of micro enterprises are informal. Women own 80 per cent of these informal entities but 75 per cent of women are facing inequalities. The Gambia is ready to address these inequalities, to rebuild the economy and rebrand itself. A new face for democracy in Gambia will involve taking on gender considerations. A good example is the national development plan, which now includes gender responsive programming and targets. Other challenges include the lack of recognition of rural women's contribution to the economy, issues around women's access to land (they have user rights but not ownership rights); and lack of access to funds to engage in mechanised farming or add value to processes. Interest rates are very high at 25 per cent. To solve this, Gambia is exploring the synergies between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Fisheries Ministries and departments to increase value addition and make sure everyone benefits equitably. Furthermore, economic policy

is gender responsive and the Gambia is working closely with the International Trade Centre (ITC) to champion #SheTrades across and beyond the African continent. Minister Touray concluded by calling for more feminist strategies in investment and financing.

**Olusegun Awolowo, Executive Director, CEO, Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC)**, presented suggestions to strengthen the Commonwealth Trade Agenda. He addressed this issue through the prism of the experiences in Nigeria, which suffered economic collapse due to falling oil prices. At that time, the Nigerian economy was driven by services (56 per cent) and agriculture (27 per cent) with oil contributing only 9 per cent. Thus, to many, the economic impact of oil prices on the economy was surprising. However, Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings were due to oil exports of 90 per cent. To reduce its dependency on oil and mitigate future risks Nigeria decided to implement a 'Zero Oil' policy and to diversify its economy. Two areas were identified for expansion, petrochemicals and women-led agriculture. For the latter to succeed, there was a need to orchestrate efforts to ensure women food producers and exporters were aware of international platforms supporting their work/produce. The #SheTrades initiative became a perfect platform to show women entrepreneurs the many opportunities that exist outside the Nigerian market. Mr Awolowo, Aisha Muhammadu Buhari (Nigeria's First Lady) and others are working on legislation to ensure Government, the largest procurement agency in Nigeria, procures from women-led businesses. Mr Awolowo further shared a personal story of drawing inspiration from his grandmother who was an entrepreneur and fashion designer, who used her income to support her husband to study in the UK. **Rebecca Marmot, Vice President Global Partnerships and Advocacy, Unilever**, presented Unilever's business model, which focuses not solely on profitability but also on making positive social and environmental impacts, in line with the SDGs. Achieving Goal 5, *on gender equality and empowering all women and girls*, is integral to the achievement of all other Goals. Furthermore, unlocking women's potential is Unilever's key priority as women can help Unilever to grow. The social and economic implications for including women are evident from the data showing that women reinvest about 90 per cent back into their families and community's compared to men

3 <https://www.carib-export.com/export-development/we-xport/>

who reinvest about 30–40 per cent.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, economic parity is estimated by the McKinsey Global Institute to be worth about US\$28 million in the global economy.<sup>5</sup> Equally important is the business case: women control 64 per cent of consumer spending, and are the vast majority of Unilever's consumers.

Unilever is the second largest advertiser in the world and one third of the world's population uses its products every day. This offers an opportunity to effect a lasting change and Unilever's examples include changing the way goods are provided to help lessen the burden of unpaid care. By working with UN Women to eliminate out dated stereotypes in advertising, Unilever has contributed to normative change. Other examples include developing life skills through the Dove Fund and lobbying for separate male and female toilets in schools (the lack of such facilities is one of the main reasons for girls dropping out of school). Unilever also partnered with DfID on an initiative called TRANSFORM,<sup>6</sup> which applied private sector solutions and approaches to solving global challenges, especially within the context of developing economies, to drive the progress on SDGs. Unilever just finished a programme in India where mobile content was developed for women farmers – portraying women as leaders, and discussing what agro inputs they might need. The gender lens is applied, for example, by making women team leaders and involving men in the project work. Gender lens enabled knowledge on the impact of violence against women as an important barrier to economic empowerment and trade. To overcome this, Unilever is now working with women and men on safety in tea estates including appointing women as team leaders, which constitutes a big change culturally. An OXFAM and Ford Foundation partnership in India works with women farmers to find solutions to barriers and to provide innovative financing. Focusing on integrating gender in the value chain, Ms Marmot stated that Unilever takes gender under consideration starting from farmers and the sourcing through to Unilever's own operations

(ensuring equal opportunities for women), inclusive of branding, and product distribution. Ms Marmot highlighted that success of the SDGs depends on co-operation between businesses, governments, supra-national bodies and NGOs.

**Farhana A Rahman, Chairperson and CEO, UY Systems Ltd, Bangladesh**, described how trade impacted her as a woman entrepreneur. Globally women's presence in ICT is very limited, and in Bangladesh women's businesses are frequently regarded ventures not to be taken seriously. These limitations inspired her to enter international trade. This has proven to be a game-changer as it showed Bangladeshi businesses and other Bangladeshi women, the benefits of including women in their workforce and in Boards. Ms Rahman was the first Director of the Bangladesh Association of Software and Services. This industry had female entrepreneurs but no single woman on the trade body. Although many challenges remain, including access to finance and markets, industry and country branding, and retention of employees, Ms Rahman's influence has realised change in the ICT business in Bangladesh over the last 15 years, with the potential of further increasing women's interest in the industry.

## 2.4 Launch: 'Understanding the Investment Potential of the Commonwealth Diaspora'

**Amelia Kinahoi Siamomua, Head of Gender Section, Commonwealth Secretariat**, presented the Commonwealth Secretariat's thinking about leveraging diaspora networks for prosperity. To better understand diaspora communities across the Commonwealth and to boost their investment potential, the Secretariat conducted a flagship survey. Six UK-based High Commissions – Bangladesh, Fiji, Ghana, Jamaica, Kenya and Nigeria – collaborated with the Commonwealth Secretariat on the report. These countries represent the Commonwealth's diverse membership, have high remittance inflows and are actively pursuing initiatives to leverage diaspora finance. **Faiyaz Siddiq Koya, Minister for Trade and Tourism, Fiji**, recognised the report, titled '*Understanding the Investment Potential of the Commonwealth Diaspora*', will assist all Commonwealth countries, especially small island states, to have a better understanding of diaspora investment ambitions. Minister Koya thanked the Secretariat for including

4 <https://unwomen.org.au/our-work/focus-areas/economic-empowerment/>

5 <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

6 <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article/2018/unilever-partnership-pledges-40-million-pounds-to-support-social-enterprises.html>

Fiji in the survey aimed at giving a true picture of situations on the ground. This is a crucial first step to realise the true potential of diaspora investments and outlining the deterrents that diaspora communities currently face. Fiji has introduced various policies to incentivise diasporas to invest in Fiji, such as the dual citizenship scheme. Fiji looks forward to working closely with the Secretariat to further diaspora investment, including the development of a diaspora investment toolkit.

## 2.5 Parallel Sessions: The Environment That Empowers

### 2.5.1 Getting the policy environment right for women's economic empowerment

Research has shown that enabling women to achieve their full economic potential — through the supply of decent work, reducing barriers that hinder women's participation such as unpaid care work, and increasing investment in social infrastructure — could add as much as US\$12 trillion (or 11 per cent) to the global economy in 2025. The session presented an invaluable opportunity to learn from high-level government officials about initiatives to improve the policy environment for women's economic empowerment, the positive results as well as the challenges experienced. The Moderator **Joanna Roper CMG Special Envoy for Gender Equality, UK**, in her inspiring opening comments, stressed the importance of achieving an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment through a multifaceted approach, which includes long term work to change social and cultural norms and the political will to effect change. Women are disproportionately represented in the informal economy and disadvantaged in terms of job security, social protection and pay, with marginalised groups (including people with disabilities) affected the most. When women participate and contribute to the economy, they bring self-sufficiency, pride, and 90 per cent social investment for future generations (e.g. health, children's education, sports development). Central to shifting from words to actions, Governments should work closely with CSOs to support women's economic empowerment. **HE Dr Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta** stressed the importance of ensuring girls get access to decent education as education is the essential foundation for women's economic empowerment. In the last five years,

Malta has made fantastic progress on women's participation in the workforce (now at par with European Union's average and aiming for more). The key was empowerment and understanding the obstacles to women joining the labour force. 'It makes economic sense to free the huge potential of women... it's a common sense economic approach'. A key policy change Malta made was the introduction of free and universal childcare for all working parents — an expensive programme but it 'freed so much potential that it is now paying for itself' as many more women joined the labour market, especially single mothers who received benefits. Within five years of undertaking this feminist approach to poverty reduction, Malta succeeded in reducing the number of people in severe and material deprivation by two-thirds to 3.8 per cent of population, which is below the EU average.

**HE Samia Suluhu Hassan Vice President of the United Republic of Tanzania** affirmed women's economic empowerment as a sound investment and good economics, a moral imperative and central to justice. Countries' progress should be measured by looking at the status of its women, disregarding GDP figures as the standard. The full empowerment of women includes the removal of social, cultural, economic and political barriers to growth including access to land and credit, as well as lack of investment in women and their businesses. To overcome these challenges, Tanzania implemented a number of policy reforms including establishment of a land tribunal where 3 out of 7 members are women; establishment of a women's development bank; and ring-fencing 30 per cent of government procurement for women owned businesses. Despite these improvements in the public sector, the private sector lags behind with only 20 per cent of businesses led by women. The public and private sectors have to work jointly to ensure the empowerment of women is more meaningful. **Charlotte V McClain-Nhlapo, Global Disability Advisor, World Bank**, acknowledged that 'Women with disabilities do not constitute a homogenous group... they really are part of our human diversity'. It's estimated that 1 in 5 women worldwide have a disability or will experience one form of disability in their lifetime, and only 17 per cent of girls with disabilities are finishing primary school, according to a World Bank study. Women and girls with disabilities are among some of the most vulnerable and discriminated against groups in

the world. Critical challenges to the empowerment of women with disabilities include stigma, social norms, discrimination and infantilisation. Women and girls also face larger barriers in their access to credit and assets, as well as to improved physical environment. We need to take active measures to remove the systemic barriers that women with disabilities face and build robust global architecture. It is important to accelerate the progress made under the UN Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disability, especially Article 6, and the SDGs, through policies implementation and strengthening of normative and legislative framework, including gender-responsive budgeting to ensure that budgets work for everyone including women with disabilities. It is also critical to collect disaggregated data on disability, pursue equal pay for equal work, and utilise new technology that offers a fantastic opportunity for inclusion because, 'When we invest in empowering women with disabilities, we build a more sustainable society for all'. Use a gender lens when doing gender budgeting, including women with disability.

**Shirley Pryce, President, Jamaica Household Workers' Union**, shared a personal and powerful story of empowerment and of growing an impressive network and Union of domestic workers from national to regional and international levels. The aim of the union is to give voice to the most exploited, vulnerable, invisible and least protected and empowered (estimated to be 67 million worldwide) in society. 'If domestic workers stop working, the world stops working'. Ms Pryce urged Commonwealth Governments who are yet to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 (also known as the Domestic Workers Convention) to follow the example of Jamaica and 28 other countries to ratify the Convention to show their commitment for the protection of vulnerable members and ensure the welfare of domestic workers are safeguarded. **Dr Margo Thomas, President and CEO Women's Economic Imperative**, quoted Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund: 'Women's empowerment is not just a moral imperative; it's an economic no-brainer'. Dr Thomas stated that the lack of economic empowerment and recognition of women's contribution to the economy, amounts to 'imposing a tax on the forgone economic growth'. A multi-pronged approach is required to tackle adverse norms and practices that negatively impact

women, and enactment of legal protections that recognise rewards and redistribute unpaid care work, as well as redistribution of assets and strengthening of collective representation and visibility. There is 'amazing value in sharing and learning from each other' — women's economic empowerment is a win-win for everyone, men, women and children. A systematic review of legal and regulatory frameworks is necessary so policies are transparent and inclusive when designed and implemented. Accountability is key in conducting systematic impact assessment of policies (ex-ante and ex-post), and assures voice, representation and agency for women.

### 2.5.2 What works with business to progress inclusive economic empowerment?

Empowering women economically helps advance welfare for all. Women are particularly active in the informal sector and in small and medium sized enterprises (according to the International Finance Corporation, women own close to 10 million businesses worldwide). Women also suffer from occupational segregation, often being clustered in the low-paid, low-return jobs or parts of the value chain. The session explored concrete actions that businesses throughout the Commonwealth are taking to improve diversity in the workforce and assist women-led businesses, women employees and women-owned SMEs, as well as promoting LGBT rights and the equal and active participation of other marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities. **Richard Burge, CEO, Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC)** opened the session, which was jointly managed with Commonwealth Business Forum. Mr Burge described diversity as an issue to be tackled across the spectrum and not just in business. Chief Executives can and do make a difference and ensure equitability, equality and a better environment for women to work in. **The Rt Hon Baroness Prashar, Deputy Chairman, British Council**, stressed the need for more support from the multinational corporations towards small enterprises to encourage inclusivity.

**Theme One of the parallel workshops focused on creating an inclusive environment.** **Tracey McDermott, Group Head of Corporate, Public and Regulatory Affairs, Standard Chartered Bank**, highlighted the importance of women's involvement in developing healthy businesses





Parallel Session on 'The Environment That Empowers' on Day Two of the Women's Forum

and achieving thriving economies. To create an inclusive environment, we need to begin with adolescent girls and focus on quality education that encompasses financial literacy and key business skills, for women to set up and manage businesses. Partnerships with communities, families, and schools and NGOs, should encourage the development of necessary skills to reduce barriers, and strengthen inclusion and women's access to finance. **Christine Svarer, Team Lead: The Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) programme and Director Women's Empowerment BSR**, encouraged businesses to improve women's economic opportunities using a simple framework such as WOW, to 'Act' — companies should institutionalise inclusivity and consider women in all roles and positions; 'Enable' — systemic progress such as building mutually beneficial relationships with companies; and 'Influence' change across sectors at all levels — companies should endeavour to showcase women's empowerment and their values and contribution in the global supply chain. **Archana Bhatnagar Managing Director of Haylide Chemicals Pvt. Ltd, India**, called for lessons learned, actual images and stories of the positive contribution of women-owned enterprises should be publicised and widely disseminated,

thereby promoting women business leaders as brand ambassadors. Women's networks should be strengthened and serve as opportunities to connect women with employers and contractors. Moreover, diversity efforts made by corporations in the US, Europe and the UK, should be extended beyond these regions through work with businesses and partnerships with NGOs.

**Theme Two of the workshop centred on Women in Leadership in corporate and public boards. Sue MacDonald, Executive President of People and Organisation, Wood PLC**, recalled the first time she was treated differently as a woman, upon entering employment, working on off-shore oil rigs. Despite the progress in the oil and gas industry, including 40 per cent of women on the boards, the majority of the 55,000 employees across all companies in the industry are men. The industry should encourage more women to join through simple methods such as sharing reports and inviting them to meetings, and ensuring women on maternity leave continue to be involved. Flexible policies would ensure women are valued, needed and wanted in the workplace. Governments also have a role to play by amending and creating workplace policies that promote women's economic empowerment, including the role of fathers in tackling gender stereotypes and

encouraging girls to aim high and enter traditionally male industries. **Folorunso Alakija, Vice President, Famfa Oil, Nigeria**, pointed out that non-inclusion of women is a huge waste of potential since companies with women in leadership positions are more financially stable and generally perform better. Companies should recognise the benefits of promoting women to leadership positions and understand that women are powerful drivers of economic growth when given the opportunity. Companies need to challenge cultural expectations to enable women to believe in their own potential to take up leadership positions, and provide required support for women to succeed at home, work and in the market place. Ms Alakija recommended that the corporate sector partner with high schools and universities to provide scholarships to girls in industries with low female engagement; institutionalise gender sensitive policies, including provision of childcare facilities; and implement modern working policies, such as flex-time, job-sharing and remote.

Recommendations drawn from the session included enhancing the promotion of women's leadership at a junior level through mentoring, shadow leadership and delegated authority to manage their careers and family responsibilities. Profiling of middle level women managers shows the pathway women can get into senior leadership positions. Inclusion of women on interview panels not only promotes inclusion and diversity, but showcases women as effective leaders. Other successful policies include supporting women returning from maternity leave by offering part-time and flexible working arrangements.

**Theme Three of the workshop focused on A Broader Diversity Agenda.** **John Miller, Director, Open for Business**, stated that companies that support diversity and inclusion are better able to compete for talent and perform better. Of the top 100 fastest growing companies, 29 have positive policies on inclusion and business is leading the way on diversity and seeing the benefits. Diversity and inclusion are also associated with higher levels of entrepreneurship. However, a lack of diversity is detrimental, and discrimination against LGBTQI is correlated with corrupt societies. **Mark Anderson, Vice President Virgin Atlantic**, explained that businesses could be better at diversity and inclusion by collectively collaborating to find solutions and elevate changes, such as ensuring gender-sensitive policies are updated and effectively implemented.

**Ola Abu Alghaib, Deputy Director and Global Head of Policy and Partnership, Leonard Cheshire Disability**, focused on the exclusion many people with disabilities are facing in the workplace, especially in lower middle-income countries (LMICs). The promotion of the economic case for inclusion and partnership between NGOs and the private sector can help employers identify people who are excluded, and help source training and skills required to access employment. **Jazz Shaban, Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Humanity and Inclusion (formerly Handicap International) UK**, also mentioned the importance of inclusive hiring, retention and promotion. Businesses should work closely with their staff to assess and promote the appetite for diversity and inclusion, and develop and implement relevant policies.

### 2.5.3 Enabling women's access to assets

Ensuring all women's access to assets is essential for women's economic and wider empowerment. Importantly, assets should not be considered in isolation. To be truly transformative, women require access to land and financial services. Ensure strong legislative frameworks for women's equal access to assets are in place and implemented in all countries. This requires challenging discriminatory norms, it being critically important to reach those women facing multiple forms of discrimination (including LGBTI women). Participants shared positive examples from across the Commonwealth such as the changes to land titling in Rwanda, which resulted in women securing 30 per cent of land titles.

**Dr Cheryl Doss, University of Oxford, UK**, recognised there is an increasing body of evidence demonstrating women's access to assets, which can improve women's livelihood, families and communities, and leads to economic growth and structural transformation in societies. Women should be enabled to get involved economically and have a voice in their communities and governments. Women also need stronger property and land rights in order to generate income, not just own lands but also invest in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Land rights for women featured in the presentation by **Odenda Lumumba CEO, Kenya Land Alliance**. Women's empowerment is anchored on land, which is a source of wealth, security and status to women. In Kenya, women dominate the agricultural sector and small-scale farmers. Women can access land but 95 per cent of landowners are men due to the inheritance laws

that are enacted by traditional rulers—mainly men. Religious leaders rarely include women’s issues on the agenda and tend to isolate women in terms of access to land. It is necessary to amend detrimental customary laws, working with civil society and traditional and religious leaders, to enable women to own land and achieve gender equity.

**Anne-Marie Chidzero, CEO AfriCap Microfinance Investment Company in Mozambique / South**

**Africa** appreciated women as creative and enterprising. In Africa, 95 per cent of businesses are small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and in Nigeria alone 41 per cent of adult women are in business. Just 2 per cent of women’s SMEs have access to assets or finance, while most women usually fund their businesses from personal savings. Women represent the most disruptive force in the economy and are the least served in the markets. Ms Chidzero shared positive trends such as private equity funds applying a gender equity lens in their decision-making, which favours women. Another positive example is the work undertaken by renewable energy companies to improve women’s access to assets through the sale of solar kits to rural communities, allowing payment over a period of time. These solar kits have enabled women to expand their businesses. The generated income is subsequently reinvested into women’s communities.

**Debra Mallowah, General Manager**

**East Africa, GlaxoSmithKline Plc**, focused on the opportunity women and their businesses can play within the value chain. Empowering women in value chains presents a unique opportunity for businesses that need to plan how to support women in reaching their full economic potential. Women need to be given opportunities in technical and management positions. Women frequently have no credit history and their businesses do not hold much physical collateral, therefore promoting financial inclusion for women, and granting access to finance and other financial tools will help grow their businesses.



# Day Three: Empowerment in the Community

## 3.1 Overcoming barriers – Violence Against Women and Girls

VAWG is the most widespread human rights violation and a fundamental barrier to the empowered future for women and girls. The plenary session looked at key solutions to addressing VAWG including the evidence emerging from DfID's ground-breaking 'What Works to prevent VAWG' programme, looking at overcoming barriers to women's empowerment. The session focused on best practices emerging from the Commonwealth, with a particular focus on intimate partner violence, which is the most widespread form of VAWG.

**Moderator: Mmapaseka Steve Letsike, Deputy Chairperson South African National AIDS Council (SANAC)**

The session acknowledged violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious crime that is widespread and a human rights violation. Ms Letsike posed key questions to panel speakers to address how to tackle VAWG, and describe measures to ensure VAWG is stopped across the Commonwealth? **Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights** and **Rt Hon Lord Bates, Minister of State for International Development** delivered the keynote speeches.

**Ms Gilmore** pointed out that since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 70 years ago, women are still subjected to the most unimaginable forms of rights' deprivation. Denial of women rights are rife as attested by evidence in the way doctors treat their female patients, teachers treat their female pupils or students, and reflected in the way politicians, chief executives, and others in positions of authority, treat their female employees or counterparts. Evidence shows a calculated effort to deny women and girls access to sexual reproductive health and rights, even though situations can lead to death of mother and new-born. It is important to re-iterate that health and reproductive rights is the basic rights of women and girls. Women and girls' rights

are narrowly misconstrued or subjugated to the patriarchal paradigm. This narrow construction of the female gender should be overcome. For instance, no rites of passage should justify genital mutilation/cutting or child marriages contracted to encourage the dominating role of the husband. Toxic forms of masculinity that include subjugation and degradation of women, do not only harm women and girls but also confine men and boys to this narrow-minded paradigm, and restricts human potential and creativity. We also need to pay special attention to the intersectionality of gender and other forms of identity, to include women with disabilities, those living with HIV, ethnic minorities and lesbians facing additional disadvantages. Women and girls have the right to live free from violence and realise their full potential and the Commonwealth should seek to have a gender-based justice. Hate is learned, and it can be unlearned. Therefore, standing up for universal and indivisible human rights is for our common good, our common interest. It is the true commonwealth. Everyone should feel equal in dignity and in rights.

**Lord Bates** highlighted how VAWG held women and girls back from their economic, political and social rights. VAWG, including domestic violence (DV) is not limited to any jurisdiction, culture or religion but wide spread and should be addressed. British research revealed that in South Sudan 60 per cent of girls suffer violence before the age of 25, mainly due to the ravages of war. The greatest challenge to addressing gender-based violence (GBV) is lack of data, ignorance and lack of education. To overcome these problems, we need to work together. The British research and innovating programme '*What works to prevent violence*', partners with leading international experts to produce effective interventions to reduce VAWG rates. The programme has started to bear fruits as illustrated by the reduction of VAWG in Afghanistan. In Tajikistan, the promotion of economic empowerment and changing of social norms through communication resulted in a reduction in the proportion of women experiencing



l-r: Steve Letsike-South Africa, Kate Gilmore-UNHRC, Rt Hon Lord Bates-UK, Hon Otiko Afisah Djaba-Ghana, Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells-Australia, Pramila Patten-SRSG:VAW, Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya-Swaziland, and Iqbal Ali Jatoi-Pakistan at the 'Overcoming Barriers - Violence Against Women and Girls plenary session.

intimate partner violence. Similarly, the work in Afghanistan resulted in a reduction in peer violence in the home and use of corporal punishment, and an increase in girls' school attendance. Progressive results from the programme should be escalated across the Commonwealth. Furthermore, women and girls with disabilities require additional support, as they are twice as likely to suffer violence in their lifetime. To be effective, all forms of violence - domestic, social and economic - should be legally recognised. The new Domestic Abuse Bill enacted by the British Parliament, includes coercive control in its definition of violence. Ending VAWG will not succeed without the involvement of men and boys and should be included in all efforts to build societies free from violence. The late Jo Cox MP, a passionate humanitarian, said: 'There is more that unites us than divides us'. This is also true for the Commonwealth—though VAWG is experienced in all countries, through co-operation and partnership, relevant actors can address VAWG and create a better future for all citizens of the Commonwealth.

**Hon Otiko Afisah Djaba, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Ghana**, presented scenarios of how Ghana promotes gender equality and measures to eliminate VAWG such as legislation, in collaboration with several institutions seeking to address women's rights in Ghana. Ghana's Constitution is based on the principle of non-discrimination and equality. However, perceptions of women as weak and less educated endure. Reporting of incidents of VAWG, including domestic violence and rape, is on the rise, but agencies responsible for tackling these issues and provision of support services face limited funding and capacity. Psychological violence - which has a hugely detrimental impact on women - is also addressed. Minister Djaba acknowledged that men and women should be treated equally and all forms of violence are unacceptable. The conversation to end all forms of VAWG should continue in the home, schools and workplace. Women and girls should be allowed the space to fulfil their ambitions and reach for their dreams. **Iqbal Ali Jatoi Country Director-Pakistan, Right To Play International**, presented on 'Right to Play', an international NGO with headquarters in Toronto, which uses sport and play to build life skills in children such as critical

thinking, communication and expression. Such methods have helped reduce the likelihood of conflict and violence. Most of the organisation's work is in public schools. Some of the challenges encountered include lack of physical facilities. For example, in Pakistan, 33 per cent of educational institutions do not have drinking water or sanitation facilities; 50 per cent have no walls; 80 per cent are overcrowded. These issues prevent effective education and contribute to violence in schools, which remains high, with 91 per cent boys and 64 per cent girls experiencing violence, while 94 per cent of boys and 89 per cent of girls' experience peer violence. Children are also subjected to corporal punishment both in school and home. This is very concerning for children who are not just passive recipients, but carriers of norms and change for future generations. Experience shows that violence stays with children into adulthood and perpetuates VAWG.

**Pramila Patten, United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SViC)**, spoke about ways to tackle sexual violence in conflict, and how the international community ensure perpetrators are brought to justice. UN Security Council Resolution 1888 on Women, Peace and Security (2009), mandates peacekeeping missions to protect women and girls from SViC. However, despite the resolution SViC continues to destroy the lives of affected women and girls and their communities. The stigma surrounding SViC results in serious under-reporting of this crime and eventually kills women. As a response to addressing SViC, Ms Patten's presented three strategic areas:

1. Take a human rights, survivor-centred approach: strengthen engagement with survivors to ensure their needs and perspectives directly drive strategies.
2. Create a culture of prevention and deterrence through justice and accountability to address the root causes of sexual violence.
3. Reduce stigma in recognition that stigma makes sexual violence a cheap but lethal weapon.

It is important to recognise that survivors' thirst for justice is as urgent as their needs for psychological and medical support. Accountability and justice should be the rule and not a rare exception. Investing in gender equality and economic

empowerment offers protection to women and girls. The focus should be on livelihood support for survivors to rebuild their lives, and in giving women and girls a voice to report crimes and share their stories. Continued heinous crimes such as violence against Rohingya women and girls, some of whom were raped to death, compel us to intensify our efforts to end such crimes and support survivors and their communities to rebuild shattered lives. VAWG is not just a women's issue; employ all resources available to tackle it including the Inter-Parliamentary Union recommendations on sexual harassment against women in politics and legally binding tools such as CEDAW.

**Bishop Ellinah Wamukoya, First Anglican Woman Bishop in Africa**, spoke about the role of churches in supporting women and girls and promoting healthy relationships and families. Within faith communities many survivors first speak out about their experiences and receive support. In specific situations, perpetrators have used scriptures to justify abusive behaviour. Faith leaders should prevent the misuse of scriptures and be a voice for women and girls and speak the truth in power and love. Furthermore, faith leaders serve as advocates for social and political change with the responsibility to influence positive thinking, attitudes and behaviour. Faith leaders come from different backgrounds and traditions and require training. They should be included in current conversations to understand the issues around VAWG and intersectionality. Bishop Wamukoya called on faith leaders to become the prophetic voice for women and girls, and support the enactment, popularisation and implementation of appropriate policies and laws aiming to end VAWG.

**Australian Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Minister for International Development and the Pacific**, focussed her presentation on good practices in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against children in the Pacific region. Hon Fierravanti-Wells highlighted the cost of violence goes beyond survivors, to impact on families communities and countries. In Australia, violence against women and children was estimated at AUD\$22 billion in 2015-2016 alone.<sup>7</sup> Understanding the economic costs of VAWG is crucial in the implementation of the

7 [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08\\_2016/the\\_cost\\_of\\_violence\\_against\\_women\\_and\\_their\\_children\\_in\\_australia\\_-\\_final\\_report\\_may\\_2016.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2016/the_cost_of_violence_against_women_and_their_children_in_australia_-_final_report_may_2016.pdf)



Parallel Session on 'Addressing Barriers to Empowerment' on Day Three of the Women's Forum

National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010-2022 (the National Plan). Another initiative aimed at the reduction of violence against women and children is the national prevention campaign: 'Stop it at the start'. The campaign's goal is to illuminate how disrespectful and aggressive attitudes by young men towards young women and girls may lead to VAWG. It encourages conversations about respect between boys and girls, and seeks to end the cycle of domestic violence. Such attitudinal change programmes should be accompanied by effective implementation of legislation, training provided to frontline workers, and an increased number of women in leadership positions to realise change favourably.

Intersectionality between gender and disability leaves women and girls with disabilities at a much higher risk of VAWG. Dangers posed by new forms of violence include image-based abuse such as non-consensual taking, distribution, or threat to distribute, of intimate, nude and/or sexual images, (cyber)bullying and harassment. Working collaboratively with governments, faith groups, civil society and other actors can lead to the eradication of traditional and new forms of VAWG. Empowering a woman, in turn, empowers her family, community and country. Strategies and initiatives to address VAWG should involve women in all their diversities –

women with disabilities, those living with HIV/AIDS, LGBTQI+. Violence prohibits women's participation economically, socially and politically. To succeed in creating a future for women and girls free of violence, spaces should be open to challenge and involve leaders to impact and realise change for the benefit of all.

### 3.2 Parallel Sessions: Addressing Barriers to Empowerment

The parallel sessions explored solutions and successful approaches employed across the Commonwealth to address specific forms of VAWG such as harmful practices (child early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting), human trafficking and child exploitation. Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights should be explored as a cross cutting, enabling factor for women and girls' empowerment and for the full enjoyment of women and girls' rights, including the right to live a life free from violence.

#### 3.2.1 Eliminating harmful practices: Child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting

According to a report published by Plan International UK and the Royal Commonwealth Society, 'around 375 million women alive today were married or



entered into union before their 18th birthday – this is over 16 per cent of the Commonwealth's population and 52 per cent of women aged over 18 years old in the Commonwealth. At the current prevalence, 43 per cent of women in the Commonwealth are married before they reach 18 years old. This amounts to more than 44 million 20 to 24-year-olds were married as children. Approximately 8.8 million women in the Commonwealth are married as children annually.' This equates to 24,000 girls every day, or 17 girls every minute.

UNICEF estimates that around 200 million women and girls globally are living with the consequences of FGM/C with around 3.6 million girls at risk of being cut in the next year alone. Moreover, available data from large-scale representative surveys show that the practice of FGM/C is highly concentrated in a swath of countries from the Atlantic coast to the Horn of Africa, with Commonwealth member states' Sierra Leone and The Gambia having prevalence rates above 75 per cent, while Nigeria is the Commonwealth country with the highest absolute number of those affected (20.1 million). This affects the well-being of girls and prevents them from completing of 12 years of schooling. The pain and complications increase the risk of school dropout rates. The session highlighted best practices, to raise the voices of survivors, activists and champions in addressing CEFM and FGM/C, and to create collaborative networks of expertise that could be scaled up in Commonwealth countries. To end FGM/C a multi-pronged approach from the local level working with community gatekeepers is crucial, so women and girls are free to speak about their experiences; and prioritising partnerships at the national and international levels. For example, the efforts in Kenya are yielding positive results with 850,000 communities having confirmed abandonment of this horrific practice.

**Christopher MacLennan, Assistant Deputy Minister for Global Issues and Development at Global Affairs Canada**, set out the priority and practical approaches of the Canadian government in placing gender equality (as its top-3 policies). Mr MacLennan emphasised that a holistic approach is taken for improving women's empowerment. Within the context of addressing FGM/C, entire systems have to be addressed simultaneously, rather than trying to challenge sequentially from childhood up. For that reason, the Canadian Government made few pledges including

commitment to have 95 per cent of every dollar spent to be gender integrated or targeted towards women and girls. The money allocated for SRHR will be doubled, and taking into consideration partners' contribution will bring the total spend to over C\$1 million. Mr MacLennan recognised the centrality of women's organisations in influencing positive change on this agenda, and the Canadian government will commit 150 million dollars over next 5 years to support women's organisations. All these steps, and conversations with partnerships following from the Forum, will take one more step in ending FGM/C. **Professor Asha Singh Kanwar, President and Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Canada**, highlighted the particular challenges of reaching and supporting girls in remote or conflict affected areas and the need for innovative local solutions such as boat schools. Education enables girls to postpone marriage as well as decide and plan for children. However, there is a need for more than just training and empowerment – a holistic model of education should involve families, communities and in-country partners. COL aims to harness the potential of existing and new technologies to achieve development outcomes and to use this technology to 'reach the unreached.' COL further trains girls in non-traditional occupations, thus changing gender stereotypes. One example of innovative educational programmes is 'GIRLS INSPIRE', which has prevented 453 child marriages. However, provision of training alone is insufficient for transformative change hence the creation of opportunities for girls to realise their potential, and engage families and communities through cultural performances. Finally, boys and men – fathers, grandfathers and community leaders should be engaged in efforts to end harmful practices and act as male champions of gender equality. **Julia Lalla-Maharajh OBE, CEO and Founder, Orchid Project**, highlighted the link between FGM/C, Child Marriage and high levels of school dropouts. FGM is seen as preparing girls to be wives. Currently, an estimated 3.9 million girls are at risk of FGM every year, and new data shows that the number is increasing. Collaborative effort is critical to stop the FGM trajectory, or many more girls will be cut. Apart from a holistic community-based approach, sharing of evidence and best practices from across the world have proved effective. Hence working with governments is critical to increase data collection capabilities for empirical evidence to effectively combat the practice. Furthermore, tackling social

norms that make parents believe their daughters will be ostracised if they are not cut should be strongly addressed.

### 3.2.2 Sexual and reproductive health and rights

Advancing the sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of women and girls is inextricably linked to other important human rights, including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to privacy, the right to education and employment, and the prohibition of discrimination. These rights have been crystallised in various international and regional agreements. SRHR for women and girls featured at CHOGM 2018 for the first time, and was moderated by **Marianne Haslegrave, Director, Commonwealth Medical Trust (Commat)**. The keynote was delivered by **Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights**. Panel speakers included two survivors, with **Neha Chauhan, Senior Technical Advisor Advocacy and Accountability, South Asia Regional Office, International Planned Parenthood Federation**; **Matthew Jackson, Director, UK Office, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**; **Tanya Barron OBE, CEO, Plan International UK**

With the adoption of Agenda 2030, member states agreed to a far-ranging and ambitious programme of action that included three targets on promoting SRHR. Target 5.6. calls on states to 'Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and

Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.' The specific indicators speak directly to the empowerment of women and legislative and policy reform on SRHR. To this end, the 2016 Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016 – 2030) is critical as it provides a comprehensive human rights-based roadmap to SRHR of women and girls. It emphasises that 'investing in such interventions for the health and well-being of women, children and adolescents has many benefits: first and foremost, it keeps them alive and healthy. In addition, it reduces poverty, stimulates economic productivity and growth, creates jobs and is cost-effective.'

However, despite these obligations, violations of women's SRHR are still pervasive and take various forms, including the denial of access to health care services that speak to the needs of women, subjecting women's access to services to cumbersome administrative procedures, and forcing or coercing women and girls to undergo procedures against their will, including forced sterilization, forced virginity examinations, and forced abortion. The UN estimates that during 2013, 289 000 women died in pregnancy and childbirth, while more than 200 million women have an unmet need for family planning.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the same report highlights that 52 per cent of maternal deaths (in pregnancy, at or soon after childbirth) are attributable to three leading preventable causes – haemorrhage, sepsis, and hypertensive disorders. The World Health Organisation estimates that

8 United Nations. (2016) Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016 – 2030).



about 1 in 3 (35 per cent) women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime which negatively affects women's physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health, and may increase vulnerability to HIV.<sup>9</sup>

Sexual health in terms of maternal health featured in the past on the Commonwealth agenda but this was the first time for SRHR to be discussed at a Commonwealth. The issues discussed included limited access to information and services related to SRHR which result in high rate of contraction of STDs and STIs and prevent adolescent girls and women from deciding when and how many children they have. This does not only take women's agency away but can lead to premature death. In fact, c. 529,000 girls died each year from issues related to SRHR. We should make efforts at reducing stigma related to SRHR, whilst simultaneously increasing quality and reducing costs of the support and services. Double standards in countries work against the interest of girls and young people: countries would rather legislate against consensual relations between adults, instead of tackling issues of paedophilia and child marriage. Girls are seen old enough to marry, but not to have education on sexual health. Data availability is a challenge as well – despite the fact that puberty now begins at about age 10, sexual data is only collected for those age 15 and above. Older women are also penalised, as there is no data collection for those above 49 years, despite the fact they are the fastest growing group of STI transmissions.

The Commission on the Status of Women highlighted a rollback in positions on unsafe abortions. The challenge is rising up the agenda again. Twenty-five million women a year have unsafe abortions in both developed and developing countries. Of those 68,000 die and many more have complications. Family planning is the most effective intervention any economy can make. Globally it cost \$535 million a year to deal with the effects of unsafe abortion. Simple interventions like family planning would save a huge amount of resources. To overcome these problems, a stronger Commonwealth strategy is needed, which recognises SRHR is related to multiple human rights violation, including the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to health, the right to

privacy, the right to education, and the prohibition of discrimination. The strategy should further recognise that realising SRHR increases the rates of education, reduces health costs and results in stronger economics for countries. Free spaces should be allowed to listen to the needs of the young citizens of the Commonwealth and make a special effort to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable - rural, young, and disabled girls - to ensure no one is left behind. SRHR should be incorporated under the universal health coverage supported by sustainable financing. The ultimate goal should be a zero-preventable maternal deaths, zero-gaps in SRHR provision and zero-VAWG. Of the economics gain, environmental and social sustainability of the Commonwealth depends upon every Commonwealth citizen, young person and child having age appropriate, comprehensive, inclusive of sex and reproductive health education and services delivered by well trained teachers, health professionals and youth advocates.

### 3.2.3 Eradicating forms of exploitation: Tackling human trafficking and child exploitation across the Commonwealth

The UN **Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons** defines human trafficking in Persons as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by coercion, force, fraud or abduction, for the purpose of exploitation including forced labour, slavery or sexual exploitation. The Global Estimates indicate that women and girls are disproportionately affected by modern slavery, accounting for 28.7 million, or 71 per cent of the overall total. More precisely, women and girls represent 99 per cent of victims of forced labour in the commercial sex industry and 58 per cent in other sectors. State authorities impose forced labour on 40 per cent of victims of forced labour, and 84 per cent of cases involve forced marriages. The session was moderated by **Dr Aidan McQuade, Human Rights Consultant**. Panel speakers: **Kevin Hyland OBE, United Kingdom's Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner**; **Dr Howard Taylor, Executive Director, Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children**; **HE Arthur Peter Mutharika, President of Malawi and UN HeforShe Campaign Global Champion**; **Beate Andrees, Chief of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch**; **Jasmine O'Connor OBE, Chief Executive**

9 <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/news-events/csw-2017/en/>





**Officer, Anti-Slavery International; Grace Forrest, Founding Director Walk Free Foundation; and Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt, Secretary of State for International Development, UK.**

One million children were victims of commercial sexual exploitation in 2016. An estimated 37 per cent of victims living in forced marriage were children at the time the marriage took place. Among child victims, 44 per cent were forced to marry before the age of 15 years and almost all child victims were girls. Boys account for 58 per cent of all children in child labour and 62 per cent of all children in hazardous work. However, girls are much more likely to shoulder responsibility for household chores - a form of work not considered in the child labour estimates (ILO, 2017). Girls are also more likely than boys to perform "double work duty", meaning both work in employment and in household chore. They are also likely to be present in less visible and therefore under-reported forms of child labour, such as domestic service in private households. In order to promote and protect human rights and individual freedoms of women and girls worldwide, the gendered nature of human trafficking and child exploitation should be recognised, as well as the root causes of extreme poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Without access to education and economic opportunities, women cannot freely participate in modern society. One of the most effective ways to protect women and girls is education, as it empowers women and girls, and directly reduces their vulnerability to modern slavery in all its forms. This can be achieved through targeted investments in the provision of education through sustained action and political commitment

across the Commonwealth. Increased investment in research and improved data collection processes will determine appropriate strategies and policies that work best and scale up protection services and interventions for those most at risk. Furthermore, businesses need to play their part by understanding the ramifications of recruitment fees which are a gateway into debt and casualties of modern slavery.

There is a need to be pragmatic and hold business leaders to account on such ramifications, and imperative solutions are always informed by survivors, who are best placed to inform on practical interventions. Hence, it is critical to listen and engage with survivors to avoid unintentional harm. It is important to raise a movement of many voices that will speak out in unison, and provide consistent messages from governments and civil society to create an environment where slavery is not acceptable. Only then will the social norms that permit slavery be eroded. It is absolutely clear that not one country or institution can end modern slavery on its own, but should involve a wide range of stakeholders from civil society, including anti-slavery groups at grassroots level, mosques, churches, trade unions, and international NGOs. Partnership and cooperation to supporting a stronger international response to eradicating exploitation are also of crucial importance. Countries should join the UN Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, and co-operate regionally to amend and pass new domestic legislations such as the Modern Slavery Act in the UK. Other initiatives could involve signing up to 'Inspire Agenda', which is a framework

for activity that is proven to end violence against children if implemented in its entirety. Currently, 19 countries globally in over 18 months have signed up to be "Pathfinder countries", trying to implement the Inspire framework.

Whilst there are many reasons for celebrations - including India halving the rates of child marriages in the last decade through access to education and community empowerment - there are still millions of women and girls being affected by modern slavery and the urgency is real. No country can develop sustainably whilst more of 50 per cent of their population is held back. The Commonwealth is a diverse and powerful family, and should continue to work together to secure a prosperous, fair and secure future for the next generation of women and girls, men and boys, working towards achieving Goal 8.7, calling for the elimination of forced labour, human trafficking and particularly recruitment of child soldiers, and Goal 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.

### 3.3 Outcomes of the Commonwealth Women's Forum

The Commonwealth is committed to gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to realising the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030. This is evident in the Commonwealth Charter and four priority areas on gender equality and women's empowerment. The Zero Draft Outcome Statement set out the Women's Forum asks of member states, civil society, Commonwealth (organisations and member states), multilateral partners, and the private sector to realise the ambitions for gender equality and women's empowerment in the 2018 CHOGM Communiqué. These priority actions and commitments emerged from the discussions at the 2018 Forum and will be reviewed at the next Women's Forum in 2021. The session's objective was to ensure that the key highlights, recommendations and asks were fully captured by the Zero Draft outcome document; it provided solid and strong recommendations as well as highlighted pertinent issues raised by the Forum on key themes; and that it included practical and action-oriented calls and recommendations.

The keynote was delivered by **Jude Kelly, Artistic Director, Southbank Centre**, who highlighted the need to build optimism and stamina in addressing issues around women's empowerment and gender equality. She encouraged women, including those affected by VAWG, to be brave and vocal about their experiences and highlighted the role of the Forum in addressing the challenges women face. **Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Cornwall**, emphasised the lack of voice and silence surrounding VAWG in her address, and it is because of silence that the domestic abuse remains a hidden problem in society. This silence is corrosive and leaves survivors' carrying the burden of shame. In order to end VAWG, affected women and girls are supported and encouraged to speak about their experiences. Arts and media, including innovative radio shows and soap operas, can play an important role in breaking this silence and saving lives.

Delegates were free to choose out of four group workshops to review the Outcome Document on one of the following areas: 1) Women's Economic Empowerment; 2) Women in Leadership; 3) Violence Against Women and Girls; 4) Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Climate Change. The facilitated break-out sessions lasted 45 minutes, and changes recorded using a laptop and overhead screen, by a Rapporteur. The Forum reconvened in Plenary, and each Groups' spokesperson reported back on key highlights of the Group's review of the document, including general comments on whether the outcome fairly captured key priorities/ asks. The Groups' specific changes and suggestions were reflected to strengthen the outcome document and integrated into the final version of the Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Women's Forum", and posted online on Thursday, 19 April 2018.<sup>10</sup>

10 <http://thecommonwealth.org/chogm>

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