



COMMONWEALTH
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GENDER EQUALITY POLICY



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Foreword

Gender equality is a human right and fundamental principle of the Commonwealth. It is also a critical means of contributing to the Commonwealth's goals of eradicating poverty, building resilient societies and economies, harmonious communities and promoting sustainable development.

In 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Port of Spain subscribed to an *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles*, which recalls and reiterates the Commonwealth's commitment to fundamental values and principles, including to development, democracy and diversity and reaffirms gender equality and empowerment "as an essential component of human development and basic human rights".

The Affirmation acknowledges the advancement of women's rights as a critical precondition for effective and sustainable development.

In recent years we have seen steady incremental advance towards achieving gender equality in the Commonwealth. We have seen pro-active measures such as quotas to increase women's political representation instituted in South Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda and India. We have supported Commonwealth governments in the Gambia, Nigeria and Pakistan to implement gender-responsive budgeting; and fostered partnerships between commercial banks to promote equitable access to financing. Many countries have specific laws, national action plans and programmes including 'one-stop centres' that link hospitals, police stations, shelters and the courts to strengthen women's access to justice. But we still have a long way to go.

Women and girls in the Commonwealth continue to face discrimination with regard to education, employment, access to credit, property and land. In many regions, women's access to justice and representation in the political, public and private spheres remains limited. Women continue to be subjected to different forms of violence or discrimination – physical, sexual, psychological and economic – within and outside their homes, in times of peace as well as of conflict.

While the Commonwealth Secretariat has often led the way in addressing the challenges of gender inequality and women's empowerment, we recognise the need to ensure that our stated commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming - articulated in both our *Secretariat Strategic Plan (2008-2012)* and the *Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2005-2015)* - is fully reflected in our structure, systems, policies and programmes of assistance.

I am therefore pleased to present the Commonwealth Secretariat Gender Equality Policy, which promises to strengthen and accelerate the Secretariat's efforts in this regard. Its timing is also pertinent, given the 2011 Commonwealth theme 'Women as Agents of Change', which reminds us of the vast and untapped potential of women and girls to contribute to tackling today's contemporary challenges of finance, energy, food, trade, development and climate change. The adoption by the Secretariat of this Gender Equality Policy will ensure that this crucial goal is carried forward beyond 2011 and will encourage us, in partnership with member governments, to find ways to empower women and girls in conjunction with men to play their vital role in shaping our common future.

Kamalesh Sharma
Commonwealth Secretary-General

1. Introduction

“Gender” refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships among and between women, men, girls and boys. These are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context- and time-specific and changeable.¹ The Commonwealth’s commitment to achieving gender equality is enshrined in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015.

This Gender Equality Policy provides the Commonwealth Secretariat² with a mandate and framework for realising this commitment through mainstreaming gender equality and equity into its policies, structures, systems and operations.³ It is intended to strengthen and guide the collective effort of all Secretariat staff to ensure that women, men, girls and boys benefit equally from their work; and that inequalities are not perpetuated. Its ultimate goal is to support the achievement of gender equality as a means of achieving democracy, peace, sustainable development and poverty eradication in the Commonwealth.

This policy document outlines the gender equality principles, goals, objectives and policy measures that should guide the Secretariat’s work. A separate Policy Implementation and Reporting Framework will accompany this document and will provide further details regarding the specific roles, responsibilities, strategies, activities and indicators for effective implementation and monitoring of the policy across the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Framework shall provide a system for tracking implementation, planning for the filling of gaps in implementation, and regularly and transparently reporting on the status of implementation internally and to all relevant governing bodies including the Board of Governors and in the biennial Reports of the Secretary-General.

1 Adapted from UNDP (2008) Empowered and Equal: UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2008-2011

2 The Commonwealth Secretariat, hereafter also called “the Secretariat”, refers to the whole office of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London including the Office of the Secretary General; the Deputy and Assistant Secretaries-General; and all other Divisions.

3 Gender Equality is defined as the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys. Gender Equity is defined as fairness of treatment for men and women, according to their respective needs. See Annex 1 for full glossary of terms.

1.1 Rationale

Gender equality is a basic human right and fundamental principle of the Commonwealth.⁴ It is also widely recognised to have broad and positive implications for the Commonwealth's goals of eradicating poverty, promoting economic growth and sustainable, peaceful development. A wealth of evidence suggests that, given an enabling cultural and legal context, better educated women can undertake higher-value economic activity; markets are more competitive if women entrepreneurs can use their talents; and greater gender equality in education and employment leads to a more productive workforce, which in turn leads to increased investment and growth.⁵ Increasing women's access to education and employment opportunities as well as other political, financial and natural resources, has also been shown to alleviate poverty and hunger, and improve maternal and child health.⁶

This indicates that mainstreaming a gender equality perspective into the practices, policies and programmes of the Secretariat, and encouraging cross-divisional collaboration, will enhance the impact of the Secretariat's programme of assistance to member countries. On a practical level, it will enable the Secretariat to leverage multiple budgets, both within the Secretariat and among a broad range of international partners, including the private sector, to extend its influence on gender equality. This is essential for delivering on the critical targets set out in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015, the Millennium Development Goals and legal obligations under international human rights law.

Recognising this, the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2008 – 2012 describes gender equality as a 'key factor' and critical pre-condition for achieving its development goals across all Divisions. It also makes an explicit commitment to the importance of gender mainstreaming as a means of achieving gender equality.⁷ This Gender Policy reflects this commitment and rationale, which is also enshrined in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015.

4 Commonwealth Secretariat (2005).

5 Bloom, D.E. and D. Canning (2008); Klasen, S. And F. Lammanna (2008); Seguino, S. and S. Floro (2003) cited in Ward et al. (2010).

6 Ward et al. (2010).

7 Commonwealth Secretariat (2010).

1.2 Background

The Commonwealth Secretariat has established leadership in promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming. It has led the way on challenging issues such as women's leadership and representation in politics and peace-building processes; gender-responsive budgeting; and the improvement of women's rights to land and other resources through the law.

It is proposed that the implementation of this Gender Equality Policy,⁸ which will be led by a pro-active leadership, will

- » enhance appreciation among staff of critical linkages between gender and other policy and programme priorities;
- » enhance the skills of staff in analysing issues, as well as developing programmes and projects from a gender equality perspective through gender mainstreaming;
- » increase commitment within and across Divisions to identify, design, implement, monitor and report on gender equality results; and
- » contribute to enhanced gender equality within the Secretariat and to improved impact of the Secretariat's assistance through effective gender mainstreaming.

1.3 Compliance and concurrence with the international gender and development agenda

This Gender Policy also serves as a tool for internal harmonisation and alignment with international instruments and commitments of Member States on gender equality and women's empowerment (Figure 1), which include:

- i. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) ;
- ii. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989);
- iii. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966);
- iv. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966);
- v. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and outcome

⁸ This policy will be supported by guidelines as well as a monitoring system to track gender equality results and progress.

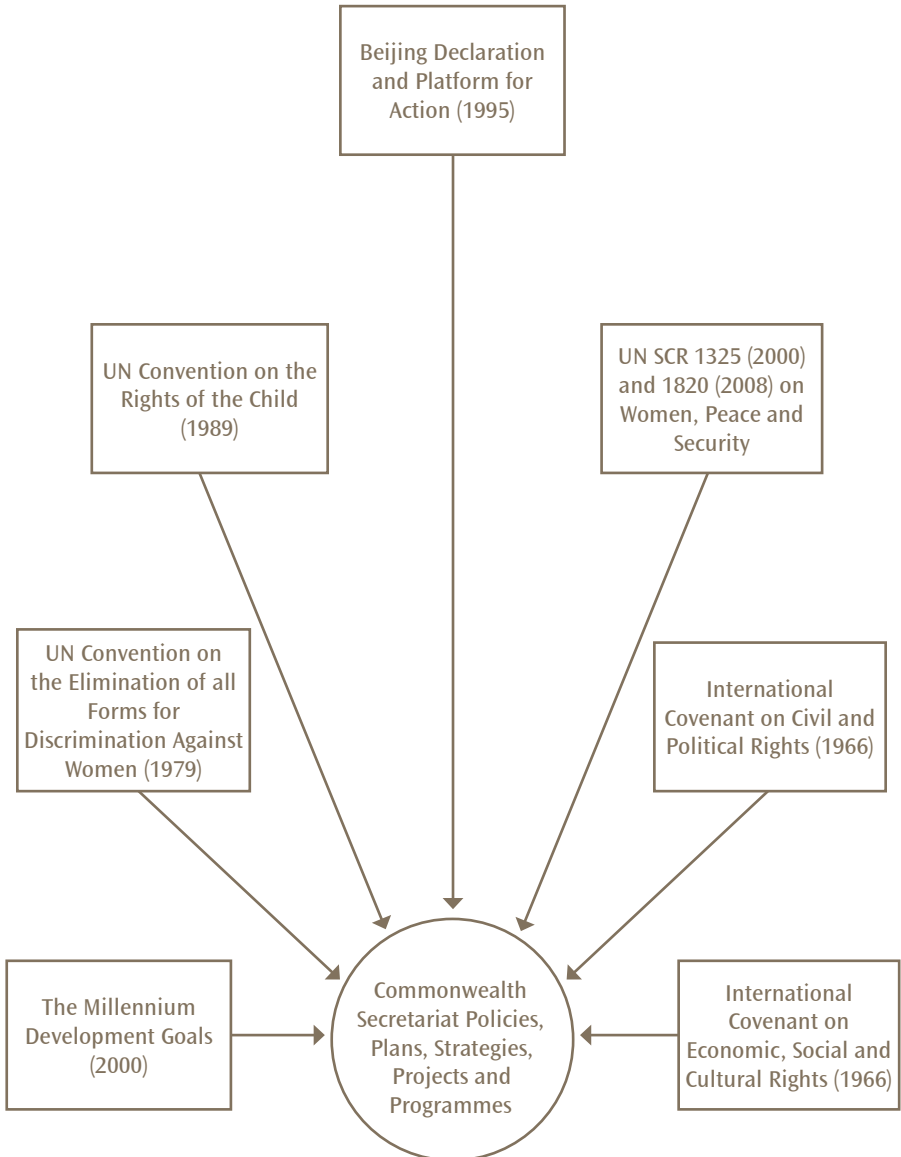
documents associated with follow up meetings Beijing+5 (2000), Beijing +10 (2005) and Beijing +15 (2010);

- vi. The United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on Women, Peace and Security (2000); and
- vii. The Millennium Development Goals (2000).

1.4 Guiding principles

Implementation of the Gender Policy will be guided by the Commonwealth's core values and fundamental principles of international peace and security; democracy; good governance and the rule of law; human rights; gender equality; tolerance, respect and understanding; freedom of expression; economic and social development. Heads of Government committed themselves to these principles in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991, and reaffirmed them at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009.

Figure 1: Guiding Commitments, Principles and Values relating to Gender Equality



2. GOAL, PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 Goal

The goal of the Gender Equality Policy is to ensure that the Commonwealth Secretariat's programmes of assistance support gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development in member countries.

2.2 Purpose

To strengthen the policy and operational framework of the Commonwealth Secretariat to promote gender equality and mainstreaming in its internal systems and processes as well as programmes of assistance.

2.3 Specific objectives

The policy aims:

- » To explicitly outline the Secretariat's commitment to gender equality.
- » To provide a clear mandate for effectively mainstreaming gender into policy formulation, strategic planning, project and programme development and implementation, performance monitoring, reporting and decision-making at all levels.
- » To provide the Gender Section within the Social Transformation Programme with corporate legitimacy to coordinate and support gender mainstreaming efforts and facilitate gender accountability across the organisation.
- » To promote a gender-responsive organisational culture.

3. Oversight and Coordination of Gender Mainstreaming

The Secretariat's efforts to mainstream gender will be supported by management at all levels.

Overall responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the Gender Policy lies with the Office of the Secretary General. In particular, the Management Committee and the Senior Management Group will have a key role to play in actively supporting and valuing the policy and providing leadership for gender

mainstreaming. Directors will lead the implementation of the policy within their divisions. A high-level Steering Committee will be established to drive and monitor the mainstreaming processes and outcomes.

3.1 Coordination and monitoring role of the Gender Section

The Social Transformation Programme through the Gender Section will coordinate the implementation of gender mainstreaming and provide consistent technical support and capacity-building services across the organisation. This will involve cross-divisional collaboration on the integration of gender issues into policy, strategic planning, and project design.

4. Gender Equality Policy Measures

The Gender Equality Policy measures, clustered into five categories reflecting the Secretariat's organisational structure, are binding on all staff. They are intended to ensure that the Secretariat's internal practices and ways of working reflect its commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. The clusters are:

- » Leadership;
- » Policy formulation and strategic planning;
- » Organisational structure, systems and processes;
- » Projects and programmes; and
- » Performance monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

4.1 Leadership

In providing strategic direction to, and leadership for gender mainstreaming across the Secretariat, the Management Committee and the Senior Management Group will:

- » Encourage and actively promote a gender-aware and -responsive organisational culture that values gender equality, and is free from the gender biases and stereotypes that perpetuate inequality.⁹
- » Adapt organisational structure, systems, processes and accountability mechanisms as necessary in order to remove barriers to and create the

⁹ This may require taking the necessary steps to educate staff in order to change values, attitudes and perceptions.

necessary incentives (both formal and informal) for effective gender mainstreaming.

- » Ensure that sufficient human and financial resources are committed to gender mainstreaming at Divisional level and that resource allocations to achieve gender equality can be tracked.
- » Monitor and evaluate gender-related performance and outcomes and use this information to inform strategic decision-making.
- » Guide and monitor the implementation of the Gender Policy through a high-level Steering Committee.

4.2 Policy formulation and strategic planning

In developing its Policies and Strategic Plans, the Secretariat shall:

- » Ensure that all policy formulation and strategic planning processes reflect the Commonwealth's gender equality commitments, including those set out in the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015; gender-specific CHOGM and Ministerial mandates; and international commitments outlined in **Figure 1**.
- » Ensure that policy formulation and strategic planning are informed by adequate gender analysis, and consider the different concerns, capacities, contributions and needs of women and men, as well as the likely impact of the policy or plan on gender equality.
- » Explicitly articulate expected gender equality results and provide associated, measurable indicators in all strategic plans.

Ensure that the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 - 2015 is perceived as a key document, relevant to the work of all Divisions, which is implemented.

4.3 Organisational structure, systems and processes

The Secretariat shall ensure that its organisational structure, systems and processes support the implementation of the Gender Equality Policy by:

Ensuring that Human Resources policies, procedures and practices promote a gender-sensitive organisational culture and ensure non-discrimination and equality of opportunity for women and men at all levels of the organisation.

Incorporating a gender perspective into the organisation's financial

management and accounting policies, systems and practices, and ensuring that revenues and expenditures are structured in a way that promotes gender equality. Specifically, a system for tracking gender-related expenditure across the organisation will be established.

Ensuring that results-based management systems and processes facilitate the extraction of sex-disaggregated results data and their use to inform strategic planning and decision-making

- » Ensuring gender mainstreaming guidelines are developed and implemented to promote gender equality through effective programme/project design and implementation.
- » Providing gender sensitisation, analysis and mainstreaming training to all Secretariat staff to develop their awareness of gender issues and build their capacity for integrating gender equality into their work and implementing the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015. This will also include measures to follow the accepted 'twin-track' approach of focusing both on women as a separate target in programme delivery and addressing the inequalities between women and men in overall programming.
- » Emphasising the importance of gender equality and promoting non-stereotypical representation of women and men, boys and girls in the language, policies, processes and practices of the Secretariat's communications.
- » Ensuring that legal counsel and advice consider gender equality issues in all matters.
- » Appointing dedicated Gender Equality "Champions" in each Division to act as information focal points and coordinators for gender mainstreaming processes.

4.4 Projects and programmes

In planning, designing and implementing its projects and programmes, the Secretariat shall:

Adopt strategies targeted at empowering women alongside interventions that seek to transform gender relations and ensure equitable participation and benefit by women and men.

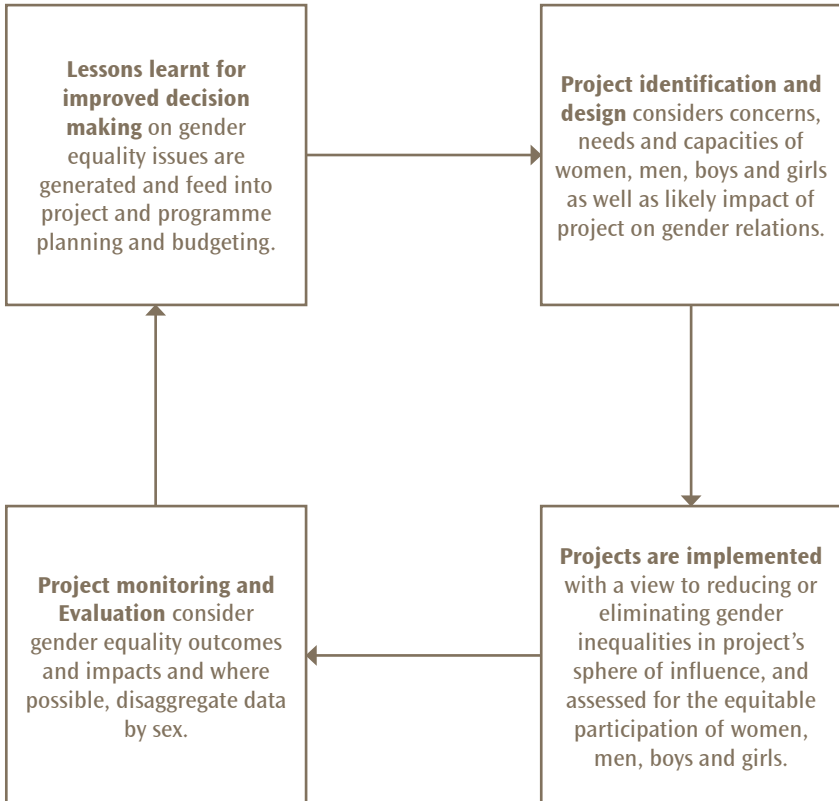
Ensure proper reflection of the Commonwealth's gender equality commitments as set out in international law, the Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 15 and gender-specific CHOGM and Ministerial mandates.

Be informed by adequate gender analysis, including consideration of the different concerns, capacities, contributions and needs of women and men, as well as the likely impact of programmes and projects on gender equality.

Articulate in all Project Design Documents (PDDs) how project outputs and activities will contribute to greater gender equality and the achievement of the objectives of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015.

Assess the design and implementation of projects for the equitable participation of both women and men.

Assess all partnerships and alliances with regional and international institutions and initiatives on the basis of their commitment to gender equality and alignment with the Gender Equality Policy and the Commonwealth Secretariat's fundamental values and principles.

Figure 2: Gender Mainstreaming and the Project Cycle

4.5 Performance monitoring, evaluation and accountability

In developing and strengthening its performance monitoring, evaluation and accountability, the Secretariat shall develop a Monitoring and Evaluation framework to:

- » Integrate an explicit focus on gender equality outputs, outcomes and impacts into all project and programme monitoring and reporting processes.
- » Where relevant, disaggregate data on project outputs, outcomes and impacts by sex, age, ethnicity, sexuality, disability status and/or any other relevant identity markers.
- » Establish mechanisms to ensure that Senior Managers are held accountable for their Divisions' progress towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming.
- » Assess individual performance on the basis of progress towards achieving gender equality results.
- » Encourage knowledge-generation, dissemination and learning about best practices in gender mainstreaming between different Divisions, Sections and Units within the organisation as well as from external sources.

ANNEX

Gender

“Gender” refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships among and between women, men, girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes. They are context- and time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age”.¹⁰

Gender equality

“Gender equality” refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration – recognising the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a “women’s issue” but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men are seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development”.¹¹

Gender Equity

“Gender equity” means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and

¹⁰ Adapted from UNDP (2008) Empowered and Equal: UNDP Gender Equality Strategy 2008-2011.

¹¹ Ibid.

social disadvantages of women.¹²

Gender mainstreaming

“Gender mainstreaming” is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and strategies of women and men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres, so that women and men can benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.¹³

Women’s empowerment

“Women’s empowerment” refers to the process of women gaining power and control over their own lives. It constitutes an important part of the efforts to bring about equal opportunities for men and women and involves awareness raising, building self-consciousness, expanding choices, increasing access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality.¹⁴

12 IFAD Glossary: <http://www.ifad.org/gender/glossary.htm> Last accessed, 20th May 2011.

13 ECOSOC (1997) Report of the Economic and Social Council for the Year 1997, UN 52nd Session, Supp. No. 3

14 Danida (2008) Gender Quality Programming. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark



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