

When Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs met in Trinidad and Tobago for their Fifth Meeting, the theme of their meeting "Engendering the Agenda" provided the opportunity for reviewing progress which had been made in the implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development since its adoption by Heads of Government in Auckland in November 1995. They discussed further strategies for achieving effective implementation of the Plan of Action and ensuring that gender was integrated into critical economic, social, human rights and political issues. Their decisions would play a crucial role in ensuring that the Commonwealth Vision for Women by the Year 2000 is realised. Their challenge was to be innovative but pragmatic as they explored new avenues which would enable Commonwealth women to enter the twenty-first century as equal partners with men.

It is to their credit that they reached agreement on strategies which were forward-looking and which set realistic goalposts for their governments. They were determined that gender integration into all government policies, procedures and programmes would become the norm rather than the exception on every issue. They demonstrated their commitment to the establishment of Gender Management Systems which would provide a systematic, co-ordinated and cost-effective strategy for achieving gender mainstreaming. They saw women at the centre of the process of promoting the Commonwealth's fundamental political values and advocated that women should play a dynamic and pivotal role in politics at both national and local levels as well as in peace and conflict resolution. They agreed that gender integration into macroeconomic policies was a powerful strategy for promoting women's economic empowerment, addressing poverty alleviation and promoting national economic development. They stood firm in their belief that the rights of women and the girl-child are an integral part of human rights and should be promoted and protected with vigour.

This publication contains papers on gender integration into politics, macroeconomic policies, and women's human rights, commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat for the Ministerial Meeting. A booklet on the conclusions and recommendations of the meeting is also available on request.