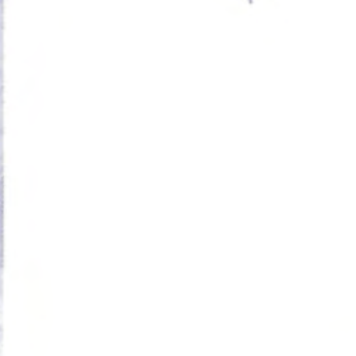


Part A



Gender Integration into Politics



Strategies for Increasing Women's Participation in Politics

Colleen Lowe-Morna

Introduction

The Facts

*"There are proportionately fewer women in the world's Parliaments than there were ten years ago. To have begun to redress the imbalance but then allow it to slip away is unforgivable."*¹

By now, the bare facts are well known. Although women predominate in community organisations, and are active in political parties at grass roots level, they constitute a minority of political party officials, and of elected representatives at local, provincial and national level.

Nowhere, says the United Nations in a background document to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, "is the gap between de jure and de facto equality among men and women greater than in the area of decision-making."

Women in Parliament

Despite the trend towards multiparty democracy, the proportion of women in Parliament has actually declined. This is starkly illustrated in the case of Seychelles in which the proportion of women in Parliament dropped from a world record of 48 per cent in the former one party Parliament, to 27.3 per cent following multiparty elections in 1993.

Globally, according to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the participation of women in national Parliaments declined from 12.1 per cent in 1985, to 11 per cent in 1995, largely as a result of dwindling numbers of women in the Parliaments of Eastern European countries. There has also been a decline in the representation of women in Asian Parliaments.

The strongest parliamentary representation of women is found in the Nordic countries, where the proportion of women in Parliament is 34 per cent.

Within the Commonwealth, the proportion of women in Parliament stood at 7.2 per cent in 1995 – a figure well below the global average.

The two Commonwealth countries with the highest political representation are Seychelles (27.3 per cent) and South Africa (26.5 per cent). A number of Commonwealth countries have less than ten per cent women amongst their parliamentarians. At least four Commonwealth countries have no women parliamentarians at all.

Variations within the Commonwealth are illustrated in the table at **Table 1** which shows the representation of women in the Parliaments and Cabinets of the eleven Commonwealth countries chosen for the study tabled in draft form at this conference: *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*.²

No Commonwealth country has yet achieved the 30 per cent threshold of women in Parliament at national level regarded by the United Nations as the "critical mass" for ensuring that women impact on decision-making.

Women in Local Government

Statistics for women in local government in the Commonwealth are patchy, and complicated by the different systems of local government within the 53 member countries.

The report of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) to the conference suggests that the proportion of women in local government is higher than at national level. This concurs with global trends.

The sampling of fifteen Commonwealth countries in the report (see **Table 2**) shows that in three countries – New Zealand (35 per cent), Namibia (30 per cent) and Tanzania (33 per cent) the proportion of women in local government is above the 30 per cent mark.

However, some Commonwealth countries still have an extremely low representation of women in local government – the tier of government closest to the everyday needs of women. The table shows, for example, that women in Zambia constitute only two per cent, and women in Kenya only three per cent, of local government officials.

Women in Cabinet and as Heads of State

According to a United Nations fact sheet prepared for the Beijing Conference, only 24 women have been elected Heads of State or Government this century – half after 1990.

On average, only 5.7 per cent of Cabinet ministers were women in 1994, an increase from 3.3 per cent in 1987. Most women ministers hold portfolios in social affairs.

Within the Commonwealth, there are currently only three women Heads of State – all in Asia: Sheik Hasina Wajed, Prime Minister of Bangladesh; Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga President of Sri Lanka; and Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Table 1 The Eleven Commonwealth Case Studies:
Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences & Strategies for Action

Country	Year of Election	Women/ Total Upper House	% Women Upper House	Women/ Total Lower House	% Women/ Lower House	Women/ Total Cabinet	% Women in Cabinet
Australia	1996	23/76 Senate	30.7	23/148 House of Reps.	15.5	2/15	13.3
Canada	1996	24/103 Senate	23.3	52/295 House of Commons	17.6	9/34	26.5
Bangladesh	1996			37/330 National Assembly	11.2	2/25	8.0
Dominica	1995	–	–	3/30 House of Assembly	10.0	2/9	22.2
Guyana	1996	–	–	14/72 House of Assembly	19.4	2/18	11.1
India	1994	20/250 Rajya Sabha	8	41/552 Lok Sabha	7.4	1/34	2.9
Malaysia	1995	12/69 Dewan Negara	17.4	13/192 Dewan Rakyat	6.8	2/25	8.0
Papua New Guinea	1994	–	–	–	–	–	–
Seychelles	1993	–	–	9/33 National Assembly	27.3	3/12	25.0
South Africa	1994	6/90 Senate	17.8	100/400 National Assembly	26.5	7/25	28.0
Uganda	1994	–	–	57/277 National Assembly	20.6	6/54	11.1

Table 2 **Women's Representation in Local Government: A selection of Commonwealth countries**

Country	Percentage of Women Councillors in Local Municipalities (or similar), in Various Election Years 1990 – 1995
Botswana	14
Britain	23
Canada	18
Ghana	8
Jamaica	13
Kenya	3
Lesotho	6
Malaysia	10
Mozambique	27
Namibia	26
New Zealand	28
South Africa	19
Swaziland	0
Tanzania	33
Zambia	3

Why Should We Strive for Gender Parity in Politics?

“This is a country which prides itself on democratic institutions. Yet in the most important of these institutions - the nation's Parliaments- men outnumber women seven to one, in the House of Representatives more than ten to one... Australian democracy is the loser...It is less that women have a right to be there than we have a need for them to be there.”³

Without Gender Parity in Politics There is No Democracy

A government by men, for men, cannot claim to be a government for the people, by the people. This is underscored by a resolution taken by the IPU Council in April 1992, on Women in Politics, which stated:

“The concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political parties and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population.”

Women Broaden the Agenda of Politics

Women are best placed to articulate their own needs and concerns. In a paper⁴ presented at a Commonwealth Secretariat/CLGF symposium in Johannesburg in May 1996, Ugandan lawyer Florence Butegewa pointed out that over three quarters of women in Africa are engaged in food production. It follows, she argued, that “policy decisions in agriculture should not be made without the active involvement of women.”

A discussion paper on *Women and Parliaments in Australia and New Zealand*⁵ echoes this view:

“As the number of women in Parliament has increased over the past two decades, there has been a broadening of issues under debate, such as abortion, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, single parenthood, women’s health and urban isolation. Further, any structural and legal impediments to the advancement of women have been removed during this period – for example, through the passing of Acts relating to sex discrimination and equal employment opportunity.

“These acts are testimony to significant efforts by women members and are now resulting in increases to workplace flexibility through industrial reform – the introduction of job flexibility, flexitime, career break schemes, workplace childcare, parental leave and so on.”

Women Bring Important Skills and a Different Style to Politics

“Women’s exclusion from power in the public arena,” says the background document to the Beijing conference, “is in sharp contrast to their ability to make crucial decisions relating to the survival of families.”

By excluding women from decision-making, the document argues, countries are depriving themselves of a reservoir of talent and wisdom, as well as a different style of decision-making. American surveys suggest that even a few women in the corridors of power lead to a more participatory, less autocratic style of government.

What is Keeping Women out of Politics ?

“In 1991, a woman voter was killed by her husband because she cast her vote for me.”⁶

Culture and its Gendered Perception of Politics

The 33 case studies of Commonwealth women politicians are a stark reminder that if politics is not everyone’s cup of tea, it is even less so for women than it is for men.

In addition to Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury’s chilling account quoted above, Professor Jahan Ara Begum of Bangladesh describes how a group of men – curious to listen to her, but literally unable to face a woman giving a public address – sat with their backs to her as she spoke.

Josephine Abiajah of Papua New Guinea recounts how male voters used to tear up her campaign pamphlets as an expression of their disgust at the thought of a woman politician.

Speaking at the Local Government Symposium in Johannesburg, Florence Butegwa listed the many expressions in her mother tongue for a woman who has “become a man”, and for men who are pitied for “losing their trousers” to their wives.

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The *Women and Parliaments in Australia and New Zealand discussion paper*⁵ cites a number of reasons given by women in these two countries for not taking up political careers which suggest that negative perceptions of politics among women cut across continents and cultures.

The responses included: “full of legal jargon”; “full of complicated procedures”; “shrouded by a need to sell your soul to a party”; “pretty rough in the bear pit”; “very public”; and “unable to make a difference anyway.”

Practical Constraints

Zambian-based gender consultants Sarah Longwe and Roy Clarke identify a host of practical constraints to women engaging in politics in a reading prepared for a workshop on Zambian women in local government in February 1995.⁷

“The gender division of labour hardly gives women any spare time. Typically a woman is busy from sunrise until long after sunset, with the unremitting and endless labour of looking after children, looking after the house, and growing food for the family. To a large extent the freedom of men to practise politics is built upon the captivity of their wives, sisters, and mothers who stay at home. The work of the woman produces the leisure of the man.”

Socio-economic Context

The Commonwealth profiles of 33 women politicians, though by no means definitive, draws two interesting correlations between women in politics and socio-economic status:

- at least half of the politicians profiled came from politically well-known families and those who did not, tended to come from well-to-do, well-educated families;
- three quarters of those profiled had at least one university degree.

Against this background, the study notes, it is no coincidence that the three women Heads of State in the Commonwealth come from family dynasties. The generally lower level of education among women; their lower socio-economic status; lack of information about their rights; lack of access to the official language of government and lack of access to independent resources all militate against the active involvement of women in politics. It emphasises however, that there is no simple correlation between levels of development in a country and levels of political representation.

Table 1 illustrates that many developing Commonwealth countries have made more progress in achieving a higher level of political representation by women than their developed country counterparts. For example, Seychelles and South Africa have higher proportions of women in Parliament than New Zealand and Australia – where women first got the vote.

In many cases, women in developing countries gained their access into politics through their struggles for independence or liberation. In South Africa, for example, women who entered the struggle against apartheid became aware of the double oppression of race and patriarchy, and lobbied for a quota for women in the first elections.

The comparative social and economic independence of women in Seychelles and the Caribbean – where men are frequently away from home – appears to account for the relatively high representation of women in the Parliaments, local governments, Cabinets and Civil Services of these islands.

A number of developing Commonwealth countries – such as Tanzania and India – have achieved the 30 per cent threshold in local government through party or state quotas.

As the CLGF Report⁸ to the Trinidad and Tobago Meeting notes, “the low representation of women in local government is a Commonwealth-wide challenge. It appears there is no straightforward correlation with economic development, and it is not simply a North-South issue.” The same is true of national politics.

These observations suggest that strategies which focus only on the general socio-economic upliftment of women – while crucial in their own right – cannot by themselves bring about a rapid increase in the political representation of women.

Objectives

This paper will focus on immediate, practical strategies which can be adopted to bring about an increase in the participation of women in politics in a relatively short space of time.

The paper primarily focuses on actions that can be taken by governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat, as the basis of an Action Plan to be considered at the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs in Trinidad and Tobago in November 1996.

The paper also suggests measures that can be taken by political parties, women parliamentarians, and civil society to complement these efforts. A joint action plan by all five sectors, the paper suggests, would go a long way towards bringing about meaningful change.

Box 1 International Covenants on the Rights of Women to Equal Political Participation

In the United Nations

- The United Nations **Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** states that: *"Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political life and shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government."*
- The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**⁹ calls on governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making by creating a gender balance in government and administration; integrating women into political parties; increasing women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership and increasing women's participation in the electoral process and political activities.

In the Commonwealth

- Commonwealth Heads of Government committed themselves in the 1990 **Harare Declaration** to "defend and achieve the principle of equality for women so that they may exercise their full and equal rights."
- At their 1993 biennial gathering in **Cyprus**, Commonwealth Heads of Government "expressed support for the proposal that special measures as appropriate be taken to increase women's positions at all levels of the political and decision-making process at the national level and in Commonwealth organisations."
- In **Auckland** in 1995, Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed the 1995 **Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development**, which states, *"as a moral and strategic imperative, governments are to ensure women's participation in decision-making processes and structures including political structures at all levels in local, district, regional, national and international ... through positive and/or affirmative action."*

Proposed Strategies

Setting Targets

"Every step of progress the world has made has been from scaffold to scaffold and from stake to stake"

Wendell Phillips, Speech for Women's Rights (1851)

The objective of gender parity in politics is one which all Commonwealth governments have by now subscribed to in one form or another, if not in domestic constitutions and legislation, in international conventions and agreements (see Box 1).

The United Nations Economic and Social Council set a target to increase the participation of women in politics and decision-making positions to 30 per cent by 1995. This deadline has now come and gone with countries around the world achieving, on average, only one third of the one third target.

The most pressing challenge before Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs in Trinidad and Tobago is to set a pan-Commonwealth target, which individual countries may work faster than others to achieve, but from which no country can afford to lag behind.

Such a target must be realistic, but not so vague as to be yet another excellent idea to which governments pay lip-service. For example, is a goal of 30 per cent representation of women in politics at local and national level in a decade's time one to which all governments can sincerely subscribe? If not, what are the alternatives?

Recognising that progress might be made more easily at local than at national level, should different targets be set for the two tiers of government? If so, such possibilities should be seized upon.

Box 2 **Setting Targets: Suggested Action**

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs

- Debate and suggest a target, or series of targets for the increased representation of women in government to be forwarded to the Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Britain in 1997.
- Form a task team to lobby governments ahead of CHOGM, and to reach consensus on the target(s) set.
- Ensure the endorsement of the targets at CHOGM.
- Translate the target(s) into action plans at home.

Commonwealth Secretariat

- Facilitate the work of the task team and the tabling of the target(s) at CHOGM.
- Monitor and publicise progress towards the implementation of these targets.

Civil Society

- Make an input into setting the target(s), and, where possible, set more ambitious targets than governments are likely to be able to set as an impetus to change. (An example of this is the British 300 Group which aims to increase the number of women in the British House of Commons to 300 out of 651).
- Assist in drawing up action plans for achieving the agreed upon target(s).
- Monitor progress towards achieving the target(s).

Affirmative Action

*"I have no hesitation in saying that whether I came through the quota or not, I am capable."*¹⁰

An Accepted Principle

Quotas are the subject of an age old debate not least, as the Commonwealth study points out, among women politicians themselves who fear being labelled as "tokens."

The debate has most recently been prompted by the declining political participation of women in the Parliaments of former communist and some former one-party states.

Despite the higher representation of women under these systems, the Parliaments in which women were represented served as rubber stamps, thus failing to open an avenue for meaningful participation.

There are, however, numerous examples of quotas being successfully employed in democracies to achieve a "critical mass" of women in politics. Sweden, which in 1972 was the first country to introduce a quota system, is the first country to have achieved gender parity in the representation of women in Parliament. "Targets, quota systems, and reserved seats in political bodies, when put into

effect ... have generally been successful" declares the United Nations in a background document to the Beijing Conference.

The principle of affirmative action was endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Auckland, as part of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development.

The issue is therefore not so much *if* there should be affirmative action to increase the representation of women in politics as *what* is the best way to go about this.

Examples of Affirmative Action to Increase the Representation of Women in Politics

Two broad approaches have been tried:

i Constitutionally or legally defined quotas

- In India, one third of the seats in panchayats, or local councils, have been reserved for women since 1992. In September 1996, Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda tabled a Bill in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) to amend the Constitution to ensure that women have an exclusive claim to one third of parliamentary constituencies in general elections. According to a report in *The Times* of London (13 September, 1996) the constituencies will be chosen on a rota system in each election. The proposed quota for women would boost their number from the present 38 MPs in the Lok Sabha to about 180 after the next general election. The indirectly elected Rajya Sabha or Upper House will not be affected, because of what officials cited as "technical obstacles."
- Article 65 of the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh specified that the number of reserved seats for women in Parliament be 15; this was increased to 30 in 1979. The provision lapsed in December 1987, and was reinstated for a period of ten years in 1990.
- In Papua New Guinea, where there has not been a woman in Parliament since 1982, the National Council of Women hopes to invoke Section 102 of the Constitution – which allows for up to four appointees to be made to Parliament – to ensure that women get back into Parliament in the 1997 elections. The Council is also lobbying for 20 seats to be reserved for women.
- In Uganda, the new Constitution adopted in 1995 guarantees women at least one third of all local government seats and (through a system in which each of the 39 districts in the country sends one woman to the national assembly) 14 per cent of the seats in Parliament.
- Tanzania has laws which guarantee that one third of all members of village councils and 15 per cent of all members of Parliament are women.

Constitutionally entrenched quotas are the quickest way of ensuring that targets for increasing the representation of women in politics are met. However, all three of the women politicians from Bangladesh profiled in *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action* said the system of constitutionally entrenched seats for women led to nepotism and favouritism in the choice of women to fill the posts.

ii Quotas adopted by political parties

As the Commonwealth Women Parliamentary Group (CWPG) Report on *Barriers to Women's Participation in Politics*¹ points out, "the fact that the majority of Commonwealth parliamentarians win elections to Parliament on a party ticket suggests that it is to political parties that we should look to play a significant role in redressing the gender imbalance in our Parliaments."

In general, smaller and more recently constituted political parties tend to have a more gender balanced composition and leadership structure. For example – as the discussion paper on *Women*

and *Parliaments in Australia and New Zealand*⁵ points out – the Greens in both countries see “gender balance” as an indicator of the health of the party. The dilemma for women in countries with such parties is that they comprise a small proportion of parliamentary membership.

The major challenge, therefore, is to bring about the same measure of gender sensitivity within older established and bigger parties. Experience across the Commonwealth suggests that this can only be accelerated in the short term through the setting of party quotas – or at least targets.

Examples of political party gender quotas

- In South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994, the now ruling African National Congress (ANC) set a quota of 30 per cent of women candidates in the elections which were run entirely on the basis of proportional representation.
- This quota is largely responsible for the fact that 26.5 per cent of all Parliamentarians in South Africa are women. In the local government elections which took place in November 1995, and which were run partly on a proportional representation and partly on a constituency based system, the ANC decreed that 50 per cent of all seats be reserved for women. However, partly because this was not enforced, and partly due to the fact that the elections were not run entirely on the basis of proportional representation, the proportion of women in local government in South Africa at 19 per cent, is lower, than in the national government.
- In Mozambique’s first multiparty elections following a long civil war, in 1994 the ruling FRELIMO party set a quota of one third women. This contributed to the achievement of 24.4 per cent of women parliamentarians, and 27 per cent of women in local government.
- In 1993, the Canadian Liberal Party set a quota of 25 per cent women candidates in the election.
- The Australian Labour Party has introduced a target (which it emphasises is not a quota) that 35 per cent of all candidates representing the party in winnable seats in state and federal elections be women by 2002. The reference to “winnable seats” is critically important in countries where elections are contested on a constituency basis, and in which the experience of women has invariably been that they get stuck in seats where they have no chance of winning.

In many countries where parties do not have quotas, women politicians have been agitating from within for more women candidates. The Commonwealth’s *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action* describes how women in the United Malays National Organisation

Box 3 Affirmative Action: Suggested Action

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women’s Affairs

- Make recommendations to home governments/political parties on the most effective method of affirmative action for achieving target(s) set.
- Monitor progress towards achievement of target(s).

The Commonwealth Secretariat

- Undertake a study, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), on “best practices” of affirmative action for increasing the representation of women in politics in the Commonwealth, to help inform the choices of member governments.

Political Parties

- Set affirmative action targets and ensure that these are achieved.

Civil Society

- Lobby governments and political parties to undertake affirmative action programmes to ensure that target(s) set for the participation of women in politics are met.

(UMNO) party in Malaysia have actively lobbied for a greater proportion of women to be put forward for winnable seats.

In some countries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have also put pressure on political parties to take affirmative action measures. For example, in Botswana Emang Basadi (which means “Stand up Women” in Setswana) lobbied political parties during the year leading up to Botswana’s last elections in October 1994 to increase the representation of women in their lists.

The group also lobbied President Quett Masire to appoint two women to the four special parliamentary seats to which he makes appointments. Largely as a result of this agitation, the proportion of women in Parliament in Botswana increased from 5 to 8.7 per cent in the elections: short of the 25 per cent target set by the NGO, but still representing an improvement.

Review of Electoral Systems

“An electoral system based on proportional lists is a powerful way to achieve greater representation for women in Parliament and Government.”¹¹

There is overwhelming evidence to suggest that women stand a better chance of getting elected under the proportional representation, as opposed to the constituency based, electoral system.

The reason for this is that in the latter case, candidates focus on the party and its policies, rather than on a particular individual. This works in favour of women – at least in terms of getting a foot in the door – because of the in-built prejudices against women noted in the introductory section.

An illustration of the advantages for women of the list system is the South African local government elections held in November 1995, which combined both systems. In the seats contested on the basis of proportional representation, women won 27.9 per cent of the seats. In the ward or constituency based seats, women won only 10.8 per cent of the seats. This gave an overall average of 18.8 per cent of the seats in local government being won by women.

The Beijing Platform for Action calls on governments to “review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reforms to such systems.”

The Task Force of the CWPG recommends that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association undertake a study of the constitutions of each Commonwealth country, and the relationship between this and the representation of women, with a view to assisting member countries in making informed choices.

Box 4 Review of Electoral Systems: *Suggested Action*

By Governments

- Undertake a review of the electoral system, as recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action, with a view to determining its impact on political participation by women.

By the Commonwealth Secretariat

- Support the above initiative through working with the CPA on a comparative study of the electoral systems of Commonwealth countries and their contribution to, or detraction from, increased participation by women in politics.

Public Awareness

“The images and models of men and women are transmitted through education in the family, formal education, the media, and by advertising messages. Action needs to be taken at all these different levels in order to eliminate any suggestion that one sex is superior to the other.”¹²

No matter how successful affirmative action strategies might be in the short term, they are not likely to succeed in the long term unless they are accompanied by a more supportive public attitude towards women in politics.

Several high profile occasions can be used to start to change public perceptions of women in politics. These include International Women’s Day, Commonwealth Day, and the national days of countries.

South Africa has its own Women’s Day and public holiday on 9 August. President Nelson Mandela used the latest such celebration to reaffirm his commitment to attaining gender parity in Parliament and in the Cabinet.

The CWPG Task Force describes how the New Brunswick Legislature initiated a Student Legislative Seminar, a non-partisan programme to provide equal numbers of girls and boys with a better understanding of how Parliament functions. Similarly, the Australian Capital territory has held youth Parliaments.

The Task Force recommends a number of practical measures which can be taken to promote positive images of women politicians in the media, including:

- sponsoring research into media coverage of women in politics;
- publishing magazines such as the Bermudian Heritage Month, “In Celebration of Women, May 1994”, which traces the contribution of women to Bermudian development;
- instituting a prize for the best media coverage of women’s political activity during the year.

Box 5 Political Awareness: Suggested Action

By Government

- Launch national campaigns around the target(s) set for achieving gender parity in politics, making use of strategic occasions such as Women’s Day, the country’s national day, etc.
- Institute a media award for coverage of women in politics. Commission research on the way in which the media is covering this issue and publicise shortfalls.
- Compile a directory of women in politics.

By the Commonwealth Secretariat

- Use every possible occasion to publicise the target(s) agreed at the Trinidad and Tobago conference, e.g., on Commonwealth Day, at CHOGMs, and all meetings in which the fundamental political values of the Commonwealth are featured.
- Serve as an up-to-date source of information, advocacy and networking on the campaign.

By Political Parties

- Encourage positive images of women in advertising campaigns. Let women and men become the “face” of the party.
- Publicise affirmative action targets and plans.

By Civil Society

- Assist in the public awareness campaign, especially in remote communities.

Encourage Women to Join Politics

Demystify Politics

The key to any education/awareness campaign directed at potential women candidates is:

- to show that in their day-to-day lives women are already heavily engaged in politics, except at the decision-making level;
- to demystify the process of politics, which many women find puzzling and alienating.

Every Woman's Guide to Getting into Politics – the handbag-size guide produced by the Australian Office on the Status of Women³, is an example of how this can be done. The book is full of practical and useful information, such as where to get funding; deciding where to stand; putting together a campaign management team; budgeting; publicity and accessing the media.

The CLGF Report to the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers suggests that such literature should be targeted at the many community organisations in which women are involved, for example, income generating groups, small credit schemes, environmental protection groups, and church based groups.

Local Government as a Way in

If women are reluctant to become involved in national politics, they are likely at least to have an interest in local government, which can become a springboard for involvement in national politics.

Two of the women profiled in the Commonwealth study *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action* – Dato Kee Phaik Cheen of Malaysia and Sheila Camerar of South Africa – cut their teeth in local government politics.

Engender Voter Education Materials

In reaching potential women candidates, women's organisations and the policy machinery in government need to work closely with electoral authorities in developing gender sensitive voter education materials.

The 1994 Mozambican election voter education materials featured a Mozambican woman pleading with her husband to allow her to run for office. The man says he will run – and take care of her interests. She responds that there are certain issues she understands better. In the end, her husband accepts this argument, and the couple begin to plan how they will organise their life differently to allow her to be both a politician and a mother.

Holding Office Within the Party

The Australia and New Zealand discussion paper on *Women and Parliaments* shows that a consistent feature of women who make it into Parliament is that they had occupied an official position, usually secretary or president of a party branch and/or had been a conference delegate before becoming a candidate. This suggests that encouraging women to hold office within the party is an important stepping stone to election.

The Role of Women's Wings of Political Parties

The Commonwealth study points to the somewhat ambivalent role that women's wings of political parties have played in recruiting and supporting women candidates – often reinforcing stereotypes of the subservience of women rather than helping to break these stereotypes.

Box 6 Encourage Women to Join Politics: *Suggested Action*

By Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs

- Initiate campaigns to encourage women to become involved in politics, such as simple guidebooks directed at community organisations in which women predominate.
- Work closely with electoral authorities in developing gender sensitive voter education materials designed to encourage women candidates to come forward.

By The Commonwealth Secretariat

- Assist in developing materials to promote the interest of women in politics and in sharing such information between Commonwealth countries.

By Political Parties

- Adopt the Inter-Parliamentary Council Guidelines on women's wings of political parties, to ensure that these wings contribute to the advancement of women.

By Civil Society

- Work with government in mounting campaigns to encourage women to take an interest in politics.

The Inter-Parliamentary Council's Plan of Action¹² sets out a number of useful guidelines for women's branches in parties. These include that they focus on: special problems encountered by women in carrying out party activities; help to mobilise women at grass roots level; assistance in special training programmes for prospective women politicians; and the establishment of support networks for women candidates and women who get elected.

Support for Women Candidates

"Baby strapped to her back with a colourful sash, she bends wearily over a hoe, tilling the field.

"Neatly turned out, briefcase at her side, she raises her hand and casts her vote in the legislative assembly."

The booklet *Together for Change: Three Struggles for Political Rights (in Africa)*¹³, from which these lines are quoted, along with a wide range of publications on women in politics, are designed to help women make this leap. Practical measures which can be taken include:

Training

Examples of Organisations which offer Training to Women Candidates

- The British 300 Group offers workshops and courses in public speaking, and advice on "pathways to power."
- In Australia and New Zealand, the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) and National Women's Council respectively have played a key role in supporting prospective women candidates. A 1985 survey showed that 28 per cent of women politicians at federal and state level in Australia had been active in WEL. In 1992, 16 Australian women's organisations formed an umbrella group called "Women into Politics" to encourage women to seek public office.
- Fifteen Pacific Island countries have set up the Women in Politics Pacific Centre to "assist individual women to compete successfully with men for elective or appointed positions." Training offered before elections includes mentoring; political education; campaign strategies; personal profiling; development of advocacy materials; public speaking; documentation

and research; understanding the electoral system; policy analysis; and fund raising. The Secretariat of the centre will be rotated every three years among the members.

- Emang Basadi in Botswana ran a Candidate and Campaign workshop for women candidates prior to the 1994 elections in Botswana focusing on: the role of the candidate; public speaking; fundraising; and identifying national and local issues.

Mentoring Programmes

In Zambia, where women constitute a mere 3.3 per cent of local government councillors, the Caucus of Women Councillors who met in 1995 to review the local government elections, each pledged to encourage and enable at least one other woman to stand as a candidate in the forthcoming local government elections, and to campaign for this woman candidate during both party and local government elections.

The Commonwealth's study *Women In Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*, describes the inspiration that women have drawn from, and the informal mentorship provided by the former Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica, Dame Eugenia Charles.

The study suggests that formal mentorship programmes would be one of the most effective ways of nurturing a new generation of younger women politicians.

At their meeting in Cyprus in 1993, Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs recognised the value of having successful women politicians contributing to the development of leadership qualities in other women and serving as role models and mentors.

Funding

Responsibility for assisting candidates in raising funds rests first and foremost with political parties. Some have created special funds for women candidates.

Examples of Special Funds for Women Candidates

- A decade ago in Canada, the Progressive, Conservative and Liberal parties established funds to provide training programmes and to give financial support directly to women to help pay expenses such as childcare and housekeeping.
- In Britain, Emily's List (Early Money is like Yeast), which assists Labour women into Parliament, makes grants of up to £1,000 to women seeking parliamentary seats to help defray childcare and travel expenses.

The report of the CWPG Task Force suggests that governments consider tax breaks for women candidates, such as ensuring that the cost of childcare during the election period is tax deductible for nomination contestants and candidates.

Encourage Women to Vote for Women

- Women voters need to be aware that their vote can make a difference. In Norway, concerned about their exclusion from power, women in one set of municipal elections voted for female candidates and increased the proportion of women in municipal councils by 50 per cent.

In Zambia, the National Women's Lobby Group, an NGO, has produced pamphlets and posters entitled "Women Use Your Vote" in English and in six languages, with the objective of convincing women that their lives can be improved by voting for women.

Publicise Encouraging Research Findings

Research findings on women candidates can be a psychological boost to the candidates and prospective candidates.

Examples of Research Findings

- The Commonwealth's study, *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*, shows how in at least two cases women candidates confounded the critics by winning seats regarded as "safe" for opposing parties.
- Research in Australia in 1991 showed that 64 per cent of those surveyed believed men entered politics out of personal ambition and desire for money, whereas only 11 per cent believed that women had the same motive. Thirteen per cent believed that men were motivated by altruism and concern for community whereas 54 per cent believed this of women.
- In 1982, Senator Susan Ryan commissioned a national opinion poll which indicated that a good woman candidate appeals more to swing voters than a good man.

Box 7 Support for Women Candidates: Suggested Action

By Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs

- Support training and mentorship programmes for women candidates from all parties.
- Initiate and publicise research on women's voting patterns and how these can help to increase the representation of women and the performance of women candidates in elections.

By The Commonwealth Secretariat

- As discussed at the Fourth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs in Cyprus¹⁴, assist in developing distance education materials for women candidates.

By Political Parties

- Play a more proactive role in supporting women candidates through training and financial support.

By Women parliamentarians

- Avail themselves as mentors for younger women politicians.

By Civil Society

- Initiate training and mentorship programmes such as those cited above.
- Look into establishing foundations to provide financial support to women candidates.

Support for Women in Parliament

*"If I succeed, it will be for the good of all women in Uganda."*¹⁵

As the old saying goes, nothing succeeds like success. Much of this drive must, of necessity, come from the politicians themselves. What unites the 33 women profiled in the Commonwealth study is that these women are first and foremost remarkable people who have discovered and invented survival strategies along often rocky roads.

Among the phrases most frequently repeated in the profiles are: hard work, diplomacy, persistence, the pursuit of excellence, being assertive, dynamism, delivery, result-oriented, and time management.

The Ten Commandments of Feminisation of Politics and Power (see **Box 8**), drawn up at a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) gathering in Alberta in 1994, summarises the personal strategies that women have developed to survive in politics.

In the 33 Commonwealth profiles, the politicians made it clear that their most important line of support is their families: parents, husbands, children, and in many cases extended family, without whom such taxing careers would not be possible.

Many also identified the support offered by party leaders and colleagues, especially those who became mentors, as being crucial to their success.

Women parliamentarians have, however, also identified institutional support which can help to ease their burden, and make them more effective in their work.

In at least eight Commonwealth countries – Pakistan, Malaysia, Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana, South Africa, Canada and Australia – there are parliamentary women’s groups or caucuses which have articulated or lobbied for such support.

The CWPG was constituted as a special interest group within the CPA in 1992 to:

- further the representation of women in Parliament throughout the Commonwealth; and
- ensure that matters of concern to women are brought to the attention of the CPA and individual Parliaments.

Box 8 *Feminisation of Politics and Power: The Ten Commandments*

- 1 **Celebrate the Difference** – Men and women *are* different. Goals can be shared, but approaches and solutions may differ – this is a strength.
- 2 **Believe in yourself** – Believe in your own abilities – you can do it! If you believe in yourself, others will also have faith in you.
- 3 **Make mistakes/get out of the comfort zone – experience is important** – As a woman in politics, you must stand up and be counted; take risks, push yourself forward.
- 4 **Bring back passion – where there’s a will, there’s a way** – If at first you don’t succeed, keep trying. Never forget those burning beliefs which first led you into politics.
- 5 **Be a mentor/role model** – As a woman in politics, lend a helping hand to other women, regardless of party affiliations. Be high-profile and confident. Where you lead, others can and will follow.
- 6 **Network** – No man, and no woman is an island. Get out there, make and maintain contacts.
- 7 **Do not backstab** – Snide remarks about another female politician not only damages her reputation – it also damages yours.
- 8 **Achieve joint efforts: 50 per cent men + 50 per cent women = 100 per cent** – A refinement on Commandment 1 – society comprises both men and women, together we can do anything.
- 9 **Shatter the glass ceiling – don’t go around or take a short cut** – Don’t compromise and don’t prevaricate – you have a right to be there. Your successes will make it easier for other women to follow.
- 10 **Work with the media** – The attitude of the media to women in politics will be changed by the attitude of women in politics to the media.

Karen Leibovici, MCA (Alberta) Submission to the Task Force

Among the forms of support identified as being useful by women parliamentarians individually and through these fora are:

Making Parliaments more Gender Sensitive

Parliaments based on the Westminster (British) model, with their long hours, confrontational debates, and men’s club aura are not the most welcoming places for women.

In South Africa, women parliamentarians, with the support of their woman speaker, Frene Ginwala, have successfully lobbied for a change in the hours of Parliament, and for a crèche facility funded by Parliament.

Many other Commonwealth Parliaments are considering similar measures. The International Parliamentary Union has launched a campaign to rid all Parliaments of sexist language.

On-the-job training

Most women parliamentarians do not have legal training, and find the trappings of Parliament foreign and alienating. In developing Commonwealth countries, parliamentarians frequently have no administrative, let alone research staff.

The demands of Parliament and of constituency work do not leave women parliamentarians much time to go off on long training courses. The plea is thus overwhelmingly for on-the-job support – of which there are many examples emerging.

Examples of on-the-job Training for Women parliamentarians

- The Women in Politics Pacific Centre provides women MPs with gender training; understanding of parliamentary procedures; drafting of gender responsive bills; documenting election campaign experience; networking with supporters and supporting other women politicians.
- The Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), an NGO set up by women in politics in Uganda offers induction courses for women parliamentarians, undertakes research on issues of concern to women parliamentarians, supports women in running workshops for their constituents and facilitates regional networking and exchanges.
- The Parliamentary Women's Group (PWG) in South Africa is drawing up a Programme of Action which includes in-house courses in information technology; accessing research findings; establishing a gender information centre with links to the country's nine provinces;

Box 9 Support for Women parliamentarians: Suggested Action

By Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs

- Support training initiatives for women parliamentarians.
- Work closely with Women's Caucuses in formulating gender sensitive legislation.

The Commonwealth Secretariat

- Commission training materials on key gender issues for use by women leaders including women politicians, for lobbying and participation in debates and discussions.
- Work closely with the CWPG in developing linkages between women parliamentarians across the Commonwealth and facilitating close networking between them.

By Political Parties

- Back women parliamentarians. Arrange mentorship and training programmes within the political party.

By Women in Parliament

- Get organised: a strong, effective lobby is the best way of ensuring that the needs of today's, and tomorrow's, women MPs are addressed.
- Suggest tangible programmes of action. Women parliamentarians are best placed to identify what support they require.

By Civil Society

- Assist in providing relevant training and support.

workshops on accessing the media and writing opinion pieces; and seminars with inputs by technical experts on key legislation coming before Parliament.

Conclusion

“Unless we look back, we are never able to measure how far we have come. At times I am amazed when I contemplate the changes that have taken place in my lifetime.”¹⁶

The statistics at the beginning of this paper painted a dismal picture of inequality, and of retrogression in achieving the objective to which virtually every Commonwealth government now subscribes of achieving gender parity in political representation.

The paper went on, however, to emphasise that the achievement of this objective is not a function of economic development alone but also of political will. It outlined a number of immediate measures that can be taken to ensure that these objectives are realised.

These measures are summarised in the form of a proposed “**Plan of Action**” table in **Appendix 1**.

In the Commonwealth study, *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*, Ugandan MP and Minister for Gender and Development, Janet Mukwaya says the secret to her success rests in being an “organised and consistent programmer.”

A similar approach is called for from those charged with ensuring that women finally find their voice in the political arena, if we are to look back at the end of our lifetimes and say that a revolution has indeed taken place.

Notes

- 1 *Barriers to Women's Participation in Politics*, Report of the Task Force of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarian Group, published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, March 1996.
- 2 *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*, profiles of 33 Commonwealth women politicians submitted in draft form to the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, Trinidad & Tobago, November 1996.
- 3 Former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating, in *Every Woman's Guide to Getting into Politics*, a publication prepared by Kate Tully for the Australian Office on the Status of Women, Australia, March 1995.
- 4 *Women in Local Government in Southern Africa* by Florence Butegwa. Paper prepared for the Commonwealth Secretariat/CLGF Symposium on Women and Local Government in Southern Africa, held in Johannesburg, 7-10 May 1996.
- 5 *Women and Parliaments in Australia and New Zealand*, a discussion paper prepared by Coopers and Lybrand for the Commonwealth State Ministers Conference on the Status of Women, September 1994.
- 6 Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, in *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*. (See note 2).
- 7 *Increasing Women's Participation in Local Government*, Report of a Gender Consultation Workshop, Caucus of Women Councillors, Zambia, February 1995.
- 8 CLGF Report to the Fifth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago, 25-28 November 1996.
- 9 The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995.
- 10 South African Health Minister, Nkosozana Zuma, in *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*. (See note 2).
- 11 Hilde Frafjord Johnson, Norwegian MP, speaking at a conference of the Association of West European Parliamentarians (AWEPA) and Southern African Parliamentarians, in Johannesburg in September 1996.
- 12 The Inter-Parliamentary Council's Plan of Action to Correct Present Imbalances in the Participation of Men and Women in Political Life.
- 13 *Together for Change, Three Struggles for Political Rights (in Botswana, Uganda and Zambia)*, a publication sponsored by the African-American Institute, USA, August 1995.
- 14 *Beyond Planning to Implementation*, Report of the Fourth Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, Nicosia, Cyprus, 5-9 July 1993.
- 15 Specioza Kazibwe, Vice President of Uganda, quoted in *Together for Change, Three Struggles for Political Rights*. (See note 13).
- 16 Lois O'Donoghue, Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, quoted in *Women in Politics: Problems, Experiences and Strategies for Action*. (See note 2).