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Gender Mainstreaming at the Commonwealth Secretariat

This section reviews the gender mainstreaming arrangements in place at the Commonwealth Secretariat. While such arrangements necessarily change in the course of time, they stand as experiences which can provide input into future efforts towards gender mainstreaming.

Within the Commonwealth Secretariat, a multi-pronged strategy is being used, the key components of which are as follows:

Political Will

Heads of Government

The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development was endorsed at the highest level by the Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in Auckland (CHOGM, 1995). It had previously been adopted by Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (WAMM) at the Beijing Conference. A review of the progress made on the implementation of the Plan of Action is now a permanent item at CHOGM, WAMM and meetings of Senior Officials.

Ministerial meetings

Engendering the agendas of Commonwealth ministerial meetings (Finance, Health, Education, Law and Youth) is a requirement of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development. For example, the Health Ministers' Meeting (South Africa, December 1995) focused on the theme of Women and Health, which included workshops on Health for Women and Women for Health, field visits and agreed upon a comprehensive action plan. Regional or sub-regional governmental meetings, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), need to be encouraged to insert gender as a permanent agenda item.

Structures/Processes

The structures set in motion within the Secretariat to facilitate gender mainstreaming include the following:

Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting (WAMM)

A progress report on the implementation of the Plan of Action is submitted by the Secretary-General to the triennial meeting of the Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (WAMM). On the eve of WAMM, the Steering Committee on the Plan of Action (SCOPA), consisting of Heads of National

Women's Machineries, meets to review the Progress Report of the Secretary-General and to propose strategies and interventions to WAMM to take the agenda forward.

Gender and Youth Affairs Division

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender Equality Programme, formerly one of 15 programmes became in 1996 one of four overarching sections under which all Secretariat activities are addressed (the others being political, developmental and administrative). As the administrator of the Programme, the Gender and Youth Affairs Division (GYAD) therefore has a unique cross-cutting role within the Secretariat.

Under the Plan of Action, GYAD has been allocated the central role in the Secretariat in all matters affecting gender equality. These include:

- ◆ co-ordinating the 1995 Plan of Action and facilitating its implementation by both governments and the Secretariat;
- ◆ providing reporting and monitoring mechanisms on the implementation of the Plan of Action for governments and the Secretariat;
- ◆ providing advice on gender mainstreaming and cutting-edge gender issues to governments, the Secretariat, international and regional multilateral organisations, Commonwealth organisations and NGOs;
- ◆ planning and implementing special projects relating to the priority areas of the Plan, in collaboration with relevant Divisions of the Commonwealth Secretariat. This involves developing tools and methodologies, piloting them in the four regions of the Commonwealth, and fine-tuning them for world-wide dissemination. It also involves training and capacity-building, primarily at the regional and pan-Commonwealth levels;
- ◆ organising programmes at the cutting edge of emergent new gender issues, building Commonwealth consensus and developing policies, strategies and approaches to be adopted by Commonwealth governments; and
- ◆ representing the Secretariat in major regional, national and international meetings on issues of concern to women.

Gender Steering Committee (GSC)

This Steering Committee, made up of Directors of Divisions and chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General (Economic and Social Affairs), was established to meet on strategic Gender and Development issues within the Secretariat. The GSC is responsible for gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the Plan of Action throughout the Secretariat.

The Committee meets bi-annually to review the performance reports of Divisions submitted to the Gender and Youth Affairs Division (GYAD). This review process entails analysis of performance evaluation, perusal of outcomes achieved, assessment of obstacle met, distilling of lessons learned, and proposing new solutions, approaches and strategies to move forward. Following this, a progress report is presented to the Management Committee and the Secretary-General by the Chairperson of GSC.

One of the biannual meetings of GSC takes place prior to the meeting of the Steering Committee for Senior Officials (SCOSO) to which the GSC submits a written progress report through the Secretary-General.

Gender Focal Points

Under the Plan of Action, Directors of Divisions are responsible for the integration of gender in their programmes and sub-programmes. Towards this end, they have

appointed Gender Focal Points (GFPs) – professional staff specially trained in gender planning – to assist with the monitoring and implementation of the Plan of Action within their Divisions. GFPs provide critical assistance to Directors in achieving Division-wide understanding and consensus on integrating gender into their work plans and ensuring the integration of the nine Secretariat-wide measures into their programmes.

Each division nominates one of their Gender Focal Points at the level of Deputy Director. In addition, the three Senior Executive Assistants to the Deputy Secretaries-General, the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) Regional Centres and the Development Advisers' Office in South Africa, are all incorporated into the Gender Focal Points system to support the integration of gender into their respective functions and programme activities. The GFPs meet quarterly.

Strategic Planning and Evaluation Unit (SPEU)

SPEU is responsible for the ongoing evaluation of Secretariat activities and for gender planning and evaluation training. SPEU has encouraged Divisions to plan strategically on gender issues by including a gender focus in the strategic planning process for the three-year Secretariat Work Plan 1997-2000. It also includes a gender perspective in the terms of reference for evaluation studies and in Secretariat monitoring procedures.

Administration Division

Administration in collaboration with GYAD reviews the recruitment process of the Secretariat to identify strategies to increase the participation of women in the diplomatic and professional staff grades. Strategies being implemented include:

- ◆ specifying that female applicants are particularly welcome and that the Secretariat is an Equal Opportunity Employer in advertisements for Secretariat vacancies;
- ◆ expanding the list of gender experts on the Secretariat Roster;
- ◆ circulating advertisements for Secretariat vacancies to National Women's Machineries; and
- ◆ including women on interview boards.

Equal Employment Opportunities Policy

The Secretariat has reinforced its commitment to the Plan of Action with the preparation of an Equal Employment Opportunities Policy. Issues of importance to gender include:

- ◆ the use of positive and affirmative action where necessary in recruitment and selection (including promotion);
- ◆ reviewing relocation and induction packages;
- ◆ responding to claims of harassment; and
- ◆ providing practical support to women and men with dependants.

Gender training

Gender training within the Secretariat is being approached through collaboration among three Divisions (SPEU, GYAD and Administration) and includes the following:

- ◆ gender planning workshops for senior and middle management – Deputy Secretaries-General, Heads of Division and Heads of Department;
- ◆ gender policy, evaluation and planning seminars for professional staff and Gender Focal Points; and
- ◆ gender-awareness training for support staff.

This programme is being complemented by a process of Division-specific gender training and skills enhancement introduced by GYAD.

Technical assistance

The General Technical Assistance Services Division (GTASD) is responsible for general technical assistance to Commonwealth governments. GTASD also facilitates the process of setting up Gender Management Systems in member governments. The Gender and Youth Affairs Division reviews proposals received by GTASD on gender projects and proposes appropriate gender-aware consultants. The other Divisions under the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) – namely the Management and Training Services Division (MTSD), the Export and Industrial Development Division (EIDD) and the Economic and Legal Advisory Services Division (ELASD) – also provide sectoral technical assistance to member governments. National Women's Machineries of Commonwealth governments are encouraged to take advantage of gender-sensitive technical assistance available through the CFTC. Lists of experts submitted to governments by the CFTC for the purpose of selecting suppliers of technical assistance always include at least one woman.

Monitoring and Evaluation

At the level of the Secretariat

There is monitoring and evaluation of the gendered policies, plans and programmes of all divisions within the Secretariat, to ensure equality and equity of opportunities and outcomes. All policies and procedures relating to Human Resources will be monitored, e.g., equal employment opportunities, recruitment and selection procedures, training, promotion, transfers, etc.

At the level of Commonwealth governments

By request, the Secretariat monitors the implementation of Gender Management Systems through the following means:

- ◆ use of the Secretary General's Report on the Implementation of the Plan of Action on Gender and Development – reflecting levels of implementation of the Plan in Commonwealth countries;
- ◆ governments should include reports of progress on the implementation and achievements of Gender Management Systems and the effectiveness of the co-ordinating role of the Lead Agency to Women's Affairs Ministers' Meetings. This information would subsequently be incorporated into the Secretary-General's Report to Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meetings on the Plan of Action;
- ◆ reports from NGOs and the private sector on the progress of gender mainstreaming in their respective organisations and sectors should be encouraged in the monitoring process. Salient aspects of these should also be incorporated into national reports;
- ◆ questionnaires submitted by the Commonwealth Secretariat to NWMs; and
- ◆ field visits by Secretariat staff and/or consultants.

Technical assistance from sectoral divisions to member governments should include, in their terms of reference, tasks relating to an evaluation of the use, application and impact of the Gender Management System.

At the level of the National Women's Machinery, taking into consideration components discussed earlier, the Women's Bureau should take a leading role in co-ordinating the monitoring and evaluation of the Gender Management System by:

- ◆ providing regular reports on the progress of implementing the GMS;
- ◆ assessing the impact of the different actors involved in the GMS on their constituencies; and
- ◆ collecting sex-disaggregated data and statistics.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's assistance in developing an initial operational strategy may include developing sector specific instruments/tools for:

- ◆ engendering policies, plans and programmes;
- ◆ development of indicators for the collection of gender-disaggregated data;
- ◆ monitoring and evaluation of the different sectors; and
- ◆ inter-agency (ComSec/UNDP/UNIFEM) collaboration, making use of comparative advantage in gender training; in the design and development of methodologies and modalities; in project monitoring and evaluation. For example, one agency may take the lead on the design and delivery of gender training at different levels for specific sectors in consultation with policy-makers at national and sub-regional levels, as appropriate. Another agency may develop methodologies to support sub-regional sharing of experiences and lessons learnt in implementing a GMS and may design modalities of strategies and best practices. The design of monitoring instruments and evaluation techniques and tools may be the undertaking of another agency.