

Foreword

Promoting gender equality across all spheres of society is a core value of the Commonwealth. Member countries took a significant stance on this in 1996 in Trinidad and Tobago, when senior officials at the frontline of promoting gender in their countries recommended that Commonwealth members should be encouraged to achieve a target of no less than 30 per cent women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors by 2005. This target was subsequently endorsed by Heads of Government at their meeting in Edinburgh in 1997.

Collectively, Commonwealth African countries have since led in achieving, and in some cases surpassing, this target. When it comes to parliamentary gender equality, seven of the top ten performers in the Commonwealth are from Commonwealth Africa – and Rwanda remains the global leader. All have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

Furthermore, the bar has been raised for all Commonwealth countries. The Commonwealth Charter recognises that gender equality and women’s empowerment are not only essential components of human development and basic human rights, they are also critical preconditions for sustainable development.

Likewise, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores women’s full and effective participation and ‘equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life’. This is aligned with the African Union’s focus on gender equality as reflected in various commitments, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (‘the Maputo Protocol’), as well as Africa’s Agenda 2063.

In effect, all Commonwealth countries are challenged to progress from 30 to 50 per cent. The gains that Africa has made so far has positioned the continent to meet this ambition by 2030 – and learning from each other will be a game changer. This is the essence of this first edition of the *Handbook for Gender-inclusive Elections in Commonwealth Africa*.

Focusing on elections as the main doorway for attaining elective office, it examines the roles of the key players in this space who

are poised to contribute to the greater participation of women: election management bodies, the legislature, political parties, civil society and the media. It shares good practice and further examines what has not worked, and why, in each of these categories.

I commend the generosity of Commonwealth leaders who have shared their personal experiences in this handbook: HE Samia Suluhu Hassan, Vice President of Tanzania; Hon. Rebecca Kadaga (MP), first woman Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda; Hon. Zainab Athman Katimba (MP) of Tanzania; and Beauty Katebe, Board Chairperson, Zambia National Women's Lobby Group.

I appreciate contributions from our Commonwealth Electoral Network of election officials and experts. Their responses to surveys and interviews have enriched the findings and shaped the recommendations provided.

Commonwealth Africa can achieve 50:50 by 2030. As this handbook underscores, it will take political will, the steadfast implementation of national, regional and international gender rules, and a commitment by all the aforementioned stakeholders to this goal, including women themselves, who must not tire of stepping forward.

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Secretary-General of the Commonwealth