CHAPTER 8

# Promoting Democracy, Peace and Development in the Commonwealth Through Investing in Gender Equality

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## Introduction

Gender equality is a key feature of democratic governance. Democracy is supposed to transform power relations between women and men in such a manner that women participate equally in governance and development processes. While this goal remains a challenge for stable democracies, it is much more daunting for conflict-ridden and post-conflict societies. This is so not only because democracy and development are difficult to achieve under conditions of political instability, but also because protracted violent conflicts have tended to hit women and children the hardest.

It is now widely accepted that democracy and development are two sides of the same coin and therefore, all things being equal, should be mutually reinforcing (Sen, 1999; UNDP, 2002; Adefuye, 2006; Adedeji, 2006). Furthermore, it goes without saying that progress on both the democracy and development fronts is most likely to ensure peace. In a nutshell, while democracy ought to promote development, neither can prevail if countries are engulfed in protracted violent conflict. Additionally, the pursuit of democracy, development and peace ought to be anchored on gender equality. Without gender equality, both democracy and development are severely deficient. This observation reinforces the imperative for all Commonwealth member countries to deliberately evolve strategies and policies geared towards financing democracy, development and peace and investing in gender equality.

The 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration emphasises the pledge of member States to 'democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and independence of the judiciary, [and] just and honest government' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1991:2). With respect to development, the Declaration recognises 'the importance and urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the peoples of the world, and seek the progressive removal of wide disparities in living standards among our members' (ibid.:1). The Declaration also notes that 'international peace and order, global economic development and the rule of international law are essential for the security and prosperity of mankind' (ibid.).

The commitment of the Commonwealth to gender equality is also stated in the Harare Declaration and elaborated on in the Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) for Gender Equality 2005-2015, adopted at the 7th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (7WAMM), held in Fiji Islands in 2004. With a view to achieving this commitment, the PoA focuses mainly on four key areas: gender, democracy, peace and conflict; gender, human rights and law; gender, poverty eradication and economic empowerment; and gender and HIV/AIDS.

The PoA was endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Malta in 2005. The Communiqué from that meeting recommended that Commonwealth member countries strive to achieve at least 30 per cent women's participation/representation in key decision-making organs in the public, private and political spheres by 2005 and further urged member countries who had reached 30 per cent to strive for 50 per cent women's participation/representation as the ultimate goal. Today, the achievement of the above benchmarks remains a challenge for many Commonwealth member countries. This challenge further extends to going beyond merely increasing numbers of women in key decision-making position to effective empowerment with the aim of ensuring that women in such positions enjoy the requisite power and authority to make a meaningful impact on their society's development.

It should be noted from the outset that achieving democracy, development and peace, and in the process ensuring gender equality, requires resources. Prudent strategies have to be put in place to mobilise these both externally and internally. Additionally, resources are needed for activities aimed specifically at promoting gender equality so that women can make a meaningful contribution in democratic governance, development promotion and peace-building.

## Democracy and Gender Equality

There are, basically, three different ways in which democracy can be defined and explained (see Landman, 2005; 2006). First, a minimal definition (explanation) of democracy locates its principle and practice around two values: political competition or contestation and participation. This definition reduces democracy to elections and the existence of formal institutions, such as the executive, legislature, judiciary, political parties, civil society organisations, etc. The notion of competition or contestation 'captures the uncertain peaceful competition necessary for democratic rule, a principle which presumes the legitimacy of some opposition, the right to challenge the incumbents... the existence of free and fair elections and a consolidated party system' (Landman, 2005:20). The notion of participation presupposes political control of the citizens over the people who govern on their behalf, 'popular sovereignty', and 'presumes the protection of the right to vote as well as the existence of universal suffrage' (ibid.). In electoral democracies, gender equality could be measured, inter alia, by the level of participation of women in electoral processes (as voters and contestants).

Second, the liberal notion of democracy extends beyond just contestation and participation to include the protection and promotion of political rights and civil liberties and

an institutional framework for a human rights culture between elections. It includes other institutional dimensions (guarantees) such as accountability, transparency, constraint over leaders, representation of citizens, rule of law, property and minority rights. In liberal democracies, gender equality can be assessed, inter alia, by the extent of women's participation in elections and their representation in various organs of government (including the legislature, executive, judiciary, public service and security establishment). Women's participation in other institutions outside the state – in various civil society organisations, including women's movements – is also crucial.

Third, the structuralist definition (explanation) of democracy extends the principle and practice of democracy beyond procedural (electoral) and institutional (liberal) dimensions found in the earlier definitions and introduces the socio-economic (structural) dimensions. In what is usually referred to variously as social democracy or developmental democracy, issues of social justice and respect for socio-economic rights loom larger than in electoral and liberal democracies. In social/developmental democracies, gender equality can be assessed not only through women's participation in elections and their representation in key institutions of governance (both governmental and non-governmental) but also through the power relations between women and men at various layers of societal life. Gender equality thus has to extend to women's participation in socio-economic governance.

The UNDP *Human Development Report 2002* reminds us that 'true democratization means more than elections. It requires the consolidation of democratic institutions and the strengthening of democratic practices, with democratic values and norms embedded in all parts of society' (2002:14). The Report isolates six key components of this as follows:

- A system of representation, with well functioning political parties and interest associations;
- An electoral system that guarantees free and fair elections as well as universal suffrage;
- A system of checks and balances based on the separation of powers, with independent judicial and legislative branches;
- A vibrant civil society, able to monitor government and private business – and provide alternative forms of political participation;
- Free and independent media; and
- Effective civilian control over the military and other security forces. (2002:4)

We should add gender equality to the list of components of democracy mentioned above. A democratic system that does not recognise representation of women in key decision-making organs is surely deficient. A democratic system is incomplete without deliberate measures aimed at socio-economic and political empowerment of women. Such measures, in the main, need not only to strive for achieving set benchmarks such as 30 or 50 per cent of women's representation in key decision-making organs (quantitative measure), but also to emphasise the significance of empowering women in these positions by according them the requisite power and authority (qualitative measure).

These transformative processes do not come about on their own. First, striving towards gender equality in the governance process as a central pillar of democratisation requires visionary leadership and firm commitment by governments. Without this, gender equality may not be realised. For instance, there is evidence pointing to the stark reality that even within the Commonwealth a gap exists between the signing of progressive declarations on gender equality and actual policy practice at the national level.

Second, linked to the above point, governments need to adhere in the governance process to agreed norms and conventions on gender equality, whether international (e.g. the Commonwealth Plan of Action), continental (e.g. the 2003 African Union protocol on gender equality) or regional (e.g. the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development). Adherence to these declarations and conventions ought to include, inter alia, institutional, legal, political and electoral reforms.

Third, gender equality cannot be the responsibility of governments and the political leadership alone. It also requires the existence of a robust and vibrant civil society capable of engaging constantly and constructively with government around gender equality issues. Within civil society, women's organisations themselves have to play a frontline role in championing issues of gender equality.

Fourth, resources have to be set aside for the promotion of gender equality at various levels and layers of governance. There is evidence suggesting that resources could be used prudently as incentives to further political will to strive towards gender equality in patriarchal societies. For instance, a self-evident case exists for all Commonwealth countries to provide public funding for political parties and make one of the criteria the number of women represented in the leadership structures of parties and as election candidates endorsed by parties.

Democracy for democracy's sake is an exercise in futility. It must (or at least ought to) be a means to an end. That end is development. Without development, democracy will forever remain a hollow concept out of reach of the ordinary people and only understood by the political elite and serving the partisan (at times self-serving) political interests of a small coterie of the powerful. It is to the centrality of development (particularly people-centred development) to a democratic process that we now turn.

## The Essence of Development

Development, simply explained, refers to the progressive improvement of the socio-economic livelihoods of a people in a given country, especially in meeting their basic human rights: (a) food, (b) shelter, (c) health, (d) education and (e) employment. These are the basic needs that every human being requires be met in order first to ensure his/her dignity and second to enjoy other rights such as civil liberties. In the extant literature, there is a tendency by some to treat development as though it was synonymous with economic growth. Economic growth simply refers to the aggregate expansion of the economy often measured by such indices as gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national product (GNP). However, it is perfectly possible for a country to achieve fairly high economic growth rates over the years, yet for its development to remain stagnant

or, worse still, deteriorate. This observation suggests that a country can have economic growth without development, yet no country can achieve development without economic growth. However, is there a link between democracy and development? Furthermore, is there a link between development and gender equality?

A useful approach for the realisation of the linkage between democracy and development is the sustainable human development (SHD) approach introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Adebayo Adedeji suggests that

> sustainable human development is... development that not only generates economic growth but also redistributes its benefits equitably. It empowers people rather than marginalises them. It regenerates the environment rather than destroys it. Finally, it gives priority to the poor by enlarging their choices and opportunities. Without doubt, sustainable human development is pro-people, pro-nature, pro-jobs and ipso facto pro-youth and pro-women. As such, it umbilically links economics and politics together, like the horse and the carriage. (2006:6–7)

SHD hinges on democratic governance in a fundamental way. The concept has been used widely as a highly reliable and clearly measurable indicator for social development. For this and other related reasons, it has added to the criticism of the reliability and utility of such indicators as GDP and GNP as adequate indices for measuring socio-economic development *a la* World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In contrast to these economistic and narrow indices, it has introduced better-refined indices such as the human development index (HDI), gender development index (GDI) and human poverty index (HPI) with well-defined measurable variables and components.

Thus, SHD essentially involves a process of enlarging peoples' choices in a manner that enables them to enjoy 'long, healthy and creative lives' (UNDP, 1990). It denotes a decent standard of living for people and has three main components used to measure socio-economic progress in countries: (a) longevity, which measures life expectancy and state of health; (b) knowledge, which measures literacy rate; and (c) per capita income, which measures standard of living and poverty incidence. In pursuit of the SHD agenda, in 2000 the UN General Assembly adopted the Millennium Declaration, committing member States to achieving eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These constitute a global social contract that – if successfully implemented – would transform societies in a positive direction both socio-economically as well as politically.

However, when progress on achievement of the MDGs was reviewed in September 2005, during the UN General Assembly in New York, it was evident that in all eight areas the gap between declaration on the one hand and political commitment and policy practice on the other remained wide. Consequently, the MDGs have not yet been achieved and the *Human Development Report 2005* points an accusing finger at three interrelated factors for this failure: (a) ineffective aid; (b) unequal trade; and (c) conflict and instability. The report argues that achievement of the MDGs will not be realised unless 'we can decisively resolve the bottlenecks currently retarding progress at the

pace and scale that are needed over the next decade' in these three broad areas (UNDP, 2005:4).

In recognition of the significance of gender power relations in the development process, the MDGs also commit UN member States to take deliberate steps to enhance the role and position of women. MDG 3 specifically aims to promote gender equality and empower women through 'eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015' (UNDP, 2003:3). The extent to which this goal is being realised leaves a lot to be desired. Gender disparity in primary and secondary education has not yet been eliminated, and it is unlikely that all Commonwealth countries will achieve this by 2015.

Women play a significant role in the development process in the Commonwealth, particularly in rural economies of developing countries. They are the backbone of agrarian economies in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where in many instances men have migrated to urban areas for wage employment. However, due in large measure to patriarchal ideology and male-dominated socialisation patterns, women still remain marginalised and their contribution to the development process goes unrecognised in official statistics, which often fail to capture the contribution of the informal sector to the overall performance of the national economy in terms of both growth and development. Consequently, women remain unsung heroes of the development advancement of many countries, a trend that needs to change through deliberate efforts to eradicate patriarchy and gender-insensitive socialisation patterns.

## Peace as a Pre-condition for Democracy and Development

Democracy cannot prevail and endure under conditions of violent conflict. By the same token, development is impossible under conditions of war. It then goes without saying that both democracy and development require, as essential conditions, peace and constructive management of conflicts. While recognising the negative impact of violent conflict on both democracy and development, it is important to also appreciate the impact of conflict on gender equality.

Conflict exists everywhere as one of the defining features of power relations in all Commonwealth countries and, well managed through constructive mechanisms, it can be a dynamic force for democracy and development. However, once belligerents seek violent means of resolution, conflict turns counter-productive for both democracy and development. This observation is important in order for us to recognise that conflict is part and parcel of societal power relations and cannot be wished away. In this scheme of things, the challenge facing Commonwealth countries is to devise mechanisms for constructive management of conflict at three main levels: (a) conflict prevention to preempt conflict through early-warning systems; (b) conflict management/resolution to deal with existing conflict, aiming to avoid a violent rupture; and (c) conflict transformation to manage a violent conflict constructively and bring about peace.

Intra-state conflicts in many Commonwealth countries are violent and costly. There is no doubt that in many of these conflicts (driven mainly by the men) women have been

the hardest hit victims. There is also evidence suggesting that women have played an important role in the constructive management and resolution of some major violent conflicts. For instance, women have participated in decolonisation wars and liberation struggles of many Commonwealth countries and are currently contributing immensely to the process of peace-building in many newly democratising post-conflict societies, such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

The major role played by women in this regard has been recognised by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted on 31 October 2000, which affirms 'the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and... the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution' (United Nations, 2000:1). To this end, the Resolution makes two particularly important recommendations. First, it urges UN member States to 'ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict' (ibid.:2). Second, it encourages UN member States to invest in gender equality for the achievement of peace 'by increasing their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter alia, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Children's Fund, and by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies' (ibid.).

Commonwealth countries are also urged to ensure that

> women in societies affected by war and armed conflicts are placed in strategic positions of decision-making and trust, and that their voices are heard and heeded. [This] will ensure that interrelated processes of development and democracy, rule of law and peace-building, political participation and socio-economic empowerment will more effectively take on board gender issues. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003:42)

As we argued in the previous sections, gender equality is a critical pillar for democracy, development and peace and security. It goes without saying, therefore, that increased participation of women in governance processes of each Commonwealth country ought to become top policy priority in terms of both quantitative and qualitative improvement of power relations between women and men. But is that the case? It is on this that the next section turns the spotlight.

## Gender Equality: Still the Missing Link?

In a recent publication on women in parliament, Jullie Ballington aptly argues that 'an essential tenet of any democratic framework is the principle of human rights, including the granting and exercise of the political rights of both men and women. The development of any political agenda that does not include the perspectives, views and experiences of those who will be affected is not credible' (in Ballington and Karam,

2005:24). This observation captures the essence of gender equality in a working democracy. However, the global trends indicate that, despite international declarations and protocols, we are still a long way from making this a reality.

Since the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2000 Beijing +5 Political Declaration and Outcome Document, further international commitments have been made by various organisations including the Commonwealth to advance gender equality. The challenge is moving from declarations to (a) political commitment, (b) appropriate policy prescriptions, (c) actual actions, (d) mind-set/paradigm shifts and (e) constant monitoring and evaluation of progress and increase the number of women in key decision-making positions in the political, public and private spheres of governance.

While data is difficult to come by in respect of women's participation and representation in all these areas, reliable statistics exist in relation to the gender breakdown of the composition of legislatures around the world (Table 8.1).

The table shows that, throughout the world, women's representation in legislatures constitutes a mere 17 per cent, a far cry from the Beijing target of 30 per cent, let alone the ultimate 50 per cent gender parity for which the Commonwealth is striving. If the global trend is disaggregated by regions of the world, the picture that emerges is illustrated in Table 8.2.

**Table 8.1:** Global trend in gender breakdown of combined houses of parliament

| *Male MPs* | *Female MPs* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|
| 36,446 | 7,450 | 43,896 |
| 83.0% | 17.0% | 100% |

*Source:* Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm.

**Table 8.2:** Women in parliaments: world and regional averages

| *Region* | *Single House or Lower House (%)* | *Upper House (%)* | *Both Houses Combined (%)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nordic Countries | 40.8 | ... | 40.8 |
| Americas | 20.0 | 19.3 | 19.9 |
| Europe-OSCE member countries, including Nordic countries | 19.7 | 17.5 | 19.2 |
| Europe-OSCE member countries, including Nordic countries | 17.6 | 17.5 | 17.6 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 16.8 | 18.2 | 17.0 |
| Asia | 16.5 | 15.7 | 16.4 |
| Pacific | 12.4 | 31.8 | 14.5 |
| Arab states | 9.5 | 6.3 | 8.8 |

*Source:* Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm

It is interesting to note that the situation depicted in this table tells us a lot about democracy and development (and, to a considerable extent, peace too) in the regions listed. It can be plausibly argued that the reason why the Nordic countries are top of the list is precisely because they practice social or developmental democracy, with an emphasis on social welfare and promotion of socio-economic rights that is manifested in, among other things, the promotion of gender equality at all spheres of governance. The Nordic countries are also high performers on a global stage in terms of their level of human development, as vividly illustrated in the latest UNDP Human Development Reports. Not only are these countries advanced and established democracies marked by high economic growth and human development rates, but their political systems are also characterised by peace and stability.

A similar argument can be advanced in explaining the position of Europe (with or without the Nordic countries). Member countries of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are also mature and established liberal democracies with institutional guarantees for the respect, observance and protection of human rights (including women's rights). OSCE member countries have also developed a well-established peer review mechanism ensuring that they hold each other accountable in terms of advancing democratic governance, including improvement of the status of women in politics. Not only do these countries have robust liberal democracies, with impressive ratings by such organisations as Freedom House in terms of their standing in respect of civil liberties and political rights, but their economic growth and human development rates are also high and, since the end of the Second World War, they have hardly experienced protracted inter-state violent conflicts.

The situation is different in developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East. Almost all sub-Saharan Africa started off well by adopting multiparty democratic systems on achieving their political independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, even before the first decade of independence was over, many of these countries had abandoned liberal democracy bequeathed from colonial administrations and adopted authoritarian regimes of either civilian or military varieties. Only a few countries were the exception to this rule – Botswana, Mauritius, Senegal, etc. Authoritarian governments in many sub-Saharan countries presided over declining economic growth and human development rates. Worse still, many of the sub-Saharan States were involved in protracted violent conflicts of both an inter-state and intra-state nature for the larger part of the Cold War era (see Harris and Reilly, 1998; Large and Sisk, 2006a; Large and Sisk, 2006b).

Only since the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the collapse of the Cold War and the onset of the global wave of democratisation (see Huntington, 1991), did sub-Saharan Africa begin to re-introduce multiparty political systems, marked by regular elections and in some instances democratic transfer of power from one regime to another. However, the extent to which individual countries have actually undergone democratic transition and have therefore embraced liberal democracy in both theory and practice differs markedly from one country to another. This in part explains their comparatively unimpressive performance in relation to representation of women in their legislatures. Yet,

ironically, some countries, such as Rwanda (48.8 per cent), Mozambique (34.8 per cent), South Africa (32.8 per cent), Burundi (30.5 per cent), United Republic of Tanzania (30.4 per cent), Uganda (29.8 per cent), Seychelles (29.4) and Namibia (26.9 per cent) have managed to achieve the 30 per cent benchmark of gender representation in their legislatures or are very close to achieving this target. What these countries need to do now is to consolidate their achievement in striving towards gender equality and aim for the ultimate goal of gender parity as set out in the PoA.

A majority of States in Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East or Arab states are struggling to achieve progress in women's representation in the legislature. In these parts of the world, 'real gains in women accessing legislatures have not occurred, and largely insurmountable obstacles persist. For example, women are still least represented in the Arab states' (Ballington and Karam, 2005:25). Ballington and Karam further note that 'women remain woefully under-represented in the parliaments of the Pacific Island States... (excluding Australia and New Zealand...)' (ibid.). This situation is explicable, in part, by either authoritarian governments that hold sway in these regions or the fragility of their existing democracies. Such authoritarian regimes and/or fragile democracies have also been hemmed in by protracted violent conflicts of various types, which have not only triggered political instability but have also come at enormous socio-economic costs.

The trend depicted above does have a bearing on gender relations and representation of women in decision-making positions within Commonwealth member countries. As mentioned earlier, member countries have committed themselves to achieving at least 30 per cent women's representation in key political, public and private spheres of governance (by 2005) and striving towards the ultimate goal of gender parity and achieving 50 per cent women's representation after 2005. Although no Commonwealth member country has as yet achieved the latter, various countries have made appreciable progress in increasing women's representation in key public decision-making bodies, especially in parliament. Table 8.3 depicts the trend in women's representation in the top ten best performing Commonwealth member countries in 1999 and 2007.

**Table 8.3:** Top ten Commonwealth countries: women's participation in the national parliament/assembly, 1999 and 2007

| | **1999** | | | **2007 (as of 31 January)** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Rank* | *Country* | *% women in parliament* | *Rank* | *Country* | *% women in parliament* |
| 1 | New Zealand | 30.0 | 1 | Mozambique | 34.8 |
| 2 | Mozambique | 28.0 | 2 | South Africa | 32.8 |
| 3 | Grenada | 26.7 | 3 | New Zealand | 32.2 |
| 4 | Australia | 25.5 | 4 | United Rep. of Tanzania | 30.4 |
| 5 | Seychelles | 23.5 | 5 | Seychelles | 29.4 |
| 6 | Trinidad and Tobago | 22.4 | 6 | Guyana | 29.0 |
| 7 | Canada | 20.0 | 7 | Namibia | 26.9 |
| 8 | Namibia | 19.2 | 8 | Grenada | 26.7 |
| 9 | Uganda | 18.4 | 9 | Australia | 24.7 |
| 10 | United Kingdom | 18.0 | 10 | Pakistan | 21.3 |

*Source:* Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003:41; IPU Database, 2007.

Overall, while progress is evidently underway in some Commonwealth countries, the majority face an enormous challenge of fast-tracking gender equality in their governance processes. Moreover, the point also has to be made that all Commonwealth countries need to go beyond sheer numbers in their striving for gender equality. We have long gone beyond the era when increasing the numbers of women in key organs of the state was a sufficient cause for celebration of progress. While increasing the numbers is, in and of itself, a critical measure of how Commonwealth countries are moving towards gender equality, it is important to recognise that this quantitative measure needs to be balanced with another equally important qualitative measure. As women begin to occupy strategic positions of power in public institutions, it behoves the political leadership to bestow on these women the requisite power and authority that resides in these positions. Focusing merely on the numbers of women and neglecting the empowerment of women to have the authority as office holders runs the risk of tokenism, either by default or by design.

## Investing in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

While it is clear that progress has been made, daunting challenges remain in the Commonwealth in terms of promoting gender equality in the processes of building and sustaining democracy, advancing development and building peace. This section focuses attention specifically on challenges for financing gender equality and investing in women's political participation and empowerment.

First, Commonwealth countries have signed various declarations, including the PoA. It is imperative that countries translate these declarations into legislation and policy practice in their own national settings. Governments have to make budgetary allocations for ensuring needed legal, institutional and policy reform towards gender equality. Some Commonwealth countries have already developed gender policies and thus need to mobilise and earmark adequate resources for implementation of these policies. By doing so, they will have gone a long way in closing the yawning gap between declarations and commitment, which in part explains countries' mixed performance in terms of achieving the agreed gender equality benchmarks.

Second, Commonwealth countries need to mobilise resources for the provision of incentives to promote affirmative action for women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality. Such measures are wide-ranging and could include, inter alia,

- *Legislated gender quotas* compelling political parties and parliaments to ensure a stipulated percentage of women in decision-making positions;
- *Voluntary gender quotas,* especially at party level (for instance, in South Africa some political parties such as the African National Congress have internal quotas for 50 per cent gender parity for leadership positions and nomination of candidates for purposes of elections);

- *Training of key actors* within parliaments, political parties, civil society organisations and election management bodies on gender equality and strategies for the empowerment of women;
- *Research* to provide evidence-based, up-to-date and comparative analytical information on a regular basis regarding the state of gender equality in various regions of the Commonwealth and progress towards meeting the PoA target of gender parity; and
- *Specifically reserved seats* for women through elections (as in the United Republic of Tanzania's 30 per cent quota for women in parliament and Lesotho's 30 per cent quota for women in local government elections).

Third, Commonwealth countries need to mobilise both internal and external funding for wide-ranging political and electoral reforms with the main aim of ensuring gender equality. For example, political parties need to institutionalise internal democracy, which should involve promoting gender equality in respect of the composition of top leadership and nomination of candidates for elections. One way of compelling parties in this direction is to provide public funding and/or campaign financing that is conditional on the levels of gender representation and number of women nominated for elections.

Resources are also required for intensive and systematic voter education and civic education. Voter education should incorporate a considerable component on the significance of women's participation in elections – not only as voters, but also as candidates contesting elections either on their own or endorsed by political parties. Civic education between elections needs to be sustained, and this should incorporate a component on the role of women in the democratic process beyond elections.

Another area that needs reforming in order to ensure that women become more active in politics and actually occupy positions of authority and power in both parties and parliaments revolves around electoral systems. Many Commonwealth countries operate the single-member plurality system. This system, also known as the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, has in many instances proved to be less conducive to gender inclusiveness compared to the proportional representation (PR) system, as Table 8.4 suggests in regard to the strengths and weaknesses of these systems

## Conclusion

Commonwealth countries have made tremendous strides in their effort to broaden the frontiers of democratic governance, expand opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development and promote durable peace. Despite this commendable progress, however, enormous challenges still remain for the Commonwealth to deepen and consolidate democratic governance, broaden development and entrench peace and security in a majority of its member countries. Additionally, and more importantly, the chapter has also highlighted major challenges for the promotion of gender equality that cut across various frontiers including democracy, development and conflict management and peace processes. Addressing these challenges require deliberate efforts and strategies to mobilise resources and invest in gender equality.

**Table 8.4:** Characteristic features of the FPTP and PR systems

| **The FPTP System** | |
|---|---|
| *Advantages* | *Disadvantages* |
| Clear choice between two main parties | Excludes minor parties |
| Ensures single party governments | Exaggerates electoral dominance of ruling parties |
| Gives rise to coherent parliamentary opposition | Problem of waste votes, which amounts to disenfranchisement |
| Excludes extremist parties | Amenable to minority government problem |
| Links MP to constituency | Unresponsive to changes in public opinion |
| Allows independent candidates to contest elections | Open to manipulation of election boundaries |
| Allows floor crossing | Less conducive to women's participation |
| Simplicity and familiarity in Africa | Problem of single party parliament |
| **The PR System** | |
| *Advantages* | *Disadvantages* |
| Fair translation of seats into legislative seats | Weak MP-constituency link and accountability |
| Inclusion of minority parties in the legislature | Gives too much power to the party |
| Inclusive and socially diverse list of candidates | Little room for independent candidates |
| Regional fiefdoms restricted | May provide a platform for extremist parties |
| Leads to power sharing and coalition governments | Instability of coalition parties |
| Less vote wastage | Less likelihood of dislodging a ruling party |
| More conducive to women's participation | Conventionally it disallows floor-crossing |
| Conducive to consensus-building politics | Less known and less familiar in Africa |

As discussed above, the majority of Commonwealth countries that still have not met the 30 per cent benchmark need to fast-track gender equality in their governance processes, while the few that have met the target need to sustain the momentum of increased women's participation to achieve 50 per cent gender parity. In addition, while increasing the numbers is a critical measure of how Commonwealth countries are striving towards gender equality, it is also important to ensure that as women begin to occupy strategic positions of power in public institutions they are accorded the requisite power and authority that resides in these positions.

As Commonwealth member countries strive towards gender equality, emphasis must therefore be placed on both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of this agenda. Investment in gender equality involves, among other things, mobilisation of resources both nationally and externally to advance women's political participation and empowerment with a view to meeting the benchmarks set in the PoA. This would include investing in legal, institutional and policy reforms; public funding for political parties; voter

and civic education; electoral system reforms; introduction and implementation of legislated and/or voluntary gender quotas; and training and research focusing on gender equality.

## Recommendations

If Commonwealth countries are to advance democracy, development and peace and in the process ensure gender equality, it is recommended that they should do the following:

### Democracy

- show political commitment towards prioritising gender equality in the democratisation process;
- adhere to the Harare Declaration as well as regional (e.g. SADC), continental (e.g. AU) and international (e.g. Commonwealth) norms/declarations on gender equality;
- create an environment conducive to the existence of a robust and vibrant civil society engaging constantly with government around gender equality;
- initiate necessary reform of legislation and policies for the realisation of gender equality in the democratic process;
- finance democracy, deliberately investing in gender equality as one of the pillars of representative democracy.

### Development

- put in place effective implementation and monitoring mechanisms for the achievement of the MDGs;
- translate the MDGs into national development policies and strategies;
- prioritise gender equality in striving towards sustainable human development (SHD).

### Conflict management and peace

- pay special attention in managing conflicts to the adverse impact of violent conflict on women and children;
- adhere to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted on 31 October 2000, which recognises the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and therefore the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security;
- invest in gender equality for the achievement of peace 'by increasing their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter alia, the United

Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Children's Fund, and by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies' (UN, 2000:2).

### Investing in gender equality

- translate the Plan of Action into national legislation and policy practice in order to bridge the yawning gap between declaration and political commitment;
- make budgetary allocations for ensuring needed law and policy reform towards gender equality;
- mobilise resources for driving gender equality, including gender quotas and reserved seats;
- mobilise both internal and external funding for wide-ranging political and electoral reforms with the main aim of ensuring gender equality, including promotion of internal democracy within political parties, electoral system reforms, and voter and civic education.

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