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* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW)
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and

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CSW/ UNDAW Panel on

**The Role of Regional and Intergovernmental Agencies
in Promoting Gender Equality**

**THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY**

collaborative processes geared towards the achievement of people-centred sustainable development.

Development of the Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA)

As part of their contribution to the Beijing Platform for Action, and setting the global agenda for achieving gender equality, Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's/Gender Affairs launched the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action which was presented to the global conference in Beijing. This Plan of Action was later endorsed by the Commonwealth's Heads of Government at their meeting in Auckland that year. Heads of Government reaffirmed women's rights as human rights and urged member governments to develop and implement legislation and strategies to promote the advancement of women in accordance with the strategic objectives, actions and priorities adopted by the Platform for Action.

In his presentation at the Beijing conference, the

The Commonwealth Plan of Action urges member countries to increase women's representation at all levels of decision-making. Realising the uneven progress recorded within member states in this area, the PoA further urges governments who have already achieved the agreed 30 per cent (30%) target, to strive for much higher aspirations (Para 3:13 (i)). This provision underscores the forward looking status of the new Commonwealth Plan of Action, and our resolve to sustain results.

In the area of education particularly in conflict and difficult circumstances, the Commonwealth urges governments to develop peace and citizenship education to promote respect for individual rights and freedoms, gender equality, diversity including religious and cultural diversity, and pluralism. The PoA also calls on member countries to monitor the implementation of the UNSCR 1325, as it realises that there can be no development without peace.

Other areas of similarity and comparison between the PoA, the Platform for Action and the Outcome Document will be highlighted in the country examples below.

Commonwealth's Comparative Advantage in Promoting the Critical Areas

The Plan of Action reflects the fundamental values and a shared tradition of member countries. Further, it highlights the Commonwealth's areas of comparative advantage, which responds to the principles and ethics of democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, gender equality and sustainable development. It also includes issues related to least developed countries

and the achievement of women's participation and representation in leadership and decision-making positions.

reconstruction initiatives, which include activities geared towards breaking the cycle of violence and poverty, and rehabilitating livelihoods.

Similarly, a gender technical expert has been appointed to work with the

informal economy. The book examines the challenges presented by trade and economic liberalization, technological change and industrial restructuring resulting in global value chains. It also highlights some examples of good practice from around the world to deal with informal enterprises and protect informal workers.

The Commonwealth Secretariat established the Commonwealth Women's Business Network. This was based on the premise that it was important in this era of globalisation and trade liberalisation to enable and empower women's businesses to benefit from the opportunities that present themselves. At the same time the Gender Section has worked on a regional basis to create an enabling environment for enterprise development. It organised a workshop on Strategies for West Africa on Poverty Reduction, Gender and Enterprise Development in Ghana in August 2004.

Through its capacity building measure, the Commonwealth Secretariat provided a gender consultant for one year to assist in engende

Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the Commonwealth Secretariat

Shortly after the 1995 Beijing conference, the governance structures and programmes of the Secretariat were reviewed with the objective to transform the Secretariat into an example of gender mainstreaming good practice. Some notable initiatives include:

- A Gender Steering Committee (GSC) was set up comprised of Directors and chaired by the Secretary-General. It meets bi-annually to review Secretariat's divisional progress in mainstreaming gender equality in their sector-specific programmes;
- Two Gender Focal Points (GFPs) were appointed by each division to co-ordinate gender mainstreaming into all programmes and projects. 'Gender Resource Packs' were prepared for Directors and GFPs with regular consultation and reviews conducted;
- An Equal Employment Opportunities Policy (EOPP) became effective in June 1997, with a Steering Committee, which monitors the implementation of the policy. Similarly, Staff Counsellors were appointed to listen to cases of low staff morale and issues relating to sexual harassment and sex discrimination in the work place;
- The Human Resources Section adopted the 33 per cent (%) target to ensure gender parity. In addition, the Secretariat's employment terms have been upgraded to reflect gender balance. This has resulted in considerable increase in the number of women at professional levels. As of July 2003, 33 per cent (%) of senior positions were filled by women; middle cadre women 40%; while 82.7% of support staff were women;
- During the period 1997-2000, workshops and training to raise awareness of gender issues were organised for Secretariat staff. Approximately, 288 staff members participated in this workshops;
- The Secretariat has developed the Gender Management System as a framework for mainstreaming gender equality in individual government ministries (e.g. agriculture and rural development, education, information and communications, trade and industry); cross-cutting ministries (e.g. finance, development planning); in cross-cutting development issues (e.g. poverty eradication and the MDGs, HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, multilateral trade, human rights). The GMS series of manuals has been widely disseminated, and most recently a GMS Toolkit has been published which includes an Action Guide (for individual learners), Trainer's Guide, Change Management Briefing, and a CD-Rom;
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As we move into the second post-Beijing decade, let us strengthen our partnerships and commitments to achieve gender equality. Along with other targets set within the