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1) A Background to Women’s Representation in the Commonwealth

Despite constituting half of the world’s population, women continue to be disproportionately represented in governance and at all levels of decision-making.

To affirm its commitment to strengthening the participation of women in government and society, the Commonwealth Heads of Government committed themselves to gender equality in the Harare Commonwealth Declaration of 1991. This was anchored by the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005-2015 Plan of Action (PoA), which draws on international commitments for the realisation of women’s rights.

2) An Overview of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

Recognising the need to increase women’s representation in political institutions, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) established a structure and governance body to work to provide greater support to women in Parliament.

Since its formation in 1989, the CWP has evolved into a body which seeks to achieve its aims and objectives from within the overall structure and functioning of the Association. The CWP was founded to enable women Parliamentarians, at future conferences the opportunity to discuss strategies to increase female representation in Parliament and work towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes.

In 2004, the group was formally recognized in the CPA Constitution and its elected Chairperson added to the CPA Executive Committee. A Steering Committee of 10 Members plans its activities which includes one representative from each of the nine CPA Regions plus the CWP President. The Chairperson serves terms of three years and the President serves for one year.

3) The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Mission Statement

The CWP, as an integral part of the CPA, works for the better representation of women in legislatures and for the furtherance of gender equality across the Commonwealth.

4) The Strategic Plan – A Statement of Purpose

CWP is an integral part of the CPA. This CWP Strategic Plan aims to serve as both a strategic communications and a strategic planning tool to enable it to act as a powerful tool for Women Parliamentarians in the CPA. It communicates the mission and work of the CWP to its own women Members, to all other Members of the CPA, Branches of the Association, to the constituents that Members represent across the Commonwealth, as well as to outside organisations and the general public.

Such a Strategic Plan should provide a framework for CWP to identify its achievements, strategically assess the challenges it encounters, build alliances, and undertake actions across the CPA and beyond in order to ensure that both men and women are involved in decision making in legislatures of the Commonwealth and that women Parliamentarians are supported in their work.

As the CWP Strategic Plan is envisaged to complement the CPA Strategic Plan 2013-2017, it is proposed that the CWP Strategic Plan runs one year behind rather than in parallel, i.e. from 2014-2018. This would allow the CWP Steering Committee an opportunity to develop its own objectives in light of the overall strategic plan for the Association and ensure that both plans are consistent and compatible.

5) The Overall Objectives of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

To promote gender equality in the work of the CPA and across the Association:

   a. To encourage women to stand for election to representative bodies by advocating the removal of barriers to their participation and to facilitate their professional contribution as members

   b. Ensure that gender continues to be mainstreamed across all activities to assist Legislatures to exceed the Commonwealth Heads of Government target of having women occupying no less than 30 percent of decision making positions.
6) Aims of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP)

Aims
1) To increase female representation in Parliaments and Legislatures across the Commonwealth;
2) To bring women’s issues to the fore in parliamentary debates;

Activities
3) To enhance the participation and representation of women in the CPA by lobbying the CPA Executive Committee, and by applying pressure and raising awareness at both the Branch, regional and Commonwealth-wide levels;
4) To ensure that matters of specific concern to women are put on the CPA agenda, conveyed to individual Parliaments and brought to the attention of the CPA Executive Committee;
5) To meet annually at the time of the CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference;
6) To facilitate networking between women Parliamentarians of the Commonwealth and women’s branches of international organisations;
7) To propose possible topics for CPA study groups to consider, and/or for special conferences to address;
8) To endeavour to meet separately on an annual basis, in addition to the Annual Meeting of the CPA;

Outcomes
9) To further the representation of women in Parliaments across the Commonwealth;
10) To work towards the mainstreaming of gender considerations in all CPA activities and programmes.

7) Strategies and areas of work to achieve these objectives

1) Advocacy:
Overall goal: To equip women Parliamentarians with the skills or tools to lobby for better representation for women, and on women’s issues.

Constituency and civil society level, CWP will advocate for/to:
- Encourage a rights based approach to empower people to know and claim their rights and increasing the accountability of Parliamentarians who have responsibility for fulfilling, respecting and protecting women’s rights.

On a political level, CWP will advocate for/to:
- Where applicable, the adoption of affirmative action policies in Political Parties by reaching across political lines to strengthen female Parliamentarians’ ability to push legislation affecting women through Parliament;
- Where applicable, Parliamentarians and Parliaments to establish a women’s caucus where it does not exist, and to support the work of the caucus where it does exist;
- Legislatures to adopt a plan to achieve greater gender parity;
- Greater female representation in decision making bodies in both the Executive, in Political Parties and the CPA Executive Committee;
- The advancement and championing of economic empowerment of women through legislation and raising public awareness, which will lead to greater gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth;
- Gender Sensitization: CWP Members should further enhance the gender sensitization of their respective Parliaments and Legislatures and support should be provided to back bench female Parliamentarians;
- Political Momentum: CWP believes that there is a distinct need for greater political will from leadership on all levels to move forward gender equality and the CWP agenda;
- Map areas where there are particular problems affecting women, such as domestic violence, FGM, or underrepresentation in politics and seek to develop robust strategies for dealing with these issues;
- Where there are women in positions in power, they should fast track initiatives to move gender issues forward. Where there is not a female presence in these positions, pressure should be applied within and between offices to move the CWP and gender equality agenda forward.
3) CWP’s Position in CPA

**Overall goal:** For CWP to be actively and closely linked with the CPA in each Region and Branch.

- **Regional Spread:** CWP Chapters in Regions and Branches should be properly established;
- **Capacity:** To ensure that CWP Meetings have a position and space at Regional Conferences or Meetings;
- **Participation in CPA activities:** CPA Branches and Regions to nominate women Parliamentarians and female members of Parliamentary staff to participate in CPA activities and to nominate CWP Steering Committee Members and CWP Members to represent the Branch at the CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference each year;
- **Budget:** Where possible, in each Region, CWP should have a budget line to enable them to meet and/or to undertake activities;
- **Regional Strengthening:** To encourage all Regions to undertake activities which will make full use of the funding allocated for Regional Strengthening Activities;
- **Advocacy with CPA Branches:** Chair of Branch CWP Chapter to have ex-officio status at Branch CPA AGM;
- **Continued Financial Support:** Members should request for continued financial support from the CPA Executive Committee for CWP activities and to work to demonstrate how the work undertaken by CWP is essential to gender equality.

8) Measuring the CWP’s success

The CWP Chairperson and Steering Committee Members will monitor the progress in the achievement of these objectives at their annual meeting ahead of the CPA Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Steering Committee Members will also seek to review the outcomes of the targets they set on the Branch, Regional and International level. The CWP Chairperson will report the success and shortcomings of the CWP to the Executive Committee at the Mid-year Meeting each year and also at the Executive Committee Meeting ahead of the CPA Annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. The CWP should produce an Annual Report.
9) Implementation Considerations

**Bridges**
- The CWP must continue to use the CPA Executive Committee and Annual General Meeting to support its work;
- The CWP must continue to seek the support of Presiding Officers and CPA Branches to further the work of CWP;
- The CWP must continue to work with CWP Regional Chapters to enhance its work;
- The CWP must continue to engage women Parliamentarians across the Commonwealth in its work;
- International Pressure and Resources being made available to support attainment of gender parity.

**Barriers**
- Lack of political will to further advance women in Parliaments, in some Branches;
- Lack of take up of regional funding opportunities by some CWP regions;
- Branches unwilling to nominate women Parliamentarians to attend the Annual Conference or other programmes;
- The implications of the funding guidelines surrounding CPA;
- Lack of take-up from CPA Branches.

**Risk Mitigation Measures**
- Continued lobbying for greater gender parity;
- Encouragement provided to all Regions to undertake a programme of work for CWP members
- Branch level CWP activities foster a supportive network;
- Support of Presiding Officers for CPA and CWP Branch Activities.

10) Regional Strengthening Activities
Examples of Regional Strengthening Activities can be found in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Annual Newsletters and online.

For further information, please contact the CPA Secretariat.