Women in the Post-Millennium Development Goal Era
Concluding Statement
A Pan-Commonwealth Conference for Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians

Houses of Parliament, UK, June 2014

Eight Millennium Development Goals with 21 targets were outlined in the Millennium Declaration at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in September 2000. Of these crucial eight goals, only three have been met and there continues to be an enormous amount to be achieved if the remaining five goals are to come into fruition.

The Post-Millennium Development Goal agenda is at the forefront of much international debate. The Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP), ahead of the CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in October 2014 under the theme “Repositioning the Commonwealth for the Post-2015 Development Agenda”, wished to develop gender specific thinking on the structure of the post-2015 development framework and the role that Parliament can play in contributing to this.

The CWP Chairperson, Rt Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP, Speaker of the Ugandan Parliament, was keen to ensure that the CWP was afforded the opportunity to meet and hear about the current thinking behind and to develop its own considerations about the role of women, girls and gender equality in the aftermath of the Millennium Development Goal period. With this in mind, the CWP Pan-Commonwealth Conference theme was “Women in the Post-Millennium Development Goal Era”.

Thirteen Branches of the CPA were represented from eight of the nine regions of the Commonwealth, bringing together 17 Members of the CWP.
A series of recommendations were developed by the participating Parliamentarians on how Parliaments can work to gain a better position for women in the post-2015 development era. Reiterating that gender equality and women’s rights are key to addressing development issues, the importance of gender equality when considering each future development goal was emphasized at this conference.

The following are some of the recommendations that emerged from the discussions:

“Legislatures must recognize gender inequality is universal in character and is applicable to all regions of the Commonwealth.”

Parliament’s role in gender equality
1) It was recognized that to ensure gender equality in the post-2015 development agenda, efforts to champion the rights of women and girls should continue from all Parliamentarians regardless of their gender;
2) Parliaments, as institutions, must ensure that they are gender sensitive;
3) The challenges of being a female Parliamentarian must become more widely understood, including media bias against women members, and a zero tolerance policy in the Legislature of unacceptable behaviour towards women must be implemented;
4) Pressure should be borne on political parties to encourage greater female representation;
5) The CWP should engage in further intergenerational work to generate increased interest for young women entering public office; and
6) The CWP should encourage enhanced use of social media to promote the work of Parliaments and Parliamentarians in raising awareness of gender equality and the role of women in the Post-MDG era.

Gender and social policy – making your mark
1) Parliaments must recognize the enduring nature of gender inequality and the fact that it often does not capture the public’s imagination in the same way as other elements of the development agenda;
2) Legislatures must recognize gender inequality is universal in character and is applicable to all regions of the Commonwealth;
3) Parliamentarians must seek to address the distinct undervaluing of unpaid work often undertaken by women, such as the provision of care; and
4) Parliamentarians must seek to ensure that women are not continuing to be more vulnerable than men when cuts to national expenditure are made, and should make every effort to track public expenditure against gender equality through the fulfilment of oversight and scrutiny functions.
A vision for the future of gender equality

1) CWP should seek greater coordination and engagement with other agencies such as UN Women to bolster women’s rights as a priority for the post-MDG era;

2) CWP continues to advocate for the UN target of women representing 30 per cent of Parliamentarians in any given Legislature;

3) CWP continues to campaign for the prevention of all forms of violence against girls and women, to end child marriage, to ensure equal rights of women to own and inherit property, sign contracts, register a business and open a bank account, have access to health services including sexual and reproductive health, and eliminate discrimination against women in political, public and economic life including equal pay; and

4) CWP continues to advocate for women to participate equally, not only in the institutions of governance, but also in the household and the private sector.

Negotiating a better position for women and girls after 2015

1) Parliaments should be more bold in demanding an account of what their governments are negotiating for the post-2015 development agenda in gender equality and seek greater transparency of the Executive’s negotiations concerning women’s position in the new Sustainable Development Goals;
2) Parliaments should organize consultations with the electorate and women specific Civil Society Organizations on the post-MDG priorities for women and girls;
3) Parliamentarians should be proactive in their oversight duties concerning governments’ commitment to gender equality;
4) The CWP should encourage Parliamentarians to be advocates in questioning UN country directors to ensure that their activities reflect the true needs of the country in question with specific reference to gender;
5) The CWP encourages the establishment of a CPA Committee on UN Affairs to ensure consistent communication with UN Agencies, to enhance and offer a more structured relationship between the UN and Commonwealth Parliaments and to provide Commonwealth Parliamentarians with a greater understanding of UN structures, decision making processes and to work to ensure gender mainstreaming in all of its work; and
6) It is recognized that Parliament often sits on the periphery in the development agenda debates and efforts to address this should be made.

The role of women in the post-MDG era

1) CWP endorsed the UN Women’s roadmap to making gender specific targets for the post-MDG era, which included:
   o Freedom from violence - prevention, adequate response, behavioural changes towards women, security, support services and justice;
   o Capabilities and resources – eradicate women’s poverty; promote decent work, education and skills; build women’s access and control of resources; improve women and girls’ health; reduce maternal mortality; ensure women’s access to sustainable energy, water and sanitation; and
   o Voice leadership and participation – promote equal decision-making in households; participation in public institutions; women’s leadership in private sector and corporate boards; strengthen women’s collective action.
2) Parliaments need to strengthen capacity, knowledge generation and advocacy on the post-MDG development framework and the gender agenda.
CWP Summary Statement on Women in the Post-Millennium Development Goal Era

The CWP identified a distinct and concerning lack of recognition of the importance of Parliament as a development actor and it was suggested that international aid agencies, donors and the UN prefer working with a country’s Executive Branch of Government, rather than a Legislature in the development of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The CWP concluded that Parliamentarians often feel sidelined in the post-MDG negotiation process; Parliamentarians feel that although they have played a fundamental role in the definition and implementation of the MDGs, they lacked the opportunity to input and be partners in their development. The CWP is concerned that this lack of involvement would be replicated in post-MDG negotiations and feel strongly that parliamentary participation would enhance the ownership of the SDGs and bring greater parliamentary perspectives to the process, instead of merely serving as implementers and scrutinisers of government work in reaching post-MDG targets.

The CWP will continue to engage UN Women and will work closely with other women’s organizations to raise awareness on issues such as greater representation of women in public life, the empowerment of women, gender sensitization in policy making and legislation, the prevention of violence towards women and girls and economic empowerment of women.

The CWP offers these proposals to assist Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures and the CPA to help achieve a greater role for Parliament in the negotiations of the post-MDG development agenda and in ensuring a better position for women and girls.

The CWP would like to thank all those involved in the conference for their involvement, support and expertise.

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List of Participants

CWP Chairperson
Uganda: Rt. Hon. Rebecca Kadaga, MP

CWP President
Cameroon: Senator Emma Lafon

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Bangladesh: Hon. Salana Begum, MP

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Queensland: Hon. Verity Barton, MP

British Islands and Mediterranean Region
Scotland: Ms Patricia Ferguson, MSP – Steering Committee Member
Jersey: Senator Sarah Ferguson

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