

# **Policy Brief for the Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs Meeting, 7 - 9 June 2010, Bridgetown, Barbados.**

## **Executive Summary**

The 2010 Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs Meeting (9<sup>th</sup> WAMM) will address the theme 'Gender Issues in Economic Crisis, Recovery and Beyond: Women as Agents of Transformation'. The central concern of the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM will be to highlight and explore the links between securing gender equality and economic development. It will provide a timely high profile forum to discuss the impact of the global financial crisis on women and girls, and examine how new funding mechanisms can strengthen women as pivotal agents in economic recovery and future growth. The vision underpinning the agenda is that post-crisis recovery can only be sustained when all parts of society contribute to, participate in, and benefit from that growth. Also central to the Commonwealth Secretariat's vision is the principle that growth is not only about economics but is three dimensional, taking in the critical elements of economic growth, social equity, and human development. In terms of the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM theme, recovery and economic growth are the desired outcomes, while equity and human development are the means to achieving this outcome. For the first time the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM will host major players in global finance, including Finance Ministers, captains of industry, and philanthrocapitalists who apply business methods to their donations to address poverty. Progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015 will also be critically examined.

The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM presents representatives from Commonwealth member nations with an important opportunity to prepare a forward looking strategic message as well as underlining the critical gender concerns of southern based NGO's, think tanks and member Ministers in the lead up to the G8 and G20 meetings in June, and the High Level Summit on the Millennium Development Goals at the UN in September. They will highlight, through practical examples, the detrimental costs of not prioritising investment in girls and women in the context of economic recovery and beyond.

## **Executive Summary**

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**Author, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, acknowledgements**

## **1. Status, representation, recent meetings**

The Commonwealth Women's Affairs meetings (WAMMs) have been held on a triennial basis since 1985. There have been eight WAMMs to date and Barbados was chosen to host the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM at the 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM held in Uganda in 2007. The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt. Hon Kamallesh Sharma, is responsible for the general organisation and conduct of the WAMMs which are carefully serviced by the Commonwealth Secretariat based in Marlborough house in London. The meeting, held in regionally rotating venues, allows for the critically important sharing of experiences and progress during the intermediate years, the setting of new targets and suitable strategies to work in an ever changing political and economic landscape and the forging of closer partnerships amongst the Commonwealth member nations.

The Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs constitute a high-level policy-making group who influence decisions and policies affecting both women and men at a national level. Their meetings provide strategic opportunities for Ministers, Senior Officials, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and partner agencies to discuss vital issues in advancing women's empowerment and gender equality, and to contribute to the Commonwealth and global agenda-setting processes. Recent WAMM's have developed the Commonwealth's gender position on aid effectiveness (Kampala, Uganda, 2007) and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (Nadi, Fiji Islands, 2004).

The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM has strategic importance for a number of reasons. It is the first time that Island state of Barbados in the Caribbean has hosted the meeting and in doing so it has become one of the smallest states (284,589 people, land area 430 sq km) to have hosted this triennial event. The financial and economic crisis has had a disproportionate negative effect on small island states in terms of trade, aid and tourism, deepening unemployment and creating budgetary pressure. It is often women who suffer the effects of this most, usually being the first to lose their jobs due to being considered secondary earners. The location of WAMM should encourage Ministers to reaffirm their awareness and sensitivity to the needs of smaller members and strengthen their determination to advocate their interests.

The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM is also presenting the Mid-Term Review of the Plan of Action for Gender Equality (PoA) which was agreed by Ministers at the 7<sup>th</sup> WAMM, presented to the +10 Global Review, and endorsed by CHOGM at their meeting in Malta in 2005. The results of the MTR should generate authoritative evidence on the state of gender equality within the Commonwealth. Key findings should reflect lessons to those gathered at WAMM, and inform strategic planning on improving policy and implementation of the PoA during its final five years. MTR output will feed into deliberations on the new Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan, 2013-2017.

The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM will enable a strong message to be prepared on economic growth and recovery coupled with a gender equality agenda for the next Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting, due to be held in October 2010 immediately prior to the IMF and World Bank Annual Meetings. It is vital that groundbreaking inter-Ministerial dialogue grows between Women's Affairs Ministers and Finance Ministers during this critical period.

The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM should also influence other international processes taking place during preceding months. WAMM will provide a high profile forum to access critical gender concerns for developing countries in the lead up to the next G-8 and G-20 meetings due to be

held in June 2010. Commonwealth members present at these must recognise their special responsibility to transmit and propagate the priority concerns and perspectives of smaller southern voices. WAMM will also help clarify a gender centred strategic message for the development community in the run up to the high level summit on the Millennium Development Goals held at the UN in September 2010.

It is perhaps unfortunate that the meeting falls after the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which took place 27<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> November 2009 and the Beijing Platform for Action +15 review held during the 1<sup>st</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> March 2010. Both would have afforded good opportunities for WAMM recommendations to have been tabled before international heads of government. Instead, it is WAMM itself which is obliged to respond to the outcomes of these meetings. Messages for CHOGM will now not be delivered until the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2011.

The participation levels at WAMM have historically been high and compare favourably with other Ministerial meetings held by the Commonwealth. However, at the 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM in 2007 only 32 member states sent delegates. Therefore the last two WAMMs have witnessed a decrease in attendance levels; in 2000 the figure stood at 46 but 2004 saw 43 out of the 53 countries attending. Participation in the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM could be hampered by the high cost of travel and long distances involved in reaching Barbados for other Commonwealth members.

The 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM saw exactly half of the member states in attendance being represented at the Ministerial level, 16 out of the total of 32 participatory nations. Strong Ministerial representation was present from Zambia with Hon Patricia Mulasikwanda the Minister for Gender and Women in Development and The Gambia with H E Mrs Isatou Njie-Saidy Vice President and Secretary of State for Women's Affairs. Canada sent 8 representatives including Hon Ms Helena Guergis the Sectary of State for Foreign Affairs and International trade. It should be noted that among the 4 UK representatives was Ms Meg Munn, an MP and deputy Minister for the Women and Equality Unit in Whitehall. It is vital that larger member states send high ranking Ministers and encourage others to do so.

Greater Ministerial presence could be hindered by the fact that amongst many member states where there is a Ministry of Gender this is very rarely its only portfolio. It is often grouped with Children and Youth, Culture, Social Services, Sport or Labour Affairs. This could make it difficult for member states to justify the expense of sending Ministers to all the relevant meetings. Multiple portfolios could also affect the attendance levels at the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM as this runs parallel to the 99<sup>th</sup> International Labour Conference due to be held during the 2<sup>nd</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> June in Geneva.

The 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM was attended by fourteen observer organisations including five UN agencies and five Commonwealth Organisations, representatives from the OECD and the World Bank. The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM should bring together some 200-300 participants including Women's Affairs Ministers; Senior Officials; parliamentarians; women entrepreneurs; lawyers; gender and youth civil society organisations; and international, Commonwealth, regional and bilateral partner agencies from around the Commonwealth and wider world. For the first time WAMM will also attract major players in global finance, captains of industry and philanthropists.

The annual meeting of the Commonwealth National Women's Machineryes (NWMs, which include Women's Commissions and similar bodies) was held in New York from the 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> February 2010. This provided an excellent forum for member countries, CSOs and partners to

dialogue and equipped them to plan priorities for the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM. It also coincided with the fifth meeting of the Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action Monitoring Group (CGPMG).

It is the precedent set by previous WAMMs that the host country will chair the meeting and as host Minister, the Hon Stephen Lashley, Barbados's Minister for Youth, Family and Sports will chair the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM. Secretary-General Rt. Hon Kamallesh Sharma will lead the Commonwealth Secretariat team.

## **2. Record for policy**

The Commonwealth has placed gender equality as one of its fundamental principles and this is an area in which the Commonwealth continues to lead by the strong example of initiating policies and strategies. The 7<sup>th</sup> WAMM held in 2004 approved the PoA and this continues to underlay and guide all Commonwealth action during the 2005-2015 decade. It has been designed to promote women's and girl's rights and help them achieve gender equality in four key areas: democracy, peace and conflict; human rights and the law; poverty eradication and economic empowerment; and HIV/AIDS.

The PoA is the Commonwealth contribution to global gender policy, building upon existing agreements and treaties signed by governments such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 UN Beijing Platform for Action. The UN Security Council has also passed strong resolutions, supported by Commonwealth members. These include resolutions 1325 and 1889 on Women, Peace and Security and resolution 1888 on sexual violence in armed conflict. The realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) also defines the current global development agenda and obtaining these are intrinsically linked with the promotion of greater gender equality.

The Commonwealth PoA has now reached its Mid-Term Review (MTR). In September 2009 MTR country survey kits were sent to NWMs and country level task teams involving representatives from key ministries, civil society organisations, the private sector and international partners were put in place to facilitate the process. Results from the MTR will be reported to the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM and the Plenary will use these to agree and affirm the 2010-2015 priorities for the PoA.

Despite progress towards the PoA, the 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM Communiqué noted that implementation was being hampered by inadequate resources (financial, human and technical). Inadequate resource allocation had meant that aspects of the PoA could not be implemented. Ministers at both WAMM and CHOGM stressed that strong NWMs were vitally important in ensuring that national development plans and new aid modalities reflected gender equality. However, at the latest meeting of the CGPMG in February 2010 the Chair Mrs Tsiane Segakwang still called into question whether the NWMs have had enough time and resources allocated to undertake their work.

In 2007 Rt. Hon Don Mckinnon, the former Commonwealth Secretary General, noted that one of the biggest impediments to gender equality was lack of money allocated. Issues surrounding financial capacity have been further exaggerated by the debilitating effects of the current global financial crisis. The big question most especially relating to the MDG's and overall gender equality is what will be the impact of the current economic crisis on the resources governments will now be willing to commit to these ends. Ensuring that funds are available to effect the changes promised by those promoting gender equality and looking at

how to measure the impact of aid resources allotted to gender have come to dominate the Commonwealth Secretariats focus. Key areas of output to date, in the form of commissioned papers, workshops, advocacy events and publications have focused upon capacity building through strengthening gender and trade, gender responsive budgets and enterprise development.

Gender-responsive budgets (GRBs) have received renewed attention as a policy area. The 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM communiqué underlined the need to enhance the capacity for the implementation of GRBs and stressed a desire to work with Finance Ministers to achieve this. In response the Commonwealth FMM in 2007 reaffirmed commitment to forwarding GRBs and agreed to biennial reporting on progress. The latest report concluded that examples of first-rate practise existed in a limited number of Commonwealth Countries such as India, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. These have shown the benefits of GRBs in supporting governments' objectives in raising economic growth and sustainable development. However, they felt that their implementation more generally throughout the Commonwealth required higher levels of political commitment and greater capacity and skills in Finance Ministries.

Institutionalising GRB's offers a crucial tool to helping minimise policy evaporation. The Commonwealth Secretariat could play a stronger role in ensuring that the methodology behind surveys on levels of countries achievement is robust and produces clear results. Gender sensitive indicators, data collection and analytical capacities must be strengthened and OECD countries should also shoulder responsibility in developing capacity amongst other member Ministries. Senior officials at the FMM stressed a desire to press on beyond pilot stages and appeared keen to witness more inter-Commonwealth peer to peer learning and sharing of information.

Commonwealth Ministers also urged the Secretariat to strengthen its engagement with international financial institutions. In response to this, the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM agenda is taking the theme of 'Financing Gender Equality' one step further and is focusing on emerging partnership opportunities in developing consensus and technical capacity for sourcing alternative development financing and operationalising appropriate institutional mechanisms. In this respect the agenda is highly relevant and contains a forward looking vision. Yet, it is also important to propagate and assess advancements made in other long standing projects. The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM offers a unique opportunity to further encourage states in their work towards gender sensitive trade reforms and GRBs.

Despite the harsh global conditions the 54 member states have made notable progress in gender equality and women's empowerment, some since the 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM:

- All Commonwealth countries have signed up to the UN Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing +15 review, which coincided with the fifty fifth meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York on the 1<sup>st</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2010. Ideally these meetings should hold member governments and ministers accountable for the promises they made in 1995.
- Efforts have been made to ratify, implement and monitor CEDAW at regional and national levels. As a result 52 member states have ratified CEDAW (Nauru and Tonga have still not signed up). However, 14 Commonwealth countries have attached reservations to their acceptance of CEDAW rendering it less effective. This amounts to almost a quarter of

Commonwealth members including countries such as India, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.

- 27 Commonwealth countries are party to the Optional Protocol, allowing the CEDAW Committee to consider whether the Convention is being violated. Australia, Mozambique and Mauritius have ratified this since the 8<sup>th</sup> WAMM. Barbados has not ratified the Optional Protocol and as a host country to WAMM it should review its position. It is necessary that the Optional Protocol be accepted, without condition, across the Commonwealth.

- In addition, Commonwealth countries are making progress in the implementation of CEDAW through law reforms. The Commonwealth Secretariat is due to publish *‘Without Prejudice, CEDAW and the determination of women’s rights in a legal and cultural context’* edited by Meena Shivdas and Sarah Coleman to be launched in June of this year. This book looks at a range of cultural as well as legal challenges to implementing CEDAW and individual approaches adopted across the Commonwealth. Commonwealth declarations in support of CEDAW and initiatives from numerous member countries are brought together here to support continuing efforts to address these issues. This should feed into discussions at the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM and assist judges, adjudicators, lawyers and activists to further advance the implementation of the principles of CEDAW.

- A number of member states have introduced laws and procedures to combat domestic and other forms of gender-based violence, encouraged by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Commonwealth Law Ministers have also shown regional sensitivity, acknowledging that *‘model legislation should be responsive to national needs’*. Caribbean countries have enacted progressive and locally informed domestic violence legislation. Jurisdictions have tentatively attempted equal pay and sexual harassment legislation, with Jamaica reflecting continuing efforts in this area. Their work along with that of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat must be applauded and further encouraged.

- *“A Woman’s place is in the house...of Representatives”* the Slogan of the Trinidad and Tobago NGO Network. According to data compiled in September 2009 and held by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Secretariat on the 186 CPA Branches; 21 Parliaments and Legislatures have now reached the CHOGM target of 30 per cent representation of women; 27 Branches have representation of between 20 - 30 per cent, and 35 Branches have no women members at all. We therefore see a marked improvement from data collected in 2005 when only 15 legislatures have reached 30 per cent and 44 Branches had no women members. The CPA Executive Committee has just agreed that the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee should become an Officer of the Association so that the CPA’s top six posts will always have at least one woman present. This decision should be viewed in a positive light and will reinforce the Commonwealth message that women must play a greater role in parliamentary politics.

In 1997 Commonwealth Heads set a target of 30 per cent of those working in political and decision-making roles by 2005 to be women, this figure at the very least must be achieved for a nation’s plans to reflect its female population’s concerns. The PoA also repeats this target (paragraphs 3.13 and 3.14); however Commonwealth countries in 2010 still have a long way to go to accomplish this. Countries which have adopted laws to increase the number of women in parliament frequently see more gender sensitive legislation and policies emerging as a result. Encouraging National Women’s Commissions to press political parties to increase

their uptake of women candidates must remain a priority. Workshops and new campaign schools for women, such as those being pioneered by Ms Carolyn Bolivar-Getson in Nova Scotia encouraging active female participation should be praised. The 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM agenda omits commenting on this aspect of women empowerment.

In recent years the Commonwealth has also focussed its attention to marginalised groups, whose lack of access to resources and rights in their countries undermines the democratic process, poverty eradication, and advancement of gender equality. The Commonwealth is home to some fifty per cent of the world's indigenous peoples. The marginalisation of indigenous women, girls and their communities was recognised by the PoA (paragraph 3.22, 3.25 and 3.26). In December 2010 the Commonwealth Secretariat is due to publish '*Indigenous Women's Rights, Challenging Gender and Social Hierarchies*' edited by Helena Whall and Meene Shivdas. This work presents the perspective of indigenous women within the Commonwealth on matters of public policy including case studies combined with policy analysis, information briefs on each Commonwealth indigenous population, and a policy brief for government officials. Hopefully this book will be noted by Women's Ministers despite the topic not appearing on the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM agenda.

### **3. Agenda for 2010 meeting**

The provisional agenda and programme for the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM, which will be confirmed or amended on the eve of the meeting, is as follows:

#### **1. Opening Plenary**

#### **2. Promoting Economic Recovery and the Attainment of the MDGs: Women as Agents of Transformation.**

- Women in the Economic Crisis and Recovery: Commonwealth Perspectives.
- Macro-economic Framework for Achieving Growth with Equity.
- Reforming Government Fiscal Policies for Equitable, Stable and Sustainable growth.

Ministerial Response

Plenary Discussion

#### **3. Gender Responsive Investment: Women as Agents of Transformation.**

##### **Presentations on:**

- Achieving Gender Equitable Recovery and Growth: Bridging the Financing Gap through Global Philanthropy Capital.
- Delivering Effective Financing through Partnership: World Sanitation Financing Facility (WSFF) – A new systems approach: Lessons for the Commonwealth.

Ministerial Response

Plenary Discussion

#### **4. Ministerial Roundtables**

- **Roundtable One: Gender Responsive Investment**
- **Roundtable Two: Economic crisis and Social Protection: Ensuring Gender-responsive and Sustainable Outcomes.**
- **Roundtable Three: Peace, Security and Prosperity: Woman's Leadership Roles.**

#### **5. Feedback and Outcomes of Ministerial Roundtables**

- Feedback from Ministerial Roundtables

- Feedback from Partners' Forum

Plenary Discussion

## **6. Strengthening Partnerships for Synergy and Accountability**

### **Presentations on:**

- Strengthening Partnerships for Synergy and Accountability
- Presentation by Commonwealth Foundation/Civil Society

Plenary Discussion

## **7. The Way Forward: Priorities to 2015**

- Discussion of Mid-Term Review of the Implementation of the PoA.
- Senior Officials Report

Plenary Discussion

## **8. Closing Plenary**

**Approve the Communiqué**

**Vote of Thanks**

**Conclude the Meeting**

**Press Conference**

## **4. Comments on numbered agenda items**

### **Session 1. Opening Plenary**

In the Opening Plenary of the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM the chair will be elected and the agenda adopted.

Based on gender disaggregated data and utilising the most recent gender analysis of the international economic crisis and post-crisis recovery trends, the Opening Plenary will also chart the strategic terrain for engendering national efforts and responses to the crisis as well as strategies for promoting recovery and sustainable development. In addition to highlighting the gendered effects of the current state of public finances and policy reforms, and advancing pivotal openings for gender-sensitive interventions, this session will demonstrate the potential development costs of an un-gendered recovery and growth trajectory in terms of failures of governance, human development and economic competitiveness.

### **Session 2. Promoting Economic Recovery and the Attainment of the MDGs: Women as Agents of Transformation.**

This session will examine whether a new macroeconomic framework is needed, based on social inclusivity and justice, to underpin gender-equitable strategies for growth. It will focus on the financial tools, political strategies and governance mechanisms for a more inclusive growth trajectory, which is pro-poor, gender equitable and ecologically sustainable. In doing so, it will draw on new intellectual currents and cross sectoral partnerships for harnessing new resources, engaging stakeholders and forging non-traditional partnerships in the pursuit of gender equitable development.

**Facilitator:** Professor Eugene Barriteau, Deputy Principle, University of the West Indies and President, International Association of Feminist Economists.

Professor Violet Eudine Barriteau is a Grenadian born Caribbean feminist, scholar and activist with considerable experience in research, administration and coordination of regional projects. She has been awarded academic scholarships and awards from several universities

and organisations. She has written over twenty chapters in books and ten articles in peer-reviewed journals. Professor Barriteau was the first Head of the Centre for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Cave Hill Campus. She is currently the Deputy Principal of The UWI, Cave Hill Campus, and President of the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE).

- **Women in the Economic Crisis and Recovery: Commonwealth Perspectives.**  
Presenter: Dr Cyrus Rustomjee, Director, Economic Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat.
- **Macro-economic Framework for Achieving Growth with Equity.**  
Presenter: The Hon Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya, Minister of Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities, Government of South Africa
- **Reforming Government Fiscal Policies for Equitable, Stable and Sustainable growth.**  
Presenter: Mr Chinedum Nwoko, Consulting Executive, Policy Associates, Nigeria.

### **Session 3. Gender Responsive Investment: Women as Agents of Transformation.**

This session will present innovations in investment capital finance that promise to bridge market-rate interests with strategic opportunities to create a blended value that benefits commercial investors and development stakeholders alike in Commonwealth countries. These examples speak to an evolving capital convergence in which mainstream capital markets and investment are increasingly becoming drivers of new solutions to poverty, social investment and international development.

It will comprise the following:

- **Achieving Gender Equitable Recovery and Growth: Bridging the Financing Gap through Global Philanthropy Capital.**  
Presenter: Michael Green, Development Economist & Co-Author of *Philanthrocapitalism*.

The lead presenter, Michael Green, will explain how blended value investing funds and instruments offer development financing solutions from a set of tools that go beyond both traditional philanthropy and market rate investing to complement the Commonwealth vision of a world with greater equity and opportunity for all its members. Michael and his co-author, Matthew Bishop of *The Economist*, were described as "two of today's best business writers" by The Globe and Mail for their influential books *Philanthrocapitalism* (Bloomsbury 2008) and *The Road from Ruin* (Crown 2010). He writes for leading newspapers in the United States and was formerly a senior official at the UK Department for International Development.

- **Delivering Effective Financing through Partnership: World Sanitation Financing Facility (WSFF) – A new systems approach: Lessons for the Commonwealth.**  
Presenter: Arthur Wood, Convenor of WSFF & Founder, Total Impact Advisors.

For the last four years Arthur Wood has been SVP of Ashoka - the world's largest supporter of social entrepreneurs - where he was the Global head of Social Financial Services with three years in DC and New York, the objective being to engage global financial services firms to enter the business of social investing to change the way social capital is allocated and deployed to increase the flow and efficiency of finance to the social sector. He has also been extensively involved in the conceptualisation and creation of new legal structures to

encourage social investment. Arthur is a regular publisher and speaker at leading global academic institutions as well as industry forums on social finance.

#### **Session 4. Ministerial Roundtables**

- **Roundtable One: Gender Responsive Investment.**  
Presenter: Mr David Ashiagbor, Economic Adviser, Economic Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat
- **Roundtable Two: Economic Crisis and Social Protection: Ensuring Gender-responsive and Sustainable Outcomes.**  
Presenters: Professor Naila Kabeer, Professorial Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex  
Professor Marilyn Waring, Institute of Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology
- **Roundtable Three: Peace, Security and Prosperity: Woman's Leadership Roles.**  
Presenters: Dr Rawwida Baksh, Women Rights and Citizenship Program, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada  
Professor Mojubaolu Okome, Political Science & Women's Studies Programme, Director Brooklyn College, New York

#### **Session 5. Feedback and Outcomes of Ministerial Roundtables**

This session will share the conclusions and insights gleaned from the three Ministerial Roundtables and the Partners Forum. Following the discussion and debate, with input from specialist experts and the Secretariat, the session will conclude with strategic priorities for future Secretariat work on Gender in the immediate, medium and long term. Messages for CHOGM will also be agreed and elaborated here.

#### **Session 6. Strengthening Partnerships for Synergy and Accountability**

This session hopes to provide a platform for the critical interface between Ministers and civil society which is essential to the growth and development of gender equality and empowerment. The feedback and exchange allows mutual understanding and appreciation of the constraints and opportunities from both sides in advancing the gender agenda at this critical juncture for governments and women's equality advocates alike. Ideally emerging from this exchange will be new modalities for co-operation, information-sharing and collective action between governments and the women's movement.

It will comprise of the following:

- Strengthening Partnerships for Synergy and Accountability  
Presenter: Roberta Clarke, Regional Programme Director, UNIFEM

Ms. Roberta Clarke is the Regional Programme Director for the Caribbean Regional office of UNIFEM which provides financial and technical assistance to innovative strategies to foster women's empowerment and gender equality. UNIFEM's Caribbean programmes centre around reducing feminized poverty and exclusion, ending violence against women, halting and reverting the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, achieving gender equality and democratic governance and the Haiti country programme. It has been instrumental in helping establish leading regional initiatives such the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership. Ms Roberta Clarke has recently addressed the Barbados National Consultation

for Civil Society Organisations and Non-State actors under the theme, Gender and the Economic Crisis, Recovery and Beyond: Women as Change Agents.

- Presentation by Commonwealth Foundation/Civil Society

### **Sessions 7. The Way Forward: Priorities to 2015**

This is seen as the technical session on gender mainstreaming in the Commonwealth and will witness the assessment of results and experiences drawn from the Mid Term Review of the PoA. It is expected that results will be below desired targets and that the shortfalls and challenges highlighted will include the availability of funds for project continuation; loss of focal points in projects; the high level of turnover in NWMs and partner Ministries; and weak levels of communications between participating countries.

Decisive action will need to be taken to step up progress towards the PoA during its final five years of operation. Senior Officials will report the consensus of their pre-9WAMM meeting and the Plenary will agree and affirm the 2010-2015 priorities for the Commonwealth Gender PoA, in the context of crisis and recovery.

Results will be presented by Professor Barbara Bailey and Dr Afia Zakiya – MTR Consultants

### **Session 8. The Closing Plenary.**

The final session will provide a summary of the issues discussed at the 10<sup>th</sup> WAMM and will outline the way forward. Ministers will also approve the Communiqué which will contain key strategic messages to CHOGM and strategic inputs into the MDGs Review Summit 2010, the G8 and G20 Summits. The date and venue for 11<sup>th</sup> WAMM will be discussed.

## **5. Interaction with other bodies**

It is common practice for the Secretariat to invite several observers to attend the Women's Affairs Ministers Meetings. These include UN agencies, regional organisations, NGOs and professional (Commonwealth) organisations.

Not all the regions of the Commonwealth were represented last time, and a greater effort is needed to ensure that all Commonwealth stakeholders are heard. CSOs are represented on the Commonwealth Gender PoA Monitoring Group, representatives are currently drawn from Ghana, Malta, India, Trinidad and Tobago and Fiji. It is important that CSO representatives should also be included in the Working Group on Gender, Peace and Security, and that the terms of reference should be reviewed at WAMM.

Before the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM a Partner's Forum will be held from the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> June at the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Conference and Culture Centre, St Michael, Barbados. This event is of high importance as it brings together CSO's, NGO's and other development partners to deliberate on the theme and work programme. The Commonwealth Foundation is mandated to support civil society's contributions to each WAMM and expects over 200 CSO representatives at this Forum. Representatives from the Partners Forum will then dialogue with Ministers and senior officials on the PoA and its Mid-Term Review using consensus outcomes from the Forum as their main advocacy tools. A civil society statement is developed by the representatives and presented to Ministers in a special plenary session.

In the spirit of the Coolum Declaration (2002) WAMM has come to afford civil society a unique opportunity to influence the outcome of the Ministerial Meetings and present their perspectives.

## **6. Other issues**

Although only two MDGs explicitly mention gender (MDG 3 and MDG 5) gender dynamics underpin the roots of multiple targets. As the Secretary-General Rt. Hon Kamalesh Sharma commented “women hold the key to realising most of the Millennium Development Goals”. Without undertaking a gender responsive approach towards all the MDGs we will not see wider sustainable poverty reduction and equitable growth in the long run. Discussions undertaken at WAMM and messages prepared for the UN MDG summit in September should keep this central to their understanding and approach.

With a review about to be undertaken by the Eminent Persons Group on the length, purpose and location of all the Ministerial meetings there is a suggested implication that these may be brought alongside larger international summits already in existence. An example can be seen in the Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting now taking place in a day beside the World Health Assembly in Geneva. If Commonwealth Ministerial meetings become wings on the summits of other powerful multilateral bodies such as the UN, there is a danger that they could become merely an agenda-setting exercise for the larger international conference. The distinct and separate voice represented by the Commonwealth's agenda may be lost.

A realistic concern in the case of WAMM is that less time and thus attention may be paid to the specific gender concerns and perspectives of individual member states, and that smaller southern voices could lose out still further. It must be noted that many gender and women's issues in Commonwealth countries are not identical to those in the world at large. It is also unlikely that the high degree of civil society participation presently witnessed would be replicated if the meeting was compressed into shorter allotted periods. Ministerial meetings also provide important opportunities for states to dialogue and reaffirm the key partnerships which form this unique network of the Commonwealth. Preserving the Commonwealth's unity especially during a time of crisis is essential.

Rwanda was accepted into Commonwealth membership by Commonwealth Heads of Government at their November 2009 meeting. Rwanda had already ratified CEDAW in 1981 and had attached no reservations to this. They have also signed the Optional Protocol and because of affirmative action in the Rwandan Parliament 56.1% of this body is now made up of women. Rwanda's strong record in this respect must be acknowledged and applauded, it provides a strong example to fellow delegates attending WAMM.

A total of 52 Commonwealth countries have ratified CEDAW, Nauru and Tonga absence from the list of signatures has been highlighted in the CPSU's previous two policy brief's for WAMM. The Commonwealth must examine why these countries have not yet signed up to these agreements and urgently seek to rectify this. Countries which have attached reservations should also be urged to accept CEDAW unconditionally. Member countries need to be encouraged to sign the Optional Protocol.

At the 9<sup>th</sup> WAMM a Working Group on Gender, Peace and Security will be officially launched, this had been first proposed by the NWMs in 2005. It has been envisioned as the Commonwealth response to further advocating and developing UN Security Council Resolution 1325. It is hoped that the Working Group will strengthen the gender equality

component of the Secretary-General's Good Offices service by advocating best practice for addressing gender equality in the prevention of conflicts as well as in post-conflict reconstruction processes. It should help forward the PoA target (para 3.13 and 3.14) of having women constituting at least 30 per cent of those involved in peace negotiation, conflict management, and peace education. The 2009 CHOGM communiqué drew attention to the importance placed on women's participation in peace processes and peace building. WAMM represents a prime opportunity to discuss the advancement of gender, peace and security still further.

The PoA has established a strong policy direction and the Mid-Term Review should help to streamline strategy still further. After the Beijing Platform for Action was agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, confidence and levels of interest among member states appeared extremely high. However, since this time hopes of achieving these goals appear to be ebbing. This needs to change. Women's Ministers must ensure that the political determination remains to effect real change in the level of gender equality in Commonwealth countries. WAMM must regain the momentum it achieved in Beijing and continue to propagate the message that "*women's rights are human rights*".

Papers relating to WAMM are produced very close to the meeting itself which allows a very limited amount of time for comments, amendments and the production of more timely papers, which could feed into the overall WAMM process. Producing details on the proposed content of WAMM in advance is an important component in ensuring the presence of member Ministers at the meeting. By being given a strong idea of the input, itinerary and speakers, Ministers are in a stronger position to press their governments to send them to WAMM.

### **Key Facts relating to the Economic Crisis and Regional Impact on Women**

Women bear a disproportionate share of the burden arising from the crisis due to their gendered responsibilities in households and the Communities, as well as their often tenuous employment security. However, most national policy efforts aimed at limiting the impact of crisis have been gender blind.

#### **Asia:**

>Women in countries such as Malaysia and Bangladesh have taken up a lot of the light assembly jobs such as those connected to textiles and apparel. They constitute roughly 78% and 85% of the workforce retrospectively. However, with the contradiction in global demand these are the types of jobs which have been hit the hardest.

#### **Africa:**

>Agricultural commodity exports have formed an important basis of economic growth and source of livelihoods for many Commonwealth African Countries. Cut flower exports have been to date one of the most resilient sectors in Uganda. However, recently even this sector has seen declining growth rates (ODI, 2010) women comprise more than 70% of the labour force in Cut flower production. Unless their jobs are protected many will suffer as a consequence (Antonoupoulos, 2009).

#### **Caribbean:**

>The global financial crisis has had an immediate effect on employment and income at a household level. Women are generally clustered around the lowest paying jobs such as housekeepers in the tourist industry, however, the negative effects of the financial crisis being felt heavily within this sector. In the Bahamas one of the largest private sector employers has had to lay off 800 workers amounting the 10% of its staff, the majority of whom can be expected to be women housekeepers (Clegg, 2009).

#### **Pacific:**

>In Papua New Guinea 75% of the budget for HIV/Aids services and programmes are due to be cut as a consequence of substantial losses in ODA. Not only will women suffering from HIV be affected but given their well-established roles as caregivers such a drastic cut in public spending will also place an additional enormous burden on them (UNDP 2008; 2010).

Jason Jackson, 'Comparative Regional Impacts of the Economic Crisis on Trade and Women's Economic empowerment', Commonwealth Secretariat and UNIFEM Caribbean (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2010)

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