

[Summary of the Commonwealth Women's Forum 2024 : Event 2](#)

What is Working in Ending Gender-based Violence

Zoom, Tuesday 04 June 2024

14:00 – 15:30 EST

Brief Record of Proceedings

The event was chaired by Ms Jennifer Namgyal (Head of Gender Section, Commonwealth Secretariat) and held in a virtual webinar format consisting of an opening plenary session with messages from dignitaries, followed by parallel sessions in breakout rooms and a closing plenary to summarise outcomes from the parallel sessions.

Representing the host country and relevant ministry for the Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) 2024, Hon Mulipola Anarosa Ale Molio'o MP, Minister for Women, Communities and Social Development, Samoa provided the welcome remarks expressing that the event was more than a discussion, but a critical exploration of effective strategies to end gender-based violence (GBV). Equally, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, in her opening remarks noted that through the Commonwealth Women's Forum, people are brought together from all walks of life to identify and implement practical actions which each person can take to make our homes, workplaces, and communities places of safety for women and girls.

Hon Myles LaRoda MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, the Bahamas, Chair of the 13th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (13WAMM) concluded the plenary by sharing reflections on the subject-matter, including critical data on GBV and the impact on families, households and communities, which was well recognised by Ministers at the 13WAMM.

Following the opening plenary, participants were ushered into three parallel sessions. The outcomes of these sessions are summarised below:

Parallel Session I: Enabling Environment to end GBV

Panellists:

Hon Robert Midwinter MLC, *Member of Legislative Council*, St Helena

Julia Jaeger, *First Vice President*, International Association of Women Police (IAWP)

Sneh Aurora, *Director*, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, United Kingdom

Moderated by **Hon Sharon Claydon MP**, *Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives*, Parliament of Australia

Summary points of discussion:

- Living in an environment without violence is a human right issue and gender equality cannot easily be achieved without an end to GBV.
- More needs to be done to address causes of GBV.
- There are various ongoing discussions on how to achieve affective action on GBV - Commonwealth member countries need to work more closely together and learn how to counter GBV.
- Violence against women and girls is more prevalent than against men and boys.



- Perpetrators are often known to victims/ members of the family.
- Many of the Commonwealth member countries have laws to address GBV, but the challenge is in the implementation.
- There should be stronger legal and policy frameworks, and these should be re-enforced.
- Cultural norms and beliefs are widely entrenched in our society which enable GBV.
- Violence against persons with disability is much higher.
- Young persons, especially boys, should be encouraged to work together with the legal frameworks so that they better understand the consequences of violence.

Good practices/what works at different levels were shared by the panellists from their areas of expertise, as follows:

- International human rights advocacy, including developing these into programmes.
- Standards setting and policy making, advocacy and engaging with the related UN conventions (there are general recommendations under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Montreal Principles on Women's Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).
- Building/sustaining networks and coalitions.
- Further extensive evidence-based research should be carried out.
- Equal and better health and social care services, education, skills and employment give enabling environment to end GBV.
- There are also linkages to good and sustainable environment, equitable distribution of natural resources, and planning to enable an end to GBV.
- Civil Society organizations play an active role in member states, in taking forward measures regarding ending harmful cultural practices and other forms of GBV.
- Creating conducive policing environment is important in combating domestic and sexual violence against women and girls.
- Crucial to have passionate female police officers in higher positions, to strengthen decision making.
- Having disability facilities, easily and readily available , for example brail and sign language .

Parallel Session II: Engaging Men and Boys in Ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Panellists:

- Samitha Sugathimala, Global Co-Chair, MenEngage Global Alliance, Sri Lanka
- Marcus Kissoon, Youth Activist/Leader, Member, Caribbean Male Action Network (CariMAN)
- Lemau Pala'amo, Co-Founder & President & Counsellor, Soul Talk Samoa Trust

Moderated by Silas Ngayaboshya, Director General, Gender Promotion & Women's Empowerment, Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, Rwanda

Summary points of discussion:

Parallel Session II delved into the effective engagement of men and boys as a means to address the systemic issues and root causes of GBV.



- The panellists recognised that there is a growing interest in initiatives that engage men and boys in efforts to prevent and eliminate GBV. Such work needs to be grounded in feminist principles, centred on women's experiences and priorities.
- These efforts should aim to create structures of consultation and partnership with women's rights and highlight the work done over the years by women and women's rights organisations. Engagements should be rooted in solidarity, with a focus on build allyship and emphasise accountability.
- Engagement of men and boys should begin at an individual level, through peer-to-peer support as well as working with mentors focusing on transforming attitudes and behaviours. However, for this work to be effective there is a need for engagement of community-based organisations and decision-makers at all levels. Importance of examining social norms within family, community and institutions were also highlighted.
- Gender socialisation begins very early in life and is reinforced by assigning toys that align with traditional gender norms. For example, dolls are often considered "gender appropriate" for girls and are meant to introduce them to concept of care.
- Recognition and redistribution of care work to boys and men challenges the notions of patriarchy, helps to break through the binary notions of masculinity and femininity and allows for power imbalances between men and women to be dismantled. This in turn helps in GBV prevention.
- Grassroots experiences must inform design of action plans and policy development and implementation. It is also important to ensure that policy can be translated in into ground-level activities. Furthermore, all initiatives engaging men and boys in elimination of GBV should be context specific.
- It is important to create safe spaces for men in which they can explore and discuss issues of self-care, mental health, vulnerability and their role in dismantling patriarchal norms and preventing and eliminating GBV. Other topics could include the backlash that women and men working on these issues experience due to patriarchal norms.
- It was highlighted that the sexual division of labour and care work play a crucial role in shaping family dynamics and contribute to GBV. Unequal distribution of unpaid labour is shaped by societal expectations and norms. It reinforces power imbalances between women and men, and contributes to women's economic dependency on men, which can trap women in violent situations.
- Resistance to elimination of GRB takes various forms including denial, defensiveness and incorrectly perceiving gender equality as a zero-sum game in which men stand to lose their privileges. Strategies to overcome such resistance should be tailored to their specific types of resistance and employ intersectional approach recognising that neither men or women are homogenous groups.

The session showcased examples of effective practices and strategies that can be employed to create a comprehensive, gender-transformative, and survivor-centred approaches for engaging men and boys as allies in ending GBV, as follows:

- MenEngage Alliance's campaign "[#HowToTalkWithMen](#)" focuses on identification and sharing of effective approaches for transformative discussions on gender quality, LGBTQI rights, masculinities, patriarchy and addressing the root causes of GBV.
- Samoa Soul Talk culturally appropriate [therapeutic approaches](#) include Va'aalo pastoral counselling, Fetu'utu'una'i le vā/ Navigating Relational Space. These focus



on regrowth and rehabilitation for men, recognizing the role they played as perpetrators of GBV, as well as the importance of community-based support and accountability.

- The '[Accountability Framework](#)' of the MenEngage Alliance provides foundations for how to effectively engage men and boys in transforming patriarchal masculinities and advance gender justice.
- In Rwanda, the [MenCare+ campaign](#) aiming to increase men's active involvement in care work, achieved, for example, reduction in men's use of violence against their partners and children; increased men's contributions to child-care; and equalized power dynamics and decision making in the household.

Parallel Session III: Safety in the Workplace – Addressing GBV

Panellist:

- Ruth Wilkinson - Co-Chair, International Trade Union Confederation women's committee, Executive Vice-President of the Canadian Labor Congress
- Siobhán Vipond - Head of Policy & Public Affairs, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH), United Kingdom

Moderated by Alia Zafar - Director, Human Resources and Facilities Management, Commonwealth Secretariat

Summary points of discussion:

Panellists shared the following key points on GBV and harassment in the world of work:

- Gender equality cannot easily be achieved without meaningfully addressing workplace issues and unions have played a key role in addressing these issues.
- The impacts of racism, colonialism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia at work has a real effect on what needs to happen in order for to eliminate GBV and harassment.
- Violence, harassment and aggression is becoming increasingly common in workplaces, thereby causing occupational health and safety concerns (this includes GBV).
- Harassment and violence are particularly high for workers in public facing jobs (retail, healthcare, education, transportation etc) and these are jobs dominated by women and gender-diverse workers.
- According to ILO data, 1 in 5 people have been affected worldwide. Notably, younger and migrant women disproportionately fall victim to sexual violence and harassment.
- Violence and harassment at work can have adverse long-term impact on mental and physical health.

Good practices/what works at different levels were shared as follows:

- Occupational safety: Good occupational safety and health in workplaces is important in addressing the challenge of GBV, in addition to good prevention strategies.
- Reporting: There should be trusted and transparent reporting mechanisms for workers.
- Role of Government: There is the role at business level as well as government level to support legislation – also a need for all actors to drive this cause for the ratification of C190. For example, Canada played a commendable role with the C190, with many employers supporting the convention – although there are 13 jurisdictions and individual political leanings which have impact on efficiency of work in this regard.



- Ratification across the Commonwealth: Some Commonwealth countries have taken good steps in ratifying C190 such as Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, United Kingdom, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Canada and Samoa more recently.
- Education: Education on the C190 is very important and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has developed a mini guide and train-the-trainer toolkit to assist in advocacy as well as partnered with International Research Centre for Women – It is important to share documents and have access to materials to support in making the case for C190 ratification.
- Frameworks: The frameworks for preventing harassment, for occupational safety and health and for risk must be utilised in an inclusive way (holistically)
- Workplace culture: There is a need to know what good culture is, in the first place. Available data in workplaces should be utilised – such as incidences data, people leaving the organisation, grievances, complaints, claims etc. Also, there should be good leadership and supportive internal policies for tackling violence and harassment. To drive good workplace cultures, organisations must ensure they are giving the right information and training to employees (including the right tools for Managers to manage and support).
- Prevention: It is important for organisations to focus on prevention mechanisms for GBV and harassment instead of mechanisms to address them after the incidences have occurred.
- Risk Assessment in Workplace: The risks assessments within workplaces should be gender sensitive.
- Collaboration of stakeholders: There is need for partnership with organisations that provide support to diverse communities such as (migrant workers, LGBTQI+ etc) and civil societies, including partnership with academic organisations such as universities on research to aid advocacy. Also, efforts should be across all sectors.
- Addressing other critical issues that lead to a culture of inequity: Other underlying issues around pay gap and childcare should be addressed. The economic component of violence is also important and should be addressed, especially in relation to pay equity.
- Recognition of fundamental principles of human rights at work and intersectionality, equality, diversity and inclusivity processes are crucial.

Trends/practical steps going forward:

- Ratifying C190
- Finding allies across sectors and the globe (collaboration)
- Cultural change
- Taking action on online harassment
- Right evidence and data gathering
- Holistic look at risks in the workplace
- Inclusivity and addressing bias

Recommendations:

At the next CHOGM, Heads may wish to set a target on C190 ratification for Commonwealth countries in 2026, thereby setting the tone for other countries.