

Commonwealth Women's Forum

Collective Action for a Resilient
Commonwealth: Solidarity
for Gender Equality

Samoa, 21–22 October 2024



The Commonwealth

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Solidarity for Gender Equality

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CWAMM	Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting
CWF	Commonwealth Women's Forum
GBV	gender-based violence
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
ICT	information and communication technology
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual
MP	Member of Parliament
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VAWG	violence against women and girls

Preamble

The fourth Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF – 'the Forum') was held in Apia, Samoa, from 21 to 22 October 2024, bringing together close to 400 delegates from around the Commonwealth. The Forum explored the critical challenges and opportunities in advancing women's empowerment and gender equality in the Commonwealth on the theme 'Collective Action for a Resilient Commonwealth: Solidarity for Gender Equality'.

Addressing the joint forums' opening ceremony in Apia on 21 October 2024, the Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa and the first woman to lead a Pacific Island member country of the Commonwealth, welcomed the forums, and noted their role in highlighting critical issues to Heads of Government.

In her opening remarks to the CWF, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, spoke passionately about delivering on her promise to put women at the centre of the Commonwealth Secretariat's work, recalling that despite progress across the Commonwealth, women continue to face significant hurdles. She stressed that addressing these obstacles is not only a matter of justice but also a route to development, adding that women's participation is necessary for building prosperous and peaceful societies.

The Hon. Mulipola Anarosa Ale-Molio'o MP (Member of Parliament), Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa, welcomed delegates to the CWF and noted the theme song 'Let them dream, let them fly' – embodying the host government's mission to create a world for every woman, child and youth to soar to their greatest potential. She spoke of the country's pride in hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2024 and highlighted the government's financial and policy commitments to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Hon. Myles LaRoda MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas, reflected on his role as Chair of the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (CWAMM), and expressed The Bahamas's ongoing support for the Commonwealth

Gender Declaration and Roadmap. As Chair of CWAMM, The Bahamas would work with the Secretariat in the coming months to produce a series of webinars that would focus on priority areas in Commonwealth regions. Minister LaRoda expressed hope that the webinar series would help to progress commitments by member countries for concrete action towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Record of Proceedings

The CWF recognised encouraging progress on advancing gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). This included increasing numbers of women in the parliaments of the Commonwealth, achieving gender parity in primary education, and widespread adoption of legislation on violence against women and girls.

However, the CWF highlighted that despite concerted efforts over the past decades, progress on GEWE remains uneven and is not advancing sufficiently fast to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 – 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

It was acknowledged that girls and women across their life course experience multiple and intersecting forms of inequality and discrimination based on their gender, age, sexual orientation or disability. The principle of 'leaving no one behind' underpins all the SDGs, and the CWF considered the importance of collectively ensuring that the most marginalised and vulnerable members of society are not being left out of, or further disadvantaged by, development processes. This also requires acknowledging and addressing the often multiple and intersecting discrimination and inequalities that women and girls face, which hinder their empowerment and undermine the enjoyment of their rights on an equal basis with others.

Girls continue to be less likely than boys to enrol in secondary education. The numbers of women in managerial roles in the private sector have recently declined, as have the numbers of female graduates in information and communication technology (ICT) programmes. Despite the Commonwealth-wide adoption of relevant legislation, the rates of male violence against women and girls

remain staggering high across our nations. Meanwhile, new forms of technology-facilitated violence disproportionately affect women and girls.

The CWF emphasised that sustainable and effective climate action is only possible when women are involved in planning and decision-making about climate change at the national and local levels. The Forum highlighted the importance of acting in solidarity, building resilience, fostering partnerships and other critical elements necessary for 'Collective Action for a Resilient Commonwealth: Solidarity for Gender Equality'. The key elements from the discussions are presented below.

Women in leadership

Women's power and decision-making in the political, public and private sectors are crucial for achieving gender equality and the SDGs. The lack of women in senior leadership restricts diversity of perspectives in decision-making, limits opportunities for mentorship and role models for aspiring female leaders, and stifles potential for innovation.

The CWF explored mechanisms and factors for including women in leadership roles in national and local government, business and civil society, as a critical step towards creating gender-equal opportunities and gender-sensitive policies. It also provided a space to reflect on the diverse ways in which women leaders have made their mark, and to strengthen solidarity by sharing experiences from different spheres and country contexts.

Despite encouraging progress on legislative reform, women continue to encounter challenges in realising their ambitions of becoming leaders in various sectors. Issues such as patriarchy, misogyny, biases and gender-based violence, including technology-facilitated violence, curtail women's ambition and opportunities in both public and private leadership.

The importance and effectiveness of quotas was highlighted, as well as the need for role models, mentors and intergenerational support, and exchange of expertise and experiences. Reflecting on ongoing wars and armed conflicts, the CWF urged the inclusion of women and incorporation of a gender perspective in all peace and security efforts.

Gender-transformative leadership was recognised as critical to ensuring that the priorities and needs of women and girls and other underrepresented groups are prioritised.

The session began with a fireside chat with the Secretary-General and Cici Manwa, Councillor for Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park, United Kingdom. Both reflected on their journeys to political leadership and the importance of family and community support in embarking on a political career. They also highlighted the importance of young people in leadership.

These themes reverberated through the panel discussion that followed, linking the following speakers. The Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, MP, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fiji

- Ambassador Amina Mohamed, Former Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Kenya, Commonwealth Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Sport, Enterprise and Development
- Emeline 'Uheina 'I Luvuluvu Katoa Tuita, Chief Executive Officer, Tonga Development Bank
- Jotika Sharma, Executive Director Programmes and Chair, International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) Women's Committee, Fiji
- Mossarat Qadeem, Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth, Pakistan
- L Nana Oye Hesse-Bayne, President, Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL), Trinidad and Tobago

The panel's discussion covered a broad range of issues, but panellists identified several common themes across their various sectors. A backlash against women's leadership expressed in the sentiment that 'gender equality has gone too far' has emerged in politics, business and the third sector. Panellists emphasised the importance of continuing to support women's leadership, of recognising the quality of leadership, and the need to refocus discussions on leadership to be about responsibility instead of power.

Gender and climate change

Globally, the climate crisis continues to have a greater impact on women than men, amplifying existing gender inequalities. Although the negative effects of climate change on women and girls are becoming better understood, less is said about the crucial role that women play in leading climate action. The CWF considered the key barriers and opportunities faced by member countries when integrating gender considerations into climate action. Strengthening the leadership and decision-making power of women, ensuring access to and deployment of gender-responsive climate finance, and increasing gender inclusion and expertise in funding bodies were identified as key enablers for gender-just, effective and sustainable climate action.

Climate change intensifies pre-existing gender inequalities. This necessitates employing a multi-pronged approach, including the need for constitutions to enshrine gender equality principles, mainstreaming gender considerations into policy and legal frameworks, and collaborating with local communities. Practical solutions – like increasing access and deployment of gender-responsive climate finance, strengthened leadership and decision-making power for women, good quality disaggregated statistics, and resilient gender-responsive infrastructure design – are critical to ensuring that women and girls can thrive in changing climate and access resources that empower them to build sustainable and resilient futures. Climate change policy-making and action must be designed through consultative collaboration to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable in climate action – including women, youth, indigenous people and persons with disabilities – are met.

The session was opened by the Hon. Doreen Sioka, Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, Namibia, who noted the importance of forming tangible partnerships with local communities in national efforts to address climate change. She also mentioned the need to leverage peer learning to strengthen gender mainstreaming and said that unless gender work is underpinned by economic equality, it will remain a pipe dream.

Following a context-setting presentation by Aishwarya Pillai, Lead Specialist – Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), the session broke into an interactive discussion under the following four dialogue themes:

- Group 1, on the theme of 'Bridging the knowledge gap on the gendered impacts of climate change', discussed the impact of climate change on women's everyday existence. It noted the need to reframe the context of programmes and interventions to understand the importance of women's voices and ensure that they are heard. The role and importance of the traditional knowledge and practices of women was also recognised. It was agreed that there is a need to preserve the knowledge and practices and find a way to incorporate them into policies and institutions.
- Group 2, on the theme of 'Increased access and deployment of gender-responsive climate finance', discussed the challenges for women in climate finance. These include lack of information on climate finance, technicality of language and lack of capacity to venture into this area. It was emphasised that there is a need to: build the capacity of women to access climate finance; make the climate finance processes simpler and quicker; ensure that end-users are included in the design of solutions; adopt affirmative action policies in the disbursement of climate finance; and to devolve solutions to local agencies that have direct interactions with women. However, this was with a recognition that solutions may differ and are dependent on contexts.
- Group 3, on the theme of 'Strengthened leadership and decision-making power for women and men in climate action', noted the need for inclusive policy dialogue at different levels. It noted the importance of affirmative action to empower women, as well as inclusiveness, and for ensuring that vulnerable persons and persons with disabilities are involved in policy and decision-making. It highlighted the need for creating an enabling environment for men and women. It was recommended that strategies to increase women's participation should take into consideration country- and region-specific situations and contexts.

- Group 4, on the theme of 'Integrating the needs of the most vulnerable in climate action, including indigenous people, persons with disability and youth', noted the importance of local/indigenous knowledge because it provides cultural and contextual knowledge. The discussion also recognised the role of women as educators. It was recommended that a stocktake of indigenous knowledge be undertaken and there should be sharing of knowledge, experiences and best practices on how indigenous knowledge is incorporated into formal policies in various jurisdictions. It was proposed that indigenous knowledge should be protected, and that a Commonwealth Fund for Women set up to bridge the recognised gaps.

The CWF welcomed the proposed Commonwealth Collaborative Network on Gender-Responsive Climate Action, introduced at the 13th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (13WAMM). It recognised that this represents a key step forward in enhancing the implementation of climate strategies across small and vulnerable Commonwealth member countries. With its potential to drive essential delivery mechanisms, the network could play a pivotal role in accelerating progress during the Decade of Action*.

Following the interactive world café dialogue, a panel discussion brought together the following speakers. The Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, MP, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fiji

- Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago, Regional Director, Oceania Regional Office, International Union for Conservation of Nature
- Brianna Fruean, Advocate, Commonwealth Youth Award winner (climate change), Samoa
- Delphine Serumaga, UN Women Multi-Country Office Representative for the Pacific

The panel covered a broad range of issues while highlighting various areas of importance, such as the need for donors to consider vulnerability, the importance of partnerships, recognising women,

* The Decade of Action (2020 - 2030) calls for accelerating sustainable solutions to all the world's biggest challenges – ranging from poverty and gender to climate change, inequality and closing the finance gap".

intergenerational strength and traditional knowledge. The need to move from gender-responsive to gender-transformative approaches for sustainability was equally highlighted.

Ending violence against women and girls

Despite decades of concerted efforts, male violence against women and girls (VAWG) continues to be the most widespread and socially accepted human rights violation, affecting one in three women worldwide. Women with disabilities face almost double the lifetime risk of violence compared to women without disabilities. Due to the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is estimated that by 2030, around ten million more girls will be at risk of child marriage and two million more girls may be subjected to female genital mutilation over the next decade.

In this context, the CWF considered questions around what works to prevent and end VAWG, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Deliberation highlighted that effective initiatives to prevent and eliminate VAWG need to be grounded in positive expressions of cultural contexts and must respond to the lived experiences of women and girls. Furthermore, innovative use of VAWG data, as well as gender-transformative initiatives engaging men and boys, were shared.

The session was opened by the Hon. Mmapaseka Steve Lestike, MP, Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. She stated that the incidence of violence against women, girls and other vulnerable persons such as LGBTQIA+ individuals worldwide is at an all-time high. The Deputy Minister also quoted the Hon. Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa:

'As long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance.'

She also stated that for the efforts on preventing and ending gender-based violence to be effective, a new understanding of women and their role in society needs to be fashioned.

The CWF heard from the following experienced practitioners and stakeholders on effective VAWG policies, programmes and initiatives that are grounded in the local context and engage men and boys in eliminating violence.

Panel 1

- The Hon. Myles LaRoda, MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas
- Fiona Hukula, Policy Adviser, Gender Equality, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
- Leigh-Ashley Lipscomb, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) / kNOwVAWdata, UNFPA Pacific, Fiji
- Sarah Kamau, Chair, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, Kenya
- Logotaua Palepa Swanney Solease, Board Member, Samoa Victims Support Group, Samoa

Panel 2

- Samitha Sugathimala, Global Co-Chair, MenEngage Alliance, Director, Foundation for Innovative Social Development, Sri Lanka
- Phillip Carlisle, Regional Chair, CariMAN, Dominica
- Tura Lewai, Human Rights Defender, Fiji

Promising Commonwealth examples of gender-transformative initiatives on engaging men and boys in preventing and addressing VAWG were presented. It was identified that for such initiatives to be effective, they need to be designed and delivered through accountable practices and policies that focus on survivors' rights and their lived experiences. Such initiatives must deliberately aim to address harmful, patriarchal norms and embrace feminist and intersectional approaches.

Furthermore, the collection of sound, comparable and disaggregated data would provide a better understanding of the nature and extent of VAWG and the economic impact of the lack of transformative action to address VAWG. Disaggregated data are essential for the design, implementation and monitoring of effective policies that aim to ensure that violence against all women, including women with disabilities, is addressed. The importance of education tailored to specific

cultural needs, along with community engagement, were identified as critical for changing attitudes and designing and implementing effective solutions.

Moving together in solidarity to prevent VAWG in the first place was highlighted as a critical element in efforts to end VAWG. The need for sustainable, dedicated funding to women's rights organisations and others working on preventing and addressing VAWG was also highlighted as the only way to impart a meaningful change.

Pacific leadership for gender equality and women's empowerment

The Hon. Lord Vaea, MP, Minister of Internal Affairs, Tonga, highlighted the progress of the Pacific region on GEWE in his opening remarks. The CWF welcomed the collaborative model of advancing GEWE in the Pacific region, which was alluded to by a panel that consisted of experts from the Pacific region. Mereseini Rakuita, Principal Strategic Lead – Pacific Women and Girls, Pacific Community

- Easter Chu Shing, Deputy Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Samoa
- Claire McGeechan, Deputy High Commissioner, Australian High Commission in Samoa
- Fiona Hukula, Gender Adviser, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat

The importance of sisterhood and creating a powerful network that supports collective action for gender equality was underscored. The effectiveness of Pacific co-operation is bolstered by the sharing of resources, knowledge and learning from experiences of partners in the region. This approach helps strengthen advocacy efforts and in designing and implementing effective strategies tailored to countries' unique contexts.

The CWF noted the 15th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women, the 8th Meeting of Pacific Ministers for Women, along with their Outcomes Document, which focuses on co-operation, sustainability and resilience building. Additionally, the CWF welcomed the 2023 Pacific Islands Forum Women Leaders Meeting's Outcomes Document including its emphasis on the need for improved

mechanisms for monitoring and accountability for gender equality, and the revitalised Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality, which promotes a coherent and inclusive approach to gender equality and social inclusion actions.

Leaving no one behind

The CWF highlighted the unequivocal commitment by all UN member states, including Commonwealth countries, to 'leave no one behind' in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5. This commitment compels us to collectively ensure that the most marginalised and vulnerable members of society are not being left out of, or further disadvantaged by, development processes.

However, the Forum considered the multiple ways in which other forms of exclusion intersect with gender inequality to hinder progress on leaving no one behind, and what individuals, organisations and governments are doing across the Commonwealth to address this. To ensure that the most marginalised and vulnerable members of society are not being left out of, or further disadvantaged by, development processes, it is imperative to acknowledge and address the often multiple and intersecting discrimination and inequalities that women and girls face. These hinder their empowerment and undermine the enjoyment of their rights on an equal basis with others.

Gender interacts with other identities, structural barriers and social factors, frequently resulting in negative impacts disproportionately borne by women and girls. The CWF heard from two wide-ranging panels on their experiences and work to address this.

Panel 1

- Su'a Hellen Wallwork, Attorney-General and Chair, Pacific Islands Law Officers Network, Samoa
- The Hon. Mmapaseka Steve Letsike, MP, Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, South Africa
- Heike Alefsen, Regional Representative for the Pacific Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

- Sruti Mohapatra, Vice-Chair, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, India
- Joleen Mataae, Vice-Chair, the Commonwealth Equality Network, Tonga Leitis Association Programme Coordinator, Tonga

Panel 2

- Dame Carol Black GBE, FRCP, Commonwealth Special Envoy for Ageing Well
- Providence Umurungi, Chairperson, Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights
- Sovaia Sisi Coalala, Inclusive Development Programme Team, Pacific Disability Forum, Fiji
- Angela Hassan-Sharp, Divisional Manager: United Nations, Human Rights and Commonwealth Division; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand

Data, digital technology and accountability

Technology holds immense potential for digital transformation and empowerment. Yet, women and girls remain underrepresented, and are disproportionately affected by harmful practices, both online and offline.

Heads recognised digital inclusion as a key facet in bridging the digital divide and furthering gender equality and women's empowerment, as reflected in the Commonwealth Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment adopted at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda, in 2022.

The session was opened by the Hon. Toelupe Poumulinuku Onesemo, Minister of ICT Samoa, who reiterated that although technology is a powerful force that transforms the way we live and work, women and vulnerable groups are particularly at risk.

The CWF heard from a diverse panel, who enriched the discussion with practical insights on ensuring digital inclusion.

- The Hon. Toelupe Poumulinuku Onesemo, Minister of ICT Samoa
- Bernadette Lewis, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization
- Seluvaia Kauvaka, Founder, Tonga Women in ICT
- Jennifer Britton, Deputy Programme Manager, ICT for Development, Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat
- Dibya Singh, Sub-regional Digital Expert, UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- Rury Demsey, Consultant, International Telecommunications Union, Area Office for South-East Asia

The CWF discussed the importance of digital inclusion and increasing women and girls' access to, use of and professional engagement in digital technology. The CWF also considered how digital technology is employed to facilitate gender-based violence, and the role of gender-disaggregated data, governments, organisations, individuals, and civil society in identifying, preventing and mitigating these risks.

The CWF noted with concern how the rapid growth of technology poses significant risks, especially for women and vulnerable groups, including cyberbullying, cybersecurity threats, online harassment and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV). However, despite these challenges, technology presents numerous opportunities, including providing access to information and education to those living in remote locations and empowering women via e-commerce and digital financial services. To create a safe and inclusive digital future, further investment in digital infrastructure is required, as well as addressing issues of digital safety, including technology-facilitated GBV. Enabling girls to study science, technology, education and mathematics (STEM) subjects and women to pursue careers in the digital realm, including providing leadership opportunities for women, were identified as some of the most important factors for harnessing technology's potential for GEWE. Furthermore, life course and lifelong learning approaches are essential to ensure that women can benefit from digital inclusion at all stages in their lives.

Women's economic empowerment

The CWF recognised that female entrepreneurs often face systemic obstacles when seeking investment for their businesses. Removing barriers to access to finance is critical for the growth of women-led businesses and poverty reduction. It leads to more diverse and innovative solutions, enables women to identify new markets and export their services and goods, and creates a more inclusive and prosperous economy for all. Yet, as of 2022, only 2 per cent of venture capital worldwide went to women-owned businesses. Women entrepreneurs typically receive smaller amounts of finance, pay higher interest rates and are required to secure more collateral.

The CWF sought to identify solutions to the challenges that women-owned businesses face in accessing finance. It also highlighted the role of digital inclusion in closing the gender finance gap, focusing in particular on experiences in the Pacific region of the Commonwealth.

It was agreed that a social protection floor is critical in ensuring women's economic empowerment. Development partners therefore must endeavour to create social and economic empowerment projects that meet women wherever they are in their journey. Their needs must be taken into consideration in designing intervention programmes. Consequently, interventions for women cannot be a 'one size fits all'; they should address each specific situation, namely, location, literacy levels, access to technology and other challenges faced by the women they are looking to support.

Interventions by development partners, governments and policy-makers must focus on building and working with communities. Women must be engaged to the point where they are comfortable and willing to take the necessary steps or make the changes required to move to the next level.

Despite the potential and opportunities inherent in business formalisation, a lot of women would rather remain in the informal sector because it is safer for them. Governments should endeavour to find innovative ways of making formalisation more appealing or attractive to women entrepreneurs.

The panel included the following speakers:

- The Hon. Myles LaRoda, MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas
- Eseta Nadakuitavuki, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women Affairs, Fiji
- Maria Ronna Luna Pastorizo-Sekiguchi, Founder, Greenhouse Coworking, Greenhouse Studio
- Tuala Maria Melei Tagiilima, Unit Head, Samoa Pacific Country Office, Asian Development Bank
- Tofilau Fiti Leung Wai, Founder and CEO of Samoa Stationery and Books (SSAB)

Women at the heart of change: leading resilience and innovation

The CWF closed with a high-level panel bringing together the Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, in conversation with the Hon. Feleti Penitala Teo, Prime Minister of Tuvalu, moderated by Taulapapa Brenda Heather Latu, former Attorney General of Samoa. The leaders reflected on the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration and progress in the Pacific region since 2012. They noted that women, youth, children and persons with disabilities must be central to global, regional and national strategies for sustainable development and climate resilience. Both Prime Ministers described the steps they had taken in their countries to strengthen gender equality and to align with international commitments. They also touched on the particular challenges for small island states.

The Prime Minister of Tuvalu drew attention to the need to engage men and boys in the fight for gender equality:

'Men must be part of the conversation, not just as advocates but as active participants in dismantling the barriers faced by women. This is how we build a society that benefits everyone.'

The Prime Ministers also responded to questions from representatives from the Commonwealth Youth Forum, emphasising how important it is for young people to understand and engage proactively in the systems and processes of change in governance.

Recommendations

The following recommendations to Heads of Government express the wishes of the participants of the Commonwealth Women's Forum, who convened in Apia, Samoa from 21 to 22 October 2024.

- Commonwealth member countries are encouraged to: allocate specific funding for gender-sensitive and generationally inclusive initiatives; establish leadership training and mentorship programmes for women, youth, children and persons with a disability at the national and regional levels; and regularly review and monitor the progress of policies that advance the roles of women, youth and children to ensure accountability and effectiveness.
- A backlash against women's leadership is evident in claims that 'gender equality has gone too far'. It is critical for countries to enable women to take up leadership positions and encourage men to support this, and to recognise that women bring a real and important perspective to leadership that is otherwise absent.
- Recognising that male violence against women and girls is the most pervasive form of human rights violation, affecting survivors, their families and communities at large, and that gender-based violence intersects with other forms of discrimination and exclusion, will enhance technical and financial investment in prevention and response mechanisms, policies and procedures.
- Commonwealth member countries are requested to ensure all initiatives to prevent and end VAWG, including those that engage men and boys, respond to the needs and experiences of survivors, are accountable, gender-transformative, feminist-centred, and adequately and sustainably funded.

- Countries are encouraged to invest in the regular collection of gender-disaggregated, sound and comparable data on male VAWG, integrating greater focus on technology-facilitated VAWG, to inform legislative reform, policy and programme development, as well as training and capacity building. They should conduct data collection with strict adherence to ethical and safety guidelines.

Commonwealth Women's Forum 2024

TATTE Convention Centre, Apia, Samoa, 21–22 October 2024

Annex A Programme

Commonwealth Women's Forum 2024,
TATTE Convention Centre
Apia, Samoa
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Collective Action for a Resilient Commonwealth: Solidarity for
Gender Equality

Day 1: Monday 21 October 2024

0700–0830

Joint Forums Opening Ceremony at Mulinu'u Bay

0900–1030

Opening Plenary

- Arrival of chief guests
 - Welcome remarks and speeches
 - **The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC**, Commonwealth Secretary-General
 - **The Hon. Mulipola Anarosa Ale-Molio'o**, MP, Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa
 - **The Hon. Myles LaRoda**, MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas
 - Launch of the 'Samoa Gender Climate' Survey by the **Hon. Mulipola Anarosa Ale-Molio'o**, MP, Minister for Women, Community and Social Development, Samoa
 - 'Echoes of the Wave: Resilience Unveiled'
 - In collaboration with Onomea Productions. Amid emotional reflections after the tsunami, **High Chief Tuatagaloa Joe Annandale** shares a survival story – a testament to enduring resilience. Within this tapestry of strength, women's empowerment emerges as a vital thread, weaving hope and determination.
 - Official photographs
- MC: Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago**, Regional Director, Oceania Regional Office, International Union for Conservation of Nature

1030–1100

Networking and Refreshment Break

1100–1230	<p>Opening Plenary continued: Women in Leadership</p> <p>In conversation:</p> <p>The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Commonwealth Secretary-General</p> <p>Cici Manwa, Councillor, Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park, United Kingdom</p> <p>Women in Leadership Panel</p> <p><i>Panel discussion by speakers exemplifying women’s leadership from across the Commonwealth</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, MP, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fiji • Ambassador Amina Mohamed, Former Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Kenya, Commonwealth Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Sport, Enterprise and Development • Emeline ‘Uheina’ I Luvuluvu Katoa Tuita, Chief Executive Officer, Tonga Development Bank • Jotika Sharma, Executive Director Programmes and Chair International Trade Union Congress (ITUC) Women’s Committee, Fiji • Mossarat Qadeem, Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth, Pakistan • L Nana Oye Hesse-Bayne, President, Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWiL), Trinidad and Tobago <p>Moderator: Jude Kelly CBE, CEO and Founder, The WOW Foundation</p>
1230–1400	<p>Networking Lunch</p>
1400–1655	<p>Parallel Session A: Gender and Climate Change</p> <p>Keynote Address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hon. Doreen Sioka, MP, Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare, Namibia • Context-Setting Presentation: The Rationale for Collaboration on Gender-responsive Climate Action • Aishwarya Pillai, Lead Specialist – Infrastructure for Resilience Island States (IRIS), the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

1400–1655
(continued)

World Café Dialogue

Group 1: Bridging the knowledge gap on the gendered impacts of climate change

Facilitator: **Vashti Maharaj**, Adviser Digital Trade Policy, Commonwealth Secretariat

Group 2: Increased access and deployment of gender-responsive climate finance

Facilitator: **Opeyemi Abebe**, Adviser and Head – Trade Competitiveness Section, Commonwealth Secretariat

Group 3: Strengthened leadership and decision-making power for women and men in climate action

Facilitator: **Steve Onwuasoanya**, Head (Ag) Human Rights Unit, Commonwealth Secretariat

Group 4: Integrating the needs of the most vulnerable in climate action including indigenous people, persons with disability and youth.

Facilitator: **Abiola Sunmonu**, Adviser and Head – Africa, Commonwealth Secretariat

Networking Break

Moderated Panel Discussion including Question and Answers

- **The Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua**, MP, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fiji
- **Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago**, Regional Director, Oceania Regional Office, International Union for Conservation of Nature
- **Brianna Fruean**, Advocate, Commonwealth Youth Award winner (climate change), Samoa
- **Delphine Serumaga**, UN Women Multi-Country Office Representative for the Pacific
- Moderator: **Unnikrishnan Nair**, Assistant Director of Climate Change, Commonwealth Secretariat

Closing Remarks and Way Forward

Ruth Kattumuri, Senior Director, Economic, Youth and Social Development Directorate (EYSD), Commonwealth Secretariat

1400–1655	<p>Parallel Session B: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls</p> <p>Keynote Address:</p> <p>The Hon. Mmapaseka Steve Letsike, MP, Deputy Minister for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, South Africa</p> <p>1st Panel Discussion</p> <p><i>Panellists will share examples of effective ending VAWG policies, programmes and initiatives that are grounded in the local context.</i></p> <p>The Hon. Myles LaRoda, MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas</p> <p>Fiona Hukula, Policy Adviser, Gender Equality, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat</p> <p>Sarah Kamau, Chair, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, Kenya</p> <p>Leigh-Ashley Lipscomb, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) / kNOwVAWdata, UNFPA Pacific, Fiji</p> <p>Logotaua Palepa Swanney Solease, Board Member, Samoa Victims Support Group, Samoa</p> <p>Moderator: Sneh Aurora, Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), United Kingdom</p> <p>Musical Interlude:</p> <p>Lorraine Lionheart, the Commonwealth Resounds!</p> <p>Networking Break</p> <p>2nd Panel Discussion</p> <p><i>Panellists will discuss engaging men and boys in eliminating violence, highlighting initiatives from across the Commonwealth that work proactively to engage men and boys.</i></p> <p>Samitha Sugathimala, Global Co-Chair, MenEngage Alliance, Director, Foundation for Innovative Social Development, Sri Lanka</p> <p>Phillip Carlisle, Regional Chair, CariMAN, Dominica</p> <p>Tura Lewai, Human Rights Defender, Fiji</p> <p>Moderator: Lemau Pala'amo, President, Soul Talk Samoa</p> <p>MC: Sneh Aurora Word Cloud and Session Summary</p>
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1700–1745	<p>Pacific Leadership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment</p> <p><i>A discussion on the Pacific's regional approach to gender equality and women's empowerment</i></p> <p>Opening Remarks:</p> <p>The Hon. Lord Vaea, MP, Minister of Internal Affairs, Tonga</p> <p>Panel Discussion</p> <p>Mereseini Rakuita, Principal Strategic Lead – Pacific Women and Girls, Pacific Community</p> <p>Easter Chu Shing, Deputy Director General, Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, Samoa</p> <p>Claire McGeechan, Deputy High Commissioner, Australian High Commission in Samoa</p> <p>Fiona Hukula, Gender Adviser, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat</p> <p>Moderator: Papali'i Mele Maualaivao, Country Programme Coordinator, UN Women, Samoa</p>
1745–1800	<p>Launch:</p> <p>Pola Puipui Samoa National Prevention Framework, prevention framework for ending gender-based violence – '<i>Let it End with Me</i>'</p> <p>The Hon. Mulipola Anarosa Ale-Molio'o, Minister for Women and Community Development</p> <p>Siliniu Lina Chang, President, Samoa Victims Support Group</p>
1800–2100	<p>Manaia Women Maketi (Night Market)</p>

Day 2: Tuesday 22 October 2024	
0900–1030	<p>Day 2 Plenary – Leaving No One Behind</p> <p>1st Panel Discussion</p> <p>Session will create the space to hear from a range of voices on the ways in which gender inequality interacts with other forms of disadvantage.</p> <p>Su'a Hellen Wallwork, Attorney-General and Chair Pacific Islands Law Officers Network, Samoa</p> <p>The Hon. Mmapaseka Steve Letsike, MP, Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, South Africa</p> <p>Heike Alefsen, Regional Representative for the Pacific Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)</p> <p>Sruti Mohapatra, Vice-Chair, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, India</p> <p>Joleen Mataele, Vice-Chair, the Commonwealth Equality Network, Tonga Leitis Association Programme Coordinator, Tonga</p> <p>Moderator: Jude Kelly CBE, CEO and Founder, The WOW Foundation</p>
1030–1045	Networking and Refreshments Break
1045–1220	<p>Day 2 Plenary – Leaving No One Behind</p> <p>2nd Panel Discussion</p> <p><i>Session will consider an enabling environment for greater inclusion.</i></p> <p>Lord Collins of Highbury, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office), United Kingdom</p> <p>Dame Carol Black GBE, FRCP, Commonwealth Special Envoy for Ageing Well</p> <p>Providence Umurungi, Chairperson, Rwanda National Commission for Human Rights, Rwanda</p> <p>Sovaia Sisi Coalala, Inclusive Development Programme Team, Pacific Disability Forum, Fiji</p> <p>Angela Hassan-Sharp, Divisional Manager; United Nations, Human Rights and Commonwealth Division; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; New Zealand</p> <p>Moderator: Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago, Regional Director, Oceania Regional Office, International Union for Conservation of Nature</p>
1230–1330	Networking Lunch

1330–1530	<p>Parallel Session C: Digital Inclusion: The Dynamic opportunities and Dangers</p> <p>Keynote Address:</p> <p>The Hon. Toelupe Poumulinuku Onesemo, Minister of ICT Samoa</p> <p>Interactive item</p> <p>Panel Discussion</p> <p><i>To consider both the potential of and the risks of digital technology in furthering gender equality and women's empowerment.</i></p> <p>Bernadette Lewis, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization</p> <p>Seluvaia Kauvaka, Founder, Tonga Women in ICT, Tonga</p> <p>Jennifer Britton, Deputy Programme Manager, ICT for Development, CARICOM Secretariat</p> <p>Dibya Singh, Sub-regional Digital Expert, UNDP</p> <p>Rury Demsey, Consultant, International Telecommunications Union, Area Office for South-East Asia</p> <p>Moderator: Virginia Dawson, Policy Director, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat¹</p>
1330–1530	<p>Parallel Session D: Women's Economic Empowerment</p> <p>Opening Remarks</p> <p>The Hon. Myles LaRoda, MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas</p> <p>Presentation of Trade Competitiveness Section (TCS) Research Findings</p> <p>Research on women-owned micro, small and medium-sized enterprises' (MSMEs') access to finance in the Pacific islands.</p>

1330–1530 (continued)	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <p><i>Panel discussion on research findings and how women entrepreneurs can build and scale-up.</i></p> <p>The Hon. Myles LaRoda, MP, Minister for Social Services, Information and Broadcasting, The Bahamas</p> <p>Eseta Nadakuitavuki, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Women Affairs, Fiji</p> <p>Maria Ronna Luna Pastorizo-Sekiguchi, Founder Greenhouse Coworking, Greenhouse Studio</p> <p>Tuala Maria Melei Tagilima, Unit Head, Samoa Pacific Country Office, Asian Development Bank</p> <p>Tofilau Fiti Leung Wai, Founder and CEO of Samoa Stationery and Books (SSAB)</p> <p>Moderator: Opeyemi Abebe, Adviser and Head of Trade Competitiveness Section, Commonwealth Secretariat</p> <p>E-platform for information on access to finance and global trade opportunities: Suresh Yadav, Senior Director AI, Trade and Oceans Directorate, Commonwealth Secretariat</p>
1530–1545	<p>Networking and Refreshments Break</p>
1545–1650	<p>Women at the Heart of Change: Leading Resilience and Innovation</p> <p>High-level Closing Panel:</p> <p>The Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata’afa MP, Prime Minister, Samoa</p> <p>The Hon. Feleti Penitala Teo OBE, Prime Minister and Minister of Gender Equity and Women’s Empowerment, Tuvalu</p> <p>Moderator: Taulapapa Brenda Heather-Latu MBE, Former Attorney-General of Samoa</p> <p>LAUNCH Resilient Spirit: <i>Portraits of Samoa Women Warriors</i></p> <p>By Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata’afa MP, Prime Minister, Samoa</p> <p>Narrative by Loau Donina Va’a, CEO, Ministry for Women Community and Social Development, Samoa</p>
1650–1700	<p>Outcomes of the Commonwealth Women’s Forum and Closing Remarks</p> <p>Arjoon Suddhoo, Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth Secretariat</p>
Evening	<p>Reception</p>

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