

Chapter 3

Gender in Education: Overview of Commonwealth Strategies

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1 Introduction

Although some progress has been made towards achieving equality for women, the situation in the main is one of unfulfilled expectations. Social and economic disadvantages experienced by women across the globe continue to be reflected in and reinforced by political institutions which are in the main defined and controlled by men.

1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development: 3

Over the last 30 years, the Commonwealth has increasingly given priority to enhancing the status and participation of girls and women in the development of their countries through improved access to educational opportunities. The educational needs and interests of girls and women have been gradually but firmly placed on the agenda of national governments and development agencies.

The Commonwealth's vision of the role of women in society has been articulated by its highest consultative body, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, and brought to fruition through the work of its various development agencies, in collaboration with other international development agencies and Commonwealth non-governmental organisations.

Commonwealth Heads of Government first formally recognised the importance of women's active participation in all aspects of the development process during the 1970s. Attention to girls' and women's participation in development gained some momentum during the 1980s with Commonwealth Heads of Government acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of women's contribution to the development process (*1987 CHOGM Communiqué*). The 1990s brought a new emphasis with the acknowledgement that women's and girls' issues were cross-cutting and

central to development. These issues could not be considered in isolation; there was a need for a broad gender policy which took account of the varying impact of policies and their outcomes on the lives of both boys and girls, and women and men. There was an evident shift towards mainstreaming a gender perspective in all sectors.

In 1996 a report commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat (Leo-Rhynie, 1996) proposed guidelines for mainstreaming gender in the education sector, in particular formal education (primary, secondary and tertiary education) of Commonwealth countries. The consultant found inadequacies from a gender perspective in the Secretariat's own education programmes, as reported to the 1990 and 1994 Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers. Similarly, the report noted that member countries' own development plans tended to identify problems without offering solutions. The report put forward methodological guidelines for conducting a gender impact analysis based on the identification of a number of critical indicators, and also reviewed process and strategies for mainstreaming gender in education.

Principal among the Commonwealth agencies which have pushed forward the agenda for girls and women are the Commonwealth Secretariat based in London and the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver. The Secretariat and COL have made a significant contribution to closing the gap and reducing disparities in the opportunities for education and training between the sexes through a range of programmes of their own and through collaborative efforts with other international development agencies. These include UNESCO, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, formerly known as the Donors to African Education (DAE).

Commonwealth governments set up the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1965 as a central body to organise their consultations and carry out agreed programmes. Within the Secretariat, specialist departments and divisions that have focused on education and girls, women and gender issues are the Women and Development Programme which, following a process of restructuring within the Secretariat, became the Gender Affairs Department within the Gender and Youth Affairs Division (GYAD); and the former Education Programme, later renamed the Education Department (EDD), within the Human Resource Development Division (HRDD). Both portfolios are now subsumed under the Social Transformation Programmes Department (see Chapter 1).

The Secretariat organises intergovernmental consultations, services Commonwealth meetings and committees, conducts programmes of co-operation and acts as a clearing-house for information. The Secretariat has focused on women and development issues as a priority concern in its consultative and functional activities. Such activities include advocacy with the relevant ministries of Commonwealth governments; national and regional workshops with relevant stakeholders; commissioned studies on gender stereotyping and on improving participation of

girls in basic and higher education; publications and their distribution; networking; and co-operation with non-governmental organisations throughout the Commonwealth.

Commonwealth education ministers have regularly endorsed the directives of the Heads of Government and suggested to the Secretariat's education officials that attention be given to continuing to address gender concerns in the educational system, paying attention to the problems of both boys and girls (*Report of 13CCEM:9*).

The Commonwealth of Learning is described in Chapters 1 and 6. When it was created in 1987, Commonwealth Heads of Government asked COL to pay attention to two special areas: women in development and the environment. The central emphasis of the agency remains the improvement of national capacity for human resource development through increasing access to education. Within its mandate from the Heads of Government, COL has emphasised the relationship of girls and women to the new communications technologies. To this end it has mounted a number of regional workshops on gender and technology. It has also initiated other discrete projects related to gender, such as the recent development of a United Nations and Commonwealth-wide system database on gender-related training materials.

The focus of this chapter will be on Commonwealth initiatives within the formal education sector both at school and tertiary level. The paper's coverage excludes aspects of training which Commonwealth agencies have undertaken in a broad spectrum of areas pertaining to women: violence against women, sexual harassment, enhancing the participation of women in industry and exports, gender planning in macroeconomic policies, income generation and entrepreneurial skills, environmental management, natural resource management, and women and sustainable development. All these combine with educational initiatives to encourage transformation towards gender equity.

The chapter will focus on work in gender and education carried out by the Commonwealth Secretariat (in particular the work of the Education Programme/Department) and COL, either alone or in partnership with other Commonwealth and international development agencies that have a common agenda. Programmes that will be examined will be those pertaining to gender in basic education, in science and technology education and in higher education. The activities of COL, many of which are cross-cutting across the sectors, will be described separately from those of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

To start with, broader Commonwealth policies on gender will be outlined, as the setting within which education policies have been laid down.

2 Commonwealth Policies on Gender and Development

The Commonwealth has played a prominent role in placing the issue of gender equality on the agenda of developing countries through its proposals and

programmes for mainstreaming a gender perspective into all aspects of national development. Nevertheless, the 'reality for most women is still a long way from the vision' (Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Commonwealth Secretary-General, *1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action*).

a. First Steps to Gender Equality

Commonwealth Heads of Government first raised their concern about women and development at their meeting in Kingston, Jamaica in 1975. At the following meeting in London in 1977, they recognised that 'unless women are active participants both in contributing to the process of development and as beneficiaries, the goals of social and economic growth would not be fully realised'. They proposed that 'all programmes of the Secretariat should reflect this awareness and contribute to the full integration of women in the development process' (*CHOGM Communiqué, 1977*).

The first concrete step to advance equality between men and women was taken in 1979 with the decision by Heads of Government, meeting in Lusaka, to appoint an adviser to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on women and development. In response, a Women and Development Programme was established within the Human Resource Development Group of the Secretariat to be a focal point for women and development issues throughout the Secretariat and to co-ordinate assistance to member countries in addressing the issues.

In 1985, on the eve of the Third United Nations World Conference on the Decade for Women, Commonwealth ministers responsible for women's affairs met for the first time in Nairobi to review and appraise their achievements and to share ideas. Ministers recommended a shift from *advocacy* to *integration*, and that the Secretariat should adopt a policy statement on women and development to facilitate this process. The policy statement was approved by Heads of Government at their meeting in Nassau in 1985, with the further request to the Secretariat to prepare a detailed Plan of Action to ensure effective implementation of the Statement. The Nairobi meeting was a precursor to the triennial Meetings of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (WAMM), which now serves as the major consultative body for the Commonwealth on gender issues.

At the 1987 WAMM meeting in Harare, the *Commonwealth Plan of Action on Women and Development* was adopted and forwarded to Heads of Government who endorsed it at their meeting in Vancouver that year. The *Plan of Action* consisted of initiatives which individual member governments agreed to undertake, as well as action by the Secretariat. The 1987 *Plan of Action* succeeded in focusing the attention of the Commonwealth on the problems that arise when women's issues are not central concerns in development efforts.

b. The Harare Declaration

In 1991, at their meeting in Zimbabwe, Commonwealth Heads of Government

drew up the Harare Declaration which provided clear directions and priorities for the Commonwealth as a whole and reaffirmed equality for women so that they may exercise their full and equal rights. Two years later in Cyprus, Heads of Government renewed their commitment to the Harare priorities, and stressed their dedication to building 'a world in which women enjoyed their full rights and were equal partners in shaping the economic, political, social and cultural development of their countries'. They also recognised that women's rights are an 'integral and indivisible part of human rights' and that men's violence against women is a contravention of basic human rights. Heads of government agreed to promote women's rights through special measures to increase women's participation at all levels of political and decision-making processes (*CHOGM Communiqué*, 1993).

During 1992–93 the Secretariat undertook a restructuring process with the aim of making the organisation more focused and efficient in areas where it enjoyed comparative advantage over other institutions. The Secretariat evolved a three-year strategic plan based on the Harare priorities. The Women and Development Programme and the Commonwealth Youth Programme merged into a composite ***Women's and Youth Affairs Division***. A special programme on ***Gender Equality*** was formulated to provide assistance and advice to member governments and the Secretariat on gender issues.

The fourth Meeting of Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs (1993) examined progress on implementation of the Plan of Action. Ministers decided the Plan would benefit from review and updating in view of recent Secretariat restructuring and the changing international development context. Although the cross-cutting nature of gender issues was recognised in the plan, the process of mainstreaming gender concerns into all Secretariat programmes was not fully developed. In view of the forthcoming United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, timely renewal of the Plan was suggested.

c. The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development

The *1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development* gave reality to the pledge made by Heads of Government in the Harare Declaration that equality for women would be one of the areas of priority action for the Commonwealth. The plan represented the new Commonwealth vision for women towards the millennium and beyond. It was taken to the World Conference on Women (Beijing) and contributed to the development of a global agenda to bring women into the twenty-first century. It represented a blueprint for Commonwealth action to achieve gender equality, providing a framework within which governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat can harness their resources to transform the Commonwealth vision for women into reality. An innovative and forward-looking plan, it mainstreamed gender issues into all policies, programmes, structures, processes and activities of governments and the Secretariat, to ensure social justice, equality and fulfilment for all (*1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development: 1*).

The plan set out *new directions* for both Commonwealth governments and the Secretariat:

- *From women to gender*: The gender and development approach seeks to integrate women's needs into the wider picture, calling for the different life courses of men and women to be considered at an early stage and emphasising the need to monitor the different impact of policies and programmes on women and men, girls and boys;
- *Focus on results*: The plan seeks to accelerate the achievement of women's empowerment, focusing more on achieving results than establishing rights and obligations;
- *Strengthen national women's machineries (NWMs)*: NWMs include ministries for Women's Affairs, focal points for gender issues within ministries, commissions and departments;
- *Integration of gender issues into the mainstream of all government and Secretariat activities*: This ensures that decision-makers and those implementing policies and programmes in all areas of member governments, together with the Secretariat itself, are equipped to build gender issues into their activities;
- *Equality and equity of outcomes for women*: Policy commitments must be delivered. It therefore recommended monitoring and evaluation at the highest levels to turn the vision into reality (ibid: 6–7).

Special *terms and techniques* were evolved to meet the objectives of the plan.

- *Gender management system*: this included two key elements:
 1. Development of gender management and development action plans which provide a framework for establishing what interventions are necessary to integrate gender into development policies and programmes within a particular country;
 2. A system for managing the integration of gender in mainstream policies and programmes to ensure that the plan's objectives are met;
- *Gender budgeting and accounting*: the purpose here is to identify and monitor the flow of sufficient resources to ensure that women and men are equal beneficiaries of programmes, and to specialist projects aimed at benefiting women only;
- *Positive and affirmative action*: 'Positive action' referred to taking specific temporary measures to achieve equality. Affirmative action referred to giving special privileges to compensate for a long history of discrimination and inequality (ibid: 8–9).

For member governments and for the Secretariat, the plan identified *strategic*

objectives which provide a framework for Commonwealth action at two levels: strengthening institutional capacity to mainstream gender issues into all sectors of society; and focus on a limited number of critical gender issues for Commonwealth action in the areas of political and human rights and social and economic development. *Women and human resource development* was one of the key issues identified for Commonwealth action (ibid: 10).

Fifteen areas considered desirable components of the *1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development* were identified for government planners and implementers. The plan also clearly stipulated how functional divisions within the Secretariat should respond to the plan.

Since 1995, the Commonwealth Secretariat has adopted special measures to strengthen its capacity to provide gender-inclusive and women-specific functional and technical assistance to governments in key programmes affecting women. The principal action points are listed in the box below.

d. Advancing the Commonwealth Agenda into the New Millennium

A recent development has been preparation of *An Update to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development for the period 2000–2005* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000). This refines the focus of the *1995 Plan* by more closely defining Commonwealth priorities for action on the basis of its areas of comparative advantage, for example gender mainstreaming through the Gender Management System approach, gender integration into macroeconomic policies, gender and human rights, politics, peace and conflict prevention. It recommends a more strategic advocacy, brokerage and catalytic (ABC) role for the Commonwealth's GYAD. It concentrates Commonwealth efforts on resources – to ensure greater effectiveness and impact of outcomes through more innovative and cost-effective strategies and approaches. The *Update* identifies gender mainstreaming processes as the cornerstones for advancing gender equality, as well as stressing the need for effective monitoring of impacts and capacity-building actions.

3 Implementing the Plans of Action

At various stages of policy evolution, the Secretariat took positive steps to implement Plans of Action on Gender and Development, 1987 and 1995.

The *1987 Plan* impacted on Secretariat programmes, including education programmes, by increasing the level of gender awareness among policy-makers and programme staff. Divisional planning for project activities, policy-making and technical assistance to governments were all affected. Consultation with member countries through points of contact regularly included reference to improving women's involvement in Secretariat initiatives, and planning within the Secretariat often ensured that the gender dimension was taken into account when Secretariat activities and workshops were implemented.

Implementation of the *1995 Plan of Action* was managed through the *Gender*

Steering Committee. The administrative Divisions were the 'front line' of the Secretariat where strategic direction was transformed into meaningful action and as such they represented an integral part of the mainstreaming strategy. Two Secretariat Divisions played a key role in overseeing that the objectives of the plan were met within Secretariat operations:

The *Strategic Planning and Evaluation Unit (SPEU)* co-ordinated gender training for all staff; reviewed proposals for expenditure to determine whether a gender intervention had been effectively included in the proposal; evaluated the gender component of project activities; and assisted with the mainstreaming of the Commonwealth mandates on gender in the Secretariat.

The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development: The Secretariat's Response

- Inclusion of gender issues in all Commonwealth and divisional mandates, action and strategic plans.
- Gender training workshops to develop the capacity of in-house professional staff for gender planning and gender analysis.
- Appointment of consultants and experts, who either have, or will acquire, the capacity for gender analysis and planning.
- Equal and equitable participation of women and men in all Secretariat activities.
- Collation of gender-disaggregated information related to implementing the Plan of Action.
- Use of this information to monitor the effectiveness of each Division in implementing the Plan of Action.
- Gender accounting that identifies and allocates resources to facilitate gender integration as well as undertaking women-specific projects and initiatives to help women 'catch up'.

The 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development

The *Gender and Youth Affairs Division (GYAD)* took responsibility for co-ordinating the implementation of the *Plan of Action* and developing a gender mainstreaming strategy for the Secretariat. GYAD prepared a guide to gender mainstreaming to assist Commonwealth policy-makers, planners and implementers consider the special needs and interests of women in all areas of planning. This presented a range of planning tools designed by Commonwealth countries and international organisations to trigger concerns for gender equality in the development

and analysis of policies, programmes and projects. The guide defines gender, provides a conceptual framework for gender equality, identifies partners in policy-making, provides an outline for the type of data and information necessary to the development of gender-sensitive policies, programmes and projects. It sets out socio-economic indicators of equality, provides a framework for assessing the needs of women in development projects and suggests gender planning tools (*Engendering the Agenda: 2*).

To further assist Commonwealth agencies and governments to implement gender mainstreaming through the Gender Management System, the Secretariat has published a series of handbooks for all stakeholders in the process. The GMS Series includes a *GMS Handbook* which is a reference manual; a quick guide to gender mainstreaming in development planning; a manual on use of gender sensitive indicators; and a GMS manual for the public sector.

Following the Harare Declaration, it is taken for granted that all Secretariat Divisions have taken steps to mainstream gender throughout their activities. From the outset, all projects must bear in mind the special needs and involvement of women. In the assistance the Secretariat gives with education, trade promotion or the application of new technology, the role of women and the relevance of the assistance to their needs is borne in mind. So too is the need to open the doors of recruitment and promotion to the female half of the human race, whose talents and energies have too often been stifled by the weight of tradition (*ibid: 3*).

4 Gender in Basic Education

The Commonwealth has focused on the needs of girls in basic education as a fundamental right. Access to basic education is recognised as a prerequisite to the enhanced participation of girls and women in higher levels of education as well as to better employment opportunities.

a. Early Concerns

The issue of girls and their special educational needs received little or no attention in the early work of the Commonwealth as an international organisation. That the education of women and girls deserved the highest priority in Commonwealth programmes was first acknowledged by the eighth Commonwealth Education Conference in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1980. Ministers noted examples of gross discriminatory practices in developing countries. In 1976 it was estimated that 79% of the 712 millions girls in the world under 15 years of age were in the developing countries. Very few of them had sufficient access to education or skills training.

There was also a very high rate of female wastage through girls dropping out of the school system. Even in countries where educational opportunities were more plentiful, there was still a preference for giving education to the boy rather than to the girl if a choice had to be made (*Report of 8CEC*).

Ministers recognised that in order for women to acquire the knowledge and

Impact of the 1987 Plan of Action on Commonwealth Work

- Workshops, seminars, training courses and policy-oriented research – included women and development issues in agenda, background papers and research.
- Provision of educational and training opportunities – CFTC fellowships and CSFP; request to governments to make special efforts to nominate women; encouragement to point of contact in national governments to set targets for women in fellowship and training opportunities; investigation of factors inhibiting participation of women; and monitoring and reporting on the participation of women in Secretariat-sponsored training.
- The provision of technical assistance ensured that women and development concerns feature in projects.
- Women and Development Programme crucial and central in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan of Action by all divisions and programmes in the Secretariat.
- Secretariat staffing policy aimed to increase representation of women in professional positions.
- The Secretariat Committee on Women and Development was established to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action by individual programmes/divisions.

The Commonwealth Plan of Action on Women and Development: 1987:2-4

skills necessary to participate fully in the development of the community, there was urgent need for large-scale and sustained programmes of public education for the masses, especially in the developing countries. This required both re-orientation of male attitudes as well as the preparation of women psychologically and socially for education and change.

Rather than conducting research into the causal factors, which were well understood, ministers proposed that a more useful activity would be the interchange of information on strategies that could be adopted to reduce the disparities between the sexes in the utilisation of educational opportunities. The Commonwealth Secretariat was urged to assist the exchange of information about successful measures by member countries to reduce: (a) gender disparities in participation in education; and (b) the incidence of early leaving or dropping out of school (*Report of 8CEC*).

Despite these recommendations, it was only in the 1990s that basic education was given priority and the position of girls within this sub-sector was identified as a critical issue.

Divisional Steps to Mainstream Gender

- Directors identified critical/priority areas in their strategic and operational plans for gender mainstreaming.
- Directors in collaboration with Gender Focal Points identified the obstacles and limitations to mainstream gender in their respective divisional activities with special attention to be given to procedural obstacles.
- A gender mainstreaming strategy to be developed for each Division.
- Continued support to be given to development of the role of professional staff (especially Gender Focal Points) in each division by identifying the training needs for divisional staff.

The work of the Commonwealth Secretariat has emphasised three aspects of gender in basic education:

- Increasing girls' access to basic education both in the formal and non-formal education sector, identifying and advocating modalities which target a large number of girls;
- Improving the quality of the teaching force, the key to improved quality of basic education, by ensuring better terms and conditions for teachers with a special focus on the service conditions of women teachers, who can play a pivotal role in the education of girls in many developing countries; and
- Greater sensitisation of teachers to gender issues.

b. Access: the Commonwealth Response to Education for All

The year 1990 began a decade of the special significance for basic education. It marked International Literacy Year when the world community sought to extend opportunities to acquire literacy. In March, in Jomtien, Thailand, the World Conference on Education for All provided a new impetus to the goal of universal access to education at the basic level. In tune with international concerns with basic education, the Eleventh Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Barbados (1990) adopted the theme 'Improving the Quality of Basic Education'. In their deliberations, ministers noted the recommendation from the World Conference on Education for All to 'ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their effective participation' (*Report of 11CCEM*).

Educational needs identified by ministers were literacy and numeracy; education to provide job skills; preparation and supply of materials; and use of teaching techniques appropriate for out-of-school learning. It was agreed that education

that was intended to increase employment skills needed to go beyond jobs that were the traditional preserve of women 'to embrace subjects where the job opportunities are widening, including such areas as growth industries and information technology' (*Report of IICCEM*:17). Ministers concurred that in all countries improvement of the quality of teachers was central to the delivery of quality basic education.

c. Improving the Quality of the Teaching Force

Improved teacher education, and teacher management and support (TMS) were identified as important ingredients of good basic education. Within strategies for better teacher management and support, the role, status and training of teachers from the gender perspective were considered critical and have occupied a significant place in the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Commonwealth's principal thrust in improving the quality of basic education focused on improving the quality, delivery and working conditions of teachers in Africa. As a result, in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Uganda and Zambia the Secretariat's Education Programme worked with ministries of education on a range of issues related to teacher management. These have included teachers' record systems, discipline and codes of conduct for teachers, and the place of women in the teaching service (*EDD Annual Report 1991/2*: 4).

d. Gender Sensitisation of Teachers in Africa

Wide gender gaps exist in the teaching profession in Africa. In most cases it is women who tend to be disadvantaged. This was recognised, particularly in relation to teacher training and educational management, by participants at the first Teacher Management and Support Colloquium for Anglophone Africa and Mozambique, held in Dar es Salaam in 1993. They identified access, equity, the curriculum and sexual harassment in teacher training institutes and the workplace as issues creating crucial barriers to the effective quality participation of females in the teaching profession. Participants emphasised the urgency of integrating gender concerns into all aspects of the TMS programme. Affirmative action was recommended as a key strategy to redress the prevailing gender imbalances.

It was also resolved in Dar es Salaam that Commonwealth action on women's issues should be undertaken in collaboration with the DAE Working Group on Female Participation and the Forum for African Women Educationalists. These bodies have consistently given financial aid and material support in the cause of gender sensitisation in education and have placed gender mainstreaming firmly in the Teacher Management and Support Programme in Africa (*Wamahiu*: iii).

In the TMS work, a gender perspective was adopted rather than a focus on women alone. The perceived advantages were:

- It is comparative, encompassing the perspectives of both men and women;

- It helps to identify the disadvantages suffered not only by women but also by men;
- It recognises the heterogeneous nature of human society;
- It involves women and men in finding solutions to the problem.

This meant the institutionalisation of a gender perspective into all levels and sectors of organisational and development planning and implementation of TMS. Three strategies for mainstreaming gender into the TMS Programme were adopted: problem diagnosis, needs assessment and gender sensitisation.

A needs assessment survey was planned for each country to identify specific groups and issues that required targeting, and to assess the local resources available to support sensitisation initiatives (ibid: 1–2). Because considerable animosity was noted towards the idea of gender mainstreaming among key actors in the development of education in Africa, gender sensitisation of various target groups was identified as integral to the successful programming of TMS activities in all countries. As a result, a gender sensitisation plan was proposed for TMS member countries during 1995–96.

A gender sensitisation needs assessment survey in 1995 identified gender issues within the teaching profession, giving attention to the extent of imbalance and perceived causes. It revealed the need for the training of gender specialists and the adoption of a more balanced approach to gender issues (ibid: 6–8).

During 1995–96, gender-sensitisation workshops were conducted in Zanzibar, Botswana and Lesotho. A training of trainers workshop was held in Malawi during 1996. The impact of sensitisation workshops was felt in terms of attitudinal change; personal commitment to change the status quo as soon as possible; commitment to the development of action plans; the acceptance of gender discrimination in African classrooms as an indicator of poor quality teaching; the strengthening of intersectoral and subregional links; and the creation of a critical pool of sensitised personnel, comprising senior education decision-makers and practitioners able to effect changes in education at national and sub-regional levels (*Wamahiu*: 1–12).

e. Commissioning of Studies

The Commonwealth Secretariat has sponsored a number of studies on gender and basic education which have illuminated the problems encountered, and have proposed solutions to enhancing the participation and performance of girls at the basic level of education.

Making a Difference in Girls' Education

The Commonwealth Secretariat, in conjunction with the Girls' Education Team of the Human Development Network of the World Bank, commissioned two studies that provided powerful evidence for change and successful strategies in two countries, Malawi and Baluchistan, Pakistan. These cases, serving as possible models for

other countries, outlined how to make a difference in the education of girls. The two studies sought:

... to examine the process by which education policies targeting girls were implemented and to assess whether the desired outcomes were achieved... [they were] also especially interested in examining whether and how policies aiming to improve education quality and curriculum relevance had taken account of the gender dimension.

Wolf and Kainja: 3

Commonwealth Secretariat and FAWE Gender Sensitisation Activities 1995-97

- Needs assessment survey in eastern and southern Africa.
- A national gender sensitisation workshop for TMS Country Working Group (CWG) in Zanzibar.
- Regional gender sensitisation workshops for CWG representatives from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland and Zanzibar.
- A national gender sensitisation workshop for CWG members and other key educational personnel in Lesotho.
- A regional gender sensitisation training of trainers workshop for CWG representatives and other key education personnel from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania and Zanzibar.
- The development of a gender training manual in Zambia.
- A gender sensitisation needs assessment in West Africa.
- Assessment of the integration of gender into the training modules adapted and translated from the Commonwealth Secretariat 'Better Schools' series for head teachers in Mozambique.

Wamahiu: 4

The findings of these studies show that 'very real and significant progress is being made in improving girls' access to education'. They also reveal a need to 'shore up these achievements with efforts to improve the quality of education and ensure that both instructional content and instructional methodologies are adapted to be more appropriate and consistent with girls' and their families' educational expectations' (ibid: 3).

The report on Malawi (Wolf and Kainja) portrays the progress made by girls since 1990 from the perspective of access (which doubled between 1990 and 1997), retention and achievement; and parental attitude to girls' education that revealed

that priority was given to the education of boys. The report focused on changes that had come about since 1990 due to the efforts made by Malawian women with political and institutional power, beginning in the 1980s, and to international interest in girls' education. Wolf and Kainja have described the factors which supported girls' education in Malawi (see box). Other factors that played a crucial role in creating change were an atmosphere within the country which set the scene for educational change and government strategies (ibid: 4–25).

Strategies which succeeded in supporting girls' education in Malawi

- Fee waivers for primary school girls.
- Creating more school spaces for girls.
- Training more female teachers and improving teacher distribution.
- Scholarships for secondary school girls.
- Improving girls' retention in school by readmitting girls after pregnancy.
- Social mobilisation campaign – bringing girls into school early.
- Establishing girls' clubs, reforming girls' initiations, encouraging positive role models.
- Eliminating school uniforms.
- Improving girls' achievements in school by gender appropriate curriculum and textbooks, changing classroom practices, gender streaming mathematics.

Wolf and Kainja: 11–24

Non-formal Education for Out-of-school Children

Studies in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan were commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat in an effort to document their interesting experiences in providing education and training for large numbers of children who either never go to school or who drop out before completing basic education. These reports gave accounts of the special programmes and measures being taken by these countries to enter into partnerships with NGOs, and to deal with the issue of providing basic education to out-of-school children in general and to girls in particular. The majority of these children are girls. The studies also point out the strengths and achievements of these programmes and the constraints experienced in attempts to achieve universal basic education. Among the non-formal education programmes reported were those of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the Social

Work Research Centre (SWRC), night schools in India and the Hafizabad Literacy Promotion Programme (HLPP) in Pakistan. The results of these studies were published in 1994 and widely distributed.

Teacher Management and Gender

A Secretariat publication on teacher management (Halliday: 1995) highlights gender issues that persist in schools. It points to unequal gender balance in school admissions; higher drop-out rates by girls from school; gender stereotyping through inherited curriculum structures and vocational guidance; sexual harassment of girls and women teachers; inequalities in promotion arrangements; and timing of extra-school activities which disadvantages working mothers.

Issues which could improve the provision for girls were also identified: the importance of putting in place curriculum structures showing that education is as relevant to the needs of girls as it is to boys; the availability of bursaries and/or grants; physical facilities for girls; personal, social and vocational guidance programmes; and parental roles in school policy formulation.

Strategies to Improve the Role and Status of Women in Education

- Conditions of service for women teachers should be same as for men. Service agreements should not disadvantage women.
- Sexual harassment cases should be treated as a matter of priority and investigated impartially.
- Educational policies should be carefully framed so that teachers are sensitised to policies which seek to redress gender and other inequalities.
- Appointment and promotion policies ensuring that both sexes can rise through the education system without discrimination.
- All subjects in the curriculum are freely and equally available to both genders.
- Approved textbooks do not reinforce traditional roles.

Halliday: 88-89

If equal opportunity legislation and regulations are to be monitored effectively, it is essential that appropriate statistics are collected by gender. The required data would include information on pupil attendance, drop-out rates, promotion rates from primary to secondary school, teacher appointment, teacher promotion, teacher utilisation, cases of harassment, officers in districts, the inspectorate and other ministry of education cadres. Without this data it is impossible to provide answers when questions of alleged discriminatory practices are raised in public debate.

f. Contribution of the Forum of African Women Educationalists

In Africa, FAWE, a unique group of influential African policy-makers, has been well-positioned to stimulate broad policy reform and create a conducive environment for increasing parental demand for girls' education. FAWE is a membership organisation that brings together African women ministers in charge of education systems, women vice-chancellors of African universities and other senior women policy-makers. It was founded in 1992 and registered in Kenya in 1993 as a pan-African NGO. FAWE has 60 full members from 34 African countries, associate members comprising male ministers of education and permanent secretaries, and 31 National Chapters. Although FAWE has more extensive and substantial programmes than the Commonwealth Secretariat, and includes many non-Commonwealth countries in its membership and activities, its initiatives in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat have made significant impact on girls' education in Africa, especially in Commonwealth countries.

FAWE's overall goal is to increase access and retention, as well as improve the quality of education for all girls within the school system and for women in universities. To achieve this, FAWE has distilled seven strategic objectives: policy and data analysis; advocacy; interventions; empowerment of girls; partnerships; strengthening of organisational capacity; and monitoring and evaluation.

FAWE programme activities aim to help FAWE members, many of whom are also Commonwealth members, to analyse, plan, guide and effectively implement external and internal investment in the education sector to redress gender imbalances. FAWE's overarching goal is to use its forum as an intellectual resource to assist in the development of member countries' national capabilities to evolve, implement and improve strategies that have the potential to accelerate female participation in education (*FAWE News*, Vol. 8, No. 1).

In 1999 FAWE produced a five-year strategic plan which charts FAWE's future strategy and which relies on its comparative advantage and strengths. The plan emphasises the need to empower girls themselves. The education of girls remains a priority area, not only for advocacy, but for specific action to promote development (*FAWE News*, Vol. 8, No. 1: 3).

The Secretariat has worked with FAWE to influence as many ministries of education as possible and Secretariat personnel have been regular attenders at major FAWE meetings. FAWE collaborates with the Commonwealth Secretariat in defining many of its policies and in implementing on-the-ground training and sensitisation activities. As a result of the intensive advocacy work of both agencies, ministerial speeches and declarations across Africa have recognised the importance of girls' education and have placed it on the map. A realisation has also emerged that positive female role models are a powerful tool for raising awareness and inspiring girls. The situation has also been helped by the growing number of girls' education programmes across Africa (*ibid*: 5). However, the gender gap in school enrolments has not narrowed. FAWE therefore emphasises the need for going

beyond the focus on numbers. It advocates review of the curriculum, changes in pedagogical practice and school culture, and the need for gender sensitisation and training. Attention is shifted to programme planning, as well as to implementation, with a need for quantitative as well as qualitative baseline data – as in the case of the second phase of the African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI).

5 Women in Science and Technology Education

Gender discrimination and under-representation of women in technical and vocational programmes and courses, as well as the participation of girls in more diversified vocational education, has been of special concern to the Commonwealth. As an aid to policy development in Commonwealth countries, the tenth Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (1987) requested the Commonwealth Secretariat to examine these problems, together with the measures which were being undertaken by member countries and their impact. In response, over the last decade the Education Programme/Department has addressed the specific problem of the dearth of girls and women in science and technology courses and occupations.

a. Barriers to Girls in Science and Technology

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Education Programme/Department began by examining the barriers that prevent girls entering and performing well in science and technology subjects and courses. Analysis of the problem revealed that for cultural and traditional reasons girls and women continued to be under-represented in comparison with men in science- and technology-based occupations and in the education and training courses that lead to them. Many countries still need assistance in developing strategies to promote positive attitudes towards science and technology for girls and women.

Principal barriers to girls'/women's participation in science and technology were identified as:

- Stereotyped and outdated attitudes held by girls, their parents and teachers about girls' abilities and occupational choices;
- Gender stereotyping in textbooks and other educational materials;
- Girls' poor performance in mathematics, constituting a barrier to learning science (especially physical sciences) and technology;
- A perception by both parents and the girls themselves of science and technology as male subjects.

To overcome these barriers and to enhance the participation of girls in science- and technology-related courses and occupations, the Secretariat launched a series of initiatives in the following areas.

Stereotyped and Outdated Attitudes

The Commonwealth Secretariat aimed to raise awareness of gender biases in science, technology and mathematics education in Africa through a regional workshop held in Accra, Ghana in January 1987. The workshop identified outdated stereotyped attitudes as one of the biggest barriers preventing women from entering science and technology. The Secretariat acted on this signal. Women scientists and technologists were identified, interviewed and photographed. Tapes of the interviews were used to create the profiles of women included in a Secretariat booklet and to prepare a programme made available for use by local radio stations. It was hoped that publicising women scientists and technologists in this way would provide role models to girls in schools in order to challenge the stereotyped assumptions of their parents and teachers. Girls' clinics were initiated in Ghana where over 200 girls were brought to a camp for a week. They listened to lectures by eminent women scientists and technologists from all over Africa. Girls had the opportunity to interact with them, and visit research institutions and industries in which women played prominent roles (Wolf and Kainja: 4).

To combat stereotyped attitudes, the Secretariat initiated the concept of a Science and Technology Roadshow for girls, which would move from city to city, and region to region, carrying a message to girls about opportunities for them in scientific and technical careers. Such a series of exhibitions, practical activities, publications and co-operation with female role models had already been tried out in the clinics held for top science students in Ghana's secondary schools. But a fully-fledged model of roadshow activities remained to be devised when the Commonwealth Secretariat Education Programme invited offers from African ministries of education to act as hosts for such a roadshow. The Ministry of Education of Botswana agreed to pioneer the event with support from UNESCO and SIDA (the Swedish International Development Agency). The Roadshow was held in Gaborone and Francistown, Botswana, 12–18 August 1990 (*Roadshow Report and Manual*: 1).

The aims of the roadshow were to:

- Convince women and girls that they could succeed in many more areas of employment if they sought appropriate qualifications and training in science and technology;
- Make an impact on the attitudes and myths that prevent girls and women from taking advantage of today's opportunities in science and technology;
- Provide information to parents, teachers, employers and the general public on the country's need for scientific and technological manpower and to encourage them to change their attitudes towards women in these fields.

The roadshow was attended by secondary school students in all Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries, accompanied by their teachers.

Women working in science-based professions and occupations in Botswana, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Zambia served as resource persons and role models. The activity was fully supported by local industries and by a number of government departments willing to open their doors to enable the girls to see women in action.

The major outcome of the Botswana Roadshow was the development of a manual that could help others in organising events of this kind, supported by a video made during the roadshow entitled *Righting the Imbalance*. The manual and video were distributed to all interested member states. To complement the roadshow, a regional resource book was published, *Women Too in Science and Technology*, which focused on Africa. Two commissioned studies were published: *Measures Increasing the Participation of Women and Girls in Vocational and Technical Education and Training: A Caribbean Study* and *Gender Sensitivity in Primary School Mathematics in India (Education Programme, Annual Report 1990–91: 8)*.

In support of the participation of girls and women in science and technology, the Programme has continued to disseminate the idea of roadshows and clinics. The video, *Righting the Imbalance*, has been in great demand. The publication *Women Too in Science and Technology*, originally published in 1990, was reprinted in 1994 (*EDD Annual Report 1992–93: 11–12*).

Gender Stereotyping in Textbooks and other Educational Materials

Textbooks occupy a central place in curricular materials in all countries, especially in developing countries. The gender biases and stereotyping found in textbooks have therefore contributed greatly to the perpetuation of gender inequalities in society. Such stereotyping reinforces discriminatory attitudes and discourages girls from studying or performing well in subjects traditionally seen as more appropriate for boys, such as mathematics and technology.

Among the strategies stressed at the meeting in Nairobi was the inclusion in curricula, at all educational levels, of examples and discussions of the contribution that women have made, and are making, to the economy. Teaching materials 'should demonstrate clearly the equality of the sexes' and be 'rewritten to ensure that they reflect positive, dynamic and participatory images of women'. Incentives and counselling should be provided to encourage girls to study scientific and technical and managerial subjects at all levels (*Harding and Apea: 1–2*).

A Commonwealth study of primary mathematics in India found that 'in its traditional form mathematics was deeply gendered and [has] pathologised girls and women over many centuries, leaving females learning mathematics in a no-win situation' (*Harris: 2*). The study by Harris reviews the literature; provides a framework for gender analysis of primary textbooks which could be applied to textbooks in use in India; and makes practical suggestions for the in-service training of teachers and teacher educators that address gender sensitivity and could help to develop locally available material for primary mathematics education (*Harris: Preface*).

Girls' Poor Performance in Mathematics

Educationalists have questioned the reasons behind girls' poor performance in mathematics. There was little evidence, but a strong perception, that poor understanding of mathematics prevented girls from doing well in science and technology subjects. It was not clear whether it was mathematics or the way in which schooling was constructed that was blocking girls' entry into the study of science. The way mathematics was taught and the ways in which teachers of mathematics and science were prepared could influence girls' learning of science (Goel and Burton: 9–10).

In 1996 the Commonwealth Secretariat orchestrated a pan-Commonwealth conference on the issue in Ahmedabad, India. The symposium pointed out that the difficulty was caused not by the nature of mathematics, but the way in which mathematics was packaged and delivered. A cluster of issues to be addressed were identified: there was need for comparative studies in different country contexts using qualitative methods; changes were needed at different levels of the system – teacher education, classrooms/schools/community groups, policy-makers and pedagogy; the time devoted to teaching for girls needed to be increased; guidance and counselling should be made available to girls; mathematics teaching should be relevant to the daily needs of girls; and more female role models were needed (Goel and Burton). The follow-up study by Harris revealed a situation where men were doing valued, and women less-valued, things throughout the mathematics sector (Harris).

b. From Research to Action

The work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in gender, and science, mathematics and technology (SMT) has been complemented through collaboration with FAWE's project on Female Education in Mathematics and Science in Africa (FEMSA). FEMSA has made significant inroads into understanding and devising interventions into the problems that keep girls lagging behind boys in science- and mathematics-based subjects. FEMSA's goals are:

- To improve the participation and performance of girls in science, mathematics and technology (SMT) subjects at both primary and secondary levels;
- To stimulate ministries of education and policy-makers to make the necessary adjustments in curriculum, teacher training and examinations, to ensure fuller participation and performance in SMT by both boys and girls.

The Secretariat and its partners have succeeded in placing the issue of women's participation in science, mathematics and technology on the agenda of most countries and agencies in the Commonwealth. There is certainly greater awareness of the need to recruit students into all levels of education to ensure better representation of girls and to direct efforts into removing traditional gender stereotypical attitudes from instructional materials.

FEMSA'S Project on Science, Mathematics and Technology

In the first phase of the project's work, Cameroon, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda completed country profiles on boys' and girls' participation and performance, perceptions of students, teachers, parents, teaching method, syllabuses, examinations, and past and ongoing interventions aimed at improving girls' participation and performance in SMT. This was followed by sensitisation seminars.

In the second phase eight new countries have completed country profiles and FEMSA has moved to action on:

- Advocacy for reform in the key areas of curriculum development, and teacher education and examinations; and
- Interventions concentrating on sensitisation of all stakeholders; motivational activities to promote girls' interests in SMT; teacher in-service training; development of relevant instructional material; and mobilising communities to support school facilities.

FAWE News, January–March 2000: 14

6 Women and Higher Education

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Association of Commonwealth Universities have played a vital role in enhancing the participation of women in higher education. Their efforts have concentrated on two fronts:

- Enabling more women to obtain higher education, in particular post-graduate education, through greater access to Commonwealth awards and fellowships; and
- Improving the participation and status of women in higher education management.

a. Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan which was instituted in 1959 following the recommendations of the first Commonwealth Education Conference in 1959 is, as Chapter 1 has already made clear, the flagship scheme of Commonwealth higher education co-operation. The awards are for 'men and women of high intellectual promise who may be expected to make a significant contribution to life in their own countries on their return from study overseas' (*Report of 1959 Commonwealth Education Conference: 6*). Within the scheme, attention has gradually been given to the poor participation of women and to measures

to alleviate the obstacles that have prevented better uptake of the awards by women.

Throughout the early operation of the plan, female participation was extremely poor. In 1962, only 10.4% of the scholars were female. Almost a decade later, in 1970, female uptake still accounted for only 12.4% of the awards. The first ten-year review of the plan took note of this and proposed the removal of gender-based discrimination in the payment of marriage allowances. These recommendations were endorsed by the 1974 Jamaica Commonwealth Education Conference (*Report of 6CEC*: 31–32). The eighth conference in Colombo (1980), by which time female representation had risen to 20.7%, took up the issue once again and urged scholarship agencies to nominate an adequate number of women applicants for awards so that more of them could be selected for scholarships under the Plan (*Report of 8CEC*: 18).

A second ten-year review of the Plan, conducted on the 25th anniversary of the CSFP, reported to 9CCEM at Nicosia, Cyprus, in 1984. By this time women took up 23.3% of the awards. Several of the receiving countries expressed the strong hope that sending countries would submit more nominations of women candidates so that the proportion of women Commonwealth scholars would be increased. Suggestions for a separate award scheme for predetermined quotas for women were discussed. Though no recommendations were made, it was recognised that there was a need for women to win more awards (*Report of 9CCEM*: 40–41).

The concern of ministers with the continued poor representation of women (20–25%) during the 1980s, was again highlighted at the 11CCEM in Barbados. The CSFP report showed that while there was a small proportional increase over the decade, the absolute number showed a net drop. A number of awarding countries expressed their desire to make more awards to women but pointed out that this was dependent on their being put forward as candidates by nominating countries. A suggestion was made that awarding countries should provide better family support to women scholars through the day-care and other social services which some universities now offer.

In some cases, awarding countries agreed to waive the usual academic requirement (upper second pass) if a nomination was supported by sufficient evidence of the quality of the candidate and his or her ability to carry out advanced academic work. A number of delegates expressed concern that age limits tended to discriminate against candidates with work experience or against women who had stepped out of academic life to raise families. The UK gave special consideration to candidates who had had to postpone their entry or re-entry into higher education (*Report of 11CCEM*: 29).

By the time of the third ten-year review in 1993, it was reported that 33% of the scholars were women. The percentage had risen from 25% at the time of the last CSFP ten-year review, the whole of the improvement having occurred between 1989 and 1993. While this was considered an encouraging phenomenon, there was

a need to go further (*Report of Third Ten-Year Review Committee*: 14). There was some evidence of affirmative action succeeding. In 1991–92, 25% of scholarship applications were submitted by women, the percentage of female nominations was 31% and the percentage of women among those actually taking up awards was 33%. One could infer from this that a modest degree of affirmative action was occurring.

Many countries reported special efforts to increase the number of women who held CSFP awards. For example, some awarding countries had implemented quotas in order to increase the number of awards to women: however there was no consensus among countries on the desirability of extending the use of quotas for the purpose of developing a better gender balance. Others suggested easing the upper age limit for anyone – male and female – who had been out of academic work but who could demonstrate ability and the commitment to return to it. This would be beneficial, especially to women who had interrupted their employment or studies to assume family responsibilities.

It was also evident that some women who had been granted awards had difficulty in taking them up, needing to be accompanied by families that included dependent children. Terms and conditions of awards needed to make special provision for scholars with dependents. There was also need for more flexible immigration procedures allowing the entry of accompanying carers for family dependents (*ibid*: 19).

The issue of awards remains on the agenda of Commonwealth ministers and at the thirteenth conference, held in Islamabad, ministers again noted that women consistently accounted for only about a third of awards (*Report of 13CCEM*: 5). Since then, the situation has somewhat improved in scholarships and the percentage of women scholars now stands at about 40%. The situation on fellowships is less encouraging – women currently hold around 20% (data supplied by the ACU).

In summary, progress in ensuring that women take up a larger share of Commonwealth awards has been slow but steady. Today women are still under-represented in the awards but the numerous affirmative measures have made an impact, raising women's participation from around 10% in 1962 to 40% in 2000.

b. Women and Higher Education Management

The Commonwealth project on women and higher education management addresses the Commonwealth's concern with issues of educational access and quality pertaining to women in higher education. The women's programme was identified as a priority area as it addressed two of the Commonwealth's focal areas in higher education – management and staff development.

Data from many countries made it apparent that administrative leadership remained the domain of men. Women had been and continued to be grossly under-represented in higher education management. A UNESCO-Commonwealth report showed that:

... in spite of advances which women have made in many areas of public life in the past two decades, in the area of higher education management they are still a long way from participating on the same footing as men. With hardly an exception, the in spite of advances which women have made in many areas of public life in the management level and at about twenty to one at senior management level. Women deans and professors are a minority group and women vice-chancellors and presidents are still a rarity.

Dines: 11

The dearth of women in senior administrative positions was viewed from two standpoints. The first was person-centred, in that the paucity of women was attributed to their psycho-social attributes, including the personality characteristics, attitudes and behavioural skills of women themselves. The focus was on the need for women to adapt – to compensate for their socialisation deficits. The alternative perspective is the structure-centred paradigm that advances the view that it is the disadvantageous position of women in the organisational structure which shapes and defines the behaviour of women. The remedy is to make a fundamental change which eliminates inappropriate discrimination in institutional policies and practices (Sheryl Bond).

The Commonwealth Response through the Commonwealth Secretariat and the ACU

To address these issues and to raise the profile of women in higher education, the Secretariat initiated a Women in Higher Education Management Programme for which the ACU offered to be the implementing agency. The programme tried to bring together the previously ad hoc activities of both organisations in a coherent range of activities.

The aim was to facilitate the development of women in Commonwealth universities so that they could use their academic, administrative and, above all, management, skills to contributing to the institutional development of universities, thus securing a significant increase in the number of management positions held by women, as universities redefined and developed their role in the twenty-first century (ACU-CHESS Steering Committee, 1993: 3).

The ACU and the Commonwealth Secretariat worked closely together in developing the remit of the Women's Programme; from 1991, when ACU, the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of a co-operative programme of activities, these three organisations collaboratively planned and gave financial support to a wide variety of projects. The programme chose to make interventions on two fronts: changing the management structures of universities and enhancing the capacity of women in universities to 'break through the glass ceiling' into top management positions.

A broad range of activities was successfully undertaken to achieve the objectives of the programme:

Crucial Strategies to Sustain the Work of the Women's Programme

- The identification and development of a group of core trainers and senior women managers across the Commonwealth who can network with each other and provide leadership in future training activities/initiatives; and
- The ready availability of reliable and user-friendly training materials which could be used by other trainers.

Training Workshops

Considerable work has focused on enhancing the management skills of senior women administrators in higher education. The programme began with a series of management training courses in several parts of the Commonwealth: Bombay (1986 and 1988); Jamaica (1990); Botswana (1991); Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1991); The Gambia (1992); Suva, Fiji (1994); Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (1995); Cape Town, South Africa (1996); Colombo, Sri Lanka (1997); New Delhi, India (1998); Malacca, Malaysia (1999); Kandy, Sri Lanka (1999); and Lagos, Nigeria (1999).

Support continued to be provided at the time of writing, for regional and national training workshops. Planning was underway for the next training workshops in the West Indies and in Pakistan.

Training Modules

A core focus of the programme was the commissioning of user-friendly training materials. The principal product of the activity comprised the training modules which address the key problems encountered by women in higher education management. Six themes were developed:

- *Management Development for Women: A Facilitator's Handbook*, which provides a basic level of information about good training practices;
- *Academic Leadership*, which provides knowledge and skill in the domain of academic leadership, points to a leadership style strongly associated with women and urges that women have the right and the obligation to assume leadership positions in the university;
- *Women's Studies as a Catalyst for the Advancement of Women in Higher Education*, which aims to help create and strengthen a cadre of women leaders on the various campuses who, by their involvement in research, teaching, outreach and advocacy within the university system, can transform the now present male dominated pattern of gender relations within the institution;
- *Managing Personal and Professional Roles*, which deals with the multiple roles that women play in society, and the often expressed dilemma of managing all those roles and achieving a balanced life;

- *Women and Research* which argues that research prowess enables women to take their share of professorial positions and suggests strategies whereby women can improve their research capacity and visibility;
- *Women and Governance in Higher Education*, which highlights the level of participation required to promote the advancement of women to senior positions within the University and assists women to develop their skills in committee and legislation work in order to enable them to contribute effectively to the decision-making process. Ancillary materials focus on:
 - Developing Management Skills, designed to offer women who are leaders and managers in higher education, or wish to become leaders and managers in higher education, the opportunity to develop some of the most useful and important management skills.
 - Women and Mentoring in Higher Education, which looks at the particular relevance of mentoring for higher education and argues that women, through their relatively limited access to higher management, are particularly well suited to mentoring relationships.

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the ACU have published the first six modules. Entitled *Management Development for Women in Higher Education*, the volumes comprise the training modules and the ancillary materials which provide additional resources to increase the richness and diversity of the Programme.

MA in Women and Management in Higher Education

This Master's degree programme on Women and Management in Higher Education at the Institute of Education, University of London commenced in 1998 and is the fruit of collaborative planning initiated by those involved in the Women's Programme through the early Secretariat workshops held in 1995 and 1996. The programme of study has been designed for individuals who want to:

- Understand more about the position of women in educational management;
- Have the opportunity to explore the situation of women in management in higher education;
- Have the opportunity to make informed decisions and plans about their working life.

The ACU continues to support women from less developed countries to attend this one-year MA course. Three cohorts of women had passed through the programme, at the time of writing, including participants from South Africa, Guyana, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Namibia. Several of them have returned home to promotions in their universities, to enrol on PhD courses or to take up new policy-making roles.

Pacific Charter for Women Managers in Higher Education

The University of the South Pacific Council adopted the Pacific Charter for Women Managers in Higher Education on 21 October 1996. This represents a major initiative by Pacific women and a landmark charter to ensure gender equity in higher education in the Pacific.

Surveys and Studies

The programme undertook a number of surveys and studies which have illuminated the status of women in higher education, highlighted the problems they encounter and suggested ways in which the role and status of women in higher education can be enhanced. Prominent among the studies was a book jointly planned and published in 1993 by the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNESCO, under the title *Women in Higher Education Management*. Edited by Elizabeth Dines, it analysed the career paths of women in higher education in the context of national higher education environments.

Other studies have included:

- *Review of Training Workshops*: In 1996, the ACU commissioned a review of the training workshops which had taken place since the inception of the programme in 1985. The review was in part financed by funds from UNESCO.
- *Gender Management Systems*: With funds from the Commonwealth Secretariat, a handbook of good practice in gender management in the higher education sector was commissioned. The aim of the handbook, which is based on a general review of the literature on gender mainstreaming and on country case studies, is to increase awareness and knowledge of strategies and mechanisms used across the Commonwealth and elsewhere to mainstream gender equity into higher education development. The handbook also provides governments and ministries of education with a user-friendly guide to mainstreaming gender integration into all aspects of planning, implementing and evaluating higher education development projects.
- *Equal Opportunity Officers (EOOs)*: With the support of a grant from UNESCO, a survey was undertaken to provide comparative information about what had prompted the establishment of EOs in the university sector, their methods of operation and the impact they have had on their institutions, with special reference to gender. The resulting data were analysed to ascertain the key factors relating to the establishment, management and impact of EOs.
- *Female Staff in Commonwealth Universities*: In 1998 the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service undertook a survey of female staff in Commonwealth universities. Its report, *A Single Sex Profession?: Female Staff Numbers in Commonwealth Countries*, portrays the low level of participation by women academics in universities in general (24%) and the very low level of

participation in senior management of universities (about 10% of professors and 7% of vice-chancellors/presidents).

Reports and Publications

The workshops and projects of the women's programme have generated a large number of reports which are useful resource materials for those working in this field. Publications by associated agencies include:

- A regular feature in each issue of the *ACU Bulletin*, containing articles, reports, news and views about women in higher education management;
- A handbook on good practice in the field of 'Women and Higher Education Management' prepared under the auspices of UNESCO's Special Project – Women, Higher Education and Development. The handbook has brought together examples of international, regional, national, institutional and classroom strategies and practices, which advance the aims of the Special Project and which strengthen the access and participation of women in higher education and in leadership roles both within this sector and in society as a whole.

Special Projects

Two special projects deserve mention. In 1995 and 1996, a three-way exchange project enabled three women academics representing the University of Adelaide, the University of the West Indies and SNDT Women's University (Bombay) to carry out two-week study visits at each other's institutions looking in particular at the teaching of gender studies and at ways in which networks could be developed between the universities to their mutual benefit. The second project, initiated in 1994, was a review and report on strategic development plans to enhance the contribution of women to universities in Southern Africa.

Commonwealth Women's Networks

Pan-Commonwealth and national level networks and contacts have been established to provide mutual support and information to women in higher education in the Commonwealth. The principal network is the *ACU Women's Network*, an electronic network operated from Malaysia. The network circulates information about appointments, successes, publications and research; shares views about women in higher education; publicises events such as conferences, meetings and workshops; poses problems and seeks help and solutions. There are currently about 100 Commonwealth women in this network. The network links up with other national and regional level Commonwealth networks for women in universities. Principal among these are the Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Australian Higher Education; the Senior Women Academic Administrators of Canada (SWAAC); the Australian Technology Network (ATN); the Forum for African Women Educational-

ists, South Africa (FAWESA); the Professional Women's Development Network (PWDN) in the United Kingdom; and the Network of Women in Higher Education in the Pacific (NetWHEP).

Future Activities

The project expects to move towards:

- Mainstreaming gender concerns at all levels of higher education through a Gender Management System for the tertiary education sector;
- Extensive advocacy work with those in a position to effect change;
- Instituting gender sensitisation programmes training for both men and women in higher education;
- Extending the network of senior women managers;
- Developing more link and exchange programmes between women's study centres.

7 The Commonwealth of Learning: Gender in Open and Distance Learning

The overall aim of COL's programme for women in development is to improve the status of women through widening access to education. COL sees distance education as a means of enabling more women to improve the quality of their lives, to play a more active role in their communities, and make a greater contribution to their countries' development.

COL Report to WAMM, 1990

The Commonwealth of Learning is committed to removing barriers to women's access to education through the delivery of gender-balanced programmes and projects, as well as through initiatives that are specifically targeted to benefit women and girls. COL is also committed to participating fully and actively, within the framework of its mandate, in the implementation of the *1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development*.

Open and distance education, because of its flexibility and openness, has the potential to reach the previously 'unreached', such as the disabled and rural poor, and girls and women with quality education. By making learning available at times and places suitable to the particular needs of the student, distance education overcomes many of the barriers faced by girls and women trying to access conventional education systems. Therefore gender issues, especially with respect to equitable access to quality education and training, feature prominently on COL's agenda.

Following on the recommendations of Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987, COL began to develop programmes relating to women in development. The central emphasis of COL's work focused on improving national capacity for

human resource development through better access to education and training. COL identified a comparative advantage in being able to apply open and distance learning methodologies to meet the special educational needs of women. Distance education 'provides them an opportunity to re-enter the educational mainstream or, for those who completely missed formal school, an opportunity to make a start'. COL also saw the need to help women to improve their education and skills for work; to be better home-makers; to re-enter the work force; and to prepare for positions of leadership and responsibility. With the flexibility it offered, open and distance learning 'allows women to study alongside their responsibilities' (*COL Report to WAMM, 1990*).

A conference of women vice-chancellors organised by COL in May 1990 identified open and distance learning as a means of educating both rural and urban women in areas such as basic and functional literacy and legal and health education, as well as providing training in entrepreneurship. It was regarded as important to identify strategies for the empowerment of women in all walks of life, as well as to ensure that modern-day technology was harnessed for the advancement of women (*COL Report to WAMM, 1990*).

a. COL Initiatives 1990-93

Following the initial report to Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs at Ottawa (1990), COL developed a strategic action plan to address the educational and training requirements of women. The provision of adult education for women and access to education and training was recognised as an essential prerequisite for female participation on an equal basis in society. Attention was focused on those aspects of education where women's needs are most critical, such as literacy, teacher-training, and gender and development.

Literacy

Attention was first directed to enhancing literacy among women, a fundamental channel to access education and training, which has been denied many women, particularly in the Commonwealth countries of the South. COL, in conjunction with Pakistan's Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), one of the few Commonwealth institutions offering literacy programmes for women through distance education, hosted a Symposium on Women's Literacy Programmes – The Role of Distance Education in Islamabad, 23-27 September 1991. Its purpose was to orient senior level personnel engaged in literacy and post-literacy programmes in the Asia-Pacific region to methods and techniques of planning, implementing and evaluating such programmes, and to highlight how literacy could be approached through the use of open and distance learning techniques. Presentations and discussions of literacy programmes emphasised the importance of literacy for women as a basic human right and the way to empower women.

In Ghana COL contributed to the Mass Literacy Programme (Masslip), a huge

government literacy programme aimed at raising functional literacy, providing technical advice on the management of the programme, field recording equipment and technical training in the use of recording equipment. Women formed a large percentage of those accessing the classroom instruction, which was facilitated by the government's organisation of free childcare in rural areas.

Gender-Sensitive Statistics

Realising the far-reaching significance of training in statistical analysis and application, the COL agreed to collaborate with the UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) in a South Pacific training workshop to sensitise both users and producers of statistics on the issues and problems relating to statistics and women.

With financial assistance from COL, the New Zealand Open Polytechnic produced a workshop resource book. This was designed to enable participants to identify information available from existing statistical collections, develop key indicators, and present data in a comprehensible form, while assessing the adequacy of existing data.

Teacher and Higher Education

The Government of The Gambia, wishing to upgrade existing teachers, called upon COL to complete a profile of teachers in the education system. The report revealed that a large percentage of untrained teachers were women. This information was used by the government to develop a programme to meet the needs of women teachers.

Statistics in the South Pacific revealed that too few women were accessing the University of the South Pacific's (USP) extension programmes. A group of graduate Pacific women recommended that the university undertake a research survey to identify barriers faced by women in the region in accessing and completing credit courses and programmes offered through distance education by the university.

COL assisted Makerere University, Uganda to establish a Bachelor of Education programme implemented with open and distance learning methodologies. This was completed under the guidance of a female senior lecturer and staff from the University of Nairobi. As a result, an increasing proportion of women have enrolled in the Bachelor of Education courses.

In Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, COL was involved in a refugee teacher training programme with the aim of identifying suitable teaching materials for teacher training in the refugee camps, the majority of whose occupants were women.

In the Caribbean, the COL Teacher Education by Distance Project in Jamaica had an original enrolment of 205 people, 203 of whom were women. Two of the three key personnel involved in the Guyana Distance Education Network project supported by COL were also women, both of whom received special training under COL sponsorship.

Fellowships

In the award of Fellowships, COL paid special attention to ensure that an equitable gender balance was achieved. Of the visiting fellowships awarded, the overall percentage awarded to females was 37.5%. Nominations for visiting fellowships were requested from ministries of education, who were asked to give particular consideration to nominating women. Of the outgoing fellowship awards that send British Columbia educators to developing countries, 27.2% were female.

b. COL Initiatives 1993–96

During this period COL was engaged in preparing materials, conducting research and training related to gender.

Distance-Education Materials

COL published the following materials:

- *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development* (1996), a core module which focuses on the theoretical justification for examining the specific roles and contributions of women to development initiatives;
- *Sensitive Learning Materials: Handbook for Educators* (1995), a handbook designed to be used by those developing distance learning materials to assist in identifying bias concerns and improving capacity for addressing them.

Research

In addition to producing and disseminating the educational resources described above, COL supported research in the field of women and open and distance learning, for example the production of an occasional paper, 'Barriers to Participation of Women in Technological Education and the Role of Distance Education' (1994). COL also provided funding toward a collaborative effort resulting in a University of the South Pacific/COL co-publication, *South Pacific Women in Distance Education* (1995).

Training

COL was also involved in training educators in the techniques of open and distance learning, women and the media, and technology training. In its budget year 1996/97, COL gave high priority to areas which included open schooling, non-formal education and technical teacher training.

c. COL Initiatives 1997–2000

At their 1996 meeting in Trinidad, Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs consistently emphasised the need for more training to raise awareness about the importance of gender issues and to strengthen the capacity for gender mainstreaming.

Ministers also considered gender sensitisation and training in gender planning and analysis vital for key stakeholders. In response, COL's efforts complemented the efforts of other Commonwealth agencies, governments and NGOs in implementing the *1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development*. COL integrated gender issues into its programming both at a broad level and through the development of discrete programmes. In the first instance, COL ensured that its programmes were gender-balanced and worked towards improving access to education and training for girls and women, particularly where imbalances had been identified.

Supporting Basic Education

Programmes to improve conditions for women and children have received priority through the development and implementation of appropriate open and distance learning materials, particularly in support of basic education. Efforts in this area have focused on initiatives to promote open schooling, non-formal education and teacher education, such as:

- Encouraging the development of open schooling systems through collaboration with UNICEF, UNESCO and local institutions. COL has convened regional workshops in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, as well as a national workshop and an international symposium in India on the potential of open schooling for increasing access to basic education for girls and women;
- Working with the Bangladesh Open University to develop a pilot programme to increase the business skills of rural women and to encourage them to become self-employed;
- Working with eight Southern African countries to upgrade teachers, most of whom are women, of upper primary and junior secondary science, mathematics and technology and general education using open and distance learning methodologies;
- Co-ordinating a materials development and training initiative in Southern Africa to provide a suite of high-quality learning materials comprising the core curriculum at the junior secondary level common to the nine countries involved;
- In conjunction with Domasi College and the Malawi Ministry of Education, developing materials to professionally upgrade 3,500 teachers currently teaching without the requisite training.

Other Areas of Work

- Assistance from COL enabled the Women's International Network (WIN) to publish a book on how women can use technologies for open and distance learning.

- COL carried out an environmental scan of the literature and barriers encountered by women in accessing the new information and communications technologies. The scan identified challenging issues on a regional basis. COL initiated regional meetings to discuss regionally specific issues and to identify strategies to address them. The meetings were held in New Delhi, November 1998 (in conjunction with the British Council); Barbados, November 1999; Tanzania, March 2000, and Australia (for the Pacific region), 2001.
- Development and implementation of an electronic database on gender-related training materials available within the UN system and from the Commonwealth Secretariat. Designed to encourage inter-agency collaboration on the design, use and review of materials that support capacity building on gender equality issues, the Steering Committee was composed of representatives from three UN agencies – UNICEF, UNIFEM and UNDP. The database is directly accessible through the UN WomenWatch website (the UN Internet gateway on the advancement of women) in conjunction with a best practices website, COL's website, and the Gender link on the Commonwealth Secretariat's website. The database's main purpose is to organise training material into a readily accessible resource base that provides useful and strategic links to agencies, and their materials, with experience in gender training. COL undertook the design and implementation of this project with the continued guidance of the Steering Committee. The database was showcased during the year 2000 review of the Platform for Action (Beijing +5) as a demonstration of a co-ordinated response to the Beijing strategies and actions. This meeting took place in New York in June 2000.
- The need to increase literacy levels, particularly among girls and women, remains one of the pre-eminent educational challenges facing developing Commonwealth nations. COL, in conjunction with the UK Department for International Development, has undertaken the development of a pilot project in selected Commonwealth countries to explore ways in which literacy programmes can be enhanced through the application of information and communications technologies. The project is currently underway in India and Zambia. Its goal is to demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness of technology-based community learning centres through which literacy workers can develop learner competencies in reading, numeracy, and the use and operation of information and communication tools. Initiated in 1998, the Implementation Plans have been developed in conjunction with the two in-country project directors to guide the project over the next three years.

d. Future Directions for COL

COL's current strategic plan builds on and strengthens its contribution to enhancing the participation of women in development through increased access to educa-

tion and training. Its Three-Year Plan, 2000–2003, focuses on the application of distance-, open- and technology-mediated education in a broad range of sectors, including basic and primary education and skills development. COL also invites ministers responsible for women's affairs and their colleagues to engage COL in a dialogue on key gender issues, and to explore ways in which distance education and open learning methodologies can be adapted to address the issues of equitable access to quality education and training, professional upgrading, teacher training and retraining, upgrading of skills in those areas critical to poverty reduction and elimination and other areas which COL's expertise can be harnessed in the realisation of ministries' objectives (*COL Report to WAMM*, 1999). A broader survey of COL's work will be found in Chapter 6.

8 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

a. Strengths

The policies, structures and processes to mainstream gender into all aspects of Commonwealth development have been put in place. The Commonwealth's vision of gender in development has been clearly enunciated in its *1995 Plan of Action on Gender and Development*, which has been endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government and subscribed to by Commonwealth countries at the national level. Commonwealth agencies, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth of Learning have adopted the strategies and mechanisms recommended in the Plan of Action and formulated their programmes and projects from a gender perspective.

This chapter has shown that, in developing their educational programmes and projects, both the Secretariat and COL adhere closely to the guidelines drawn from the Plan of Action. Both agencies have included a gender dimension into their work affecting all levels of education. Commonwealth agencies have also collaborated very effectively with other agencies having similar aims. Considerable attention has been given to ensuring that the Commonwealth programmes which enhance the participation of girls at the basic level give due consideration to enabling more girls to attain basic levels of literacy and numeracy through the formal system of education, as well as a range of out-of-school initiatives. To make girls and women more competitive in the new scientific and technological fields of employment and in the knowledge industries, special attention has been paid to girls and women's access to science and technology education and to the new communication technologies. At the upper level of the education sector, women's access to the award of scholarships and fellowships encourages greater uptake by women. Women's entry into senior management positions in higher education has been promoted by the Women and Management Programme.

The Commonwealth has succeeded in creating an enabling environment for the achievement of gender equity in education. The review of policies, strategies and programmes in development in general, and education in particular, indicates that appropriate guidelines and structures have assisted the various Commonwealth

agencies and their functional divisions to ensure more equitable representation of girls and women at all levels of education. The gender perspective is advocated throughout the development, implementation and assessment of education activities in the Commonwealth.

b. Weaknesses

Why then is the reality still far from the vision?

The principal obstacle within the Commonwealth agencies has been the lack of resources to push programmes forward. Over the last decade, funds available for programme implementation have gradually shrunk and budget allocations for projects have been inadequate for carrying out wide-ranging programmes that can make a real impact. Where possible, staff have collaborated with other agencies and have been able collectively to launch activities which are making a difference on the ground. However, the resources are grossly inadequate to address the enormous problem of girls' disadvantage in education. Despite the efforts of Commonwealth agencies, national governments and NGOs, and despite the strenuous efforts of UN agencies pursuing Education for All, the problems of girls' attendance in schools in many of the south Asian countries and in Africa continue to be of great concern. Exhortations by ministers of education and ministers responsible for women's affairs that more funds should be provided for the education of girls and women have not borne fruit. Faced with many competing demands on their resources, Commonwealth governments and the Secretariat are unable to match the intention to raise the level of girls' participation in education with the necessary funds.

A second, related, factor has been the slow process by which staff have been made aware of the policies, sensitised to the issues and acquired competencies to plan their own programmes from a truly gender perspective. The division responsible for this at the time (GYAD) put in place most of the structures such as gender steering committee, gender focal points and training for staff. Requirements from SPEU and the management, that all projects must pay attention to their impact on women, have again strongly influenced the planning of programmes and the presentation of project proposals. Reporting procedures have also required data to be disaggregated and the impact on women clearly noted. However, limitations of time and resources, have hindered the implementation and impact of policies and guidelines. It is expected that as more staff are exposed to the tools of gender mainstreaming, the changes in project plans and implementation will become more real than cosmetic.

c. Opportunities

The opportunities for achieving gender equity in the education sector of Commonwealth countries have been recognised and much work has commenced, marking important steps towards the attainment of this objective. In this respect,

the Commonwealth has been a leading light for others to follow. The Plan of Action, together with all the work that has gone into developing strategies for mainstreaming gender through evolving gender management systems, represents a groundbreaking initiative. Much more can be expected from carrying this work forward.

The Commonwealth represents a unique model for co-operation. The Secretariat's successive teams and the COL have demonstrated their ability to achieve much with limited resources. Given more resources and continued co-operation with partners, the potential for expanding current work is enormous.

The Commonwealth also has a wealth of experience that can be tapped to assist the development of new models of co-operation and new programmes. 'Learning from each other' is an accepted Commonwealth way. While there is much evidence of this having happened in the field of education, the possibilities for more studies, greater sharing of information, building of networks and developing new models for enhancing women's and girls' education cannot be ignored.