

Preface

The Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development presents a vision in which the Commonwealth works towards “a world in which women and men have equal rights and opportunities in all stages of their lives to express their creativity in all fields of human endeavour, and in which women are respected and valued as equal and able partners in establishing the values of social justice, equity democracy and respect for human rights. Within such a framework of values, women and men will work in collaboration and partnership to ensure sustainable economic and social development for all nations”

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of her/his country. Women can represent gender concerns more effectively, because of their particular experiences and interests, and because they have greater knowledge of gender issues and perspectives. They can also bring a more constructive and less adversarial style to politics. The social, economic and political empowerment of women is therefore essential for achieving transparent, accountable and efficient government and administration.

This compilation brings together profiles of 33 women politicians from 11 Commonwealth countries, representing government, opposition and civil society. Their stories reveal the experiences of women when they enter the political arena and try to make a significant contribution to the political, economic and social agenda in their countries. The richness of experiences of women who come from countries which share a common heritage of law, education, language, government systems and administrative practices, provides a tapestry of good practices, strategies and lessons for other women. Their profiles will be a source of inspiration to women who are already involved in politics as well as those who are contemplating entering the world of politics. The message of hope from these real-life experiences is that although the path is never easy, with determination, perseverance and a commitment to democratic ideals, women can work in partnership with men to build a better world.

The Commonwealth is committed to increasing women’s participation in all political and democratic processes. In 1995, Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women’s Affairs recommended a target of no less than 30 per cent of women in decision-making by the year 2005. The experiences of the women politicians will not only provide role models for the Commonwealth but will present the global community with insights into the political empowerment process of women in the context of the Commonwealth’s fundamental values – democracy and governance, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and sustainable development.

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