

Chapter 21

Conclusion

21.1 Key factors for success

The case studies featured reflect a decade of commitment, energy and innovation on the part of Commonwealth countries in advancing the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2005–15). There is a strong demonstration of positive results from governmental and civil society interventions to find innovative ways to address the structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from participating equally in society.

The significance of this collection of case studies is the light they shine on ways of changing the perceptions of both women and men about the role women can play in political, economic and social development. There are several common elements appearing throughout the case studies that can be highlighted as key factors for designing successful interventions to advancing gender equality and empowering women. These are as follows:

21.1.1 The importance of multi-stakeholder engagement

When many different actors combine their individual strengths they can achieve significant collective results. Working with leaders across the public and private sectors, regulators, professional organisations and entities – such as stock exchanges and chambers of commerce – helps to create working environments in which women’s corporate leadership is nourished. Engaging with a range of stakeholders in the private sector including employers, business associations and employee representatives, informs the creation of business-focused tools and methodologies that promote gender equality at the workplace in a way that makes economic sense and is appealing to employers.

Most of the case studies attest to the important and varied support of national women’s machineries – from building a cross-party platform for women parliamentarians to strengthen their collective power (Pakistan), to providing policy advice to increasing leadership and governance capacity across a range of different industries in New Zealand. Similarly, partnerships with NGOs and CSOs, community leaders and non-traditional partners, such as popular local artistes, have been important in raising public awareness on VAWG, helping women to access available services and supporting survivors of violence to reintegrate into their communities. NGOs and CSOs often contribute to monitoring performance, research, the development and implementation of laws and protocols, and outreach.

21.1.2 Shifting social norms through engagement with men

Gender equality is not a solely a ‘women’s issue’ and women are not the only ones who will benefit from a more equal society. Rigid gender norms impact the daily lives

of both women and men. Men face gender-specific issues such as poor health, lower life expectancy and lower education levels. Men should also be included in changes towards eliminating discrimination against women and girls. The case studies demonstrate the extent to which women advocates are engaging men as champions of gender equality.

Successful interventions for addressing GBV, HIV/AIDS and gender equality in the workplace have proactively engaged with men to get their personal commitment to be champions of change in their own communities, at work and in government. This has been exemplified through the Workplace Gender Equality Act in Australia and the Pacific Women's Network to engage men through selection and training to be advocates for VAWG prevention in addition to others. Synchronising activities by women and men appears to be the most effective approach and monitoring the work of male advocates helps to ensure accountability to the lead women's organisation.

21.1.3 An integrated approach to addressing GBV

This trend can be seen across several countries featured in the case studies. GBV survivors often face physical, emotional and psychological trauma. This requires access to a variety of services simultaneously to address their multiple needs and can result in further discrimination and victimisation while accessing services. The success of GBV integrated service provision depends on co-ordinated programming that engages the different sectors across multiple levels with institutional buy-in of key stakeholders. Collaboration between the various service providers (medical, legal, police) is essential and services that are adequately resourced and located under one roof can be more readily accessed, leading to increased report and service demand as more people are able to benefit. The last decade has been the most progressive in terms of introducing new laws aimed at preventing VAWG.

21.1.4 Availability of specific funds, resources and opportunities for women

The case studies illustrate that positive, significant and measurable results are achieved when dedicated resources and specific opportunities are made available for programmes on women's rights and gender equality. Whether it is specialised police units to tackle GBV (Botswana); provisions to guarantee women's employment under government programmes (India); introducing gender equality legislation in the workplace (Australia); providing access to credit, mentoring and skills-building programmes; or supporting entry into markets that foster entrepreneurship; when adequate resources are available considerable progress is made towards achieving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Women's organisations still have limited resources to deliver their mandates so out of necessity they closely monitor distribution and seek to ensure effective allocation. Organisations that collaborate widely with like-minded groups and individuals can develop a partnership programme involving both financial and in-kind support to offset limited resources.

21.1.5 A comprehensive approach to building women's leadership and raising consciousness of women and men

The case studies show that while access to resources is key to advancing gender equality it is insufficient on its own to transform the deeply ingrained structures that discriminate at the individual, community and institutional levels. For such transformative changes to take place, interventions must adopt approaches that aim to shift the consciousness of men and women, particularly in positions of leadership, and build the agency of women to exercise individual choice and collective action for positive change. A comprehensive approach that considers all the various actors and coordinates across sectors for collective action and change is required. This is exemplified in the New Zealand Women in Leadership Programme that focused on challenging unconscious bias of individuals, including the women themselves as the programme supported women to re-enter the workforce, while at the same time creating shifts in organisational policies such as planning for better work-life balance and talent management for women to develop careers into leadership.

21.1.6 Strong advocacy and media awareness-raising campaigns

Strong advocacy and media awareness campaigns help to create an enabling environment for successful interventions. The case studies report on an impressive range of media and advocacy tools – from short films and documentaries to gender equality workplace toolkits to e-learning modules that provide innovative strategies like how to start conversations on workplace gender equality, and how to use practical tools such as the pay-gap calculator.

In Tanzania, CHAMPION's strategy of combining national media awareness alongside local community outreach and sensitisation was particularly effective, allowing messages at the community level to resonate and be reinforced by the wider national campaign. The 'Be a Role Model' national campaign, which aimed to reduce social acceptance of intimate partner violence, followed months of workshops and one-to-one dialogues at individual, community and regional levels. The campaign's messages reached more than 4.5 million people in six months using ads in eight newspapers, two television stations and three radio stations, posters and brochures, and community outreach.

Nigeria's 'She Should Contest' campaign has opened up new avenues for democratic decision-making. This online conversation about getting more women into the political sphere enables ordinary citizens to participate in candidate nomination and election through a simple 'type-and-click' forum. Most importantly, it has removed a critical barrier to women's participation in politics – lack of information and access to resources – and challenged a common perception that women's exclusion from political office is acceptable and culturally appropriate.

21.1.7 Robust data collection and co-ordination

The case studies view sex-disaggregated data as essential, whatever the intervention, and as a necessary pre-requisite to applying successful and better targeted interventions.

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus initiative in Pakistan advocates for data to be acquired and monitored. Strengthened and computerised national and provincial electoral databases are also required to ensure effective analysis of actual political participation and to enable better-informed policy-making.

In Bangladesh the One-Stop Crisis Centre emphasises data collection, which has been instrumental in monitoring the quality of service provision so that corrective measures can be put in place as needed. Monitoring and evaluation is also behind the regular, rigorous and standardised collection of data on women and children protection units in Namibia. The data is utilised to track cases involving GBV, including information about outcomes and services provided to complainants.

The Central Registry on Domestic Violence, piloted in Trinidad and Tobago, demonstrates how a more coordinated approach to data collection across agencies can contribute to improving the reliability of data sources and can support more effective interventions to address violence against women. This case study outlines the importance of the Registry but also reports a number of challenges including unavailability of data, threats to data quality, limited human resource capability and the need for software training, which should be considered for more effective implementation.

21.2 Moving forward

There is a need to carry forward the lessons learned and the successful strategies utilised and featured in these case studies. There are an increasing number of actors involved in promoting gender equality but not all of them are using an integrated holistic approach, which has been proven to be the most powerful tool for achieving results. Although much was achieved over the life of the PoA, there is still more to be done. It is hoped that policy makers, civil society actors, private sector stakeholders and the donor community will always consider policies from a gender and pro-poor perspective to ensure that women and men, boys and girls are able to contribute to, and benefit from, development opportunities. Gender equality will be severely constrained if policies and programmes of the type described in the case studies are not more widely developed, resourced and implemented.