

FOREWORD

'Ladies in Limbo' began as set of consultancies in preparation for a workshop on the management, organisation and structure of Women's Bureaux in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The case studies have been developed into a book by Shirley Gordon, a Jamaican with long experience of development projects in the Caribbean and Latin America. The Commonwealth Secretariat wishes to thank her and all four consultants, Peggy Antrobus, Hazel Blake, Sonja Harris, Joycelyn Massiah and Magda Pollard, for their hard and committed work.

After working with the national machineries of Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana and Jamaica, the four consultants, the heads of the Bureaux, (except of Grenada) and two resource people from the Commonwealth met for two and a half days in Barbados.

There, the group used the case studies as the basis of a thorough analysis of their current and common situations. They discussed structure and staffing, the relative means of locating the bureaux in one Ministry vs. another. They shared problems; responsibility without authority, objectives and functions not supported with the resources to implement them, and they assessed their achievements. At the end of these two and a half days, the group prepared a document, incorporating their discussions, which analysed their needs and identified supports required for improved performance. At this point, the group was joined by the Permanent Secretaries responsible for the bureaux and they began this second half of the meeting by discussing the issues presented.

What was most apparent on the first day with the Permanent Secretaries was the mismatch of perceptions as to what exactly the functions of a Women's Bureau should be. It became obvious that, as the impetus for the creation of Women's Bureaux had come from the international community, those charged with executive management, the Permanent Secretaries, had been isolated from essential debate on the role, function and priorities of the bureaux.

Over the next two days, discussions centred on developing mechanisms which could assist both the Permanent Secretaries in the better management and the Bureaux Heads in supports necessary for the implementation of their tasks. Together, the Permanent Secretaries and Bureaux Heads drew up an Action Plan to support National Machineries which undertook:

- the identification in each country of the most appropriate location for the Bureau and the inter-ministerial linkages and supports required
- the assessment of resources, both human and financial, necessary to strengthen and support the work of the Bureau
- assessment of training needs of staff
- development of measures of effectiveness which would enable Permanent Secretaries and staff alike to evaluate the achievements of specific targets and programmes adopted

For the while, the staff of the Bureaux remain Ladies in Limbo. It can but be hoped that the understanding established at that initial workshop will stimulate activity designed to support and enhance the true potential of national machineries for women's affairs.

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