



Balancing Political Participation: Moving Towards Gender Equality

Islamabad, Pakistan

16 – 20 July 2006

RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

A workshop on “Balancing Political Participation: Moving Towards Gender Equality”, was held at the Marriot Hotel, Islamabad, Pakistan from 16 to 20 July 2006. Participants at the workshop were Parliamentarians from four of the Commonwealth member states of South Asia – Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – and the four Provincial Assemblies of Pakistan (the constituent Branches of the CPA Asia Region). The workshop was organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Parliament of Pakistan.

The core objectives of the workshop were:

- To develop strategies for increasing women’s representation and participation in government and decision-making levels at all levels, particularly in the context of legal and policy frameworks adopted by member Governments, including the Commonwealth Plan of Action, Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Beijing Platform for Action;
- To identify the intersections between gender, democracy, poverty reduction, HIV/AIDs and sustainable development; and
- To explore gaps and challenges affecting young people as they attempt to participate in political and governance processes.

At the end of the three days of plenary and working group discussions, participants agreed to the following recommendations to provide the framework for future actions and initiatives in the Region:

STRATEGIES TO INCREASE WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION AND PARTICIPATION

- **Budget:** Parliaments should introduce truly consultative Gender Responsive Budgeting initiatives as a mechanism to hold Governments accountable and ensure that intended beneficiaries of budget allocations actually benefit from such allocations.
- **Education:** The school curriculum should introduce concepts of gender equality and a positive portrayal of the role of women in society.
- **Electoral Systems:** In jurisdictions where list systems of proportional representation are in place, they should encourage the election of women e.g. employing the ‘zebra’ formula of South Africa where lists ensure that every third person on a list is a woman. Parties must ensure that at least 30% of open seats should be contested by women.

- **Gender Disaggregated Data:** It is critical that gender disaggregated data and indicators are developed and made publicly available to highlight the low representation of women in the Region.
- **Mentoring:** Parliamentarians should consider mentoring newer women Members to strengthen their skills and capacity to engage in parliamentary processes.
- **Parliamentary:** Women should consider establishing an All Party Caucus for Women in Parliament to encourage solidarity, influence policies and promote the achievement of gender equality.
- **Political Culture:** Patronage and sexual harassment should be removed from the political landscape.
- **Political Parties:** Political parties should be mandated to ensure at least 30% women's representation and participation at all levels of the party structure and nomination lists.
- **Role of Media:** A good working relationship between Parliament and the media is important and should be encouraged.
- **Special Measures:** Where possible, targeted and specific measures such as quotas and affirmative action policies should be used to increase women's participation and representation at all levels as mandated by the Commonwealth Ministers for Women's Affairs in the [Commonwealth Plan of Action](#) and endorsed by all Commonwealth Heads of Government, e.g. Pakistan reserves 17% representation at the federal and provincial level of government. In addition, there should be no differences in treatment between directly elected women and women on reserved seats.
- **Training:** There should be adequate training and capacity-building initiatives on parliamentary practice and procedure, development of leadership skills, and dealing with the media, as well as networking with other Parliaments to exchange information and ideas.

THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN HIV/AIDS, MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES AND GOOD GOVERNANCE¹

- **Awareness:** Parliamentarians should play an advocacy role and share knowledge with others in order to raise public awareness, reduce stigma, facilitate access to treatment, and facilitate collaboration among relevant ministries and agencies.
- **Budgets:** Budgetary resources for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other diseases on the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) must be mobilized, and targeted initiatives should be encouraged, particularly for women, children and other vulnerable groups.
- **Education:** Parliamentarians can make effective efforts to educate their fellow colleagues on the devastating socio-economic, demographic and human rights impact of HIV/AIDS and they must address its challenges from a multi-sectoral perspective.
- **Leadership:** Parliamentarians must play an effective role in improving interaction between Government, civil society and other stakeholders and mobilize fellow Parliamentarians to address these health issues, both nationally and internationally.
- **Parliamentary:** Parliamentarians should form All Party forums on HIV/AIDS to develop policies relating to the pandemic.

¹ These recommendations should be read in the context of the CPA report on [The Role of Parliamentarians in Combating the HIV/AIDS Pandemic](#)

- **Poverty Reduction:** Parliamentarians should insist on full participation in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP) [as recommended by CPA](#) and, through PRSP, they should address poverty reduction challenges, such as poor nutrition and salary parity, which confront women in the Region.
- **Role of the Media:** The media must be engaged in combating the spread of the pandemic through advocacy campaigns, including the 'Abstinence, Be faithful, Condomize and Declare' (ABC & D) slogan.
- **Special measures:** Parliamentarians should introduce legislation to protect the rights of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and to combat discrimination and stigma.
- **Voluntary Counselling and Testing:** Parliamentarians must show leadership in encouraging people to step forward to seek Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT).

BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE TO CREATE ACCESS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

- **Constitutional/legislative reforms:** Provision for young people's participation must be included in legislative instruments and policies such as National Youth Policies. In addition, where there are discriminatory laws against young people, such laws must be repealed or amended accordingly.
- **Education:** Education remains a powerful and necessary tool. Young people must engage in advocacy, sensitization of themselves and their societies on issues of governance and the role and contribution of youth as it relates to sustainable development.
- **Exchange Programmes:** Information sharing, networking and partnerships should be encouraged amongst young people. Such information sharing should focus on good practices which are result oriented e.g. Youth Parliaments which are promoted by the CPA.
- **Mentoring:** It is crucial to mentor young people so as to assist in developing their capacity to participate and represent.
- **Power relations:** Issues of democratic politics and governance relate to power relations and so young people must be assertive and push for their rights to participate and be represented at all levels to be actualised.
- **Rights-Based Approach:** Emphasis must be laid on rights, privileges and duties, so that young people are aware that they have a responsibility to hold Governments accountable. Conversely, everyone, including young people, should be aware there are duties to their societies.
- **Role of the Media:** The media have a crucial role to play in efforts to address attitudinal change towards politics and governance issues.
- **Special Measures:** Where possible, targeted and special measures such as quotas should be used to create access to, and the inclusion of, young people in political and governance processes. Sri Lanka, for example, provides that 40% nominations at the local government level must be people under the age of 35.
- **Youth Caucuses:** Young people should form organized groups to provide themselves with a forum to discuss and network on issues confronting them. Such groups could develop a 'youth manifesto' and Governments should work in partnership to allow youth voices be heard.