

Discussion Papers

# Commonwealth Women and Development Partnerships

Anuradha M. Chenoy

Discussion Paper # 224



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विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली



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# Commonwealth Women and Development Partnerships

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Anuradha M. Chenoy\*

## Introduction

The diversity, difference and yet historical binding give the states and people of the Commonwealth scope for collective development through partnership and alliance. In the combined aims of the Commonwealth Charter and statements of the CHOGM there is clear commitment to mainstreaming gender in policies and institutions supported by the Commonwealth. In 2015, CHOGM took the decision to promote actions that would get more women into leadership roles.

Gender is integral to the Goals of CHOGM 2018 of: sustainable development, tackling climate change, deepening democracy with good governance, rule of law and practice of human rights and ensuring human security by tackling the threat from terrorisms and crimes. Women need to have an equal if not lead role in these goals that tie in with the sustainable development goals (SDGs) committed to by all Commonwealth states. Commonwealth Secretary General's Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland's declared goal of 50:50 role for men and women in the economy by 2030 as a target is worthy of adopting simultaneously by all states.

The central argument of this paper is that holistic state policies are essential to fulfil these aims, with an equal role for women at multiple levels to create processes and institutions to achieve these goals. This position is in keeping with evidence based development literature that argues that women's empowerment and inclusion leads to more sustainable, faster development. A Development Assistance Committee

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(DAC) Report of 1998 reported that the effectiveness of foreign aid increases if it targets and focuses on women's equality. We argue that development assistance methodology where India is playing a lead role, rooted in the South-South Cooperation framework, also put gender at its centre.

This paper analyses (1) the gap between rhetoric and reality of CHOGM declarations and tries to measure how far Commonwealth states are moving towards implementing their declared commitments. (2) How Commonwealth countries development assistance and cooperation policies (and foreign aid) and their implementation are inclusive of women in all development policy measures. (3) What are some of the good practices adopted by states to be more inclusive of women that can be used by others? (4) How can CHOGAM create partnerships to facilitate equality and inclusion of women?

## **Closing the Rhetoric Gap**

Research, evidence and accepted knowledge has established that states in the world as in the Commonwealth are highly unequal, and as inequality increases, unequal relations and positions between sub groups at different levels and genders also increase.

Gender inequality is embedded in unequal power relations that stems from the unequal access and possession of assets, including land; typecast roles where women are largely confined to reproductive, care roles; tied to private spaces; silence and normalization of violence and threats against women, symbolic use of women as territory and honour of the community; and many other such characteristics of patriarchy. Commonwealth policies and commitment to improving gender relations and inclusivity of women has been repeatedly announced at CHOGM and commitments made. Gender equality is a principle in the Commonwealth Charter. How far has this commitment rhetoric translated into policy? How has policy turned into practice?

Gender development indices of the UNDP brought out by the Commonwealth secretariat, highlight that these inequalities continue to

exist. The gender gap remains highest in the less developed countries of the Commonwealth, has improved slightly in the middle income countries and women's inclusion and leadership is highest in the high income countries like the UK, New Zealand and Australia. This indicates that it is not just high growth helps women's empowerment but on the contrary the inclusion of women in all sectors and state policies targeting women assists in sustainable development. Much ground has to be traversed in order to achieve any level of parity between genders.

Some of the successful practices in Commonwealth countries include:

- Singapore increased government expenditure on education, health and social expenditure in the last few years, while decreasing its expenditure on defence marginally.
- Women in the labour force have increased in Nepal and Sri Lanka, but declined or remain static in India.
- Legislation in India like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Right to Education make adequate provisions for women's employment and education. Measures like Swachh Bharat (Clean India), schemes for providing cooking gas help empowering and supporting women's labour. There are more girls receiving primary education today, than ever before in Indian history. Education for girls is being incentivized by state endowments.
- Most Commonwealth countries have mainstreamed gender equality as national goals, but cultural impediments such as the lower status of women, poverty, violence against women, corruption and fragile institutions remain barriers.
- In 2015, 53 Commonwealth countries had 30% women representatives in the lower and upper house of parliaments and number of women in the cabinet and speakers of assemblies had significant increase. Reservation of women at local grass root level administration has increased, and shows better results. (For example, a study from UN Women showed that 62% of districts led by women panchayat leaders had more drinking water projects, compared to those led by men).

## **Inclusive policies and restricted implementations**

Best practices and setting goals. The Commonwealth Secretariat's setting goals and measuring results is good practice. Regular reports, the latest being: 'The Commonwealth Plan of Action (PoA) for Gender Equality 2005-2015', set out by the heads of national women's machineries, charted in their earlier meetings assesses the progress of Commonwealth states in the critical areas of gender related to democracy, peace and conflict; Human rights, poverty eradication, economic empowerment and in HIV/AIDS. It lists the successes in these programs as well as the large gaps that continue to exist.

Implementation the PoA is critical. The report suggests that governments can benefit with engagement with CSOs, media and private sectors and believes in facilitating CSOs. It argues that cultural and religious organizations be used "in raising public awareness and promoting changes in attitudes on gender issues." This however, requires government policy changes on women's roles and how they are treated. The Commonwealth secretariat is committed to spread knowledge and provide resources for gender equality. In addition monitoring, evaluation and reporting is an integral part of the process, of very four year strategic planning period. (The Commonwealth Plan...2005-15).

Our first conclusion is that an assessment of CHOGM promises and follow up reports from the secretariat suggest that there is an attempt to bridge the gap between rhetoric and implementation by many countries. However several others are not accountable enough to the promises made, leading to fears of an empty rhetoric. The national and local women's and civil society groups have pointed this out and attempted to use rhetoric entrapment to their leadership. CHOGM leaders should accept the verdict of their own autonomous women's groups and CSO's, that much more needs to be done and priority given to fill the gender inequality gap.

## **Aid and Development Partnerships**

While aid and development assistance has directly targeted women in the 1970's, the approach changed in the 1980's to mainstreaming



gender, which proposes a gender perspective in all policies and programmes. Evidence has shown that many such programmes have not worked because of lack of capacity. Other research shows that direct targeting of issues like reproductive health, enhancing women's economic participation is more successful as an intervention. (Swain and Garikati, 2014) No indicators clearly show that foreign aid transforms gender relations, lessens inequality and ends poverty. But nonetheless even incremental changes go a long way. Further domestic, national, regional policies if synchronized with development assistance promote development as the well-known case of South Korea has shown (or even Europe after the Marshal Plan).

Our second conclusion is that both approaches- the targeted as well as mainstreaming approaches need to be combined. Assistance to Women's programmes for health, education and capacity building should continue while women are encouraged in other sectors in equal opportunity/ quotas based policies.

## **New and Feminist Approaches to AID and Development Assistance**

With newly emerging countries like India and South Africa providing significant aid/ development assistance, Countries like Singapore, Malaysia and others, becoming middle level donors, different methodologies based on development partnerships as opposed from foreign aid have emerged, from those adopted by the DAC-OECD.

India's model of development assistance for example, is rooted in the South-South Co-operation framework; views it's assistance not as aid but partnership; focuses on the demand from the partner; is unconditional and non- interventionist on the question of rights; development assistance has broadened to include Lines of Credit, concessional loans, technical assistance, loan waivers, scholarships, capacity building. (Chaturvedi, 2012, a&b).

DAC-OECD policies have set clear principles that support women's equality in aid programmes. In this context, special mention needs to

be made of Canada's new foreign aid policy of 2017 which focuses on women's rights, and within five years 15% of development assistance will be for gender equality programs compared to 2% in 2015-16. All sectors of aid will have to integrate women's equality. Canada's partners will have to consult women locally and include them in decision making when launching new programs. Priority will be given to Sub Saharan Africa and fragile states. The aid policy calls itself feminist approach. This approach shows that alternative approaches by state actors are possible.

Similarly UK and Australia's gender equality and women's empowerment are core part of development aid, economic diplomacy, and foreign policy. Their goals are synchronized with OECD-DAC principles on enhancing women's voice in decision making, leadership and peace making, promoting women's economic empowerment and ending violence against women and girls. The Australian target is that 80% of investments, regardless of their primary objectives must address gender issues. (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs)

In contrast, there are some gender gaps in India's development assistance policy, as summed up in the conclusions of conference proceedings on gender in India and Africa cooperation, where it was agreed that even as India and Africa share a long history of partnership, this "has remained inattentive to gender issues." And that development partnership "needs to be contextualized in a deliberate, gender-inclusive manner" to ensure the Sustainable Development Goal (5) to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. (Mishra, 2015). Clearly, several steps to filling the gender gap in development partnership remain to be taken.

Indian DA has been well received by recipient countries. The Government of India has engaged with some large Indian CSOs like SEWA to initiate empowerment programmes with Afghan women. The solar mamas programme of the barefoot college supported by the ITEC programme has in the last decade trained 604 women who in turn have helped in the electrification of 1083 villages in 63 countries across Latin America, Africa, Middle East and Asia. (Desai, 2014) In addition to other programmes like rooftop rainwater harvesting

The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Program offers over 10,500 slots to 161 partner countries on a vast number of courses ranging from English, IT, technical skills etc. It would be very significant contribution if all these courses included a special module that includes gender, climate change, democracy and rights and how these are linked to development needs.

India has offered \$10 billion for development projects in Africa over five years from 2018. India has extended 155 lines of credit putting in already \$7.6 billion to 44 countries. (Vora, Business Line, 2017). An assessment needs to be made how women and excluded sections of societies can benefit from these.

India has been inclusive of gender in several of its key development programmes. For example, in the India-sponsored scholarships to the Initial Teacher Education and Training program for African participants, so far, only about 34% are availed by women. (Aman Sinha, 2015). Indian missions in Africa are propagating and facilitating that women participate in the various capacity building and scholarship programs being offered in India. The results are still to come.

Other countries of the Commonwealth that provide development assistance and capacity building programmes include: Malaysia, Singapore, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Malaysia's Technical Assistance Cooperation, (Outside DAC, like India) that supports capacity building programmes for ASEAN neighbours and also West Asia and African countries, is also a major input. In these combined programmes, thousands of trainers and officials are being trained. These people can be effective transmitters of gender and environmental goals.

Our third conclusion is that all capacity building and technical assistance programmes done by Commonwealth partners should include a gender module. A fine gender training module has been prepared by UNWomen that can be used.

## **Gaps and Challenges**

Many regions in Africa, and part of the Commonwealth, like the sub Sahara countries, that includes Ghana, Lesotho, and others remain in the poverty trap. Billions of dollars of foreign aid has not reached those it is intended for, but 'lost' in delivery. (A 2004-2005 World Bank Report showed that \$148 billion was embezzled outside of Africa by politicians and bureaucrats. Significant amount of which was foreign aid and loans for development for poor. Jallow,2010) The economy of Tanzania contracted despite pouring in of massive foreign aid that supported local development experiment, between 1973-1988.

Consequently donors and partners have identified new methodologies where capacity building is seen as the answer to under development. There is a need to harmonize and synchronize these as much as possible and at least share good practices and experiences. The Commonwealth can examine trilateral development partnerships in these regions, especially on programmes for women.

## **Way Forward and Building on Past**

To gauge the way forward, it would be useful to look at the review of the Commonwealth 2005-2015, Plan of Action (PoA) titled: 'An End Term Review of the PoA' that brought out serious findings and lessons learnt, that provide pointers for future strategies and plans:

- POA was a useful structure but had no binding policies.
- Except for the target of 30% reservation for women in political and public spheres, there were no targets.
- Lack of focus as there were too many calls for actions and it was not possible for the secretariat to monitor or implement these.
- Lack of flexibility, as ten year period was too long and not flexible enough to shift emerging issues.
- Lack of awareness- as many organizations unaware of plans.
- Lack of monitoring, evaluation and accountability.

The suggestions made by the evaluation are worth considering: (i) Commonwealth plans align with SDG (5). (ii) Concentrate in niche areas such as Gender responsive budgeting; (iii) Focus on campaigns and programmes on ending Violence against Women (VAW)- VAW (violence against women negatively impacts 2% of global GDP which is equivalent to 1.5 trillion USD, as argued by Rebecca Scot, Commonwealth meeting); (iv) Focus on legislative reform for empowering women. (Commonwealth, 2016)

Western donors have studied DA that comes from emerging countries (Evidence Reports, from the Institute of Development Studies, 2014). Just as India and others have studied and taken lessons from DAC methodologies. Further OECD-DAC has been pushing for greater principles of accountability. This accountability should be from both donors and recipients. (Chaturvedi, 2008).

Commonwealth forums on aid-effectiveness have made suggestions in the context of changes contexts and actors, where the main shortlist better effectivity for Commonwealth would be in (i) Promoting differentiated country treatment and SSC. (ii) Modelling a new compact on transparency. (iii) Devising common approach to joint risk management. (iv) Promoting independent facilitation, mediation and peer-review mechanisms. (v) Identifying key posy-Busan monitoring. (vi) Integrating aid effectiveness principles and climate change. (Commonwealth, 2011)

Clearly, gender issues are late comers in the key effectiveness paradigm. There is urgent need to put in strong institutional mechanisms at all levels -from identifying gaps between gender differences, to fostering productivity, and fostering synergy and knowledge through a gender lens (Grown, Addison and Tarp, 2016).

Our fourth conclusion is that there is a need to invest resources on impact assessment, comparative development, to gather data on gender differences and change. This gender and exclusion based data can support and measure policy, useful for the Commonwealth and beyond. At the

same time, the Commonwealth secretariat and women's machineries, need not re-invent the gender wheel, but build on best policies, and mind the gaps.

## **How can gender be embedded into CHOGM agenda 2018 on climate concerns?**

Climate change and global warming has and will have disastrous impact and women are more likely to be victims and near negative consequences. Climate activists and environmental thinkers have argued that women are key to climate governance, and are important for implementing and planning policies for environment saving, and renewable energy. Women at local levels need to be part of the decision making on climate policies, since women are important negotiators between the community and its resources.

There are similar suggestions for deepening democracy with good governance, rule of law and practice of human rights and ensuring human security by tackling the threat from terrorisms and crimes.

Our 5<sup>th</sup> conclusion is that CHOGM go beyond trade and strategic ties and centre gender into its bilateral and multilateral relations. Development partnerships focusing on SDG -5 on gender, can be developed between countries of the Commonwealth, keeping in mind each partner's aims and strategies.

### **CHOGAM 2018 can**

- Have greater synergy between countries that are giving development assistance/foreign aid so as to actively adapt best and successful practices that focus on gender.
- To succeed in the 2018 GHOGM goals twin policies of mainstreaming gender as well as specifically targeting women to include them in programmes need to be taken up.
- CHOGM recognize that gender blind or gender neutral policies for either financial inclusion, climate change, democracy and security will help men and women, but will not be able to bridge the gender gap.

- Commonwealth Secretariat continue to bring out its Plan of Action Reports as well as an additional ‘Action Taken’ Report. As well as an independent assessment as they have done earlier. This will fit with the accountability measures agreed to by all.
- Government to Government development assistance/ aid continue with special understanding to gender and climate, environment protection norms. The understanding of transparency in assistance, as part of accountability, for quantitative analysis, impact assessment and building trust.
- The large number of capacity building and technical training to thousands by so many Commonwealth countries have a gender module that addresses all the participants (men and women), inclusive of VAW, gender in climate policies and sustainable development.
- A short term POA needs to measure the promises made in CHOGM and implementation on gender related issues.
- Commonwealth countries use different methodologies for development assistance and foreign aid, however all these methodologies can agree mainstreaming gender; and for targeting gender equality goals.

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