

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018

Response to the Communiqué from the Gender & Development Network

Background

Commonwealth Heads of Government met in the United Kingdom from 19-20 April 2018, and produced a [Communiqué](#) following the meeting. This short briefing is the Gender & Development Network's initial response to the Communiqué.

The [Gender & Development Network](#) (GADN) brings together over 150 UK-based NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues.

Response

While there are a number of useful points on gender equality within the Communiqué, as well as an overarching recognition of the critical role of gender equality in realising the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there were also many things left unsaid. Prior to the Heads of Government meeting, a [Commonwealth Women's Forum](#) was convened, resulting in a number of valuable recommendations. The final Communiqué would have been strengthened by the inclusion of many more of these recommendations.

A fairer future

We welcomed the Heads' acknowledgement of the role of women's rights organisations and wider civil society in realising full social, economic and political participation of all (para. 2). However, we were concerned by the lack of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation as explicitly mentioned identifying categories which may affect this full participation. Further, women's full participation was deemed essential to democracy and sustainable development, but no mention was made of justice for women themselves or the fulfilment of women's human rights.

We welcomed Heads' commitment to ratifying and implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), through legislation, policies and programmes that mainstream and promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in social, economic and political life (para. 3).

We welcomed the mention of action to prevent and eliminate sexual and gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage; and female genital mutilation (para. 4). We welcomed the fact that these were seen as barriers to the development and the full

realisation of girls' and women's human rights. While this was the sole mention of girls' and women's human rights in the Communiqué, we welcomed its inclusion. We were concerned by the lack of commitments in this area, however, noting that Heads 'encouraged support' and 'encouraged continuing action'. We were also concerned by the lack of any mention of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

We welcomed the Heads' encouragement of member countries to include a 'gender and equity lens' in their national development plans in prioritising ICT access (para. 7).

We were concerned by an absence of commitments or references to women's leadership, despite a dedicated plenary session on the topic at the Women's Forum, and numerous recommendations in the Outcome Statement of the Women's Forum.

A more prosperous future

We welcomed Heads' resolution to 'address systemic barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy [...] and to promote women's economic empowerment', but were concerned that these measures are in order 'to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth' as opposed to in order to fulfil women's human rights (para. 18).

We welcomed the recognition of the importance of taking a 'gender-responsive approach to the development of trade policy', but are concerned by the lack of recognition of the negative impacts of trade policy on women ([read more](#)), or specific measures to measure and mitigate these effects, for example by consulting with women's rights organisations and conducting ex-ante gender impact assessments.

We were also concerned by a lack of mention of any other topics related to women's economic empowerment beyond trade, such as decent work, unpaid care, social protection, corporate accountability, or the proposed ILO convention on gender-based violence in the world of work, as recommended in the Outcome Statement of the Women's Forum.

A more sustainable future

We welcomed the language around providing 12 years of quality education and learning for girls and boys, and, based on the principle to leave no one behind, Heads' agreeing to support marginalised groups, especially disadvantaged girls (para. 34). However, we were concerned by the lack of commitment to guarantee these reforms, noting that Heads 'encouraged the implementation of specific actions to provide the opportunity' for these policies.

We were also concerned by the lack of mention of the need to understand barriers to transition to secondary education, including funding research in this area. Further, the need to reform curriculum, materials and methods to ensure they promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes, was not mentioned.

We welcomed the recognition that blinding trachoma disproportionately affects women, and the encouragement of Heads to work towards gender equality across sport (para. 33 and para. 35).

A more secure future

We welcomed Heads' recognition of the role of women, and the encouragement of their active involvement, in preventing and countering violent extremism (para. 38). We were concerned that no commitments were made, contrary to the call in the Women's Forum Outcome Statement, to establish a Women, Peace and Security standalone fund within the Commonwealth offering long-term grants to grassroots women's rights organisations.

We welcomed the Heads' resolution to tackle illicit financial flows and money laundering, including through exchange of information, which will enhance domestic resource mobilisation (para. 40).

The missing recommendations

Beyond the concerns raised above, some key recommendations from the [Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Women's Forum 2018](#) were notable by their absence in the final leaders' Communiqué, including:

6. *Recommend* that Heads, drawing on Commonwealth good practice and experience, develop practical strategies and legislation that increases women's access to leadership from the grassroots to national and international levels, to enable meaningful political leadership, by women. Call on Heads to commit to working with all political parties and systems to increase the proportion of women candidates. This includes training, sponsorship, mentoring programmes, and access to networks and mentoring programmes such as the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) and the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network (ComWLG), with particular attention given to creating opportunities for young women and girls.

8. *Call* on Heads to commission an independent review of violence against women in political and public life and in the home, and to establish a funded zero-tolerance national policy to prohibit and prevent the specific forms of election-related violence (both in the public and domestic settings, and including online violence) experienced by women voters, women candidates and their teams.

19. *Call* on Heads to create an enabling macroeconomic environment - including adoption of progressive tax regimes, gender responsive budgeting, investment in social infrastructure - promote decent and safe place for work; recognise, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care work; address occupational segregation and the gender pay gap; promote protection against discrimination and a living wage for women in line with international agreements and human rights principles; and introduce and enforce existing legislations on women's access to, and control over land and other productive resources and services.

20. *Call* on Heads to lead global action on developing and implementing gender responsive trade policies and economic development in collaboration with women to ensure that women are able to benefit equally from the opportunities trade brings. Call on Heads to address the systematic barriers to women's full and equal participation in the economy, both in the formal and informal sectors including women's access to land, finance and markets, and support investment in women owned businesses. The Commonwealth could

harness trade and investment opportunities through initiatives such as the SheTrades and encourage governments and businesses to join the partnership.

21. *Commit* to extending employment regulations and social and legal protection to cover women workers in the formal and informal economy including, inter alia, introduction of universal coverage and access to social protection, not linked to employment contributions.

22. *Call* on Heads to recognise the economic value of unpaid care work.

24. *Recognise* that intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of VAWG, in places and times of conflict; call on Heads to provide technical and financial resources to end VAWG, including through development and implementation of legal reforms and changing social attitudes and structures to ensure justice for survivors.

25. *Further call* on Heads to support the Commonwealth Secretariat to build a coalition of governments, businesses, civil society, human rights and faith-based institutions, communities and individuals to prevent VAWG through the development of multi-sectoral tools, identification of strategies and initiatives to address VAWG, increase obligations on states to adhere to international standards and domestic laws and enhance the accountability and rehabilitation of perpetrators.

26. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Right (SRHR): *Acknowledge* that SRHR for women and girls was featured at CHOGM 2018 for the first time. Note that SRHR are inextricably linked to other relevant universal human rights, ensuring women and adolescent girls are able to lead healthy, empowered and productive lives.

27. *Call* on Heads to implement and uphold comprehensive SRHR for women and young people and ensure that by 2030 they have universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes with relevant data collection, review and follow-up. Ensure adequate health service provision in accordance with WHO guidelines.

GADN had been pleased to see these strong recommendations in the Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Women's Forum, particularly in relation to women's economic empowerment, reflecting precious GADN advocacy asks. It was concerning to note these were not taken forward in the final Leaders' Communiqué.

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