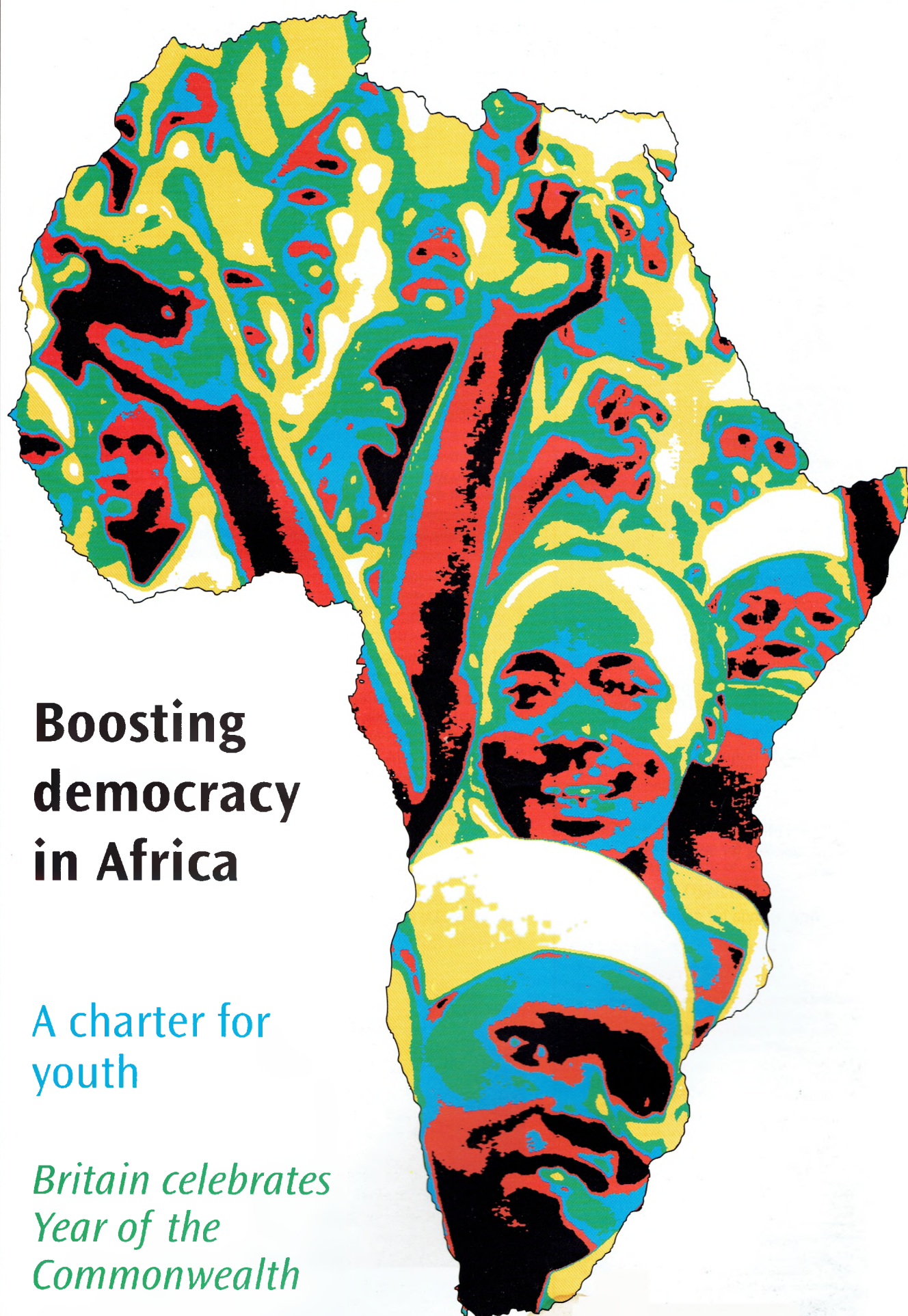




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Ministers see Gender Management Systems as the way forward

Four countries are to begin implementing 'Gender Management Systems' in May, following recommendations made by Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs at their recent meeting.

THE GENDER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (GMS) is a comprehensive package of principles, procedures, structures and mechanisms, which provide the framework for the systematic integration of gender concerns into the mainstream activities of governments. It will lead to a more equitable distribution of resources and sharing of power between men and women.

In May, the four countries, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize, Brunei Darussalam, and St Kitts and Nevis, will receive assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat to establish a GMS module. The module when finalised will consist of:

- an overall framework and guide for mainstreaming gender into governments;
- tools to assist with the integration of gender into key government sectors (such as education, health, agriculture and environment);
- reference materials, including international commitments and agreements relating to women's issues; and
- instruments for monitoring and evaluation.

The implementation of the GMS was one of the main recommendations of the ministers at their fifth meeting, held in Trinidad and Tobago last November, under the theme, 'Engendering the Agenda'.

The GMS is an innovative strategy designed by the Commonwealth Secretariat under the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development. This strategy is part of the Commonwealth's contribution to the global commitment made to women in Beijing in 1995.

Through the institutional structures



Giving women a voice: A woman being interviewed for radio in South Africa

and mechanisms identified under the GMS, the capacity of governments to address gender concerns will be significantly enhanced. The GMS approach does not focus on the availability of new resources, but rather seeks to utilise existing resources in a much more effective manner by making gender the concern and responsibility of all government agencies in collaboration with civil society.

To ensure that gender becomes part of the national agenda, a comprehensive gender plan has been designed which includes: a national policy on women; the central role of the ministries of finance and planning; the public service; gender training; and the strengthening of national women's bureaux.

On the issue of gender integration into politics and conflict resolution, the meeting proposed a number of interrelated strategies to achieve gender balance. These include the achievement of a target of no less than 30 per cent of women in decision-making in the political, public and private sectors by the year 2005.

It was also proposed that ministers would initiate practical measures to promote positive images of women in decision-making, for example, by engendering curricula and text books, as well as by compiling a directory of women in politics and other decision-making structures.

Ministers agreed to take positive steps to encourage women to stand as candidates in elections. They called on

the Secretariat to work closely with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to develop linkages between women parliamentarians across the Commonwealth.

The recommendations also urged governments to increase the participation of women in the ministries concerned with war, peace and refugee situations, and ensure that women envoys are included in peace initiatives. Ministers should also lobby governments to ensure that gender considerations are taken into account in the provision of assistance for victims of conflict.

On the economic front, the ministers recommended that the Secretariat should assist governments to develop and implement policy options for integrating gender issues into national budgetary policies and procedures within the context of economic reform.

The recommendations stressed the need for long-term measures to eliminate violence against women. The ministers stressed that governments should review educational materials and revise text books as a means of combating social attitudes that may lead to violence against women.

The ministers called on the Secretariat to collaborate with the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association to strengthen the capacity of the judiciary and other legal professionals to respond to violence against women and girls, and to promote and protect the human

rights of women and girls.

They also requested the Secretariat to support the governments in their implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, especially states which face severe resource constraints.

The ministers suggested that technical assistance from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) should be provided directly to national women's bureaux, in order to facilitate the establishment of GMS. It was also

their view that in order to ensure co-ordination and efficient use of funds, the Secretariat should seek to strengthen its collaboration with all its development partners, including the United Nations Fund for Women (Unifem), Unicef, ILO and the UNDP.

N E W S I N B R I E F

Submissions invited

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group on the Harare Declaration (CMAG) held its sixth meeting at Marlborough House in London on 17-18 February. It welcomed the parliamentary elections in The Gambia but called upon the Government to lift the ban which excludes some people from politics without further delay.

On Nigeria, the Group reiterated its concern that all political detainees, including Chief Moshood Abiola, had not been released.

To canvass as many views as possible, it invited further written submissions from all interested parties to reach the Commonwealth Secretariat by the end of April. The Group also welcomed the signing of the Abidjan Accord on 30 November 1996, between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone.

Overtures from Palestine and Yemen

An independent Palestine may one day take its place alongside other members of the Commonwealth. Afif Safieh, the Palestine Liberation Organisation's London Ambassador, paid a visit to the Commonwealth Secretary-General in February to discuss Palestine's future prospects of joining the association. While the Palestinian Authority does not yet meet the association's requirement that members be fully sovereign, it does meet other requirements such as having a historical tie to Britain.

Palestine's interest follows a formal application by Yemen. Formerly the Aden Protectorate, Yemen was ruled by Britain from 1829 until 1967 and is now a fully independent country.

A committee of representatives from 12 Commonwealth governments has been set up to review terms and criteria for membership following Mozambique's admission as a special case at the Auckland summit. The group's report is due to be presented to Commonwealth leaders when they meet in Edinburgh.

New Zealand to help small states at United Nations

New Zealand will make a regular contribution of US\$75,000 to the running costs of the Joint Office for Commonwealth Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York, it was announced in late February. Belize, Dominica, The Gambia, Grenada, Maldives, St Lucia, Seychelles, Solomon Islands and Western Samoa all use the Joint Office.

The funding announcement was made jointly by New Zealand Foreign Minister Don McKinnon in New York and by Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, in London.

It follows Commonwealth-wide appeals by the Consultative Group on Small States at its meeting in London on 31 October 1996 and by the Commonwealth Secretary-General for increased contributions to help maintain the Joint Office.

Currently, the Joint Office functions on a cost-sharing arrangement whereby participating governments meet 10 per cent of the costs and three donors, Australia, Britain and Canada, meet equally the remaining 90 per cent.

CSC meets in Malawi

The Commonwealth Science Council (CSC), which promotes scientific co-operation among Commonwealth countries, is to hold its 19th meeting in

Lilongwe, Malawi, from 14-16 May.

The Council's three flagship programmes on energy, water resources and biological and genetic resources will be high on the agenda. Members will also look at CSC funding, especially the question of arrears in contributions and ways of generating extra-budgetary finance. Furthermore, the meeting will discuss the issue of concessionary membership terms for small states. Although all 53 countries of the Commonwealth are eligible to join the Council, 17 of them, mainly small states, have yet to do so.

Senior scientists from some 36 Commonwealth countries, as well as observers from international organisations, are expected to attend.

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This site is being developed as the hub for all Commonwealth information. The Secretariat puts up all its press releases and articles from its Features Service on this site. An extensive list of Commonwealth and Secretariat publications (with instructions on how to order) is available. It also has links with the on-line version of the authoritative reference book, *The Commonwealth Yearbook*, and with the Web sites of the Commonwealth of Learning, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Institute. Commonwealth NGOs are also listed.

There is even a section on the Commonwealth designed specifically for young people.

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