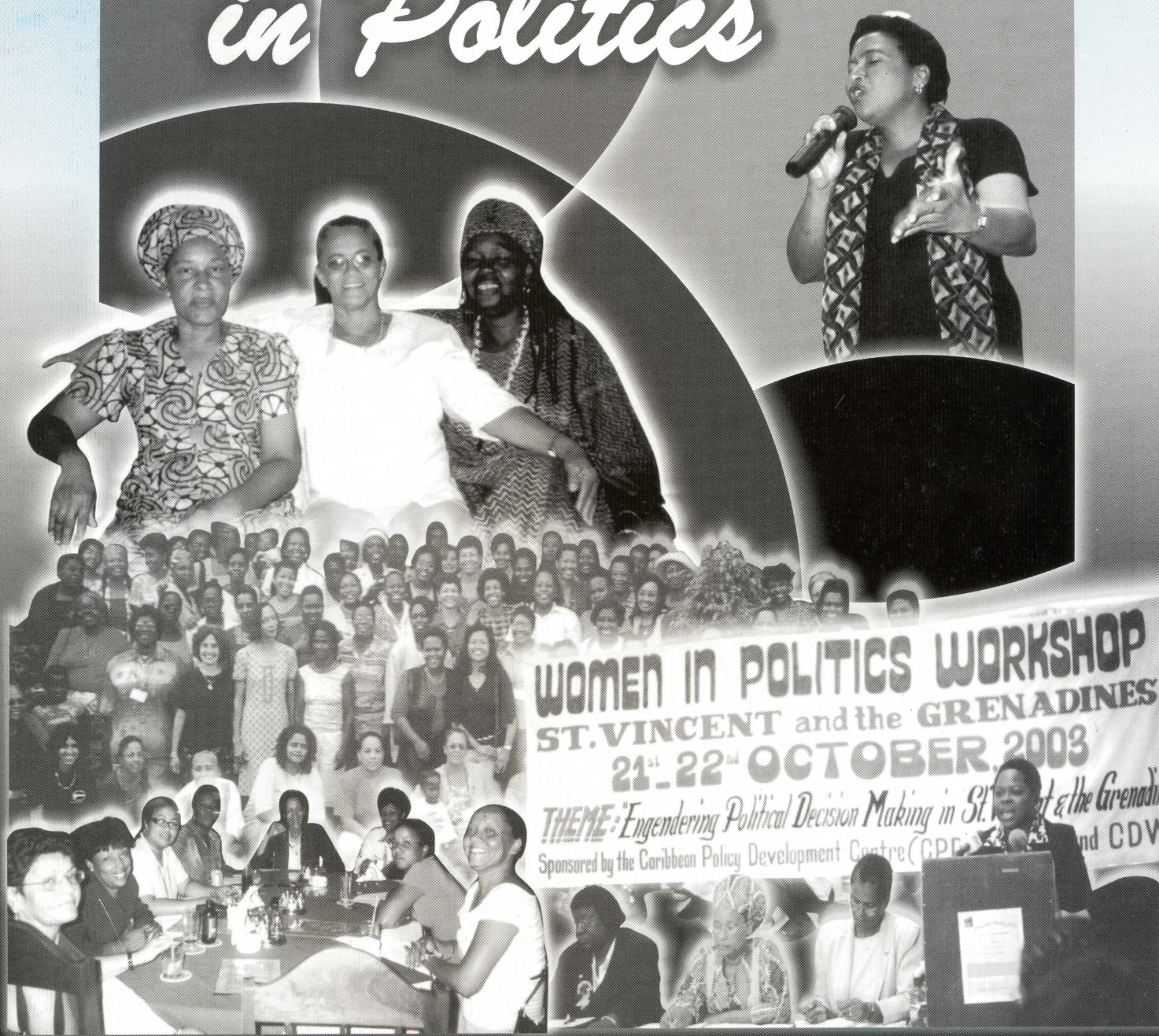


WOMEN *in Politics*





AFRA News

CAFRA NEWS is the biannual magazine and primary networking tool of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA).

Its main purposes are to:

- Inform members and other interested people about the association's programmes and activities
- Provide a forum for discussion and debate on key issues of concern to women in the region
- Promote the sharing of experiences and foster links among individual feminists, activists and women's organizations
- Assist in breaking down language barriers in the region
- Stimulate women's creative expression
- Contribute to the development of the women's movement regionally and internationally.

We welcome letters, articles, poems, reviews, opinions and artwork for editorial consideration. The Newsletter Committee has a final right to edit content and to reject material that is not appropriate for publication, that is, material that does not further the aims and objectives of CAFRA, that does not promote a spirit of sisterhood, and material that is racist, sexist or 'maternalist'. Individual authors and reviewers are solely responsible for views and opinions expressed in published articles.

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CAFRA is

A regional network of feminists, individual researchers, activists and women's organizations, which defines feminist politics as a matter of both consciousness and action.

We are committed to understanding the relationship between the oppression of women and other forms of oppression in the society; and we are working actively for change.

CAFRA's MISSION

To celebrate and channel the collective power of women for individual and societal transformation, thus creating a climate in which social justice is realized.

CAFRA's OBJECTIVES

- Promote and support the continued growth and development of the feminist movement in the entire region.
- Research, analyse and document the situation of women in the region from the perspectives of ethnicity, class, culture and gender relations.
- Network with women's organizations and other organizations which support CAFRA's Mission.
- Influence policy at national, regional and international levels in government non-governmental organizations and institutions, in keeping with our Mission.
- Support, through our programmes and work, efforts aimed at economic self-sufficiency for women.
- Generate a new and critical examination of the nature of 'politics' and 'power' and of women's relationship to it as a basis for a policy on women, politics and power in the region.
- Provide information on actions and struggles taking place in different parts of the region and to encourage and support international solidarity when necessary.
- Develop action and research priorities based on the needs of women in the region.
- Foster dialogue and debate towards the development of non-patriarchal procedures, perceptions and structures.
- Develop an institution that promotes personal growth, the most efficient use of human resources, sustainable development of our environment and economic self-sufficiency.

Editorial

In this edition CAFRA is paying attention to women in politics. It is certainly not miraculous that we do so. After all, one of CAFRA's goals is that women have to become visible in political functions. In the first place we see that there is still inequality of power relations between men and women that has its reflection in politics. Though we see that all over the Caribbean women are moving forward into politics, we still observe that women are underrepresented. That fact alone justifies women going into politics.

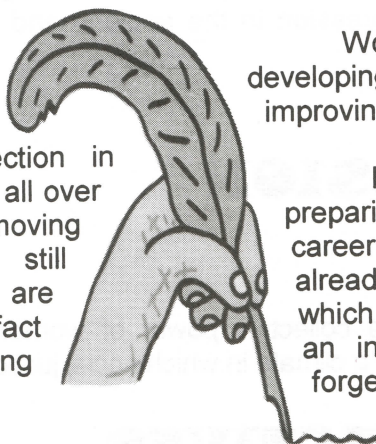
In the second place we also want them to be our voice. For so many years men have used their political power to preserve the inequality of power relations between men and women. It is certainly not too much to ask for our women politicians to stand guardian for women's rights.

Some women have been evaluating the role of women in politics and already expressed their disappointments. Somehow most of these female politicians do not meet our expectations. Why is that? Is it because there are not enough women inside the political arena to fight the internal battle against the traditional old political culture which does not allow women into politics and which is a culture that lacks good governance? Is it easier for these women to go along with the old political culture? Was it perhaps never their idea to change political power dynamic, but just to build a political career? Or do we

expect too much from these women? We do not have all the answers yet. Still we are proud of women who have the courage to step into politics and fight these battles.

Women with a vision who are developing strategies aimed at improving the life of women and men.

I hope that all women who are preparing themselves for a political career and the ones, who are already in politics, have a mission of which the development of women is an integral part. We must never forget, that once we do not have the position of power anymore and we are back down amongst the people, we also will become victims of the policies we ourselves have outlined.



Carla Bakboord
Deputy Chair CAFRA

Carla Bakboord is CAFRA's Deputy Chairperson, based in Suriname. She is a social worker specialising in gender issues.

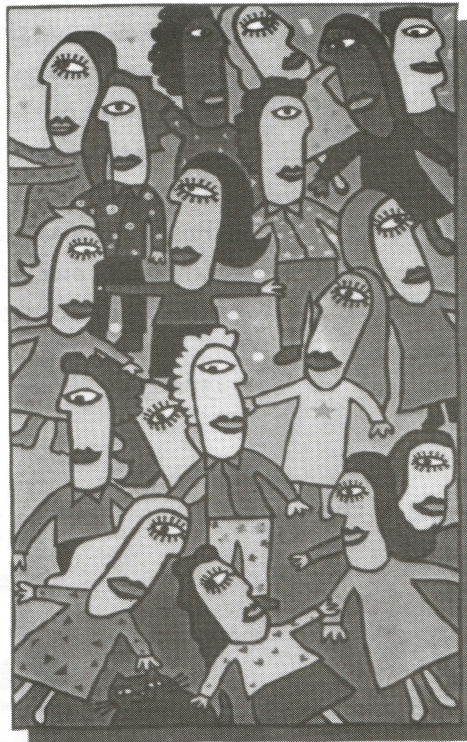


I SAY IT WAS THE WOMEN

By Elliot Roache
(for all the tall upstanding sisters
of the generation)

Hard poems bruise my mind
(you're one of them)
but I can't write them.
My slave age knees give way;
new tides of old ideas
shake my crumbling rock;
I fall asleep at the wrong moments
but I dream of your grave faces,
your dark earnest faces,
your daring voices
hard in argument,
and in the dream I
listen, I approve,
but in the bitter day I
turn aside.
The long hard years
confound me like a
curse.

It's not been easy.
Since the Trade
began you perished;
you gave birth in
coffles and slave
ships; the children
died; they flung each
stillborn fetus
to the sharks; you
spawned on slave
plantations; some of your young were
you; some were a splinter tribe;
white was the seed but black the soil
and brown the issue of that raving age.



You worked and spawned and wept
and nurtured and endured
throughout the mad Slave Trade, the
mad slave system.

A black cook's rhetoric,
but I say again it's not been easy.
In the first freedom time in wattle

mud-straw huts you
cradled a new age with
bare hands, shaping
civilization from cow
dung and marl and
sweat, working provision
grounds, tending black
cooking pots on stones in
dooryards while
mosquitoes and flies
raged round from bush
and filth like Tartar
horsemen. I affirm it
here, I touched that
generation and I know
that you gave suck and
succour, taught faith
and love and hope to your
rock-clinging season to
lumbering men who else

had plunged into the precipice of chaos.
You raked the embers of the race out of
its ashes. Your breasts alone bridged
eras.

C In time, my time,
A (don't doubt a poet's
F witness)
R you cooked and washed
A and scrubbed,
N planted and prayed and
E taught
E in those harsh clapboard
W schools
S that nurtured villages.

You fought too,
 marching long barefoot marches
 sweating, singing psalms
 with the white captain and that Tubal
 Butler, killing the great beast that
 stood between us and a brighter sun,
 breaking hard barricades of history,
 bursting an Empire's walls,
 draining its fetid swamps.

Always some hide in terror
 from the sweating seasons:
 some turn to harlotry
 and some disperse among the alien,
 some under Jesus' robes; and some go
 mad, staring in nightmare,
 dreaming in the sun,
 wailing like ghosts in alien cultures
 from the broken ramparts of the race.
 But still you turn and turn
 to take the gown of honour,
 the mud-stained shift, the purple of the
 race: you kiss tradition, fate and
 circumstance.

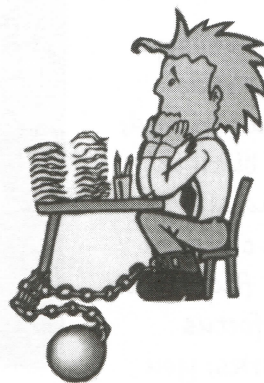
Our gospel truth
 is harder than we know it.
 Written in the ink of blood,
 molasses and spent sweat,
 it reads: Centuries of slavery
 left the nigger naked,
 stripped bare of human attributes
 cropped back to the ape stock.



At one cold cutlass stroke
 religion went; down fell
 another and the language went
 and pride and names and
 cultures
 all drained out like blood from
 mortal wounds- Africa
 dismembered, disembowelled.

I die maintaining this:
 It was the women who restored us.
 I've known them in my time-
 mother, sister, teacher, wife,
 a green corn row of lovers-
 and in my last dry season, going
 blind,
 I look on you who would not yield to
 night nor nothing.
 I know the end's not chaos,
 that you have shaped an end, a destiny
 and we shall grow
 though we ourselves,
 ashamed of our own shames,
 shamed of our need to fight
 those last and hardest battles with
 ourselves, our waste, our worthlessness,
 would silence you..

1973-1974



A GREEN CORN ROW OF LOVERS



Introduction

In his poem, "It was the Women," the Poet Elliot Roache sings a praise song to women. In one picturesque verse he says, "It was the women who restored us," and described them as a "Green Corn Row of Lovers." They love enough to accept the challenges of leadership.

This love became very evident as the stories of three (3) women in politics unfolded, tales of courage and determination. They came from different walks of life, had no script to follow other, than the lives of women before their time who had resisted the atrocities of their day and fought for social justice. They had too, the obstacles of the living script of the male way of functioning, which the voting public willingly embraced rather than dig a little deeper into the lives of the heroic survivors of the "mad slave system."

The Workshop organized by the Caribbean Policy Development Center CPDC, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA), the National Council of Women (NCW) and the Committee for the Development OF Women (CDW) was designed to honour female politicians past and present, and build skills for effective representation.

The specific objectives were to:

1. *To create a pool of women candidates and provide a support system for all women in politics and assist women in preparing themselves as viable candidates for the political arena.*
2. *To create a supportive environment for female politicians.*
3. *To facilitate effective communication among women on an individual, organizational, local and regional level, confronting issues of power relations among women with respect to class, colour, race and gender.*
4. *To bring together women in politics in a non-partisan atmosphere and provide training, or assist them in acquiring/sharpening/honing their skills in the areas of political campaigning and gender-sensitive public policy formulation.*

Warrior Women

Every country has its unsung heroines, brought to life as the women's movement unearthed their stories.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, two early warrior



women are **Bertha Mutt** and **Elma Francois**. One changed the standard of living in her native country. The other was an example of people integrating the region as she took her struggle to another island.

In 1935, a series of riots spread through the Caribbean, as the poor looked for better livelihoods. When the price of matches was increased by 1%, it was Bertha Mutt, the Market Vendor who led the protest march on the House of parliament and into the Prisons. As a result, there was a Commission of Inquiry into the living conditions of the poor.

In 1897, Elma Francois was born in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. She initially earned her living in the cotton fields. She had a deep concern for the suffering and way of life of her people. So she attempted to organize the workers at the Cotton Finery and was fined. She migrated to Trinidad and Tobago in 1919, where she was employed as a domestic worker. Elma Francois became a member of the Trinidad Working Men's Association and from that centre was an organizer of hunger marches on the Red House, the Seat of Government. She became the visionary force in the Negro Welfare Cultural and Social Organization and led the fight against homelessness, unemployment, discrimination, working hours and involvement of the Caribbean in war. For her contribution to people's livelihoods, Elma Francois was named a National Heroine of Trinidad and Tobago on September 27, 1987, forty-three years after her death.

There was a fire inside these warrior women, leading them to action. This same fire burned in **Valcina Ash**, a business woman, who was the second woman to contest national elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1983. In her own words,

Mrs. Ash "*saw the needs of people, the suffering and poverty.*" Her shop was a centre for buying basic items, as well as to exchange views. When the ruling party asked her to contest, she thought she could make a contribution to improved conditions of life.

She remembers that she had little support from the Central Party, she was thrown into the lions den. Rather it was the community women who rallied around her, contributing their resources. For example, each supporter would bring a T-shirt for stencilling with her slogan.

The campaign trail was difficult, as persons threatened to assault her and used very violent and slanderous language. She, however, stuck to her message of improved conditions for the poor and with meagre resources, she gained the confidence of the majority and secured the necessary votes to win the seat. She was however, never given a Ministerial Position. In the following election, she lost by a narrow 125 votes.

Mrs. Ash's bravery has left her well respected in her community, still opening opportunities for her villagers. She proved that in order to win a seat, it was not necessary to have a lot of money to give bribes, and purchase alcohol as the men were doing. Yet, she never got a chance to perform at Ministerial level. She learnt that women had to use a number of strategies to attain their objectives because men usually assumed that women are weak. The most useful qualities in her experience were good moral standing, trustworthiness, tact, consistent follow-up, a fighting spirit, courage, and a strong capacity to ignore insults. None of this would sustain you if you lack a clear vision and appropriate strategies to make it a reality. Needless to say, this is only accomplished by working tirelessly without rest. Valcina had two kinds of experiences facing the polls. The first time was in a by-election and the second in a national election. In both instances the strength of one's party had a



lot of impact on the chances of success. Not everyone behaves the same, but definitely during a by-election all the party's energy is focused on the single candidate whereas in a national situation it is largely everyone fighting to win on their own. In their different ways both elections are very intense. A major weakness of the electors was their tendency to believe propaganda while candidates had to guard against taking bribes, especially when one needed several items of promotional materials to carry out the campaign.

to treat the vote as a responsibility to exercise as a citizen and not a commodity to be sold.

Some of the issues that women in politics face are the devaluing of women's contributions. These were usually done through unkind comments as for example, the prediction that she will go back to the kitchen after the election. Managing parenting responsibilities, finding cash, and not having the encouragement and support of the women's movement, were real challenges for her.

The Praise Singers

Amor Lashley

confesses to a deep love for people and love for her country. After spending several years in Canada, she returned to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, with a zeal to serve her country. She became the Public Relations Officer for the then Ruling Party and eventually rose to be the Deputy Chairperson of the Party.

Amor Lashley had full support of the Party, holding as she did a powerful position. She recalls that people were very receptive to her message and herself as a person. She observed that people were also deceptive, as this receptivity did not translate into votes. She failed to win her seat. In her view, failure was due in part to the fact that the Women's Movement had not endorsed and supported the women candidates. She has decided to leave politics and enter the Church, as she continues her career as a Home Economist. One of the lessons this woman learnt from her experience was that it was important to have one's own resources because usually the party has very little. It was definitely in a candidate's favour to lay the ground work of one's campaign for at least a year before contesting the election. This would allow time to educate the electorate

The Worker

Andrea Young,

a "Worker Woman," is a young woman who made great steps, in spite of her youth and gender. She was involved in the constituency as a member of a party group,

working with an aspiring female candidate. She advanced up the ranks from a member of the youth arm and the women's arm to become the Assistant Secretary General of the Party, a very challenging role.

All this was happening during 1999 when her party was still in opposition. She was also elected to the Manifesto Committee to help shape a policy on women. The electorate was restless with the party that had been in power for seventeen years. Change was in the air.

Personal change took her overseas on a lucrative contract. Nationally, change ushered in the opposition party and she was asked to make another change. She gave up a good contract and returned to St. Vincent and the Grenadines to serve two years as a senator for youth affairs. In the February 2003 cabinet reshuffle her appointment ended.



Andrea found her political involvement and stint in Parliament very challenging. In the first place it was a tremendous responsibility for her as a young women, especially as she discovered that being a senator did not give her opportunity and resources to do practical interventions that people expected of her.

Her role was limited to speaking on bills and other matters under debate. Her exposure to the women's workshops held by NGOs taught her that issues for women have not changed and the need for champions to represent these causes.

She was not at all considering a candidacy because she found the slurs cast at women in politics very disgusting. For example, many felt that she was too young to be in Parliament. She did not intend to run but she did not have the money to invest in campaigning, felt that both men and women on either side of the house needed a support system to enable them to function effectively in the House. The rules should be changed to give Senators and Parliamentarians generally a more practical role, their functions and responsibilities should be clearly inculcated through training and they should have more power. Andrea Young finds the slanderous remarks of women at public meetings to be most disturbing. It is destructive and offensive. Her question is *"Why do women want to emulate this male attitude? What training can be done to change this behaviour?"*

Challenges Facing Potential Women Candidates

In the history of Electoral Politics in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, only fifteen women have contested National Elections, of this number, seven won their seats. All were members of the Ruling Party.

The question was asked of the women interviewed – *"What do you see as some of*

the reasons for failure at the polls?" Their responses are summarized as follows:-

1. ***Some women feel that they are not capable of performing the duties of elected office.***
2. ***Some would not consider giving up their "good" jobs to enter politics.***
3. ***Family would not support the decision.***
4. ***Politics is too dirty and ugly.***
5. ***The public assassination, which seems to be reserved for women only.***
6. ***The selection process by men that tends to bypass women.***
7. ***Political Parties have no policy of mandatory female candidates.***
8. ***lack of mechanisms to prepare women for candidacy.***
9. ***The attitude that women should be at home nurturing partners and children.***

The women briefly described, all have a deep love for justice. They are indeed a ***"Green Corn Row of Lovers – resilient."*** The strength of purpose has not died. Society has failed to honour the women, and the women have failed to ask for more. They have rather retreated into their wells and may bite and devour each other. The twenty-five participants at the workshop agreed that there is a need for further training. The organizers have made a commitment to continue the process. Elliot Roache in his praise song to the women, insists that he will die maintaining this. ***"It was the women who restored us."*** How can we in turn restore the women to their place of honour?

Nelcia Robinson
Co-ordinator, CAFRA,
Trinidad and Tobago.



ELMA FRANCOIS

This short biography of Elma Francois 1897-1944, reveals to us a remarkable woman. It is possible that the colonial history, written in the past, would have regarded Elma Francois as another passing rabble rouser. In the recovery of our people's history however, this unheralded woman stands out as a fighter of heroic proportions, consumed by the need to do her duty simply, lovingly and without let up. Many who have had to migrate from their islands under the pressure of nature and society will be grateful for Rhoda Reddock's portrait of a comrade and a sister who made history within the different circumstances that were given to her, as they are given to others.

The surname 'Francois', and the place where her family came from – Overland, cf. 'oversea' – these two factors suggest that Elma Francois had 'Carib blood'. This section of the Vincentian community had been violated in colonial wars and put at the bottom of the social ladder. A hurricane in 1898 and a volcanic eruption in 1902 severely ravaged the area and laid waste the land, livestock, sugar factory and other means of production. Thrown then to the bottom of the economic ladder, the Francois family broke up and moved to less hostile areas of St. Vincent. Sion Hill on the brow of Kingstown, the capital, was Elma's first promised land. It was a settlement of workers for the surrounding estates as well as for the shops, homes, port and other

The Surname "Francois," and the place where her family came from – Overland c.f. "overseas" – these two factors suggest that Elma Francois had "Carib Blood."

workplaces of Kingstown. The hard experiences of workers on the estates and in the town would be common knowledge in Sion Hill. The then settlement was also well placed to pick up and interpret any stirring of ideas in the capital. It is interesting to speculate that the visit of Marcus Garvey to St. Vincent may have made some impression on the young Elma Francois. Outside of Kingstown, a Garveyite group was formed in the village of Stubbs, where other members of the Francois family had settled.

Those of us who are part of a continuing struggle for emancipation cannot afford the fantasy of thinking that the strong sense of purpose of Elma Francois fell into her head from the sky. It was Elma's experiences and initiatives as a social being which brought about the development of her ideas. If Elma Francois' primary school education and her re-education by experience moulded her into such a stalwart figure, then you, I and Caribbean working people have a profound progressive reservoir to draw on which has not yet been tapped.

What impresses me most from this account of the life and struggles of Elma Francois is the powerful sense of discipline, single-mindedness and caring that is evident in all the modes and aspects of her living. Whether as parent, peer leader, or political partner, Elma is gripped by a consistent sense of responsibility, a sense of class and an acute sense of the political which is not sectarian or exclusive. Her social experience/relations as a woman must have been an important element in the final

formation of her truly revolutionary discipline.

The decision of Elma Francois' son to enlist in the British army was a fatal blow to her. The painful effect which it had on her testifies both to the strength of her political convictions and the power of the family bond for her. Evidently she saw her son's decision as a very personal failure on her part. It struck at the very core of her sense of duty.

The glimpses into Elma's educational and organizing tactics and work give me quite a thrill, close as some of it is to the experiences shared by many of us today. Courage, vigour and enthusiasm are implied in Elma's animating a discussion among limers and people on the block. The same is true as she transforms information gathered from reading into intellectual resource for use by NWCSA in study or decision making. Again her inspiration of others, by example and moral force so that they also become powered by the cause, reveals a dynamic leader with an infectious warmth which set her comrades and colleagues aglow.

In her role as a political partner and ally, we can see that Elma Francois showed a personal concern for the development and the security of those in whose company she struggled. Her comrades 'looked up' to her for leadership. The organization required that men and women co-operate in developing their collective political consciousness – instituting a dynamic relationship between the sexes. One cannot but help suggest again that the manysided relations in the social organization of labour which are the lot of Caribbean women – strong arm defender of the rest, reproducer of labour power, comforter, culturiser, and producer – strengthened Elma Francois and the other women activists in the NWCSA. Elma did not hold back from working with others even though there were some

differences between them. She could see the larger oppression on which they were agreed and did not make the smaller conflict become an obstacle in the fight for the people to advance.

This study by Rhoda Reddock of the life and struggle of sister Elma Francois and the NWCSA uncovers another page in the long book of struggle for emancipation which our working people have been waging. The focus on Elma Francois is welcome. It reassures us of the strength, intelligence and human resources of the oppressed and the doubly oppressed. We know that the future, resting in the hands of committed and conscious working people, is indeed a secure future.

The historical profile of the NWCSA permits us to view with pride our revolutionary parents fighting concrete battles in the war of race, class, gender and colony. Armed with this portrait of Elma Francois, we can compare her features with those of her contemporaries and measure our own and our contemporaries' convictions and heroism with more humility.

'History,' says one writer, *'does not declare itself, its message must be uncovered.'* I am grateful to Sister Rhoda Reddock for the messages uncovered and yet to be uncovered by the viewers of this portrait.

Earlene Horne

Kingstown, St. Vincent and the
Grenadines
April 8, 1987

Taken from the work of Rhoda Reddock.

Elma Francois: The NWCSA and the Workers' Struggle for Change in the Caribbean.



Discrimination Amongst Women Against Women in Politics

When I agreed to be a candidate for local government, I knew there would be challenges and obstacles ahead of me, but I never thought it would come from members of the political party to which I belonged. Especially considering the party machinery approached me in the first place. I later learned the discrimination came from one of the very individuals who approached me.

My journey started in 1996. I took some time to seek advice from three persons whom I highly respected, namely; the party leader (opposition party at the time), a medical doctor who was previously involved politically with the party and a colleague who is a Pan-Africanist and an activist. The results of those consultations were: Party leader informed me that I was considered "controversial", the medical doctor gave me his full support and my Pan-Africanist colleague advised me against it.

After weighing all the responses and taking into consideration the support from the people in the streets, I decided to go for it. This decision was delayed as there was an unsettled situation with an incumbent councillor, I therefore offered to withdraw my application until the 1999 election as the party could not decide which of the five new candidates they would approach and ask to step down.

1998 General Elections rolls around and my party is now the governing party. I then approached the area representative (MP), one of the two persons who originally approached for the 1996 municipal election and restated my commitment. The song and dance began, as I was informed that the area's Executive Committee had some concerns about my loyalty to the party because of my pan-Africanist activities and my form of dressing. I requested and was granted a

meeting with the committee. At that meeting the problem seemed to be non-existent.

My name was then added to the slate and the campaign was launched. Needless to say, support from the MP was non-existent, but the kicker was the message sent to me via a male member of the party. The message in essence was to ask me to tone down my dressing as it was felt that I was pushing my Africanness down their throats. My reply to the messenger was "I know they don't want me to tone down my dressing, for if I do, I'll go buck naked, campaign and still win". My campaign continued with all the obstacles and challenges, which I overcame, running a campaign on a negative budget but the end result was I won my seat.

The price for my actions have been exclusion from:

1. *Certain public functions*
2. *Representing the council on official matters outside the country*
3. *Some meetings of importance regarding my portfolio*
4. *Meeting discussing my seeking re-election while I was out of the country*
5. *The area's Executive Committee, while the other Councillors were included on theirs*
6. *The MP for my area bypassing me and liaising with other councillors and the Mayor in order to build a case against me proving I'm not a team player, in addition;*

7. *I've been accused of being an opposition spy in the party's camp*
8. *I've been called a weed-head and an alcoholic (my dreadlocks)*
9. *Difficult to work with*
10. *Non-support of any project coming from my office, etc.*

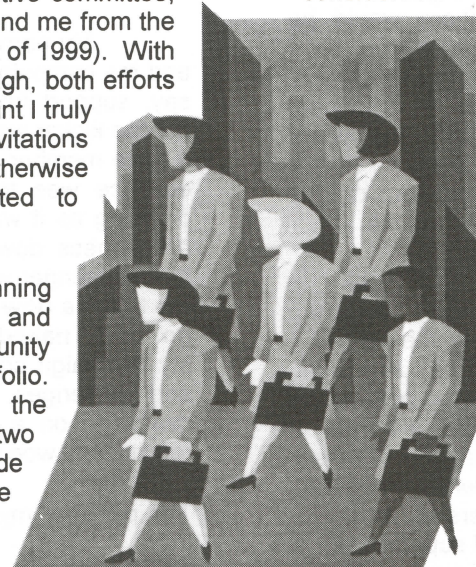
When I opted to exercise my democratic right and challenge the executive committee, the move to expel, then suspend me from the party was in full swing (August of 1999). With the intervention of the Most High, both efforts were unsuccessful. At this point I truly experienced "shunning". Invitations were mislaid, lost or otherwise unaccounted for; trips related to Council business were secret.

In March of 1999 after winning my seat I was given "Crime and Drug Abuse" and "Community Participation" as my portfolio. Both of these were new to the Council, but I accepted these two lemons and made lemonade with one and lemon meringue pie with the other, which I gracefully served to them. Today the Council can boast of fulfilling their mandate with the existence of a Community Participation Department (CPD). A short list of some of the achievements of the CPD follows:

1. *Created, designed and implemented a literacy program for employees who now can sign their names at the bank or credit union for their paychecks rather than mark an X*
2. *Created designed, and implemented an Employee Assistance Program to assist employees with personal, work-related and/or substance abuse problems*

3. *As head of the Housing & Shelter Committee at the City level, formulated procedures to manage the shelters, assist with the training of the Shelter Management Team and address the problems of shelters during a disaster, i.e.: hurricane*
4. *Coordinated and formulated procedures for the EOC office*

Fast-forward to 2003 and elections. After considerable double-talking and secret



meetings, the mayor informed me on a Friday at 11:15 am that my name was not selected to be on the ballot. The convention was scheduled for the following day at 2:00 pm. That left me no time to contest so-called democratic convention; consequently I was effectively eliminated from contesting the upcoming election on March 5th 2003.

The Area Representative (MP) who by the way is a woman and the Minister of Human Development, Women and

Children at the time made this decision. Party officials have stood by and watched the game progress and labeled it a "woman's thing".

I feel as though I have been gang raped, dragged up the highest mountain, and kicked off by the gang wearing size 12 steel-toed boots. I have landed at the bottom bruised and mangled, but by no means broken. I will not be **VISIONLESS AND WEAK-KNEED, BUT REMAIN BASICAL AND STRONG, AND WILL BE BACK COME 2008!!!**

By Nzinga Barkley-Waithe



SENATOR LORRAINE L. BERRY

District: St. Thomas/St. John
Date of Birth: November 15 1949
Place of Birth: St. Thomas, Virgin Islands
Party: Democrat
Term: Eleventh



Senator Lorraine L. Berry

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Senator Lorraine L. Berry, currently serving as Vice-President of the 25th Legislature of the Virgin Islands was born on St. Thomas, November 15, 1949, to Joseph and Emelda Ledee, the eldest of nine children. She is a 1967 graduate of Sts. Peter and Paul high school and later attended the University of the Virgin Islands, majoring in Business Administration. Senator Berry's entire professional life has been dedicated to public service, serving in a number of government posts before winning her bid to the 15th Legislature in 1982. Senator Berry was subsequently re-elected to succeeding Legislatures, now being the only sitting Senator currently serving eleven consecutive terms.

In the 25th Legislature, Senator Berry chairs the Committee on Public Safety, the Judiciary, Homeland Security and Justice. She is also Vice-Chairperson of the committee on Economic Development, Agriculture and Consumer Protection; Vice-Chairperson of the Committee on Health, Hospitals and Human Services and a member of the Committees on Government Operations and on Rules. She also serves on the Judicial Council, the Law Revision Commission and the New Task force on the Cruise Ship Agreement.

During her tenure, Senator Berry has served as Chairperson of the Committee on Government Operations in the 15th Legislature; Chairperson of the Committee on Finance in the 17th, 18th and the 23rd Legislatures; Chairperson of the Committee on Health in the 19th and 20th Legislatures and was Majority Leader in the 18th Legislature. During the 22nd Legislature, Senator Berry was honoured to serve as President of the Legislature, the second of only two women in Virgin Islands history to serve in that post. Additionally, her vast experience in government, has exposed her to wide-ranging societal concerns and endeavours, such as: Partners for Health; The Cancer Task Force; ex-officio member of the Public Services Commission; Co-Chairperson of the Commission on Status and Federal Relations, member of the Association of Caribbean Organizations and a member of the Cruise Ship Long Term Agreement Task Force.

Because of her unselfish devotion to the people of the Virgin Islands, Senator Berry became the 17th person, fourth woman and the only elected official to date to be named "Person of the Year" in 1997 by the Rotary Club of St. Thomas which, in extolling her devotion to the public interest, noted Senator Berry exemplifies "Service Above Self", further stating, "Senator Berry tells it like it is, with a dauntless disdain for the consequences, willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause if that is what it takes." Among other numerous awards of recognition were the Hope Award from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Educational Feddy Award. Senator Berry is a member of the Friends of St. Thomas Public Libraries, the League of Women Voters; the Business and Professional Women's Club; The American Lung Association of the Virgin Islands; the Democratic Territorial Committee; President of VIDAC (Virgin Islanders for Democratic Action Club); Founder of the Northside Civic Organization; and the catalyst who assisted in establishing the Beacon Schools in the Virgin Islands. Senator Berry is also actively involved in community issues, which includes among many, an Annual Youth Symposium and Women's Conference.

Prior to her election to the Senate, Senator Berry's public service included: Manager of the St. Thomas District Office of the Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress; the Bureau of Audit and Control of the Department of Finance; the Industrial Incentive Board of the Department of Commerce; and the Neighbourhood Youth Corps in Schools Program within the Department of Education.

A member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Senator Berry resides on the Northside of St. Thomas with her husband Richard, (Proprietor of Berry's Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning). He daughter, Roxanne, a graduate of the Masters Program at Smith College, School of Social Work, is married to Anthony Bellotti and resides in Alameda, California and her son, Kurt, a graduate of Central Florida University, resides in Winter Springs, Florida.

C A F R A N E W S

TREASURES OF THE 20TH CENTURY GUIDEPOSTS FOR THE 21ST

SELF KNOWLEDGE

There are many milestones in my life, each on complete in itself, yet pivotal to my progress. When I attended Primary school, a favourite motto on the wall was:

"A little learning is a dangerous thing, drink deep or touch not the Perian Spring"

I thought I would like to drink of this spring, but could not understand why a little learning would be dangerous. I however decided that I would be drinking deep. Over the years, this thirst for knowledge has been like a fire inside, driving me to actions, which some people described as "bordering on madness".

In Secondary school, I was top of my class in Mathematics and Biology up to form IV, when for the first time I was made aware that I was different from the boys. I was told that I could not do Mathematics and Biology beyond form IV because Mathematics and Science were for boys.

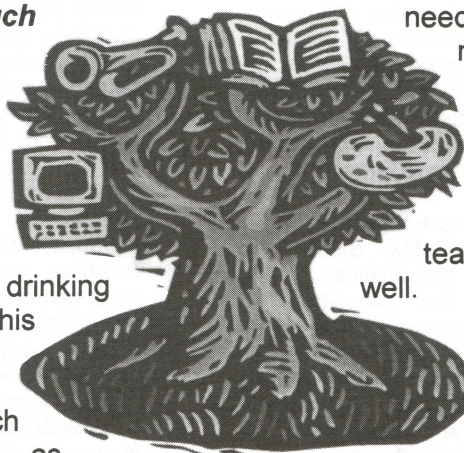
My teacher, who I now see as a change agent, said that it would be a pity for me not to continue these subjects up to fifth form. So I was allowed to attend Mathematics and



Nelcia Robinson

Biology at the Boys Grammar School where the Science teacher chastised the boys by saying – "Imagine letting a girl get more marks than you!".

From these examples I see the need for a driving force, motivation and setting of goals as important to our advancement. The need for guides and mentors such as my teacher is important as well.



A MENTOR FROM THE PAST

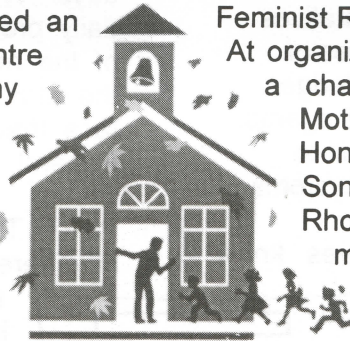
The fire inside was very evident in a woman, years before my time, who is a role model and mentor for me today.

In her book "Elma Francois", historian Rhoda Reddock (1988) said that "Francois would go to Woodford Square and take on any group of men". Her approach was to sit on the bench next to perfect strangers, and use the Newspapers to start political discussions. Here she met the people in their locale. She struggled with them against poverty. However, I would be unaware of Francois and her methodology if Rhoda Reddock, a strong Caribbean woman leader had not recognised the importance of

documenting the lives of our warrior women.

ERROR CAN BE GAIN

When I was 21, the fire inside was burning brightly. I opened an Early Childhood Education Centre without consulting any authorities. Two female inspectors saw what I was doing and gently said: "We saw your school, the area is well ventilated, but you are doing everything else wrong. The seats are too high, you are teaching them to read and write etc. However, we won't close it down if you would let us train your teachers". I, of course said yes. The objective was to free mothers for work and recreation outside the home.



I learnt from this the need to acknowledge mistakes – to be willing to learn, that addressing errors can bring you gain. These and other experiences served me well for the next twenty years as an individual and within organisations. It was a tremendous learning experience to be involved in the Women and Caribbean Project under the leadership of Joycelin Massiah.

In 1984, I resigned a position of assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, St. Vincent and the Grenadines to contest National Elections.

It was very clear that the system needed changing. I was credited for bringing a "clean and educated campaign" which overshadowed my very leftist tendencies, and challenged all candidates to let go the mud-slinging.

Although I contested two National elections without winning a seat I continue to hold my views.

Fully launched into the NGO community, and as Coordinator of the Committee for the Development of Women, among other things, I was being honed for my work as Coordinator of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA).

At organizational level, CAFRA is itself a change agent. The founding Mothers and early pioneers – Honor Ford Smith, Joan French, Sonia Cuales, Cynthia Ellis and Rhoda Reddock wanted clearly to move away from a welfare approach to one of challenge and transformation.

The administrative and Research Coordinators, staff members and National Representatives including Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen, Roberta Clarke, Gemma Tang Nain and Catherine Shepherd played pivotal roles in the movement's progress in challenging times.

CAFRA's broad strategy is in:

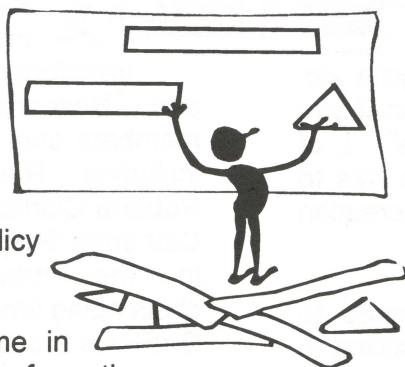
1. **Collective power for stronger lobbying** – building on what already exists
2. **Consciousness raising**, for example, recognition that Beijing issues are part of existing work, which fits into the 12 Critical Areas of Concern
3. **Beginning at people's level** through its research
4. **Dissemination of information**
5. **Drawing up of strategic plans**

CAFRA is a Network, it is a Social Movement – "A formally organized group that acts consciously and with some community to promote or resist change through collective action". CAFRA's structure and actions meet

these requirements. The Leadership of Joycelin Massiah in UNIFEM, Peggy Antrobus of WAND and DAWN opened spaces for CAFRA in its transformational role. At times they were brokers and financiers.

CAFRA National Representatives have all been through processes of knowing self. This self-knowledge allows them to work as change agents. Their self esteem has been built to enable them to challenge the systems.

National Representatives know that we do not have to do everything that presents itself, but we can enable groups to work at problem solving. We can lobby and provoke our governments and policy makers to take action.



A key tool for me in this movement is the use of creative expression for social change. Armed with stories my mother told me, poems and ring games from school days, and songs from the rural areas I engaged the village elders, children, and adults as a community. It is an effective way to get people relaxed and talking. It lit the fire inside them and mobilised them for action.

In 1995, a group of women activists was lobbying at the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD). Out of frustration that our governments were not understanding that structural adjustment was causing poverty, we began to sing

*"Mother the great stone got to move
Mother the great stone got to move
Mother the great stone
The stone of POVERTY*

"Mother the great stone got to move"

Then we went on a Hunger Strike "in the market place" through which the delegates had to pass on their way to the negotiations. It lasted five days. We were well organised, sending daily press releases, making demands of the negotiations. Perhaps I looked the most "hungry" because it was my face that appeared in the International Papers!

The lesson here is utilising skills at different levels. While we occupied the hunger site and positively influenced the negotiations others were doing the media work.

CAFRA as an organisation embodies the feminist movement. Here are some strategic projects:

1997 - Groundbreaking women in Caribbean Agriculture Project

- Anthology of Caribbean Women Poets

1998 Strengthening Leadership in the Women's Movement In collaboration with UNIFEM and HIVOS

1999 Women in Power and Decision-making in collaboration with the Network of NGOs for the Advancement of Women, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs and the United States Information Service.

2000 Research on the impact of new trade agreements on the living conditions of women.

2001 Secretariat for the Caribbean Gender and Trade Network engaged in Research,

Economic Literacy and Advocacy.

- Advocacy and Lobbying skills training to enhance capacity to implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

2002 - The Domestic Violence Intervention/Prevention Training Project for Police Officers and Social Workers in collaboration with UNIFEM, OXFAM, IDB, CDB, DFID and the Association of Caribbean Commissioner of Police (ACCP)

- CAFRA co-hosted the Peggy Antrobus Symposium in November 2000. This symposium examined the work of Peggy Antrobus with a view to honouring her achievements and drawing valuable lessons for the women's movement. The opportunity was also used to recognise the contribution of other warriors in the women's movement including Neva Edwards of Dominica and Hazel Brown of Trinidad and Tobago.

2002 - Publication of CAFRA News focusing on Feminism and the involvement of young women.
- Purchasing of a permanent Secretariat for CAFRA

CONCLUSION

As the 21st century unfolds, so do the critical issues affecting women and their communities. The social economic framework built by male-dominated structures is giving birth to crises that affect humanity, and an

environment in which the male feels threatened. This has in turn given rise to threats of a backlash on women's advancement.

It is therefore critical that the Regional Women's Movement be vibrant and focused. We need to dig for and reveal the treasures of the 20th century hidden in our diverse experiences and use them as guideposts for the 21st century.

We must step out of our mental models of "how things should be", to embrace change. The fact that there are cries to let the youth in, and youth themselves feel locked out, is for me good news. It tells me the youth want to come in. We must give them skills, help them organize where they are. Tell the boys what it means to be "woman", so that they can be men; tell the girls what it means to be "man", so that they can be women. It is not either/or. There must be balance in continuing to engage the skills, knowledge and resources of the older, while drawing in the younger. **EDUCATE** – A little learning is indeed a dangerous thing.

Finally, in recounting the tales of the women's movement, it is good media to praise, glorify and dwell on the good times. I want to offer another view, another lesson – Many of our unsung heroines are achieving, making positive change, through a lot of pain – the pain of persecution, misunderstanding, discrimination and a failure. These are women who face and overcome the biggest leadership challenge, which is to keep on walking when our hearts are breaking and the pain seems more than we can bear.

I thank you.



DONNA M. CHRISTIAN-CHRISTENSEN

United States Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress



Donna M. Christian-Christensen

The Honorable Donna M. Christian-Christensen continues to distinguish herself as a leader in the United States Congress. In her fourth term as a member of the House of Representatives, she is the first female physician in the history of the U.S. Congress, the first woman to represent an offshore Territory, and the first woman Delegate from the United States Virgin Islands.

In the 108th Congress, Delegate Christensen is involved in the following House Committees, Subcommittees and Caucuses: Chairs the **Congressional Black Caucus' Health Braintrust**, which oversees and advocates minority health issues nationally and internationally; is a Member of the **House Committee on Small Business**, and its Subcommittee on Resources and its Subcommittee on **National Lands**; is a Member of the on Homeland Security and its Emergency Preparedness and Cybersecurity, Science Development; is a Member of Caucus; Member, Steering Committee, Congressional **Travel and Tourism Caucus**; Member, Congressional Rural Caucus; Member, Coastal Caucus; Member, Congressional Fire Caucus and additionally, a Member of the Congressional National Guard and Reserve Caucus.



She is the recipient of many honours and awards, especially for her work in health. In recent years she was honoured as a "Distinguished Alumna" by George Washington University, and received The Distinguished Service Award from the Howard University School of Medicine, and an honorary Doctor of Laws from Moravian College in Bethlehem Pennsylvania.



THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE FOR 2003 SHIRIN EBADI

The Iranian lawyer and human rights activist Shirin Ebadi was born in 1947. She received a law degree from the University of Tehran. In the years 1975-79 she served as president of the city court of Tehran, one of the first female judges in Iran. After the revolution in 1979 she was forced to resign. She now works as a lawyer and also teaches at the University of Tehran.

Both in her research and as an activist, she is known for promoting peaceful, democratic solutions to serious problems in society. She takes an active part in the public debate and is well known and admired by the general public in her country for her defence in court of victims of the conservative faction's attack on freedom of speech and political freedom.

Ebadi represents Reformed Islam, and argues for a new interpretation of Islamic law which is in harmony with vital human rights such as democracy, equality before the law, religious freedom and freedom of speech. As for religious freedom, it should be noted that Ebadi also includes the rights of members of the Baha'i community, which has had problems in Iran ever since its foundation.

Ebadi is an activist for refugee rights, as well as those of women and children. She is the founder and leader of the Association for Support of Children's Rights in Iran. Ebadi has written a number of academic books and articles focused on human rights. Among her books translated into English are *The Rights of the Child*. A Study of Legal Aspects of Children's Rights in Iran (Tehran, 1994) published with support

from UNICEF, and *History and Documentation of Human Rights in Iran* (New York, 2000).

As a lawyer, she has been involved in a number of controversial political cases. She was the attorney of the families of the writers and intellectuals who were victims of the serial murders in 1999-2000. She has worked actively – and successfully – to reveal the principals behind the attack on the students at Tehran University in 1999 where several students died. As a consequence, Ebadi has been imprisoned on numerous occasions.

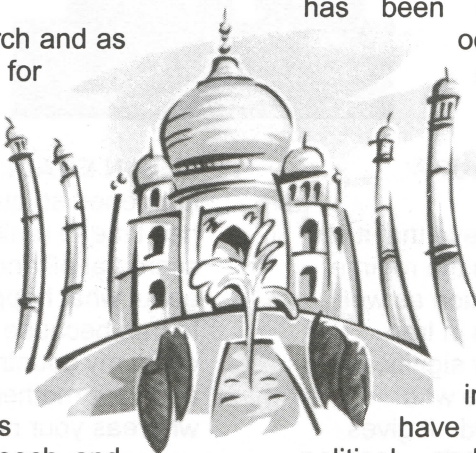
With Islam as her starting point, Ebadi campaigns for peaceful solutions to social problems, and promotes new thinking on Islamic terms. She has displayed great personal courage as a lawyer defending individuals and groups who have fallen victim to a powerful political and legal system that is legitimized through an inhumane interpretation of Islam. Ebadi has shown her willingness and ability to cooperate with representatives of secular as well as religious views.

Shirin Ebadi the Iranian human rights lawyer was shocked to hear the news that she had won the US\$1.3 million dollars Nobel Prize for Peace. She was awarded the prize out of a field of 156 candidates. Ebadi spoke with *NEWSWEEK* about the situation in Iran and the impact of the award on the people of Iran.

NEWSWEEK: Is your prize a watershed for democracy in Iran?

SHIRIN EBADI:

I hope it is. I always acted within the law; I never did anything that was illegal. I support peaceful protests. But when



things go wrong I'm there to defend the victims, for free. In 1999, when the student dormitories were attacked, I defended one of the victim's family in court and this is what led me to be jailed. So I hope that this prize will give supporters of human rights in Iran the courage and the energy to continue. As a matter of fact, the biggest benefit of this prize is to show that it is still possible to stay in Iran and work for the advancement of human rights there.

NEWSWEEK: Do you think that the regime can reform itself or is it stuck in a deadlock between the reformers and the old guard?

SHIRIN EBADI: I believe that it still is possible to bring reform to the regime, but it is now high time for action as well as pragmatic thinking. Even in Iran where there hasn't been any significant reform, the number of people who support reform has increased. It gives me hope that it will eventually happen.

NEWSWEEK: Can human rights exist in an Islamic republic?

SHIRIN EBADI: There is no contradiction between an Islamic republic, Islam and human rights. If in many Islamic countries human rights are flouted, this is because of a wrong interpretation of Islam. All I've tried to do in the last 20 years was to prove that with another interpretation of Islam, it would be possible to introduce democracy to Muslim countries. We need an interpretation of Islam that leaves much more space for women to take action. We need an Islam that is compatible with democracy and one that's respectful of individual rights.

NEWSWEEK: You didn't cover your head with the hijab, or veil, at the press conference. Did you want

to make a statement?

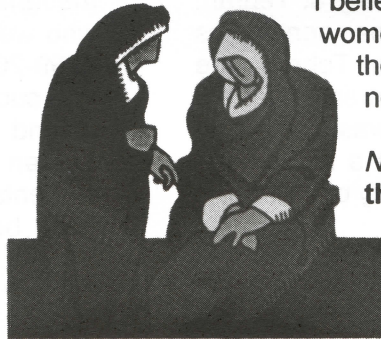
SHIRIN EBADI: Inside Iran, a woman is required by law to wear the hijab so I wear it. But as I mentioned, I believe that with a more progressive interpretation of Islam we can change this. I believe that it is up to individual women to decide whether they want to wear the hijab or not.

NEWSWEEK: What do you think will happen when you return to Iran? Are you scared?

SHIRIN EBADI: Everything happened so quickly that I haven't even had time to really think about it. I am not scared at all and I don't care so much about what happens to me. I will go back to Iran because I am Iranian and I want to die in my country. Imagine you're home and your mother is a sick old woman whereas your neighbour next door is a younger more dynamic mother. Still, you'll stay with your sick old mother because she is your mother. When I'm in Paris, where thanks to the French Revolution people have all rights, of course I enjoy it and I'm happy. But it is not my home.

NEWSWEEK: What is your hope for the future of Iran?

SHIRIN EBADI: I hope that young Iranians can go further than me. My generation had very little means to keep itself informed. When I was young we had neither computers nor the Internet. Our only source of information was a small library at the University. So I hope that today's young people can do much more and do better for our country than I did.



The following article is evidence of perceptions of some males. I encourage you to send your comments to assist in formulating a collective response.

Beyond the bust
Denzil Mohammed
ON CAMPUS

Gender imbalance at UWI,
Part II

"BUT WHY is this an issue"

That was what Gender Studies lecturer Dr Patricia Mohammed asked me last week, as did some politically conscious UWI gals ready to pounce on me.

Methinks the ladies doth protest too much.

There's some serious boob-envy floating around campus, you know. I can't help but look around and see how easy these girls seem to have it. After all, they've busted in and taken over.

Feminine wiles get girls everything. Once the pair of power points at you, struggle with all your might and squirm all you can, you just can't say no. It's the phallus of the females.

Woe to the few fellars who don't make the macho mark because homophobia is perhaps the only tool guys now have to erect their masculinity in the unfamiliar marshes of female domination.

Geez – fellas have some serious issues to deal with.

But beyond the bountiful breasts 'n bums lie some pretty big brains. Just take a look at President's Gold Medal winner Summer Alston-Smith. My god: packages

like that ought to be illegal. And of the 18 open scholarships offered this year, 12 were garnered by girls, who also got 60 percent of all further additional schools.

When this place really was a man's world, "no one said a word," according to Dr Mohammed. When the feminist movement of the '70s attempted to balance the scale of the sexes, gender deficiencies in myriad spheres were busted open. Women travelled beyond their conventional confines and seized places among men in the classrooms, job market and politics.

But does another outweighing of the sexes, this time in favour of women, justify itself simply because women have been scorned in the past? Does the present trend warrant the same silence of a century ago, simply because it is a righting of wrongs?



Man problems

From the A'Level results, it should not come as a surprise that girls dominate university admissions.

Perhaps it's because they "mature" faster, or maybe daddies have them under lockdown. Some researchers believe girls have learning styles more conducive to the classroom, while boys are more vulnerable to the lures of popular culture.

Maybe that's why nightclubs are full of lonely fellas and there's all this "women get in free before 10 pm" business just to get girls to come. And it could also be the reason you won't find a gang of bad Naps gals piping at Library Corner.

Additionally, boys are more likely to get on bad, i.e. drop out or be expelled from high school, than girls. And, in

Certain cultural customs, particularly in rural and low-income families, boys are expected to earn their keep as soon as it is possible.

A When it comes to entering a university, a variance in opportunity arises. According to Prof Rhoda Reddock, head of the Department for Gender and Development Studies at St. Augustine: "Men have more opportunities outside of formal education for economic advancement."

"The options are few for women. Without tertiary education, women are usually relegated to service work."

There are, in fact, a growing number of men seeking jobs in repair, construction, technology and other areas that don't require a three-year degree but promise a good salary. As one female, second-year student pointed out, "Tech/voc institutions are predominantly male": shorter study duration is preferred so there's more time to live and lime.

Last year, the local UWI population comprised 5,141 women and 3,488 men: a 3:2 ratio. And there were nearly 600 more female part-time students out of 2,647. At Mona 71 percent of the total campus population was female two years ago.

Dr Mohammed, who has taught at Mona, noted a disturbing trend: "Boys think being a bookworm is unattractive."

And, according to some researchers, mental learning isn't easy for boys, "and it is easier to pick up a gun," said Dr Mohammed.

That is where homophobia comes in.

"Education and masculinity don't go together. Especially in Jamaica, that is

how young boys see the image of education. It is homophobia. They must maintain the status quo," she said.

Oh Lawdy, Miss Maudie and she neighbour Claudie! What a declaration, especially for this day and age! But could there be even a remotely comparable rebellion against fag-dom here in sweet T&T?

Of the 963 students in the Humanities Faculty last year, a spindly 167 of them were men. In Education, men counted for only 15 percent. And this trend has been static for a long time. I wonder if its former name, Faculty of Arts and General Sciences, i.e. FAGS, has something to do with it?

And on the other side, the bastion of masculinity seems to be standing firm: engineering is 74 percent male.

But women are making headway even there. Compared to first-year admissions of 1987, when men comprised 87 percent, the rise in women is significant. Women make up 26 percent of engineering undergrads today, and 38 percent of those pursuing higher degrees.

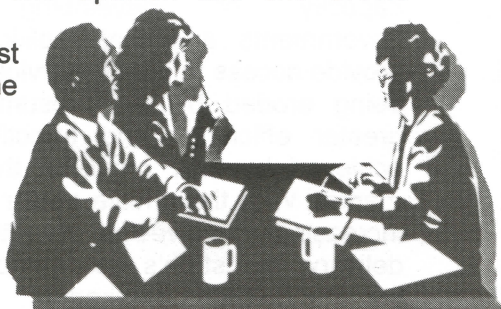
So while men are recoiling into their time-honoured domain, women are spreading beyond every confine: the phallus is falling flat.

In Part III, the problems associated with female predominance at university will be explored, as will the outcomes of more women than men with higher education.



ASSEMBLY

The workshop on Women's Health – Violence Against Women & HIV/AIDS was very well attended with over forty women and men in attendance. The group was assigned one Spanish and one Creole translator to assist with the language. The



discussion was very animated, with many stories told. The group did not come up with a resolution, but put forward five recommendations, which were presented at the feedback plenary the following afternoon. The Recommendations are:

1. There should be a review of the laws of the Caribbean, which deal with violence against women to determine what works and what does not and make the appropriate changes.
2. Women should be the primary focus of our public education on violence against women.
3. Women should be able to access educational opportunities which lead to positions of power and authority, so that they are able to practice in the legal system, as well as to take up positions in all areas of violence against women.
4. Caribbean States should be made accountable for the

violence against women that its agents commit.

5. Men should be engaged as participants in men's collective activism against violence against women.

CIVIL SOCIETY STATEMENT ON THE PROVISION OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

PREPARED FOR THE
COMMONWEALTH FINANCE
MINISTERS MEETING
16 – 18 SEPTEMBER 2003

I. PREAMBLE

We, representatives of civil society and people's organisations working in the Commonwealth regions and countries of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, South Pacific, Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom, met in Brunei Darussalam from 22 to 24 July 2003 to share experiences and views on the provision of essential services within Commonwealth states.

2. We acknowledge the efforts that various Commonwealth governments are

C making to provide essential services for
A their citizens and commend
F Commonwealth Finance Ministers for
R selecting this important issue for their
A 2003 meeting. Governments have
N committed themselves to meeting the
E United Nations Millennium Development
W Goals (MDGs) and targets. Reaching
S these goals will require universal access
 to essential services.

3. Essential services are fundamental to human survival and to a life of dignity as enshrined in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), which states that everyone has "... *the right to an adequate standard of living including food, clothing, housing, health care and necessary social services...*" Access to essential services is also enshrined in other international agreements, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which recognises the right of the child, *inter alia*, to education, health care services, and clean drinking water; and General Comment No.15 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (November 2002) that obligates states to ensure that resources are available to meet the rights to water and binds them to promote access to safe water "...*equitably and without discrimination...*".

4. However, in developing countries, many people, particularly the rural and urban poor, women and children, do not have access to affordable, quality services. We believe that the crisis in the delivery of services essential for life, such as water, sanitation, electricity, education and health care demands a different response to that envisaged by some governments and international financial institutions. Education, health and water are also global public goods. Public goods are recognised as having benefits that cannot be easily confined to a single "buyer" (or set of "buyers"). These goods are non-excludable, in other words, no one can be excluded from benefiting.

However, global public goods suffer from under-provision or insufficient or unequal access. Strong public participation in essential services cannot be separated from ensuring universal access to global public goods.

5. Every government has a duty to honour its constitutional obligations to, and social contract with, its people. These are threatened in a number of ways. The capacity of developing country governments and their political will to provide access to quality services for all is being eroded by the presumption that greater efficiency and effectiveness is achieved by their provision through the market. With the private sector becoming increasingly involved in essential service delivery, the state's accountability to its citizens is being weakened. Moreover, where foreign transnational corporations become involved in the provision of essential services, self-determination of public policy can be undermined.

6. Governments' constitutional obligation and social contract are also threatened by the Bretton Woods Institutions, regional development banks and their major shareholder governments, which are touting the benefits of private provision of public services and actively pushing such policies through their poverty reduction programmes. This is happening at the same time that large and powerful corporate interests are driving the negotiations of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), under which specific commitments to liberalise could erode the ability of governments to regulate or subsidise essential services.

7. Private sector provision of essential services are not automatically superior to public sector delivery. Evidence from developed countries that pioneered privatisation of utilities has shown that this approach does not always work, and in some instances the results have been disastrous. The assumption of superiority of private sector provision is part of the neo-liberal agenda, and it is based on the

premise that the presence of markets will always result in more efficient delivery of services. However, one of the features of developing economies is the presence of market failures, in particular the dominance of monopolies that often replace government as a single provider of services. With the presence of monopolies, the competitive discipline that drives the realisation of efficiencies in private sector provision of services is absent.

community, including those of vulnerable groups; promoting efficiency and equity; and ensuring adequate revenue for public utilities. A notable feature of such partnerships is the participation of women as key and equal stakeholders.

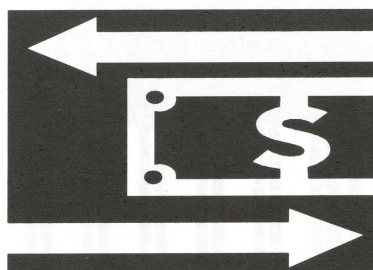
9. Specific concerns about the private provision of essential services include the following:

II. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

8. Case studies on essential service delivery prepared by civil society organisations and researchers in advance of our meeting in Brunei Darussalam, together with the experiences of participants have revealed the following:

- The critical link between access to essential services and poverty eradication underscores the need for democratic and participatory approaches in all aspects of service delivery, from the selection of options or models for service delivery through to policies and methods of implementation. Indeed, decision-making about the design of service delivery models should include end users, doubly so when those users are poor or marginalized and would otherwise lack the voice needed to influence service delivery to ensure affordability, access and equity.
- Private sector participation in essential service delivery does not typically solve pre-existing problems. Indeed, it can exacerbate budgetary problems as well as those related to access, quality and the availability of services to the poor.
- Public sector/community partnerships can be effective in addressing the specific needs of a

10. *Greater Risks and Costs to the State*

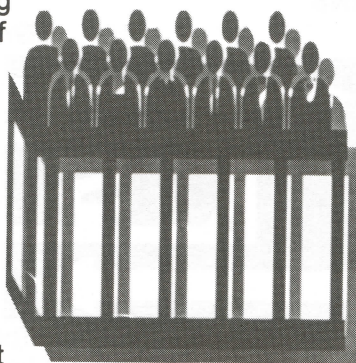


Private sector participation in service delivery is not without risks and costs to the state.

- The private sector is not necessarily interested in delivering services that do not guarantee profits and is likely to select those services and customers with the most profit-making potential, rather than those with the greatest need.
- Governments and/or consumers often shoulder the cost of improvements of the utilities before they are privatised.
- The private sector typically requires governments to carry the burden of risk, as evidenced by insistence on commercial and political guarantees, and contracts in which the government retains responsibility for major investments.
- The public sector is required at times to absorb past public debt and future private debt as part of franchising or sale agreements.
- Traditional cost-benefit analyses of private sector involvement, from ownership to delivery, have often been shown to be flawed, providing an overly optimistic view of its benefits. Projected costs for both the public sector and the

private sector in taking over essential services are often highly inflated.

- The aforesaid aspects of public-private partnership often result in the public sector losing its ability to cross-subsidise and to have a revenue stream for rehabilitation, maintenance and expansion of services.
- Hidden costs of public-private partnerships include the impacts of corruption and losses incurred from undervaluing assets at the time of original sale to private interests or overvaluing them when the state purchases the assets of failed privatisations.



11. **Increased Inequality**

Private sector participation in service delivery may not necessarily uphold such principles as equity, affordability and ensured access, all of which are key for meeting the MDGs. In some instances where basic services have been privatised, they have gone from being instruments of social inclusion to ones of exclusion.

- In the case of health care and education, allowing for private providers who target higher income earners creates further inequality in society, disproportionately affects women and exacerbates class tensions.
- Indeed, user fees for primary health care and basic education have also been shown to increase inequality as the poor lose access to these services. Targeted subsidy schemes have not always been effective in ensuring access by the poor, a majority of whom are women and children, in no small part due to problems of means testing and delivery of subsidies.
- The costs of increased tariffs for utilities are disproportionately

borne by the already marginalized, particularly the rural poor, women and children. Where tariffs are increased beyond the means of the poor to pay, the result is loss of access. The free basic water policy of the Government of South Africa is one example of how a minimal level of access to a service might be assured.

- The greatest benefits of privatised services tend to accrue to those who already have formal access to the system.
- Pricing is done in a non-participatory and undemocratic manner and negates the principle of pro-poor policy making. In many instances it is often neither progressive nor based on the consumer's capacity to pay.

12. **Threats to Good Governance**

The issues of good governance, democracy, transparency and accountability are central in any debate on the provision of essential services.

- Where private participation in essential service delivery is considered likely to yield benefits, a transparent and participatory policy making process can enhance both the design and political legitimacy of the reform.
- All too often, however, private sector involvement in service delivery is neither transparent nor accountable and generally fails to invite genuine participation by stakeholders in decision-making about any aspect of service provision.
- Furthermore, there is typically a lack of meaningful transparency and accountability in all aspects of private-public partnerships, from the phase where advice and conditions are given by donors, such as the World Bank, IMF and

regional development banks; to the contracting and bidding stages; to the assessment of service provider performance.

- There is an inherent conflict of interest in processes where consultants and audit firms advising governments on private delivery of public services stand to gain from privatisation.

13. *Poor Regulatory Mechanisms*

Strong, pro-poor, independent regulatory mechanisms and institutions are essential for ensuring access to quality services in sufficient quantity and at affordable prices, whether the service is owned by public, private or community interests. This need for regulation is particularly crucial in the case of infrastructure services, which are natural monopolies and where there is the risk of firms using their monopoly power to extract additional rents. In the context of weak or non-existent regulatory mechanisms, it is not sufficient to undertake long-term 'capacity building' programmes at the same time as privatisation as significant negative effects are likely to occur long before adequate regulatory capacity is achieved. Realistic policy sequencing requires regulatory capacity to be firmly established before private control over essential service management or assets is adopted.

14. *External Influence*

The international financial institutions (IFIs) and donor agencies have been instrumental in promoting the private provision of services in developing countries, particularly in Least Developed Countries and Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. External influence by IFIs and donors in delivery of public services should be eliminated.

15. Despite these problems, policies for privatisation of services are

gaining momentum and are largely unquestioned.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

16. The provision of essential services must be considered in the context of national development. As governments seek to deliver essential services to their citizens they should ensure that they are sustainable, equitable, gender sensitive and promote social inclusion and justice. Governments must retain control over essential service delivery to meet these ends. Importantly, they should work to improve the process of essential service delivery and the regulatory framework for services.

17. Given the influence of IFIs and bilateral donors on essential service delivery in developing countries, these actors have a role to play in supporting governments to meet their essential service delivery obligations in a manner that is consistent with achieving the MDGs and equitable national development.

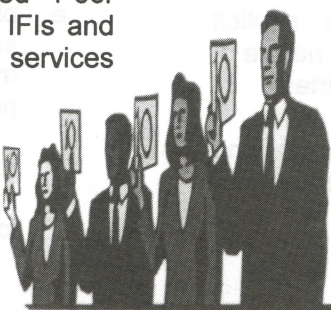
Commonwealth Finance Ministers

18. In order to improve the *process of essential service delivery*, national governments should:

- call for an end to privatisation-related conditionalities as part of the HIPC programme and regular programmes of the World Bank and IMF at the Annual Meetings, based on the world Bank Study 'Private Participation in Infrastructure in Developing Countries' which found that private ownership did not automatically solve problems in government run enterprises.

Participation

- ensure the involvement of people themselves in the analysis of problems, and



identification, implementation and monitoring of solutions for service delivery. This should include a comprehensive options assessment that places equal weight on economic, social and political issues, and recognises the state's obligations to human rights and development goals. Any discussion of options should include, at the outset, an assessment of the feasibility of using and reforming existing systems to address the problems identified;

- c. put in place a decision-making framework that guarantees the multi-stakeholder participation needed to ensure that the rights of people, particularly target communities, are protected; and assesses thoroughly the risks of reform options to people, the private sector and governments. This framework should conform to the principles of good governance and be grounded in a rights-based analysis that ensures accountability, efficiency, transparency, participation, equity and sustainability;
- d. improve the enabling environment for civil society participation, for example ensuring freedom of speech and association;

Governance

- e. develop transparent and participatory processes that result in the consideration of the full range of possible technical and institutional policy options prior to the selection of a particular plan;
- f. negotiate all agreements for service provision in a manner that is open, transparent and inclusive. Anti-corruption mechanisms for private-public partnerships require explicit attention, due to the endemic nature of such problems in many countries;
- g. observe greater transparency and accountability in governance for

service delivery at all levels so that there is:

- public disclosure and legislative approval, where applicable, of IFI-state policy proposals including adjustment loan conditions;
- information available about decisions on contracts for delivery of essential services and about service provider performance;
- removal of restrictions on access to information on public-private partnerships to permit greater public participation in decision-making about the provision of essential services;

- h. refrain from making commitments to liberalise public services under GATS.

19. In order to *improve the regulatory framework* for essential services, national governments should:

- a. legislate for universal access to all essential services to ensure that the poor are not deprived;
- b. give priority to systems of delivery that are compatible with sustainable development goals;
- c. ensure that public control in the planning and management of essential services is maintained;
- d. ensure, through widespread participation, that contractual agreements contain "public interest" provisions that promote universal coverage and equitable pricing;
- e. plan for capital investments in service delivery in a participatory manner to ensure capacity and political will for these investments;
- f. refrain from signing contracts that leave the state vulnerable to fiscal losses and erode government

revenue through tax concessions including: repaying private sector debt, long-term purchasing agreements, state responsibility for capital investment;

- g. prioritise budget allocations for essential service delivery and ensure that general revenue priorities are determined by the people and implemented in an open and transparent manner;
- h. set performance benchmarks to facilitate monitoring and evaluation of programs and systems.

Finance Ministers from OECD Countries of the Commonwealth

20. In playing their part to support national governments' obligations to deliver affordable, quality, essential services for all, bi- and multi-lateral donors should:

- a. support public sector investment in capital/operating costs of publicly delivered essential services even while recognizing that some public utilities are not performing well;
- b. eliminate private sector participation in the delivery of essential services as a determinant of good performance;
- c. acknowledge the special vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States and support the governments of these countries, through untied overseas development assistance (ODA), in their efforts to provide essential services to their citizens without having to resort to privatisation.
- d. meet the internationally agreed aid target of 0.7 per cent ODA/GNI to assist governments that are hard pressed to meet their social spending obligations.

The Commonwealth

21. In order to support national decision-making processes on options for essential service delivery, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Commonwealth Foundation should:

- a. facilitate exchanges on the best cases of public ownership/public service delivery and enhancement thereof;
- b. facilitate study and exchange of the most effective cases of public participation in regulation and accountability of either publicly-owned or mixed or private delivery.

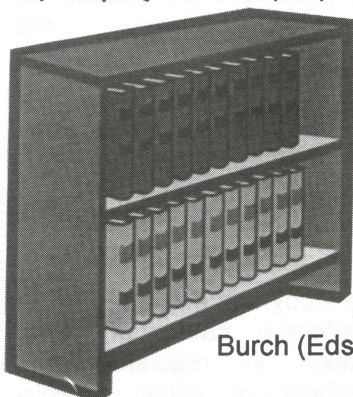
IV. CONCLUSION

22. As civil society organisations, we reiterate our support for our governments to reinforce their efforts to address the essential service needs of their people, especially the poor and women, within their various national development plans.

23. We reiterate our commitment to the issue of provision of essential services and to empowering citizens to participate effectively in any new structures and systems for essential service provision that may be established in our countries.

24. We acknowledge and appreciate the space provided by the Commonwealth for civil society organisations to participate in such meetings as this and its demonstrated willingness to listen to our concerns and points of view.

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