



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
AT THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB



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New research reveals best and worst places in the Commonwealth to be born a girl

A new report published today by the Royal Commonwealth Society and Plan UK to mark the Commonwealth's 2011 theme, 'Women as Agents of Change', reveals that New Zealand is the best place in the Commonwealth to be born a girl, whilst Sierra Leone and Nigeria are among the worst.

On the day that Her Majesty The Queen, Annie Lennox and others come together in Westminster Abbey to celebrate Commonwealth Day, this new research shows that girls and women continue to be seriously disadvantaged.

Because You're a Girl: Growing Up in the Commonwealth compares how well girls/women are doing relative to boys/men in their country across eight indicators. The report uses best available data on indicators that reflect various aspects of a girl's life cycle, from survival (e.g. life expectancy, nutrition) to achievement (e.g. athletes and medals at the Commonwealth Games, Commonwealth Scholarships won).

The report suggests that it is political will – and not economic wealth – which is most important in advancing gender equality. Some of the poorest countries in the Commonwealth do relatively well against the eight indicators used in the report, while some rich countries remain a long way off gender equality.

Key findings include:

- New Zealand tops the chart as the best place in the Commonwealth to be born a girl, closely followed by Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.
- At the bottom of the chart, ranking joint 50th are Nigeria and Sierra Leone. India and Pakistan both score poorly, coming in 41st and 45th respectively.
- Five times more girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth in Nigeria and Sierra Leone than in New Zealand on average and girls in New Zealand can expect twice the number of years in school than girls in Nigeria.
- The United Kingdom ranks joint 8th with Singapore. Rwanda – the Commonwealth's newest member state – comes in at number 10.
- Poverty levels do not always correlate with levels of gender inequality. Rwanda (10th), Mozambique (21st), and Malawi (23rd) all score highly despite being among some of the poorest countries in the Commonwealth.
- The Commonwealth's richest country, Brunei Darussalam, only manages a rank of 23rd.
- The starkest evidence of gender inequality is revealed by the pay gap indicator. Even in the best performing countries, women only earn around four-fifths of male income on average. In New Zealand – the star performer in the final rankings – women only earn around 72 per cent of the average income and there are still twice as many men in New Zealand's Parliament as women.

- By comparing the ratio of male to female athletes entering and winning medals at the Delhi Commonwealth Games, we find that Canada, Australia and Nigeria take gold in terms of women's participation in sport.
- Despite decades of campaigning in Western Commonwealth countries, Rwanda and South Africa top the female political participation table. Indeed Rwanda ranks first in the world in this regard. The United Kingdom ties with Pakistan at joint 17th.

Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Dr Danny Sriskandarajah said: "Our Report Cards make for worrying reading. Even the countries at the top of the Commonwealth class fall short of true gender equality. I hope Commonwealth leaders will show the political leadership that is needed to promote women as agents of change. This year, the Commonwealth has the opportunity to be at the vanguard of the fight for gender equality."

Chief Executive of Plan UK, Marie Staunton said: "Our research shows that in those Commonwealth countries that have shown bold political will, there has been great progress towards realising girls' rights, lifting them out of poverty."

But my message to the Commonwealth today is that much more needs to be done. Globally 75 million girls remain out of school and robbed of a fulfilling future. Often undervalued and neglected, and held back by their gender and age, girls are prevented from contributing to the societies in which they live. This holds us all back.

Plan's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign challenges each of us to take practical action towards a Commonwealth and a world in which every girl can fulfil their potential."

Notes to Editors

'Because You're a Girl: Growing Up in the Commonwealth' is available to download from www.thercs.org/society/research or from www.plan-uk.org/newsroom.

Report Methodology

In each of the eight indicators, the report looks at how well girls/women are doing compared to boys/men in each Commonwealth country (for which we have data). The report then compares the female to male ratio in each country to the average across the Commonwealth. Using the 'standard deviation' statistical measure, each Report Card assigns grades. An 'A' is given if the country is well above average (more than half a standard deviation above the mean), a 'C' if the country is below average (more than half a standard deviation below the mean) and a 'B' if the country is average. The final rankings are constructed on the basis of the average grade across the indicators we have data for each country. All data are sourced from existing data sources and using the latest year available. These data sources are often compiled by multilateral agencies using official data from member states. More details of the methodology used can be found in the report.

About Plan: Plan is a global children's charity. We work with children in the world's poorest countries to help them build a better future. A future you would want for all children, your family and friends.

For over 70 years we've been taking action and standing up for every child's right to fulfil their potential:

- Giving children a healthy start in life, including access to safe drinking water
- Securing the education of girls and boys
- Working with communities to prepare for and survive disasters
- Inspiring children to take a lead in decisions that affect their lives
- Enabling families to earn a living and plan for their children's future.

We do what's needed, where it's needed most. We do what you would do.

As part of reaching out to those who need it most Plan's Because I am a Girl Campaign works to improve the lives of girls and young women who too often find themselves ignored, particularly when poverty means families have to make hard choices. The State of the World's Girls Report has been published annually since 2007 to support this campaign. www.plan-international.org/girls

About the Royal Commonwealth Society: The RCS is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth. Founded in 1868, it conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. Its educational, youth and cultural programmes include one of the world's oldest and largest schools essay competitions, and an innovative international youth leadership programme. Headquartered at the Commonwealth Club in London, the RCS has some 4,000 members in the UK and a presence in over 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies.

The RCS is a registered charity in England and Wales. (226748). www.thercs.org

The Commonwealth: The modern Commonwealth was established with 8 members in 1949. In 2011, it has 54 members with a total population of nearly 2 billion. It is a voluntary association of governments and peoples, built around shared language, institutions, challenges, aspirations and values. Commonwealth countries work together to promote common values: democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all.

Commonwealth Day & the 2011 theme, 'Women as Agents of Change': In 2011, Commonwealth organisations are focusing on the theme 'Women as Agents of Change', recognising that, by investing in women and girls, we can accelerate social, economic and political progress.

This theme is being celebrated on Commonwealth Day, Monday 14th March 2011. This annual event is an opportunity to promote understanding on global issues, international cooperation and the work of the Commonwealth's organisations which aim to improve the lives of its citizens.

To mark Commonwealth Day, the Royal Commonwealth Society (on behalf of the Council of Commonwealth Societies) organises an Observance at Westminster Abbey. Britain's largest inter-faith gathering, the Observance is attended by HM The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, and Commonwealth leaders including the current Chairperson-in-office, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Trinidad and Tobago. They are joined in the Abbey by more than 1,000 schoolchildren, as well as hundreds of VIPs. Speakers at the 2011 Observance include singer-songwriter and campaigner, Annie Lennox, international economist, Dambisa Moyo and Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy. www.commonwealthday.org

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Marie Staunton, Chief Executive of Plan UK and Dr Danny Sriskandarajah, Director of the RCS are both available for interview on request.