

Transforming Our Commonwealth

Report of the Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC,
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth,
to CHOGM 2024





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The Commonwealth

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Eight Years of Service 2016–2024



A portrait of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a black top. She is wearing a large, ornate shawl with a colorful floral and paisley pattern in shades of purple, red, and gold. She is also wearing a multi-strand pearl necklace and gold earrings. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white.

"We have re-established the Commonwealth as an influential and indispensable force for good in the world."

Previous page, top: speaking at the launch of the Zanzibar Says NO MORE campaign in Zanzibar, March 2024; bottom: with ministers, officials, youth leaders and youth workers at the 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting, Kampala, Uganda, July 2017.

1. Eight Years of Service, 2016–2024

The Commonwealth is special. Our capacity to successfully combine scale and diversity with shared values, common interests, natural advantages and joint action sets us apart.

The power of 56 nations working together, harnessing the ingenuity and imagination of a third of the world's population, creates an exceptional ability to navigate shifting global dynamics and build resilient democratic institutions, societies, economies and sustainable environmental systems across our Commonwealth.

Through decades of change and challenge in our world, under the exemplary leadership of the predecessors I have been proud to follow, the Secretariat has helped the Commonwealth to achieve remarkable things.

The Commonwealth led the international pressure against Apartheid.

Through the Langkawi Declaration of 1989,¹ the Commonwealth placed the progressive deterioration of the environment on the global agenda for the first time, paving the way for the UN's first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992.

Our Charter,² ratified in 2013, created the framework for the Sustainable Development Goals.

And pan-Commonwealth agreement on climate change helped to unlock global agreement at the Paris Summit in 2015.

On taking office in 2016 as your sixth Secretary-General – and the first woman to hold the role – I found a team of skilful and committed people within the Secretariat, delivering valuable work.

Yet despite the continuing significance of the Commonwealth's efforts, I also inherited many

challenges, including a 'burning platform',³ a challenging 'C' rating in the UK Government's 2011 Multilateral Aid Review,⁴ and a 42 per cent funding shortfall. Interest and support were waning, and the trust of our member countries was eroding.

Assessors found the Secretariat to be bureaucratic and ineffective, with weak strategic oversight, unsatisfactory resource management and poor cost- and value-consciousness, and there was little confidence that positive change could be achieved.⁵

Within my first year in office, Secretariat staff supported me in designing and delivering a decisive programme of reform and modernisation. We worked together to transform the Secretariat's rating from a 'C' to an 'A+', restored the Secretariat's financial health and adopted smarter working practices. We have received a clean bill of health from external auditors for each and every year of my tenure.

As a direct consequence, we have not only delivered every one of the promises I made to you on taking office, enacted every mandate you have given us, and acted on every request for support you have made – we have re-established the Commonwealth as an influential and indispensable force for good in the world.

At the same time, together, we have marshalled our full strength to respond to the immense, unprecedented and unpredictable challenges the world has thrown at us, while positioning ourselves

1 Commonwealth Secretariat (1989) 'Langkawi Declaration on the Environment'. <https://thecommonwealth.org/langkawi-declaration-environment-1989>

2 Commonwealth Secretariat (2013) Commonwealth Charter. <https://thecommonwealth.org/charter>

3 Goheer, N. (2021) '6. CLOCK, CLOUD, and Contestation: The Digital Journey of the Commonwealth Secretariat', in Bjola, C. & Zaiotti, R. (Eds.) *Digital Diplomacy and International Organisations: Autonomy, Legitimacy and Contestation*, Routledge.

4 Department for International Development (UK) (2011) *Multilateral Aid Review: Ensuring maximum value for money for UK aid through multilateral organisations*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a79eab1e5274a18ba50fbf3/multilateral_aid_review.pdf

5 *Ibid.*



to seize the opportunities presented to us, and build a better, more hopeful future for all our 2.7 billion citizens.

An Analogue Inheritance

In 2016, the digital revolution was in full swing. Countries and corporations, people and processes were more connected and integrated than at any other time in the history of human civilization.

The Commonwealth was detached from this advancement to the extent that it was 'pushing itself into insignificance'.⁶

Seventeen years earlier, at the 1999 CHOGM in Durban, Commonwealth Leaders had established a High-Level Group to prepare our family of nations for the challenges of the new millennium. This included an intergovernmental expert group on information technology, tasked to examine and overcome barriers to the adoption of digital technologies across our family of nations.⁷

It took seven years, until the 2005 CHOGM in Malta, to agree an Action Plan and establish a Special Fund. For the following nine years, a Steering Group and various working groups were created, met regularly, and generated reports, but by time of the Steering Group's 20th Meeting in

2010 independent assessors found that the few projects the programme had supported were only tangentially related to the broader ICT agenda.⁸

In January 2014, while the world spun ever-faster, the programme was terminated. The original idea and mandate were indisputably right, but the programme faltered because the Secretariat's outdated working practices led it to stagnate. There was a failure to recognise the paradigm shift that ICT had caused, with no strategic thrust and an inability to 'adapt to the demands of an interconnected and interactive world'.⁹

After 16 years, and at a cost of more than £1 million, the programme ended.

Modernisation & Reform

Reform is rarely comfortable, but the above example illustrates how urgently it was needed.

The Commonwealth should always be able to hold its head high, setting an example to an admiring world that knows what we stand for, and admires what we achieve.

The key to a strong and effective Commonwealth is a strong and effective Secretariat.

6 Goheer, *op. cit.*

7 Commonwealth Secretariat (1999) 'The Durban Communiqué', paragraph 7

8 Narotra, J. P. & Tabone, J. V. (2011, April) *Review of the Connects Projects*, report presented to the steering committee.

9 Goheer, *op. cit.*

In response to challenging independent reviews, initiated when I took office, I outlined a new vision for a Commonwealth of all our talents: a compelling and powerful global advocate for all our members and people, based on our shared values; and a catalyst for real change.¹⁰

This vision centred around the Commonwealth's extraordinary ability to forge consensus and co-operation among countries of all sizes, and our understanding that the challenges of an increasingly connected world are so complex that no single nation can hope to achieve the twin goals of democracy and development by acting alone.

The Secretariat's role was to convene the processes, develop the partnerships and marshal the skills, expertise and resources required to empower and protect our member countries and all our citizens.

We redefined our purpose.

- To seek cost-effective, measurable and positive impacts on the lives of the people of the Commonwealth.
- To lead the pursuit of expanded trade and economic partnerships, to create jobs, grow future industries and build sustainable economic success.
- To drive the development of common economic frameworks to address systemic and long-term challenges and inspire sustainable development, tackling inequality and endemic poverty, alongside programmes that decrease the vulnerability and increase the resilience of small states.
- To generate a new consensus for education, health and justice, to build the foundation of skills, wellbeing and institutional strength which enable a better future.

¹⁰ Secretary-General of the Commonwealth (2016) *Phase 2: The Review of the Secretariat: Delivering Our Strategy: Next Steps*.



The Secretary-General speaks at the 13th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting, Nassau, The Bahamas, August 2023

- To establish a new, more effective approach to partnership in global negotiations, to maximise the strength and influence of our common voice.
- To foster data-driven policy-making and national strategy implementation across member countries.

Enabling this within the Secretariat required wholesale reform of our processes and working practices to create a dynamic, transparent and performance-driven environment which could attract the best and brightest talent from across the Commonwealth.

It required us to refocus our work and programmes on the needs and experiences of our member countries, with tangible actions and results as our continuous purpose.



Planting a calabash 'miracle' tree in Uganda, January 2024

"The key to a strong and effective Commonwealth is a strong and effective Secretariat."

It required us to build effective and lasting partnerships, promoting peace and prosperity through genuine partnership, and finding common ground among countries with diverse backgrounds, scales and at different stages of development.

It required us to rebuild Commonwealth unity.

And it required us to more effectively champion the Commonwealth across the world, as an advocate for our members, especially those who have too often been ignored in the halls of the international system.

We streamlined seven separate programme divisions into three empowered, interoperable delivery clusters, and complemented the Strategic Plan with a new Delivery Plan with modernised management practices.

We replaced ineffective structures with smart teams, challenged to think differently, going beyond traditional silos and ready to respond to nonlinear and emergent challenges with an absolute focus on delivering efficiently, effectively and in context.

Alongside this, crucially, we reinvented ourselves as a digitally proficient and effective organisation to ensure that we became a diamond in the 21st century.¹¹ We upgraded our systems and cybersecurity, and connected all our staff and offices around the world continuously. We digitalised our data, enabling us to work faster, with greater skill and accountability and to the highest standards of financial control established by the International Aid Transparency Index. We digitalised our delivery, transforming our capacity to understand and respond to the challenges of the world and the needs of member countries across every area of our work. We modernised our digital identity, establishing an inclusive, modern brand and online presence for an inclusive, modern

11 Goheer, *op. cit.*

"We reinvented ourselves as a digitally proficient and effective organisation."

Commonwealth, which could carry the pride of our members and help to solidify our role within the international system. And we fostered a new culture of innovation, partnership and collaborative action across the Secretariat, which has become integral to our ability to advance in today's complex, interdependent, dynamic and fast-changing world.

In essence, we rebuilt the house we were living in: recasting our foundations, refocusing on the needs and priorities of all our member countries, repairing our ability to deliver, establishing our ability to adapt, and restoring our ability to lead on the world stage.

Navigating Crises

These qualities are essential for any high-performing organisation to function well from day to day, which is the least that Commonwealth member countries can expect from the Secretariat.

But the reforms we pursued at the outset of my first term were both tested and justified in the most comprehensive way by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Investment in the Secretariat's digital skills and infrastructure enabled us to shift our entire operation – including the ongoing delivery of Ministerial Meetings – online, indefinitely, within 24 hours.

Digitalisation of our data enabled us to quickly expand our Commonwealth Innovation Hub,¹² providing all our member countries with live information on infection, hospitalisation, mortality and – in time – vaccination rates, to enable more informed and accurate decision-making in every member countries.

Digitalisation of our delivery enabled us to ramp up our programmes and technical assistance at exactly the moment when extra support was most needed.

And the Secretariat's enhanced credibility on the world stage enabled us to develop effective partnerships with vital institutions such as the World Health Organization.¹³

None of this would have been possible without the reforms we identified and delivered.

We all mourn the 1.3 million Commonwealth citizens who died during the pandemic. At the same time, we can take pride in the work we did to support each other, and bring our values alive, during one of the most devastating periods in living memory.

Responding to the Needs of Our Members

From fortified foundations, we have transformed our ability to deliver results.

The mission I set out upon taking office – tackling climate change, building prosperity, reducing violence against women and girls, empowering youth and promoting good governance – was drawn from our Charter, our established mandates and the priorities shared with me by our member countries.

My previous roles in public service had taught me how deeply important a data-driven approach is to crafting truly context-responsive, financially prudent and sustainable policy solutions.

I was, therefore, determined to ensure that we at the Secretariat did everything we could to support our member governments to achieve stronger policy results through the collation, distillation and correct application of all relevant data in the key policy areas above.

In each of these areas, our delivery has been deep, wide and responsive.

Climate Change

The breakdown of the earth's stable climate, induced by human activity, was a disruptive force in 2016, and the impacts of climate change have intensified significantly in the eight years since.

12 thecommonwealth.org/innovation

13 World Health Organization (2022, February 7) 'Commonwealth and WHO to strengthen cooperation on health, including access to vaccines', media release. <https://www.who.int/news/item/07-02-2022-commonwealth-and-who-to-strengthen-cooperation-on-health-including-access-to-vaccines>

The Secretary-General talks with a woman whose house was destroyed by Hurricane Maria in Dominica, November 2017



We are living through extremes of heat, drought, storms, floods and fires the likes of which we have never seen, and facing challenges for humanity the likes of which we have never known.

In 2017, hurricane Maria devastated my own country of birth, Dominica, costing 226 per cent of her GDP.

In 2019, Cyclone Idai, one of the most severe tropical storms, wreaked havoc across Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, leaving 2.6 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. Just six weeks later, Cyclone Kenneth struck Mozambique, compounding the destruction in an already devastated region.

The 2019–2020 Australian bushfire season was catastrophic for both people and nature. Nearly 19 million hectares were burned, impacting close to three billion animals, and 80 per cent of Australians were affected in some way.

In the summer of 2022, the UK experienced five heatwaves, with record-breaking temperatures of over 40°C. These heatwaves were linked to 2,985 deaths in England.

That same year, unprecedented floods submerged one-third of Pakistan, displacing 33 million people and resulting in devastating loss of life.

In 2023, Vanuatu was devastated by category 5 cyclone Lola, which hit seven months after twin cyclones Judy and Kevin had wiped out 50 per cent of her GDP.

These are just a handful of examples. There are scores more. In every region of the Commonwealth, fertile lands have turned to dust, wells have run dry, storms and floods continue to overwhelm communities, and the ocean rises.

When I took office, it was abundantly clear that climate change-induced weather disasters were an existential threat to our small island and developing states, with consequences extending beyond environmental decline and amplifying existing social, political and economic inequalities which bring forward the tipping point for instability and conflict.

I also was learning, especially from our small states, that in addition to co-operating at every level to do less harm to our planet, we needed to do more good. That same year, I convened the first Commonwealth meeting to explore regenerative development models to reverse the impacts of climate change. This meant not only mitigating damage but also actively working together across disciplines on solutions to restore and regenerate the precious resources of our planet. And this cross-sectoral approach gave birth to our Common Earth programme.

As I set out on this journey to champion a regenerative and inclusive approach to development across our member countries, my goal was to ensure that this idea, and practice, was embedded in the very fabric of the Commonwealth's work going forward.

Together with all our members, we ensured that the groundbreaking Commonwealth Blue Charter, which supports sustainable ocean development, was adopted by our Heads of Government at CHOGM 2018.

Our CommonSensing project, a partnership with the UN Institute for Training and Research launched in February 2019, utilises satellite technology and analysis of geospatial data to help our vulnerable members make informed decisions and build climate resilience.

More recently, in June 2022, the Commonwealth Living Lands Charter was adopted by Heads at CHOGM, which brings our family of nations together in principled and practical ways to prevent ecological breakdown, foster the sustainable management of land and oceans, and restore the health of these most precious resources.

Ineffective international rules and broken promises have systematically prevented our most vulnerable member countries from accessing vital climate-mitigation resources. So, we established the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub, which has unlocked more than US\$360 million, with more than an additional \$500 million in the pipeline;

embedded climate finance advisers in every region; and trained thousands of public officials in accessing and managing funds.

The thread of our regenerative and inclusive approach has been further refined recently through our emergency response protocols – including our Disaster Risk Finance Portal and Rapid Response mechanisms – which provide essential support to our member countries when climate-induced disasters hit. We are now strengthening and expanding that support through the Commonwealth Disaster Resilience Centre and the Health Innovation Accelerator Fund, which is a partnership with the global health organisation PATH.

And through our partnership with Cambridge University on 'Their Future, Our Action' – which has engaged leaders, indigenous peoples, ministers, officials, experts and thousands of young people from across our Commonwealth – we have developed the new COMPASS tool to de-risk climate investments in small island states, enabling them to access vital resources much faster and more easily.

The Secretary-General speaking
at COP27, Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt,
16 November 2022



Our principled and practical programme of climate support for Commonwealth member countries is a credible, results-oriented approach which is making a genuine difference. It has also given us a platform to renew the Commonwealth's global climate leadership.

At successive COP summits, our role as the foremost champion of small and vulnerable states has been firmly established and recognised.

Our voice has been strong and powerful, and our influence has been further enhanced by the creation of new conferences of Commonwealth Environment and Climate Change Ministers and Ocean Ministers, respectively.

Continuing the momentum built by the 2022 CHOGM Communiqué, our members were instrumental in achieving the historic Loss and Damage breakthroughs at COP27 and COP28.

And harnessing the power of our Universal Vulnerability Index, we stand with our small island developing states at the forefront of advocacy to reform the global financial architecture. Commonwealth leaders recognise this as an important tool to support the Bridgetown Initiative, which proposes innovative and equitable ways to enable climate vulnerable states to truly build climate resilience, such as cheaper loans, debt moratoriums in times of crisis and private sector-backed funding for climate mitigation.

Prosperity

Despite severe economic challenges, intensified by climate disasters, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic – which led to an economic contraction of more than \$1 trillion across the Commonwealth – and the disruption to trade, inflation and interest rates that resulted from the conflict in Ukraine, we continue to deliver on my promise to put the 'wealth' back into 'Commonwealth'.

By systematically leveraging our practical benefits in language, common law, regulatory coherence and business procedures, and working with our large and dynamic diaspora communities, we have firmly established a trade advantage which means the cost of doing business between Commonwealth countries is 21 per cent lower than trade between non-Commonwealth countries.

Intra-Commonwealth investment has tripled during my time in office. In 2021, despite the pandemic, intra-Commonwealth exports reached an all-time high of \$721 billion, up by nearly \$140 billion from the previous year. They surpassed \$800 billion dollars in 2022, and should exceed \$1 trillion by 2026. Following the full implementation of our digital trade facilitation measures, we will be on track to reach our target of \$2 trillion in intra-Commonwealth trade by 2030.

The combined stocks of physical infrastructure, natural capital and human capital across our Commonwealth family now exceeds \$150 trillion – more than 10 times greater than our collective GDP, and 30 times more than our global trade in goods and services. Our extraordinary economic potential is underscored by the fact that our human capital makes up two-thirds of this total.

The overlapping economic shocks of COVID, climate change and conflict mean that debt is a persistent challenge – especially for our small states. In response, we have vastly improved and digitalised our Commonwealth Meridian debt management system, which now manages a combined portfolio of more than \$4 trillion of public debt across 42 countries, while our world-leading anti-corruption benchmarks are challenging the ill-gotten gains that steal from the poorest and undermine development prospects.

Today, more than 80 per cent of the best-performing countries in Africa on Transparency International's Corruption Index and the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance are Commonwealth member countries.

Youth & Gender: Equality & Empowerment

Youth

In every one of our ministerial groups – trade, finance, law, foreign affairs, health, education, women's affairs, sport, climate change and environment, oceans and youth – together, a modern, transformational agenda has been agreed.

For every one of those groups, we are delivering the mandates we have been given, and driving positive change which can unleash the Commonwealth's extraordinary potential.

That potential is embodied in our more than 1.6 billion young people.

When they declared the Year of Youth, our Heads of Government recognised that we have a shared duty to heed, celebrate and amplify the voices of the young people who form the vibrant core of our Commonwealth family.

Throughout the Year of Youth, together, we have reaffirmed our commitment to creating a world in which every young person, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to contribute, thrive and shape their own destiny.

My focus on young people has been shaped by a single truth: that they are not simply the beneficiaries of our efforts, they are active agents of change, partners in development, and leaders – today and tomorrow.

Their energy, creativity and determination are and will be the driving forces behind our collective progress. Their dreams, aspirations and actions have the power to transform our Commonwealth and our world. With their ability to think laterally and creatively, they can provide radical new solutions to our shared problems. We ignore their thinking, drive and leadership at our peril.

As decision-makers, it is our collective responsibility to nurture their potential, remove the barriers they face and create an enabling environment where they can thrive.

“Young people are active agents of change, partners in development, and leaders – today and tomorrow.”

In this, we are strengthened by our Charter – the highest expression of our ideals, aspirations and obligations. That Charter is unequivocal in recognising the importance of young people and their participation in all aspects of society, and it underscores the strength of our belief that empowering young people is both a moral imperative and a practical advantage.



**THE YEAR OF
YOUTH
2023**
Celebrating 50 years of the
Commonwealth Youth Programme

The Secretary-General relaunches the YourCommonwealth.org website as part of the Year of Youth, March 2023



Building on half a century of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, we have mainstreamed youth across all of our work, and created an unprecedented number of forums and platforms for young people to shape our work and, by extension, lead the world.

Through our partnerships with global tech giants, we are equipping tens of thousands of young people with digital skills.

Our pioneering Youth Development Index (YDI) has been an essential tool in supporting youth development. Governments inside and outside the Commonwealth use our YDI extensively to make critical judgements on policies, programmes and initiatives. And its findings show steady and meaningful improvement in youth development across the Commonwealth, which speaks volumes about the resilience of our young people.

Women's Empowerment

Gender mainstreaming across the full spectrum of the Commonwealth's work has enabled us to proactively champion the social, political and economic empowerment of women in every country, at every level.

This is a fundamental question of justice, equality and progress. Women make up more than half of the Commonwealth's population, and our collective ability to thrive in the modern, connected, digitalised world requires equal power and equal opportunities for women.

And the tangled knot of crises we have faced brings this into the sharpest possible focus.

The terrible burden of the pandemic did not fall equally.

Women and girls took on vast amounts of unpaid care work in the darkest days of lockdown.

Job losses throughout the crisis came in sectors such as retail, tourism and hospitality, which are made up predominantly of women workers.

Calls to domestic violence helplines increased five-fold, at the same time that essential services were discontinued, leaving untold numbers of women and children trapped in homes with their abusers.

We established the Commonwealth Says NO MORE campaign – the first-ever pan-Commonwealth platform to address domestic and sexual violence – and developed free-to-access tools and resources. The campaign now has chapters in many Commonwealth countries and has been endorsed by all our Heads of Government.

And our programme of support for economic and political empowerment is equipping more women and girls than ever with the skills, access and power to seize the new frontiers of opportunity and progress presented to us by technological innovation.

If we so choose, we can build a future for the women and girls of the Commonwealth that we can all be very proud of.

Peace & Democracy

The Commonwealth is the largest association of democratic nations in the history of the world. Democracy is at the heart of our Charter, and provides the platform upon which peace is established and enhanced.

Our election observation work has led the world for decades, and the whole-cycle approach we have taken under my leadership – through which we work hand-in-hand with governments to protect and develop the process and institutions of democracy – has made a decisive difference to member countries across the Commonwealth throughout the last eight years.

This approach is complemented by my Good Offices role, which is an essential function of the Secretary-General as the only major office in international diplomacy appointed directly by Heads of Government. Perhaps the highest privilege of the office of Secretary-General is to be entrusted and empowered by Heads of Government to directly and personally assist countries in times of crisis and help deliver peace.

That assistance includes the ongoing delivery of our Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, and our Ministerial Groups on Guyana and Belize.

That assistance includes quiet, preventive diplomacy to mitigate political, electoral and constitutional challenges; the deployment of eminent Commonwealth persons to defuse political tensions and improve political stability; multidisciplinary conflict prevention and peacebuilding technical support; political and conflict sensitivity analysis support to the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) missions; and the newly established Marlborough House Dialogues.

Throughout my time in office, I have provided this support – on request – across more than 20 countries. I am proud that we have helped to de-escalate tensions, strengthen institutions, improve political stability and build peace. I am grateful to Heads of Government for recognising the ongoing importance of this work in the 2022 CHOGM Communiqué.

A Confident, Connected Commonwealth

This is just a snapshot of eight years of delivery and progress.

The report that follows provides a more comprehensive overview of everything we have achieved together.

Taken together, it amounts to a programme of principled and practical support which is more comprehensive and impactful now than at any other time in the history of the Commonwealth.

It is a programme that has provided efficient, effective and essential assistance across all our member countries; has made a practical difference to the lives of our citizens; and has restored the Commonwealth from a position of dwindling relevance to a powerful force for good in the world. In the context of intensifying crises, which interconnect, entwine and worsen one another, and the resulting pressure which has been placed on the international system, this is remarkable.

The design and delivery of this programme is strengthened by the rich expertise, knowledge and experience of my eight Special Envoys, who generously offer their advice and support on a pro-bono basis.



Commonwealth leaders at the 2022 CHOGM in Kigali, Rwanda, July 2022



For example, working with my Special Envoy for Science and Technology, Professor Manahel Thabet, I have compiled definitive analyses of the progress that every Commonwealth country has made towards every SDG target. I have complemented that with analyses of digital governance, alongside assessments of progress towards implementing clean, green, sustainable energy solutions in every country. This valuable data serves as a foundation for evidence-based, targeted interventions that are driving meaningful change in many of our member countries.

In a fracturing world, the Commonwealth is growing in scale and influence, precisely because of what we stand for and what we can deliver. Indeed, by 2020, The Gambia and The Maldives had rejoined our family of nations. In 2022 they were joined by Gabon and Togo, whose decision to join, despite having no historical association with the Commonwealth, underlines our relevance and value.

Through the reforms we identified and implemented, we have not only ensured our survival and improved the service we provide to our member countries: we have re-established our global influence and guaranteed our future.

We have developed the expertise, confidence and adaptability to rise to the challenges of our world. And now – through our world-leading work to help

our members understand, master and harness transformative technologies – we are well-placed to seize the benefits of the 21st century together.

New technologies such as artificial intelligence, big data, blockchain and cloud computing have become critical to nearly every sector. They are driving profound changes in our daily lives, changing how we consume, produce and work, how societies connect, and how businesses are run.

With the right support from the Secretariat, our member countries can capitalise on these technologies to transform public services; deliver more equal, healthier, more prosperous, more resilient and more secure societies; and claim their fair share of the \$15.7 trillion bounty which AI is expected to add to the global economy by 2030.¹⁴

Acting on the CHOGM 2022 mandate to close the digital divide, we are providing systematic support to build digital skills and access across all our regions.

The Commonwealth Artificial Intelligence Consortium is setting a new global standard for the use of AI in government and throughout society, especially for small states.

14 PwC (2017) *Sizing the prize: What's the real value of AI for your business and how can you capitalise?* <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/data-and-analytics/publications/artificial-intelligence-study.html>

Since the last CHOGM, our Law, Trade, Finance, Health, Education, Youth, Ocean, Environment and Women's Affairs Ministers have all agreed transformative new agendas in digital policy and practice.

We arrive in Samoa for my final CHOGM as Secretary-General with the world's most dynamic and comprehensive political and economic framework for harnessing the best of technological change for all of our 56 countries and 2.7 billion people.

I reflect, with gratitude, on the journey we have walked and the issues we have confronted and addressed together.

During my tenure as Secretary General, I have felt incredibly blessed to enjoy a relationship of deep trust with Commonwealth leaders. This did not happen overnight, but developed from the distinguished legacy of my predecessors who worked tirelessly to demonstrate to Commonwealth countries that we were not just fair-weather friends.

Based on relationships which had been built up over decades, and the deep trust that leaders placed in me, I was able to benefit greatly from the frankness with which leaders shared the dreams and aspirations, as well as the concerns and needs, of their people. It is through this display of courage and selflessness, combined with our willingness to listen carefully and offer advice delivered with their best interests at heart, that we were able to work closely to mould effective responses.

"I reflect, with gratitude, on the journey we have walked and the issues we have confronted and addressed together."



The Secretary-General with His Majesty King Charles III at Marlborough House, London, UK, on the eve of His Coronation, 5 May 2023

I am deeply grateful for this incredible honour, and for the opportunity to provide that support, and hope my successor will continue to nurture the deep trust that defines our Commonwealth family.

Today we stand together as a smart Commonwealth; a connected Commonwealth; a modern, innovative and successful Commonwealth, with the capacity and confidence not merely to face the future, but to build it.

Our potential has always been extraordinary – now we have the incredible opportunity to realise it.

By bringing people together, drawing strength and inspiration from what we share, we can create a genuinely durable Commonwealth in which no one is left behind. We can advance the goal of a more secure, peaceful, fair and sustainable world for everyone, everywhere. And we can all enjoy the kind of prosperity that harnesses new technology and is achieved in harmony with nature, safeguarding our unique and only planet for generations to come.

This is our history, and our promise; our experience, and our aspiration.

And it is the flame of opportunity that I will pass, with pride and gratitude, to my successor as Secretary-General, who will be able to continue the journey of reform, delivery and leadership.

They will be uniquely blessed, as I have been, to hold this office and serve our precious Commonwealth.

I am immensely grateful to Heads of Government for the faith they placed in me in 2015, and again in 2022.

I am equally grateful for the support afforded to me by Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and by His Majesty King Charles III, whose passion for our Commonwealth has been unparalleled.

To work with and serve you all has been the great privilege of my life.

I will stand with you all, and behind my successor, as you continue to strive together, in restless and practical pursuit of the global common good.

*The Rt Hon. Baroness Patricia Scotland KC,
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth*



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II receives the Secretary-General during an audience in the Oak Room, Windsor Castle, UK, April 2018

2

Resilient Government Key Projects 2016–2024





This page: flag-flying at Commonwealth Day 2024, London, UK.
Previous page, top: with former South African President Thabo Mbeki at the signing of the Second National Peace Accord for peaceful elections in Nigeria, February; bottom: the Commonwealth and member country flags flying in Parliament Square Garden on Commonwealth Day, London, UK, March 2020.

2. Resilient Government: Key Projects 2016–2024

Introduction

The Secretary-General began her tenure on 1 April 2016 with a clear mission from Heads of Government to revitalise and modernise the Secretariat. One of her first tasks was to commission an independent review of its operations. The review revealed challenges, including bureaucracy, excessive processes and a lack of innovation.¹ In response, the Secretary-General expeditiously enacted several reforms, including the implementation of a comprehensive Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan² aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), both of which were approved by the Board.

"I intend for this Secretariat to be the best it can possibly be. The Secretariat has to be the fulcrum of best practice where the brightest and the best in the Commonwealth, imbued with a culture of public service, must aspire to work."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, in one of her early notes to staff

The Secretary-General's efforts to streamline operations, cut costs and foster a dynamic digital culture quickly gained recognition from member countries. At the 2017 Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting her reforms were praised and she was encouraged to expand the scope of her efforts.³

Since then, the Secretary-General has worked tirelessly to transform the Secretariat as a leading force for good, building an impressive track

record of success in tackling global economic, environmental and political challenges. Under her leadership the Secretariat has charted a steady upward course through turbulent times, as multilateral co-operation faced increasing pressure from rising populism, nationalism and authoritarianism.

"The Secretariat has to be the fulcrum of best practice."

**The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC,
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth**

The Secretary-General's work is grounded in the belief that peaceful and stable societies are the bedrock of sustainable human development, environmental protection and economic growth. Drawing on her distinguished legal career, including her role as the UK's first woman Attorney General, she strengthened the Secretariat's programme of support to its member countries on advancing democracy, good governance, the rule of law and human rights.

Highlights of the Secretariat's achievements under her leadership include the following.

- **Conflict prevention and peacebuilding:** The Secretary-General played a critical role in de-escalating politically charged situations in 27 member countries between 2016 and 2024, and provided multidisciplinary conflict prevention and peacebuilding technical assistance to at least nine member countries through quiet, preventive diplomacy.
- **Through a 'whole-of-election-cycle' approach,** the Secretariat has offered tailored assistance to member countries throughout the electoral process, ensuring long-term electoral integrity. Between 2016 and 2024, the Secretary-General deployed

1 Commonwealth Secretariat (2016, November 5) 'Secretary-General states case for transformative change at Commonwealth', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/secretary-general-states-case-transformative-change-commonwealth>

2 Commonwealth Secretariat (2017) Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21. https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/migrated/inline/CommonwealthSecretariatStrategic_Plan_17_21.pdf

3 Commonwealth Secretariat (2017, September 22) 'Foreign affairs ministers praise Commonwealth reforms', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/foreign-affairs-ministers-praise-commonwealth-reforms>

Key figures, 2016–2024

27	39	7,000+	17	55
political situations defused through the Secretary-General's Good Offices	Commonwealth Election Observer Groups deployed in member countries	Commonwealth anti-corruption officials trained	new model laws and toolkits published by OCCJR	member governments engaged through the Cyber Programme

40 full Commonwealth Observer Groups, two Commonwealth Expert Teams and five staff-only missions.

- **Marlborough House Dialogues and Get-Togethers** have strengthened the culture, process and institutions of democracy, bolstering the foundations for peace and prosperity in accordance with the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter.
- **The Office for Civil and Criminal Justice Reform (OCCJR)** was created in 2017 to support member countries to deliver access to justice and sustainable development through the creation of effective national laws, policies and legislation. Seventeen new model laws and legal toolkits were published between 2016 and 2024.
- **The Countering Violent Extremism Programme**, launched in 2018, has delivered more than 150 capacity-building activities which have directly benefitted more than 2,000 Commonwealth citizens.
- **The Commonwealth Cyber Programme**, set up in 2018, has assisted more than 1,000 officials from 55 Commonwealth countries with the implementation of the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration.⁴

Through these and other initiatives, the Secretary-General has promoted and protected the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, assisting member countries to advance peace, strengthen legal frameworks, consolidate democratic processes and tackle corruption. Her leadership has been instrumental in helping Commonwealth countries make substantial progress towards the SDGs, and has earned her a reputation as a principled and trusted ally to member governments.

4 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) 'Cyber Declaration'. <https://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-cyber-declaration-2018>

2.1 Whole-cycle Election Support

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 14: ‘Heads reaffirmed their commitment to the Revised Commonwealth Guidelines on Election Observation, endorsed at the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, and called for strengthened efforts throughout an election cycle to support member countries in improving their democratic processes and institutions, including through the establishment of domestic mechanisms to review and take forward observer recommendations.’

Background

Election observation is an effective mechanism for evaluating the integrity of the electoral process in member countries. The presence of impartial and independent election observation missions helps to deter fraud, foster public trust, mitigate conflict and strengthen democratic institutions by drawing up recommendations for future improvements.

Objective

The Secretariat is mandated to support member countries in adhering to Commonwealth values, particularly by helping them conduct transparent, credible and inclusive elections.

Strategy

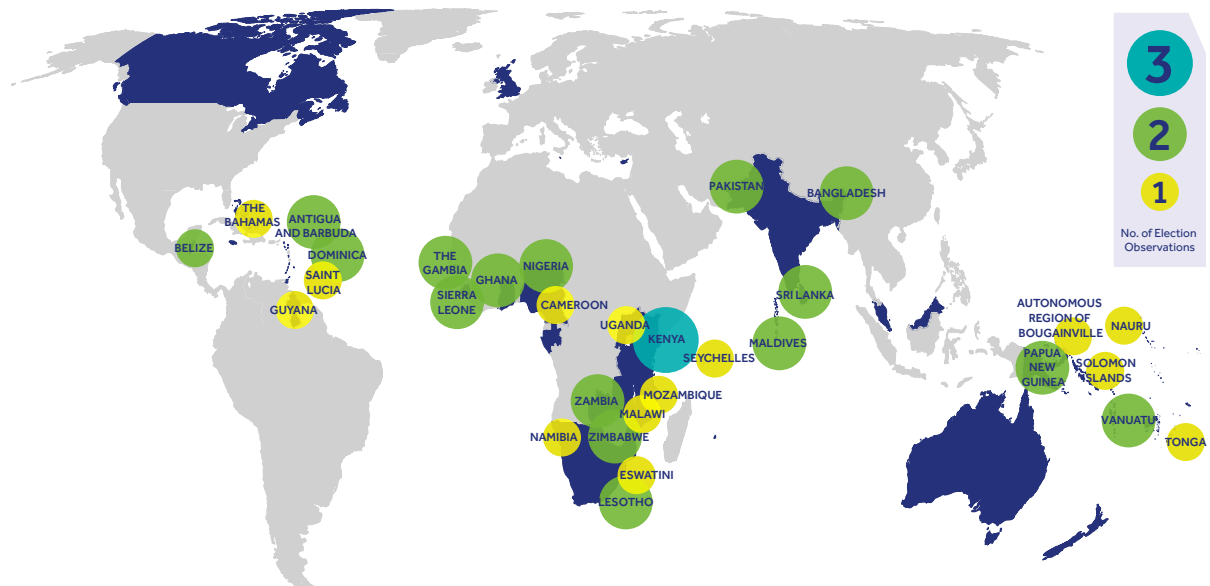
Since taking office in 2016, the Secretary-General has implemented a holistic strategy to support peaceful democratic governance in member countries through a ‘whole-of-election-cycle’ approach, the purpose of which is to ensure continued support for the promotion of the culture, processes and institutions of democracy before, during and after elections. Our support is centred around four main pillars: election observations, technical assistance, knowledge products and the training of election officials.

To strengthen this approach, the Secretary-General commissioned experts from member countries to draft the *Revised Commonwealth Guidelines on Election Observation*.⁵ These guidelines, endorsed by leaders in 2018,⁶ have been fully integrated into the Secretariat’s electoral support programme and the Secretary-General’s Good Offices work.

5 Commonwealth Secretariat (no date) *Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries*. <https://thecommonwealth.org/multi-sector-support-and-related-toolkits>

6 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Heads of Government Meeting Communiqué: ‘Towards a Common Future’*. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-heads-government-meeting-communicue-towards-common-future>

Figure 2.1: Commonwealth election observations by country, April 2016–September 2024



The Secretariat's extensive engagement with countries throughout their electoral cycle reflects the confidence that member countries have in our ability to provide proactive and practical support. From 2016 to 2024, the Secretariat received 69 invitations to observe elections and positively responded to 47, deploying 40 full Commonwealth Observer Groups, two Expert Teams and five staff-only missions.

The Secretariat has also provided technical assistance on electoral reform, inclusion and citizen observations; produced good practice guides on emerging issues such as campaign finance and electoral cybersecurity; and built the capacity of electoral officials across the Commonwealth.

Impact

- From 2016 to 2024, the Secretary-General deployed 40 full Commonwealth Observer Groups, two Commonwealth Expert Teams and five staff-only missions.

- Through the Commonwealth Election Professionals initiative, the Secretariat has provided a trusted platform for capacity-building and the exchange of electoral best practices. Between 2016 and 2024 a total of 10 training sessions have been held, benefitting 192 election professionals from 47 election management bodies across the Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Americas and Pacific regions. This work was funded by an extra-budgetary contribution from the Government of Australia.
- The Secretariat has, through its work, earned global recognition for offering high-quality election observation missions at a fraction of the cost of other international observers.



Case study: Supporting Zambia towards peaceful democratic governance

The Secretary-General has been steadfast in her commitment to supporting Zambia on its continued journey towards peaceful democratic governance. In 2017 Zambia faced potential unrest, and the Secretary-General quickly visited the country to engage with then-President Edgar Lungu and then-opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema. During this visit, the Secretary-General negotiated Hichilema's release from prison, earned the trust of President Lungu, and negotiated an agreement between the two parties to engage in a peaceful dialogue to address their political concerns.

Building on this established trust, the Secretary-General deployed a Commonwealth Observer Group in Zambia to observe the 2021 Presidential election, which resulted in a victory for Hakainde Hichilema. In the face of fears of violence, the government and its challengers had committed to a peaceful process, signing a pledge brokered by the Secretary-General.

"The Commonwealth didn't give up. They came back before this election and found conditions had not improved from the time they left in around 2017/18... but they continued trying to help to build a peace platform that will allow for free and fair election, a credible election. Voting day, there's no violence by and large. The outcome is clear, a landslide for us."

H.E. Hakainde Hichilema, President of Zambia, following the 2021 election



H.E. Prof Yemi Osinbajo leads a Commonwealth Observer Group during the parliamentary and presidential elections in Sierra Leone, June 2023

Case study: 'Full cycle' electoral support to Cameroon

In 2020–2021, the Secretariat provided training support to Elections Cameroon (ELECAM) on the electoral system and legal framework, voter registration and gender mainstreaming. This was entirely demand-driven and co-funded by the Government of Cameroon, demonstrating strong political will.

The support involved a series of training workshops, including the training-of-trainers of senior officials and senior management; combining virtual and real-time facilitation, with support from a Canadian consultant; and the training of regional staff provided offline by trained ELECAM officials.

ELECAM officials found the support provided by the Secretariat's Electoral Support Section to be very useful, necessary and responsive to their needs.

An important outcome of the training was a proposal for policy reform to enable electoral staff to better perform their roles, and also to better enable civil society and media engagement. Moreover, participation in the Commonwealth Electoral Network allowed ELECAM officials to learn from experiences in other Commonwealth countries. ELECAM has focal points for participation in different networks, including the UN and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, but found the Commonwealth Electoral Network to be most useful.

Key to the Secretariat's success was its institutional positionality and technical credibility; its flexibility to adapt its hybrid delivery model to the needs of the participants; and, above all, its longstanding trust-based relationship with the country. This had been built up over the years through sustained engagement in accelerating democratic reforms, which had also contributed to the establishment of ELECAM as the first independent election management body in the country. This demonstrates impact that goes far beyond the successful delivery of a national capacity building effort.

Impact Story: Supporting campaign finance legislation in Jamaica

With the completion of the second phase of technical assistance, the Secretariat's sustained support to the Electoral Commission of Jamaica (ECJ) and its Office of the Registrar of Political Parties (ORPP) on the implementation of the country's new campaign finance legislation is now beginning to bear fruit.

The Secretariat's engagement with the ECJ stems from its development, in 2019–2020, of *Political Finance Regulation: A Best Practice Guide to Commonwealth Legislative Approaches* (2020). Drawing on the experiences of 26 election management bodies (EMBs), the *Guide* showcases good practices from across the Commonwealth. The ECJ attended the two-day validation meeting of the *Guide* at Marlborough House, London in March 2020, at which they compared experiences with other Commonwealth EMBs and provided a presentation on key provisions of Jamaica's 2018 campaign finance legislation.

At the point at which that legislation was passed, Jamaica was the first and only country in the Commonwealth Caribbean to have such a law. However, owing to a lack of institutional experience in administering what is a particularly specialised and complex area of law – as well as the time required to develop the requisite policy and administrative framework – the legislation was not implemented in time for the 2020 general election.

Having benefited from the exchange of good practice during the validation meeting, as well as the *Guide* itself, the ECJ approached the Secretariat for technical assistance on the implementation of this law. This resulted in the first phase of support to the ECJ in 2021, in which a consultant, using a combination of online interviews and desk research (travel to Jamaica having been precluded by the COVID-19 pandemic) drafted an implementation plan. This plan identified priority issues for the ECJ's consideration, and made a series of recommendations on staffing, budgeting, operations, policies and procedures.

This report was positively received by the ECJ, which sought a second phase of support to take forward the implementation plan. Subsequently, the Commonwealth's Electoral Support Section identified a consortium of three leading campaign finance experts who, in January 2024, deployed to Kingston, Jamaica, where they held a series of meetings with the ECJ, political parties, civil society and the police.

Building on the Implementation Plan, the consortium focussed on two broad strands of work.

1. The provision of more detailed recommendations on staffing, budgeting and capacity building.
2. The development of tailored policies and procedures.

The consultancy resulted in the drafting of four policies and three procedures in the areas of campaign monitoring, compliance checking, enforcement and disclosure, and in six key recommendations to the ECJ. In seeking to achieve both ownership and buy-in, the consultants ensured that the ECJ provided significant inputs into the drafting of these policies and procedures.

With the next general election due by September 2025, it is expected that the Secretariat will be able to provide a third phase of support to the ECJ. The consortium suggested five key areas that this third phase could focus on: enforcement processes; the development of a scheme of delegation; the drafting of guidelines for political parties; the establishment of a campaign finance unit within the ORPP; and an analysis of areas of possible legislative reform to further strengthen the campaign finance regime.

2.2 Marlborough House Dialogues

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 10: *'Heads renewed their commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental political values of democracy, gender equality, and inclusive development, as outlined in the Commonwealth Charter.'*

Background

Experience shows that neutral platforms for dialogue, facilitated by trusted and impartial partners, can help opposing parties openly express their views and negotiate without any fear of bias. Such platforms are essential for addressing the root causes of conflicts and engaging all stakeholders for the promotion of the values of the Commonwealth Charter.

Objective

Recognising the importance of these platforms, the Secretary-General launched the Marlborough House Dialogues and Get-Togethers in 2022 as part of the Secretariat's mandate to strengthen democratic processes and foster peace across the Commonwealth.

Strategy

The Marlborough House Dialogues serve as a formal platform on which Commonwealth leaders and decision-makers can debate some of the most pressing challenges currently facing free and democratic societies. These dialogues are deliberately designed to offer a neutral space in which discussions can unfold in a spirit of collaboration and respect for the values of the Commonwealth Charter.



Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, joins H. E. Johnston Busingye, Rwanda's High Commissioner to the UK, and the Secretary-General for a Marlborough House Dialogue, March 2023

The dialogues have provided a space for leaders to express their positions on key national developments to a diverse, intergenerational audience – for example, previous dialogues coincided with elections in Kenya and Sierra Leone.

“The dialogues offer a neutral space in which discussions can unfold in a spirit of collaboration and respect for the values of the Commonwealth Charter.”

In contrast, the Marlborough House Get-Togethers offer a more informal setting - a ‘fireside chat’ format - where Commonwealth leaders, trailblazers and changemakers share their personal leadership journeys with an audience of Commonwealth scholars and youth leaders.

Impact

- Since 2022, the Secretariat has hosted four intergenerational dialogues, creating a new forum for engaging with political leaders and thinkers from across the Commonwealth.
- The inaugural dialogue, held in March 2022, welcomed Dr William Ruto, then Deputy President of Kenya; later that month we hosted Rt Hon Raila Odinga, former Prime Minister of Kenya. Both leaders publicly committed to credible, peaceful, and transparent elections in Kenya - the first time that Presidential candidates had made such a public commitment.

- The third Dialogue featured Hon Philip Davis QC, Prime Minister of The Bahamas, who emphasised the importance of climate action within the Commonwealth family ahead of the 2022 CHOGM in Rwanda and COP27 in Egypt.
- In March 2023, Hon Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, joined the Secretary-General for the fourth Marlborough House Dialogue and called for greater representation of women in leadership.

“Women’s representation in the parliament needs to reach 50 per cent. This requires challenging the cultural impediments and social conditioning to create a more supportive environment for women to participate in politics. Doing so is important because there is a direct correlation between the level of women’s representation in leadership and the level of national development.”

Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, Prime Minister of Samoa, at a Marlborough House Dialogue

2.3 Anti-corruption Benchmarks and Training

Mandate

2022 CHOGM 2022 Communiqué, para 32: *'Heads commended the Principles of the Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks, which are non-binding, and reaffirmed their commitment to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all forms; develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels; and ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory, and representative decision-making at all levels, in accordance with SDG 16.'*

Background

Corruption costs the global economy more than \$3.5 trillion annually.⁷ Developing countries lose around 10 times as much to corrupt practices as they receive in official development assistance, and the amount of money lost globally through corruption is equal to the total amount needed to successfully implement the SDGs.

7 Johnson, S. (2018, December 13) 'Corruption is costing the global economy \$3.6 trillion dollars every year'. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/12/the-global-economy-loses-3-6-trillion-to-corruption-each-year-says-u-n/>

Objective

Tackling corruption has been a key priority of the Secretary-General since taking office. She spearheaded efforts to transform and reinvigorate the Secretariat's anti-corruption programme in order to empower public institutions to fight corruption and promote transparency.

Strategy

The Secretariat's anti-corruption work now takes a system-wide and co-ordinated approach that involves support in three core areas.

1. **Capacity building:** The Secretariat, through the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre in Botswana and Centre of Excellence in Grenada, provides training in the prevention, investigation and prosecution of corruption. In-country, on-demand programmes are also delivered by in-house experts to strengthen the skills of national anti-corruption agencies.



The 14th Commonwealth Regional Conference of Heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Africa, Accra, Ghana, May 2024

Case study: Anti-corruption successes in Kenya

The engagements between Kenya's Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission (EACC) and the Commonwealth Secretariat on anti-corruption have been mutually beneficial. The EACC is an active partner of the Commonwealth's training events (online and at the Commonwealth Centre in Botswana), forums and meetings (Anti-Corruption Centre and network, annual meetings and conferences for heads of anti-corruption agencies).

While taking part, EACC learned from sharing its best practices and lessons with other countries, and its staff benefitted from training at the Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Centre in Botswana. At the same time, EACC provided its expertise as resource persons in training and workshops to help other Commonwealth countries to learn. Furthermore, EACC's work on anti-corruption, such as asset-tracing and recovery, was used as a benchmark and shared with other Commonwealth countries.

2. **Networking and partnerships:** The Secretariat has established regional Anti-Corruption Networks to facilitate the exchange of best practices, peer learning and the sharing of toolkits and experiences among practitioners.
3. **Research and publications:** The Secretariat has produced practical, user-friendly publications including the *Combating Corruption in Commonwealth Africa* and the *Tackling Corruption in the Commonwealth Caribbean* reports. These highlight successful strategies adopted by countries – including Seychelles, Botswana, Mauritius and St Vincent and the Grenadines – to fight corruption.

A key achievement was the launch in 2021 of the *Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks*. These offer a robust and holistic set of recommendations designed to help governments and public sector organisations assess laws, procedures and actions against international good practice, and to make improvements if needed.

Impact

- The Secretariat's anti-corruption work under the Secretary-General's leadership has received global recognition and multiple awards, including the 2018 Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani International Anti-Corruption Excellence Award.⁸
- Between 2016 and 2024, the Secretariat provided tailored capacity-building assistance to all Commonwealth countries in Africa and the Caribbean.
- Through the Secretariat's support, the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre has supported 20 national anti-corruption agencies and trained more than 7,000 officials.
- A 2018/19 survey of agencies trained by the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre found that 80 per cent of trainees felt their knowledge had expanded, and 70 per cent reported enhanced performance.

8 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018, December 7) 'Commonwealth Adviser wins International Anti-Corruption Award', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-adviser-wins-international-anti-corruption-award>

Key figures, 2016–2024

20

national anti-corruption agencies supported

7,000+

Commonwealth anti-corruption officials trained

80%

of officials trained reported improved knowledge

- Through the Secretariat's capacity-building initiatives, member countries have reported that 50 per cent of public procurement bids are now published, with more than half of audit recommendations implemented.
- Trinidad and Tobago was the first country to pilot the *Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks* in 2022.⁹
- In 2022, Commonwealth law ministers recommended the *Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance*. This landmark document, drafted with input from accredited organisations, is set to be considered by Commonwealth leaders at the 2024 CHOGM.

"I am writing to express my appreciation for your engagement and support at the recent Regional Conference of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa... the theme was 'Uniting Commonwealth Africa in the Fight Against Corruption', and with your leadership, assistance and input the theme was truly met and your ongoing and unstinting support as Secretary General of the Commonwealth in the fight against corruption."

May De Silva, Commissioner, Seychelles Anti-Corruption Commission

"I wish, on behalf of the Directorate and the Kingdom of Lesotho, to convey my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Secretary-General and the Secretariat for allowing and enabling this important training to take place. This is indeed a clear manifestation of Secretary-General's commitment in the fight against corruption within the Commonwealth. The training programme was a much-needed intervention which will go a long way to building capacity within our country and in our institution."

Sefako Seema, Commissioner, Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences, Lesotho

9 Commonwealth Secretariat (2022, April 13) 'Commonwealth trains Trinidad & Tobago government officials in Anti-Corruption Benchmarks', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-trains-trinidad-tobago-government-officials-anti-corruption-benchmarks>

2.4 Rule of Law and the Commonwealth Office for Civil and Criminal Justice and Reform

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 21: *'Heads renewed their commitment to fully implementing the Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles on the Three Branches of Government and noted the updated Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures prepared by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.'*

Background

The rule of law – a core value enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter – forms the bedrock of democracy, human rights and justice. It plays an essential role in building accountable institutions and fostering justice for all. The importance of the rule of law is further recognised in SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. However, progress towards achieving SDG 16 has been slow and uneven,¹⁰ with some countries even experiencing setbacks. In light of this, the need for urgent, targeted and collaborative action has become increasingly apparent.

Drawing from her decades-long legal background, the Secretary-General has taken an innovative and resourceful approach to transforming the Secretariat's Rule of Law programme. Her goal has been to provide member countries with practical, affordable and adaptable tools to help them promote justice for all and strengthen public institutions, in alignment with the Commonwealth Charter and SDG 16.

Objectives

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Rule of Law programme has been reformed in order to provide context-sensitive, structured support that meets the unique needs of member countries. Her priority has been the formation of innovative cross-sector partnerships, bringing together knowledge

and expertise to develop legal toolkits and models that help member countries achieve their goals more swiftly, affordably and effectively.

Strategy

The assistance that the programme provides to member countries is divided into three overarching areas.

1. Strengthening public institutions and frameworks to promote justice, human rights and good governance in Commonwealth member countries.
2. Supporting the development and implementation of national laws that uphold the rule of law, improve civil and criminal justice systems and enhance access to justice.
3. Providing technical assistance, capacity-building and legal expertise to help member countries to develop effective policies and frameworks.

A cornerstone of these efforts is the Office for Civil and Criminal Justice Reform (OCCJR), launched by the Secretary-General in 2017. The OCCJR has developed 17 model laws and toolkits, valued in the millions of dollars, and made them freely available to member countries. These resources cover critical areas such as virtual assets, small claims courts, mutual legal assistance, case management, mediation and anti-corruption. Developed with input from member countries and leading legal experts, these tools are both practical and adaptable, addressing the unique legal challenges faced across the Commonwealth.

Additionally, the Secretary-General spearheaded the Commonwealth Equal Access to Justice Declaration, adopted by Commonwealth law ministers in 2019 and endorsed by Commonwealth leaders in 2022. An accompanying action plan has since been developed to guide member countries in implementing the commitments made under this declaration, with the ultimate goal of bringing justice within reach for all Commonwealth citizens.

10 UNDP, UNODC and OHCHR (2024) *Global Progress Report on Sustainable Development Goal 16 Indicators: At the Crossroads: Breakdown or Breakthrough for Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-07/undp-unhcr-unodc-global-progress-report-on-sdg16-indicators-v2.pdf>



Impact

- The OCCJR has developed and published 17 model laws and toolkits, which are freely accessible to member countries – many of which have benefited from them.
- One of the most significant achievements has been the development of the *Model Law on Virtual Assets*, launched by the Secretary-General in July 2024. It takes a principled approach to helping member countries to regulate virtual assets in line with international standards set out by the Financial Action Task Force, a global rule-making body. As of August 2024, 19 Commonwealth countries are in the process of using this model law to draft new or amend existing domestic legislation. These include Nigeria, Malawi, Jamaica, India, South Africa, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Botswana, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Key figures, 2016–2024

17

new model laws & toolkits published by OCCJR

19

Commonwealth countries are using the *Model Law on Virtual Assets*

“As further fora for practitioners, we welcome the establishment of the Office for Civil and Criminal Justice Reform, and the Commonwealth Innovation Hub, announced by the Secretary General during CHOGM, providing a space for collaboration and the sharing of best practice in real time.”

UK Government Response to the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee’s Seventh Report of Session 2017–19 on Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit¹¹

¹¹ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (UK) (2018) *Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit: Government response to the Committee’s Seventh Report: Eleventh Special Report of Session 2017–19*. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaaff/1427/1427.pdf>

2.5 Secretary-General's Good Offices

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 12: *'Heads further reaffirmed their support for the role of the Good Offices of the Secretary-General as a mechanism to protect and promote the Commonwealth's fundamental values and principles.'*

Background

Conflicts often arise from unresolved frustrations and disagreements, and have the potential to escalate into wider instability, posing significant risks to national, regional and global peace. In response to this, Commonwealth Heads of Government have empowered the Secretary-General to act as an impartial mediator through her Good Offices for Peace, mandated to prevent and resolve conflicts in alignment with the values of the Commonwealth Charter.

Objective

The Secretary-General's Good Offices for Peace offers support to member countries, upon request, to defuse political tensions and prevent conflicts by

assisting countries to resolve internal differences through engagement, dialogue, mediation and technical assistance.

Strategy

Upon taking office, the Secretary-General made 'Good Offices for Peace' a dedicated outcome of the Secretariat's Strategic and Delivery Plans, reactivating its role and reinvigorating its interventions in accordance with Commonwealth values. She also introduced a two-pronged approach to conflict prevention: short-term measures that focus on dialogue and problem-solving, and long-term interventions that are structural and preventive. This framework is complemented by evidence-based peacebuilding initiatives that support a proactive, inclusive and sustainable approach to conflict resolution and enhance the Secretariat's capacity, particularly that of CMAG, to foresee and respond to potential conflicts,

Case study: De-escalation of Guyana-Venezuela border disputes

In October 2023, a fresh cycle of border tension between Guyana and Venezuela was exacerbated when Venezuela called a referendum concerning its proposed annexation of Guyana's Essequibo region.

As tension escalated, the Secretary-General issued two statements. She also convened an emergency meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Guyana (CMGG) in December 2023, at the request of the Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and per the mandate given by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1999 to monitor 'further developments in respect of the existing controversy between Guyana and Venezuela'.

Ministers reiterated the Group's 'firm support for the maintenance and preservation of the sovereign and territorial integrity of Guyana, and the unobstructed exercise of its rights to develop the entirety of its territory for the benefit of its people'.

Additionally, the Secretary-General supported and encouraged Guyana's participation in the 14 December 2023 dialogue between President Mohamed Irfaan Ali of Guyana and President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela, which was convened by the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph Gonsalves, as President pro-tempore of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. Both parties agreed to the Argyle Declaration which reiterated their commitment to the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace.

The Secretary-General's continued commitment to the resolution of the Guyana-Venezuela dispute, as well as her quiet and multi-track diplomacy, contributed to the de-escalation of tensions and the preservation of Guyana's sovereign and territorial integrity.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General with the presidential candidates at the Electoral Pledge ceremony in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 25 May 2023.



"Commonwealth Heads of Government have empowered the Secretary-General to act as an impartial mediator through her Good Offices for Peace"

Key interventions

Early in her tenure, the Secretary-General facilitated a high-level political dialogue in Zambia on election-related tensions ahead of the August 2016 national elections. By appointing Professor Ibrahim Gambari, Nigeria's former Foreign Minister and an African elder statesman, as her Special Advisor on Political Dialogue, the Secretary-General helped build trust and confidence in the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ).

Professor Gambari worked with national election stakeholders to establish mechanisms to promote national cohesion, tolerance and conflict prevention and resolution. His mission fostered an inclusive, time-bound, constructive political dialogue that culminated in a roadmap for reform ahead of the 2021 general elections. Professor Gambari's

engagement received widespread commendation, including from the President and the Leader of the Opposition, the chair of the ECZ and civil society.

"[Professor Gambari] played a very important role, through the various initiatives he undertook while in Zambia, to support and maintain a peaceful atmosphere before, during and after the elections, for which the Government and people of Zambia will forever remain grateful."

H.E. Muyebe Chikonde, High Commissioner for Zambia to the UK

Since that success in Zambia, Good Offices for Peace has supported 26 Commonwealth member countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Dominica, Fiji, Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Eswatini, Kiribati, Jamaica, Lesotho, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Maldives, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tonga and Uganda.

In addition, multidisciplinary conflict prevention and peacebuilding technical assistance has been provided to at least nine member countries: Cameroon, Dominica, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kingdom of Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, and Sierra Leone.

In her Good Offices role, the Secretary-General convenes the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), which upholds the Commonwealth's fundamental political values,

including the rule of law, human rights and the separation of powers. Under her leadership, CMAG went from being perceived as a punitive body to one that collaborates with member countries to offer support and technical assistance, preventing conflicts before they escalate.

Impact

- The Secretary-General played a critical role in de-escalating politically charged situations in 27 member countries between 2016 and 2024, and provided multidisciplinary conflict prevention and peacebuilding technical assistance to at least nine member countries through quiet, preventive diplomacy.
- The Secretary-General's Good Offices has received widespread appreciation for its role in ensuring peaceful resolutions to seemingly intractable issues, fostering peace and reinforcing the Commonwealth values. The Secretary-General's efforts have also been recognised by Commonwealth Heads of Government.¹²

Some further key interventions during this period include the following.

Sierra Leone, 2023 General Elections

In the run-up to the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone, fears of renewed high-intensity conflict loomed large. The Secretary-General's adoption of a proactive and integrated Good Offices and electoral cycle approach contributed to mitigating pre- and post-election grievances and helped prevent loss of life. Amid the pre-election tensions, the Secretary-General engaged in quiet and preventive diplomacy, convening a dialogue in London with President Julius Maada Bio and opposition leader Dr Samura Kamara. This dialogue helped prevent violence by encouraging both leaders to publicly commit to peaceful elections. Additionally, the Good Offices supported local efforts by facilitating a pre-election peace pledge

by religious and community leaders,¹³ securing the moral commitment of all candidates toward peaceful elections and national unity.

Samoa, 2021 Constitutional Crisis

In April 2021, Samoa faced a constitutional crisis following its national elections. The Secretary-General engaged directly with political parties, offering quiet diplomacy and assistance that contributed to resolving the deadlock. Her intervention supported the recognition of Samoa's first female prime minister, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, following a critical ruling by the Court of Appeal, restoring stability and democratic governance.

Gabon, 2023 coup d'état

Following the coup in Gabon in August 2023, the Secretary-General's proactive engagement with the military junta resulted in their commitment to a two-year democratic transition. Her diplomatic efforts, supported by CMAG, have been instrumental in ensuring that Gabon remains on track to restore constitutional rule.

12 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) *Heads of Government Meeting Communiqué: 'Towards a Common Future'*. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-heads-government-meeting-communique-towards-common-future>

13 Commonwealth Secretariat (2023, May 24) 'Commonwealth Secretary-General to witness national electoral pledge ceremony in Sierra Leone', news release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-secretary-general-witness-national-electoral-pledge-ceremony-sierra>

2.6 Human Rights

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 10: *'Heads renewed their commitment to the Commonwealth's fundamental political values of democracy, gender equality, and inclusive development, as outlined in the Commonwealth Charter. They further reiterated their commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant international instruments. Recognising that human rights are applicable in online and offline media, they underscored the vital role of a vibrant civil society, including human rights defenders, in delivering good governance and democracy. They underscored the importance of good cooperation between member countries and their respective National Human Rights Institutions or equivalent mechanisms.'*

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 15: *'Heads noted the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat (the Secretariat) in facilitating the promotion and protection of human rights with member countries, particularly through the implementation of the Universal Periodic Review and treaty body outcomes. Heads acknowledged support for the establishment and strengthening of National Human Rights Institutions or equivalent mechanisms. They appreciated the human rights expertise and assistance provided through the Commonwealth*

Small States Office in Geneva. Heads encouraged efforts to reinforce respect for human rights and reiterated the continued importance of sharing human rights good practice and expertise across the Commonwealth.'

Background


The protection and promotion of human rights are fundamental to the Commonwealth Charter. However, in an era of growing global unrest, human rights violations are escalating. The urgency of safeguarding the rights of all Commonwealth citizens has never been greater.

Objective

The Secretariat is mandated to support member countries to effectively engage with international human rights mechanisms, and to work to ensure the realisation of human rights for all Commonwealth citizens.

Strategy

From her earliest days in office, the Secretary-General has placed human rights at the heart of the Secretariat's work, recognising them as central to peace, security and sustainable prosperity. Under her leadership, the Secretariat's



Cadets of the Mauritius Police Force and staff from the Commonwealth Secretariat's Human Rights Unit during a five-day training session on promoting and protecting human rights, November 2022

Human Rights Unit has expanded significantly in both capacity and scope. The Unit now provides enhanced support to member countries, focusing on strengthening public institutions to protect human rights and improving national human rights reporting to ensure greater adherence to international standards, including the Commonwealth Charter.

“The Human Rights Unit has expanded significantly in capacity and scope, providing enhanced support to member countries.”

The Geneva-based Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) and its two resident human rights advisers continue to support both resident and non-resident member countries, particularly small states, with human rights technical assistance as well as logistical support. The UK Government currently provides funds to maintain the services of these two advisers.

Since these human rights advisers were deployed in Geneva, the engagement of Commonwealth small states at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) has increased significantly: on average, small states have been supported to deliver 60 statements annually at the UNHRC. As a result of these efforts, the Commonwealth addressed the HRC as a group for the first time in 2020, delivering a Commonwealth Joint Statement, led by the UK as Chair-in-Office.

Our increased visibility in Geneva has led to partnerships with other organisations, such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human

Rights, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), UN Women and the Convention Against Torture Initiative (CTI).

Additionally, the Secretary-General continues to engage in quiet diplomacy to raise human rights concerns directly with member countries, and reports on relevant issues, when necessary, to the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group.

The Secretary-General continued the practice of addressing the annual Human Rights Council High-Level Segment, showcasing the Commonwealth’s human rights priorities while also ensuring the organisation’s visibility at the highest level. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to be one of the Secretariat’s key strategic partners in delivering technical assistance to Commonwealth member countries.

Between 2023 and 2024, the Secretariat organised three regional capacity-building workshops in Barbados for the Caribbean, in Fiji for the Pacific and in Tanzania for Africa. The workshops aimed to help member countries to reduce their human rights treaty body reporting backlog, and to set up or strengthen national systems to report on or engage with international human rights mechanisms. A total of 90 government officials from 37 member countries benefited from the three workshops.

Between 2016 and 2024, the Secretariat has continued to support the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, a voluntary body representing national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights from 46 member countries. The Forum plays a vital role in ensuring that national and international standards are upheld to improve the enjoyment of human rights for all in its member countries.

A major priority under the Secretary-General’s leadership has been the interconnection between climate change and human rights. The Secretariat



has integrated the human rights-climate change nexus into its core work, and is clear that environmental protection and the safeguarding of human rights must go hand in hand.

Impact

- From 2016 to 2024, 25 member countries, including 17 small states, benefited from the Secretariat's direct technical assistance to strengthen their engagement with key international human rights mechanisms such as the UNHRC and its Universal Periodic Review. These countries include Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Eswatini, Fiji, Gabon, The Gambia, Grenada, Ghana, Guyana, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Nauru, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Tanzania, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.
- Ten member countries received the Secretariat's in-country technical assistance to set up or strengthen systems for reporting to and engaging with international human rights mechanisms.
- With the Secretariat's support, six member countries (Samoa, Belize, Kiribati, The Gambia, Malawi and Dominica) have submitted their overdue human rights treaty body reports. Ongoing assistance is being provided to six more countries (Barbados, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Antigua and Barbuda and Belize) to help them finalise their reports.
- Fourteen member countries (Malawi, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Belize, Saint Lucia, Barbados, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Kiribati, Dominica, Fiji, Vanuatu, Gabon, and Guyana) underwent UNHRC's Universal Periodic Review with support from the Secretariat.
- A total of 710 government officials – including judicial officers, parliamentarians and police personnel – from Bangladesh, Uganda, Mauritius and Pakistan have benefited from the Secretariat's 14 training sessions on promoting and protecting human rights.

2.7 Countering Violent Extremism

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 26: *'Heads further reaffirmed the continued relevance and importance of viable solutions and encouraged member countries to actively share expertise and best practice with those members affected by violent extremism and terrorism. They encouraged member countries to support the efforts of the Secretariat in providing effective gender-responsive assistance in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, including in preventing the use of the internet for radicalisation leading to violence and recruitment of Commonwealth citizens by violent extremist groups.'*

Background

Violent extremism remains a significant global threat, endangering the safety of citizens and causing widespread economic disruption in affected countries. Many Commonwealth countries lack the capacity to effectively manage the complexities of preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE), leaving them vulnerable to this growing challenge.

Objective

In response to this threat, Commonwealth Heads of Government, at CHOGM 2015, agreed to explore the creation of dedicated capacity within the Commonwealth for countering violent extremism and terrorism. The UK and Australia committed £5 million in combined funding over five years (2017–2022) to establish the Commonwealth CVE

Unit and deliver essential technical assistance to member countries.

Strategy

The Secretary-General established the Commonwealth CVE Unit in 2017. It worked across member countries to identify and understand the risks associated with violent extremism and to build national capacity for implementing systematic CVE policies. Its support included policy advice, research, discussion forums and practical training aimed at building a 'whole-of-society' approach to countering violent extremism. Key interventions were delivered in countries including Bangladesh, Cameroon, Jamaica, Kenya, Tanzania and Trinidad and Tobago.

Direct beneficiaries of the programme included national security policymakers, counter-terrorism law enforcers, police services, security services, prison services and civil society groups including women's and youth organisations. Through a collaborative and multi-sectoral approach, the CVE Unit helped strengthen the Commonwealth's ability to address the root causes of violent extremism while ensuring that solutions were locally tailored and sustainable.

One of the flagship initiatives of the CVE Unit was the development of the 'Respect in the Commonwealth' training programme. This programme was designed to be universally applicable, offering governments, organisations and individuals tools with which to foster

Case study: Community-oriented policing in Tanzania

Between 2017 and 2022, the Secretariat provided funding and technical support for the Tanzania Police Service (TPS) to develop a curriculum and supporting training materials on Community Oriented Policing for Preventing and Countering Violence Extremism (PCVE). In November 2021 the curriculum was approved and used by all police training colleges in Tanzania.

This training curriculum and manual were the first of their kind for Tanzania. When the project started in 2017 – at a time when the threats posed or inspired by ISIS, Boko Haram and al-Qaida in the region were at their peak – the training empowered the police to prevent and counter extremism at the community level from which it originated. A training official at TPS reported increased confidence among trained police instructors on how to teach PCVE to community police officers, particularly in vulnerable border regions. This confirmed the findings of a 2023 Secretariat study which found that the increased confidence and knowledge helped community police officers to foster strong community engagement and partnership.



dialogue, build respect and lead change within their communities and countries.

Despite Commonwealth Heads of Government reaffirming their support for the Secretariat's CVE Unit at the 2022 CHOGM, funding for the programme ran out and was not renewed by member countries.

Impact

- More than 150 capacity-building activities were conducted across five Commonwealth regions, training more than 2,000 individuals across 15 sectors, including police, intelligence services, prison systems, child protection and youth groups.
- In Tanzania, the CVE Unit facilitated the establishment of a coalition between local stakeholders and the police, creating the 'Haki na Uselama Forum' to promote community policing and advocacy in efforts to prevent violent extremism.

- Despite the lack of external funding after 2022, the Secretariat continued to deliver capacity-building initiatives. This included providing training for practitioners and policymakers in Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean on deterring the use of the internet for terrorist purposes and improving access to networks responsible for controlling extremist content on major online platforms.

Key figures, 2017–2023

150

capacity-building initiatives delivered

2,000+

individuals trained, including officials and police officers

15

sectors engaged on countering violent extremism

2.8 SMART Governance Programme

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 29: *'Heads reflected on the link between good governance and transformational leadership that is accountable, transparent, inclusive, and non-discriminatory. They committed to the effective and equitable delivery of public goods and determined to continually evaluate their governance systems, and make improvements where necessary, including placing citizen participation (especially of young people, women and others facing inequality), at the heart of policy development. Heads called for increased technical assistance from the Secretariat, especially to Low-to-Middle-Income-Countries, in policy formulation and development.'*

Background

In an increasingly digital world, effective governance is key to the success of national development goals, including the SDGs. Efficient governance systems enhance public service delivery, but many Commonwealth countries face significant challenges in building robust digital infrastructures. The main obstacles include limited capital, outdated

technological frameworks and a shortage of specialised knowledge. These barriers have led to high costs and delayed the development of digital platforms essential to delivering inclusive, citizen-centric services.

Objective

Recognising the critical need for improved governance in a digital age, the Secretary-General appointed Professor Prajapati Trivedi as her Special Envoy for SDGs Implementation. To support member countries to build efficient governance systems, she mandated Professor Trivedi to develop the Strategic Management and Accountability for Results Toolkit (SMART) – an innovative digital governance system.

Strategy

Building on the Secretary-General's vision and requirements, SMART provides a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy aimed at improving government performance, boosting efficiency and ultimately enhancing the delivery of public services.



It is designed with developing countries in mind, offering solutions that adapt to their evolving institutional frameworks. SMART, now known as the SMART Governance Programme, has proven especially valuable in a post-pandemic world in which the efficient, transparent and inclusive delivery of services is critical, particularly for marginalised communities.

The SMART Governance Programme is built around three core objectives.

1. Foster an environment that encourages Commonwealth countries to share knowledge, skills and best practices in governance and public service delivery.
2. Significantly lower the financial barriers to digital transformation by centralising the development, deployment and maintenance of digital governance systems.
3. Provide all willing member countries with access to cutting-edge digital governance tools that enhance the efficiency, transparency and inclusiveness of public services.

Steering committees and working groups, made up of member countries, are being established to champion the SMART Governance Programme and facilitate knowledge transfer, with the goal of providing access to the system across the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth AI Consortium is also being used to support member countries to make greater use of AI-powered smart governance technologies.

Impact

- Nearly 2,000 public policy officials from Commonwealth countries have been trained in the SMART Governance Programme. This includes regional training programmes for Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific.
- Country-specific on-demand programmes have been delivered in six countries: The Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Barbados, Nigeria and Namibia.
- Additional countries expressing interest in the SMART programme include Barbados, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica and Nigeria.

2.9 Maritime Boundaries Programme

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 38: *'Heads further encouraged member countries to accelerate the transition to sustainable markets, in the context of strengthening global efforts to reach the goals of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, which include common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances, through laws and policies that incentivise sustainable and inclusive economic development [...]. They further urged member countries to improve resilience by diversifying national supply chains, creating green jobs, building resilient infrastructure, advancing sustainable ocean economies, encouraging domestic consumption, adopting digital solutions, and promoting food security through climate resilient food systems.'*

Background

Legal uncertainty on the extent of maritime jurisdiction and entitlements impacts coastal states' ability to manage their marine resources. It can also lead to conflict over access to resources, stifle investment and hinder marine environmental protection and the development of alternative energy sources.

For nearly three decades, the Secretariat has provided advice and technical assistance to help member countries exercise their rights under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Objectives

The Secretariat's Ocean Governance and Maritime Boundaries team is tasked with providing technical assistance and advice to member countries on the development of ocean policies and related instruments, as well as the delimitation of maritime boundaries.

Strategy

In addition to providing technical assistance, since 2009 the Secretariat has been a partner in the Pacific Maritime Boundaries consortium. The consortium provides a network of experts assisting small island developing states (SIDS) in the Pacific with the delimitation of their maritime boundaries and extended continental shelves, and provides

training and expert guidance to member countries. It also provides a forum for the advancement of technical discussions on bilateral and multilateral boundary delimitation between Pacific Island states.

"The Secretariat has provided advice and technical assistance to help member countries exercise their rights under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea."

The Commonwealth Secretariat has also worked with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to develop a strategy and programme to revitalise resource capacity for Pacific island countries for the settlement of outstanding maritime boundaries and securing and managing marine space.

In 2021/22, the Secretariat facilitated five engagements to advocate for the interests of Antigua and Barbuda, and Seychelles, in their negotiations on maritime boundaries.

The Secretariat continues to provide technical assistance and capacity-building to the Seychelles on progressing negotiations on marine boundary delimitation. For example, successful training in 2023 included both a mock negotiation exercise to demonstrate principles in practice, and a field exercise on identifying appropriate basepoints for the construction of appropriate baselines.

In Guyana, the Secretariat's support on good governance and certainty of jurisdiction in the maritime sector has resulted in the delivery of advisory reports on an appropriate regulatory framework for its maritime zones, and the drafting of regulations under the Maritime Zones Act for the establishment of safety or buffer zones in its exclusive economic zone. A draft bill was developed for consideration and passage by the Government in 2023.



Impact

Between 2016 and 2024, five maritime boundaries were successfully negotiated with support from the Secretariat.

- In Antigua and Barbuda, the maritime boundary with France, in respect of Guadeloupe and St Barthelemy, was formally agreed in 2017.
- The maritime boundary with the United Kingdom in respect of Anguilla was signed in 2021.
- Vanuatu and Solomon Islands signed an agreement on their respective boundaries in 2016.
- Maritime boundaries agreements were also signed between:
 - Saint Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines in 2017
 - Saint Lucia and Barbados, formally adopted at the CARICOM Heads of Government meeting in July 2017.

2.10 Commonwealth Cyber Programme

Mandate

Recognising the need to work in consultation with each other to enhance cybersecurity to protect critical national infrastructure, and the economic and social value of cyberspace, Heads adopted a Commonwealth Cyber Declaration that reflects Commonwealth values, and sets out a common commitment to an open, democratic, peaceful and secure internet, respecting human rights and freedom of expression.¹⁴

Background

As of 2018, approximately half of the Commonwealth's population were internet users. As digital connectivity has expanded so, too, has the threat of cybercrime, which is predicted to cost the world \$10.5 trillion annually by 2025.¹⁵ This growing threat is a major concern for Commonwealth countries and demands an urgent and collective response.

Objective

To combat this threat, Heads adopted the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration in 2018 to support the development of a cyberspace that promotes social and economic development and protects digital rights.

Strategy

To implement the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration, the Secretary-General established the Commonwealth Cyber Programme in 2018, with support from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. The programme takes a multisectoral approach, focused on five pillars, to help member countries to build cyber resilience by strengthening their legal, institutional and operational capabilities in a holistic, co-ordinated and proactive manner.

The five pillars are as follows.

1. Cybersecurity Legal Frameworks

In response to requests, the Secretariat has reviewed the cyber resilience capabilities of Botswana, The Gambia, Namibia and Kenya, and recommended legislative changes aligned with international standards. With the Secretariat's support, in 2023 Namibia introduced its National Cybersecurity Strategy and Awareness Creation Plan 2022–2027. Similarly, The Gambia drafted a Cyber Bill in response to our recommendation,

14 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018) 'Cyber Declaration'. <https://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-cyber-declaration-2018>

15 Morgan, S. (2020, November 13) 'Cybercrime To Cost The World \$10.5 Trillion Annually By 2025', *Cybercrime Magazine*. <https://cybersecurityventures.com/hackerpocalypse-cybercrime-report-2016/>



which is currently being considered for adoption. In addition, the Secretariat trained 51 Kenyan magistrates in 2021 and 40 Zambian officials in 2022 to strengthen their cybercrime investigation and prosecution skills.

2. Electronic Evidence

Between 2018 and 2020 the Secretariat trained more than 80 judges, investigators and officials from eight Commonwealth Caribbean countries on electronic evidence and cybercrime prosecution techniques. In partnership with Regional Security System, the Secretariat's training helped 13 Caribbean law enforcement officials gain certification in cybersecurity. These efforts have resulted in the development of guidelines and operational protocols for collecting electronic evidence and supporting cross-border prosecutions in CARICOM Member countries.

3. International Co-operation against Cybercrime

Thirty-five countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Asia-Pacific region have taken part in the Secretariat's activities to strengthen co-operation on cross-border cybercrime investigations. The Secretariat has also established a directory of 46 electronic evidence focal persons from different Commonwealth countries to facilitate co-operative action against cybercrime.

4. Cybersecurity Frameworks for Elections

The Secretariat worked with the election management bodies of Ghana, Pakistan and Trinidad and Tobago to improve their cybersecurity frameworks for delivering secure elections. Around 52 officials from 38 African, Asian, Caribbean and Pacific countries have benefited from the Secretariat's election cybersecurity workshops. The Secretariat also published *Cybersecurity*

for Elections: A Commonwealth Guide on Best Practice (2020), which offers countries tried-and-tested solutions to tackle cybersecurity issues during elections.

5. Cybersecurity Knowledge Exchange

Between 2020 and 2023 the Secretariat organised 10 conferences to raise awareness and facilitate policy-making among 405 judicial officers, prosecutors and law enforcement officials on cybersecurity. Its six reports, covering issues such as elections and online safety, helped countries to strengthen their anti-cybercrime legislative, policy and institutional frameworks.

The Secretariat also produced guidance on the treatment of electronic evidence in criminal proceedings to help countries adopt the Commonwealth Model Laws on Electronic Evidence. The annual *Commonwealth Cyber Journal* and the *Commonwealth Cybercrime Monitor* provide analyses of the latest developments, trends and cybercrime cases to inform policymaking. Additionally, the Secretariat's e-learning platform enables judges, police officers and prosecutors to learn about the collection, authentication and admissibility of electronic evidence.

Impact

Between 2018 and 2024, the Commonwealth Cyber Programme has assisted more than 1,400 officials from 55 Commonwealth countries to implement the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration.

Key figures, 2018–2024

1,400+

government officials benefited from the Cyber Programme

55

Commonwealth member governments engaged

12

reports and research papers published

19

training workshops and conferences delivered

8

countries received bespoke technical assistance

3

Resilient Environment Key Projects 2016–2024





Previous page, top: the Secretary-General speaking at COP27, Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, November 2022; bottom: coastline along the Great Ocean Road, Victoria, Australia

3. Resilient Environment: Key Projects 2016–2024

Introduction

In December 2015, history was made when 196 countries came together at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris (COP21) and committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions in a collective effort to limit the global temperature rise to as close as 1.5 degrees Celsius (°C) as possible.

This historic agreement came just days after Commonwealth Heads of Government issued a Statement on Climate Action at their biennial summit in Malta, setting a climate change 'speed limit' of 2.0°C and an aspiration for 1.5°C. In their statement, Commonwealth leaders affirmed:

"We are now mobilising global and national efforts to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 or 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, and to achieve sustainable economic and technological transformation, both in mitigation and adaptation."¹

This was yet another testament to the Commonwealth's visionary leadership on climate change. As early as 1989 – six years before the first COP – Commonwealth leaders issued the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment, which recognised that any delay in addressing the impending climate crisis increased the existential threats to the planet.²

Hailing from Dominica, one of the smallest and most climate-vulnerable islands in the Commonwealth, the Secretary-General deeply understands the existential threat that climate change poses. Under her stewardship, the Commonwealth Secretariat has emerged as a compassionate and influential global advocate for the needs and interests of developing countries, particularly small and vulnerable states.

Recognising the disproportionate impacts of climate change on countries like her own, the Secretary-General made environmental stewardship a cornerstone of her leadership. Over her eight years in office, she has transformed the Commonwealth's approach to climate action, driving innovative and far-reaching initiatives that expanded the Secretariat's programme of practical support and assistance to unprecedented levels.

"The Secretary-General made environmental stewardship a cornerstone of her leadership."

Among the key achievements under her leadership are:

- **the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub**, which has unlocked \$363.55 million for small states to address climate breakdown, with another \$500 million worth of projects in the pipeline
- **the Commonwealth Blue Charter**, committing all 56 member countries to collaborate on ocean-related challenges and promote sustainable ocean development
- **the Commonwealth Living Lands Charter**, which addresses the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation
- **the Universal Vulnerability Index**, which provides a more nuanced understanding of a country's vulnerability to economic and environmental shocks

1 Commonwealth Secretariat (2015) 'Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Communiqué'. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-heads-government-leaders-statement>

2 Commonwealth Secretariat (1989) 'Langkawi Declaration on the Environment'. <https://thecommonwealth.org/langkawi-declaration-environment-1989>

Key figures, 2016–2024

\$363.55m

in climate finance unlocked for 21 small states

3,000+

officials from 21 member countries trained in climate finance

640+

officials from 50 member countries trained in 15 ocean issues

10

countries received assistance on ocean policy and debt-for-nature swaps

- **Common Earth**, a regenerative climate change model that combines indigenous wisdom with scientific innovation to reverse environmental damage
- **critical support for a Loss and Damage Fund**, designed to accelerate access to climate finance for small island developing states.

These initiatives, alongside many others, have been instrumental in helping Commonwealth countries to implement their national climate plans, or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), through a unified vision, co-ordinated action and strong collaboration.

The Secretary-General's steadfast leadership, relentless advocacy and tireless action have reinforced the Commonwealth's role as a force for good in the global fight against climate change. Her contributions have been recognised with numerous international awards, and many Commonwealth countries have lauded her as an environmental champion.

Case study: The inaugural Commonwealth Environment and Climate Change Ministers Meeting

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the first Commonwealth Environment and Climate Change Ministers Meeting was held in September 2023 in New York City, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.

Chaired by the United Kingdom, the meeting was a timely opportunity for Commonwealth countries to establish a united voice on climate issues ahead of COP28. Through in-depth deliberations, ministers identified key priorities to take forward to COP28 and shared country experiences to accelerate action on NDCs and the preservation of land, oceans and biodiversity.

Climate finance – a key COP28 issue – was high on the agenda, particularly for Commonwealth small and other vulnerable states. Ministers stressed the importance of mobilising all sources of climate finance and the need to reform multilateral finance institutions.

"The Commonwealth Environment and Climate Ministers Meeting represents a significant milestone in our collective journey to combat climate change and protect our environment."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

"I want to emphasise the importance of the Commonwealth in championing the global ambition we need to achieve the peaceful, prosperous, hopeful future we all want to see for generations to come."

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, United Kingdom

3.1 Small States Advocacy

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 41: *'Heads noted the outcome statement of the 2022 Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Small States and noted the urgent need to address small states, including the vulnerabilities of SIDS.'*

Background

Of the 56 Commonwealth member countries, 33 are small states; 25 are small island developing states, accounting for two-thirds of the global total. It was first recognised in the 1970s that small states face unique economic, administrative and international challenges – yet no specific international programme existed at the time to address these needs. Following a 1979 meeting in Samoa, the Commonwealth was tasked with bringing the issue before the Heads of Government at their biennial meeting. Soon afterwards, the Commonwealth became one of the first international organisations to establish a programme dedicated to supporting small states.

Objective

From the outset of her tenure, the Secretary-General was empowered by Commonwealth Heads of Government to champion the interests and needs of small states, ensuring that they receive

greater practical assistance and advocacy on critical issues such as climate change, human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development.

Strategy

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Secretariat has significantly scaled up its advocacy, policy and technical assistance efforts, both with national governments and through collaboration with international institutions such as the UN and the World Bank. This multi-pronged approach has ensured that the unique needs and interests of small states remain a central focus of the Secretariat's work.

Impact

During the Secretary-General's tenure, the Commonwealth's support and advocacy for small states has cut across all areas of our work, from the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub to our ambitious programme of work on artificial intelligence, and resulted in tangible progress across multiple fronts. With the Secretariat's support – which has focused above all on improving access to finance and addressing economic vulnerability – small states have received significant assistance in implementing their national development and climate plans.



Unblocking roads for relief supplies in Carriacou, Grenada, in the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl, July 2024

As Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata'afa, stated at COP27:

"The Commonwealth has always worked for the interests of small states. It finds resources and develops programmes that can address their specific needs and challenges. We very much appreciate the opportunity to host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which will further enhance the profile of small island states."

Our commitment to and action on behalf of small states cuts across all of the Secretariat's work, but some highlights from across the Secretary-General's tenure include the following.

Commonwealth Small States Offices: One of the Secretary-General's first acts was the establishment of Commonwealth Groups of Permanent Representatives in New York and Geneva. These groups, chaired by member countries and supported by the Secretariat's Small States Offices, provide a platform for small states to strengthen their voices within multilateral agencies. The Geneva office now houses permanent trade and human rights advisers to build the capacity of small states' representatives.

"Our commitment to and action on behalf of small states cuts across all of the Secretariat's work."

Universal Vulnerability Index: To address the economic vulnerability and effects of climate change that many small states face, the Secretary-General spearheaded the development of the Commonwealth's groundbreaking Universal Vulnerability Index (see below).

Loss and Damage Fund: Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Commonwealth has been unwavering in its stance on loss and damage resulting from climate change. At the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Rwanda, leaders united in calling for increased action and financing for loss and

damage. Their collective call contributed to the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 in Egypt.

The Living Lands Charter: In response to the Heads of Government mandate, the Secretary-General led the development of the implementation plan for the Commonwealth Living Lands Charter. This plan facilitates co-ordinated action among the 56 Commonwealth countries on land, biodiversity and climate challenges, directly impacting a quarter of the world's land area. Unveiled at COP28, this initiative has already led to nature-based solutions projects in Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia.

Advocacy Champions: At the 2022 CHOGM, Heads welcomed the UN-Commonwealth Joint Advocacy Strategy for Small States. To further this effort, the Secretary-General established the Commonwealth Small States Advocacy Champions Group, which held its first meeting in Washington DC in April 2023 on the margins of the World Bank/IMF Spring Meetings. At the meeting, 15 Advocacy Champions and representatives from member countries identified three priority areas for collective advocacy: economic vulnerability, climate action and access to finance, and debt sustainability in small states.

Virtual Centre for Small States: The Secretary-General is also overseeing the development of the Commonwealth Virtual Centre for Small States, a digital hub aimed at enhancing knowledge sharing, building capacity and supporting existing institutional structures. The Centre is set to launch at the 2024 CHOGM.

3.1.1 Universal Vulnerability Index

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 41: *'[Heads] noted the development of the Commonwealth Universal Vulnerability Index, which could complement indices such as Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, and called for urgent global discussion on a definition of climate vulnerability to access concessional finance.'*

Background

Small and vulnerable states are increasingly overwhelmed by the dual threats of climate change and rising debt. As the climate crisis intensifies, the



cost of capital for small states continues to rise, exacerbating their vulnerability and threatening their debt sustainability. Even financially prudent countries can see their entire GDP wiped out by a single disaster, forcing them to borrow at exorbitant interest rates due to their vulnerability. Data shows that the least developed countries borrow half as much as developed countries but spend three times more on interest payments.

These small states, which have contributed the least to climate change, end up paying twice: first through the damage caused by natural disasters, and then through the inflated costs of capital required to rebuild. As a result, 60 per cent of vulnerable countries are either in debt distress or at high risk of it.

Objective

In 2018, Commonwealth foreign ministers mandated the Secretary-General to attain a universal agreement on vulnerability.

Strategy

In response, the Secretary-General, who has been bold and consistent in her advocacy for a fairer global financial system, launched the Commonwealth's Universal Vulnerability Index

(UVI) in 2021. The Index uses widely available data to generate a single composite vulnerability index and give different vulnerability scores to 138 developing countries, and seeks to transform how development finance eligibility is determined.

Instead of relying solely on GNI per capita as criteria, the index offers a more nuanced approach by taking exogenous and endogenous factors into account. The UVI focusses on measuring non-structural resilience, making it more effective at assessing the vulnerability of small states. The principal features of the UVI are:

- it is universal and is developed based on available data for 138 countries
- it is dynamic and captures changes in the vulnerability of countries over time
- it recognises the importance of structural and non-structural resilience in assessing national vulnerability.

This approach aims to support the reform of the global financial architecture to deliver increased funding to support small and vulnerable countries to cope with the dual threat of disasters and debt.

"In an age of big data, complex analysis and artificial intelligence we cannot rely on decades-old systems and 18th century concepts to guide us but must fundamentally overhaul the way we think about development finance."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

"Countries like ours can't print money when we face a crisis. We have to borrow. Yet some of us are no longer eligible for concessional interest rates. Tools like the United Nations Multidimensional Vulnerability Index, and the Commonwealth's Universal Vulnerability Index, reveal the special needs of Small Island Developing States."

H.E. Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda, at the 45th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community, in Trinidad and Tobago

Impact

The UVI has played a pivotal role in shaping global discussions on vulnerability, contributing to the development of the UN Multidimensional Vulnerability Index. Commonwealth leaders have widely praised the Index, and several have publicly expressed their support for its consideration by the international community for the reform of the global financial system.

Over the years, the Commonwealth's advocacy for a broader understanding of vulnerability has amplified the voices of small states in international forums, helping to drive longer-term outcomes in global policy.

Key figures, 2016–2024

25

SIDS engaged (all Commonwealth SIDS)

1

Virtual Center for Small States to launch at 2024 CHOGM

1

Universal Vulnerability Index, covering 138 developing countries, established

3.2 Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 55: ‘Heads noted the continuing efforts of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub in assisting developing country members with human and institutional capacity to mobilise climate finance for NDC implementation, including development of bankable projects and climate policy support.’

Background

In 2009, developed countries committed to providing US\$100 billion annually in climate finance by 2020 to help developing countries respond to, and mitigate the effects of, climate change – such as rising sea levels, storms, heatwaves and droughts.³ Yet navigating the complex climate finance landscape remains a significant challenge, particularly for small and other vulnerable states that are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation. Small island developing states (SIDS), for instance, report that it takes between two and three years to develop a climate proposal, followed by an additional year of legal and implementation arrangements before receiving funds to initiate projects.

3 See for example OECD (2024) ‘Climate Finance and the USD 100 billion goal’, webpage. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/climate-finance-and-the-usd-100-billion-goal.html>

Objective

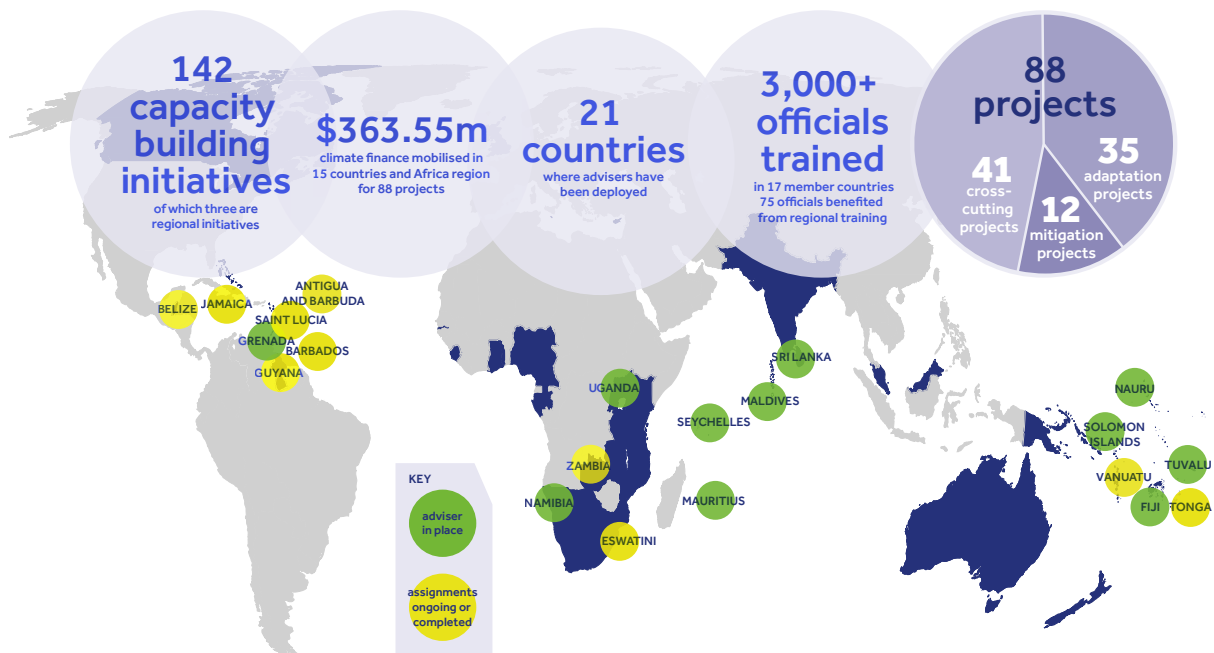
In 2015, Commonwealth Heads of Government mandated the Secretary-General to operationalise the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH). This innovative initiative aims to simplify the climate finance process, helping countries bypass bureaucratic red tape and successfully access international funds to combat climate change.

Strategy

During her first year in office, the Secretary-General launched CCFAH, with an AU\$1 million grant from the Government of Australia and a £1 million grant from the Secretariat, plus in-kind support from the Government of Mauritius.

The Hub deploys specialist advisers directly into government ministries, helping officials prepare bids for climate finance to support projects focused on climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience-building. These projects range from creating greener technologies to constructing storm defences, with the Hub providing comprehensive support for everything from climate finance applications and capacity building to policy advice and knowledge sharing.

Figure 3.1: A visual summary of CCFAH’s work



Case study: Climate Finance Advisers' legislative and institutional impacts in small states

Under the CCFAH initiative, Commonwealth National Climate Finance Advisers (CNCFAAs) deployed to the Caribbean, African and Indo-Pacific regions have contributed to enhancing the climate resilience of small states by raising readiness financing, developing a pipeline of bankable projects and building enabling institutional and policy frameworks. Country readiness is indicated by the establishment of climate finance and climate change units, fit-for-purpose policies and strategies, nationally accredited bodies and improved capacity to develop, access and utilise climate data and knowledge.

Some of the key results in climate readiness in the countries reviewed include:

- the Climate Change Bill in Mauritius
- a comprehensive operational manual for the Tonga Climate Change Fund
- climate policy developed or reviewed (Belize, Solomon Islands)
- Climate Action Strategies (Belize, Jamaica)
- the establishment of new institutional arrangements (Belize, Fiji)
- new national climate funds (Antigua and Barbuda, Tonga)
- National institutions accreditation by Climate Funds (Tonga, Solomon Islands, Antigua and Barbuda)

Case study: Building climate resilience in Zambia and beyond

Between 2022 and 2024, Zambia has faced an escalating water crisis that has severely impacted the lives and livelihoods of millions. Recognising the urgent need for intervention, CCFAH supported the Government of Zambia to secure climate finance for two projects designed to improve water security, build resilience and support sustainable development.

The first project, currently being implemented by Zambia's Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation, was approved by the Global Environment Facility in July 2022. This two-year project is assessing groundwater supplies in rural areas and building human, technical and institutional capacity for sustainable groundwater management, with a focus on solar-powered water systems.

The other, related project was funded by the Adaptation Fund Climate Innovation Accelerator in 2024, receiving US\$250,000. This project, implemented by UNEP, supports the mapping of aquifers in Zambia with the goal of improving water security for the benefit of 85,000 people in the water-stressed Nyimba and Lumezi districts of Eastern Province.

"This project will be crucial to improving the lives and livelihoods of 85,000 people of the Nyimba and Lumezi Districts in Eastern Province, where flash flooding and episodes of drought are a part of life. Many people live in extreme poverty and do not have access to drinking water. Not only does the project envisage a reliable source of fresh water, but it will be using solar-powered water pump systems, reducing greenhouse gas emissions while building resilience."

Beatrice Kanyamuna-Pole, Senior Hydrogeologist, Ministry of Water Development, Zambia

Additionally, in 2023, another youth-focused Zambian education programme, developed with CCFAH's assistance, received substantial funding from Germany's Internationale Klimaschutzinitiative to locally manufacture and develop rental systems for e-bikes, promoting sustainable transportation and reducing emissions.

To further strengthen the capacity of member countries, the Secretary-General launched targeted training programmes for government officials in line ministries. These programmes focus on mobilising climate finance and building institutional capacity, not only to improve access to funding but also to ensure the effective utilisation of resources.

Impact

Over the past seven years CCFAH has made significant strides in helping small and other vulnerable states access the funding needed to implement critical climate adaptation and mitigation projects – thereby saving lives, livelihoods and infrastructure. A few highlights include the following.

- As of July 2024, the Hub has helped countries to secure US\$363.55 million in climate finance, including \$9.30 million in co-financing.
- That funding covers 88 projects (35 adaptation, 12 mitigation, and 41 cross-cutting) across 15 countries from multilateral and bilateral funding lines, multi-donor funding collaboratives, public and private sector banking consortia and so on.
- The Hub has deployed 27 Commonwealth National Climate Finance Advisers (CNCFAs) across the Africa, Indo-Pacific and Caribbean regions, providing on-the-ground expertise to facilitate climate finance applications.
- The Hub has delivered 142 capacity-building initiatives, training more than 3,000 local officials on climate finance mobilisation.
- The Hub has developed various high-value resources, including a comprehensive toolkit and a 'Commonwealth Climate Finance

Case study: Enhancing climate negotiation skills of Mauritian officials

For SIDS like Mauritius, which are particularly vulnerable to the devastating impacts of climate change, effective participation in international climate negotiations is not just important – it is essential. Engaging successfully on the global stage allows these states to advocate for their specific needs and ensure that their voices are heard in shaping climate policies that affect their future.

In recognition of this critical need, Mauritius approached the Commonwealth Secretary-General at COP27 for support to enhance its capacity for climate negotiations. The Secretary-General responded by tasking CCFAH with developing a tailored training programme to prepare Mauritian climate negotiators for COP28.

Between 19 April and 12 May 2023, CCFAH delivered the inaugural Capacity Building Workshop on Climate Change Negotiations in collaboration with the Government of Mauritius, supported by the European Union and facilitated by the Indian Ocean Commission.

More than 70 participants from government, civil society and other sectors, including youth leaders, attended the three-day training programme on international climate negotiations. The training focused on the outcomes of COP27 and included practical sessions on setting negotiation priorities and holding mock COP negotiations.

Appreciating the training programme, the Minister of Environment, Solid Waste Management and Climate Change, Hon K. Ramano, observed that participants had

“been able to enhance their understanding of the climate change negotiation process. Demystification of the COP process has enabled the acquisition of basic knowledge on the processes and capabilities to master the tools and best practices of negotiation and communication on climate change.”

With this enhanced expertise, Mauritian negotiators were better equipped to articulate their country's climate needs with knowledge and authority on the global stage, and to position themselves as a key influencer in African SIDS climate policies.

Building on the success of the Mauritius programme, CCFAH extended similar training to other SIDS. In 2024, highly successful workshops were conducted in the Maldives, Fiji and Tuvalu, as well as for the wider Pacific region. These efforts upskilled over 100 additional participants, empowering them to become effective and informed climate negotiators.

Key figures, 2016–2024

25 SIDS engaged	\$363.55m funding secured, including \$9.30 million in co-financing	88 projects covered	3,000+ local officials trained	27 National Climate Finance Advisers deployed
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Essentials E-learning Course' to support small and other vulnerable states in accessing climate finance.

- CCFAH enhances its institutional progression and strengthens the hub as a fit-for-purpose vehicle by streamlining its operational framework and aligning its resources with targeted regional needs for effective project delivery and capacity building.
- The CCFAH experience has provided the Commonwealth with valuable insights and expertise, enabling successful delivery of

climate negotiation training, including the Commonwealth Youth negotiation training, which reached over 100 participants.

Commonwealth leaders acknowledged the Hub's contributions in their 2022 CHOGM Communiqué:

"Heads noted the continuing efforts of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub in assisting developing country members with human and institutional capacity to mobilise climate finance for NDC implementation, including development of bankable projects and climate policy support."

Case Study: Building Coastal Resilience in Tonga

In June 2024, the Kingdom of Tonga received grant funding from the Global Climate Fund (GCF) for an initiative, supported by CCFAH, to mitigate the impact of extreme climate events.

The GCF approved a \$22.66 million grant, and the Government of Tonga committed \$1.2 million to co-finance the fund, with the UNDP adding a further \$63,000 to bring the total close to \$24 million.

CCFAH advisers have been embedded within Tonga's Ministry for Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications, and have provided strategic and technical guidance on mobilising climate finance.

Ms Luisa Tuiafitu Malolo, Tonga's Director of Climate Change, stated:

"We gratefully acknowledge the support provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat, through [CCFAH], towards the development of this important project and we look forward to continuing our partnership."

GCF financing will be used to support the development of a revised national land use strategy that incorporates long-term climate risks and impacts coming into effect in 2025.

Tonga will establish a national community dialogue platform to enable island-wide discussions on land use to develop long-term adaptation strategies. The financing strengthens local capacity to monitor and manage climate risks as well as community adaptation, and bolsters national authorities' ability to use climate risk data. The project will also engage local actors to integrate climate risks and adaptation community development plans.

3.3 Blue Charter

Mandates

2018 CHOGM Communiqué, para 29: *'Heads adopted the Commonwealth Blue Charter, setting out the principles by which Commonwealth member countries will lead international efforts by sustainably developing and protecting their ocean. They committed to take action to safeguard the ocean for future generations. Heads agreed to establish Action Groups on ocean issues led by Commonwealth member countries, which will collaborate with partners at national, regional, and international levels, in addressing identified priority ocean issues of member countries. Heads mandated the Secretariat to take forward a Commonwealth Blue Charter plan of action to support this.'*

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 63: *'Heads acknowledged the critical role of the ocean in mitigating and adapting to climate change and supporting sustainable blue economies for resilient economic recovery, especially for small island states. They reaffirmed their commitment to the Commonwealth Blue Charter, welcoming the progress made by the ten Action Groups, led by sixteen champion countries. Heads noted, inter alia, actions taken by countries on tackling marine plastic pollution, expanded ocean observations, ocean-based climate action, marine environmental protection, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable use of the ocean and strategies for blue economy.'*

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 64: *'Heads recognised the value of Blue Charter actions in advancing progress towards SDG 14 (life below water).'*

Background

The climate crisis is intrinsically linked to an ocean crisis. Ocean-related climate disasters have doubled over the past two decades, and 24 per cent of them have occurred in Commonwealth countries. Ocean acidity is also at its highest in two million years.

With more than one-third of the world's coastal ocean falling under Commonwealth jurisdiction, and 49 out of 56 member countries possessing coastlines, the health of the oceans is vital to the livelihoods and sustainability of Commonwealth nations – and, by extension, the world.

Objectives

Recognising the critical importance of the ocean to Commonwealth countries, and building upon ongoing bilateral assistance programmes, the Secretariat envisioned a groundbreaking, pan-Commonwealth framework rooted in the principles of the Commonwealth Charter. The goal was to support all 56 member countries to actively co-operate in addressing ocean-related challenges and meeting international commitments for sustainable ocean management.

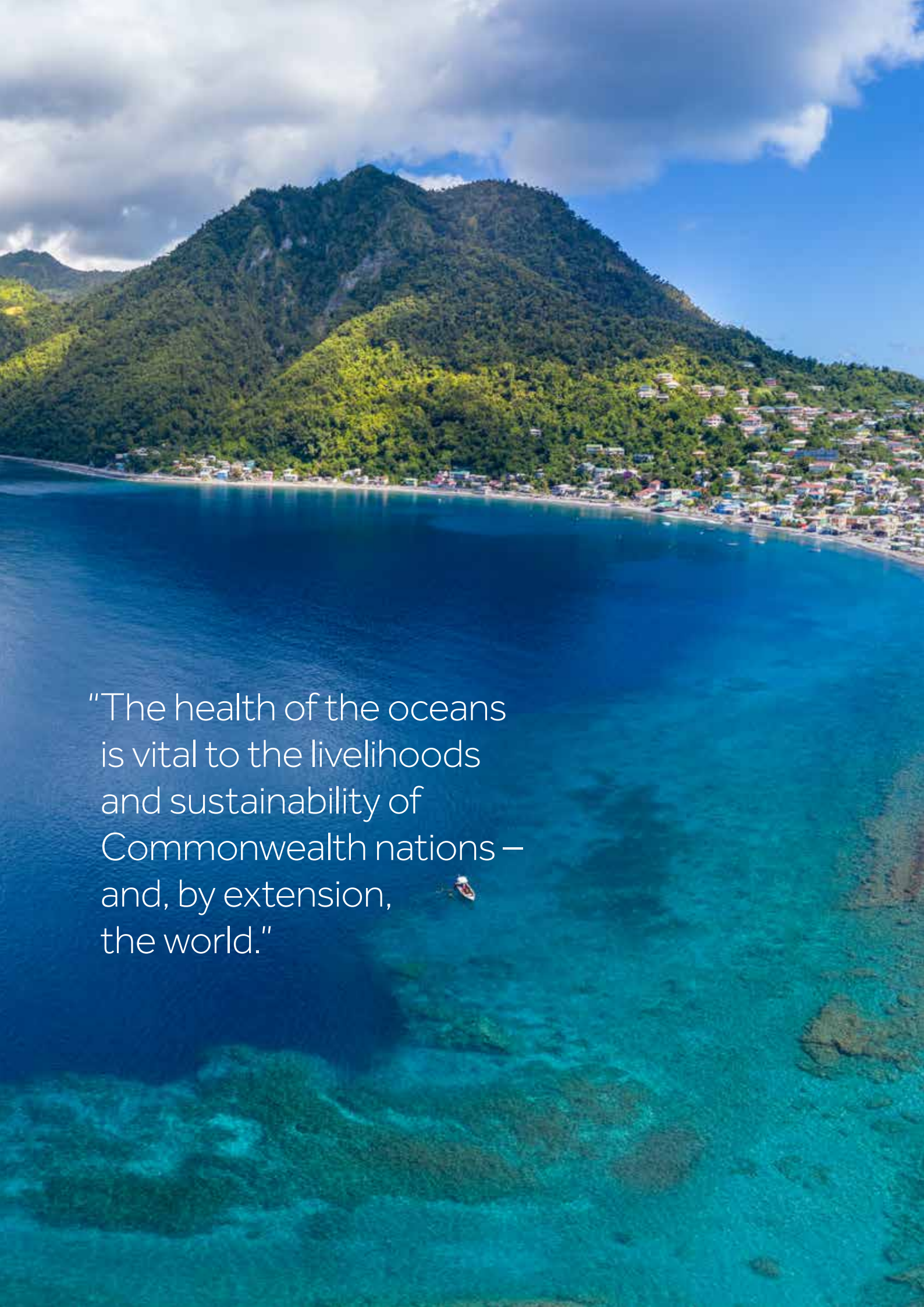
Strategy

The idea for the Commonwealth Blue Charter took shape under the Secretary-General's leadership. The proposal was introduced at the UN Ocean Conference in June 2017 and received widespread support. By December 2017, a draft of the Commonwealth Blue Charter was shared with member countries, and a few months later, at their biennial meeting in 2018, Heads of Government officially adopted the landmark Charter.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter set forth a unifying framework of principles by which Commonwealth countries would lead global efforts to sustainably develop and protect the oceans. Since its adoption, the Blue Charter has become a global standard-bearer for co-ordinated action on ocean conservation and management. The Charter is implemented through 10 Blue Charter Action Groups, led by 17 Commonwealth member countries. Forty-seven Commonwealth member countries are members of one or more of these Action Groups.

Supported by the Secretariat and Bloomberg Philanthropies, the Blue Charter Incubator was launched in 2022 to help member governments and partners develop solutions that address shared ocean challenges. By January 2023 the incubator was supporting eight promising projects in Barbados, Canada, Fiji, Kenya, Kiribati, Nigeria, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. A further call for projects is planned for 2025.

Lack of investment in the ocean has been concerning for many developing member countries: of all the SDGs, SDG 14 on the ocean is by far the least funded. In line with a 2022 CHOGM mandate,



"The health of the oceans is vital to the livelihoods and sustainability of Commonwealth nations – and, by extension, the world."

Key figures, 2016–2024

50 Commonwealth Countries engaged	8 countries supported by the Commonwealth Blue Charter Incubator	640 officials trained	20 expert webinars hosted	7 blue economy and coastal climate rapid readiness assessments conducted	60 case studies highlighting best practices in ocean financing and conservation disseminated
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the Secretariat is working on mobilising additional ocean funding from the philanthropic and corporate sectors, potentially in the form of a Blue Charter Action Fund.

To support more mainstream action on oceans, the Secretary-General convened the inaugural Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Meeting (COMM) in Cyprus in April 2024. Ministers attending the meeting agreed to lead on ocean protection and management through the Commonwealth Blue Charter and a proposed Commonwealth Ocean Declaration, which will for the first time identify their shared priorities and collaborative actions around sustainable governance of the seas. The Declaration is expected to be adopted at CHOGM in Samoa in October 2024.

Partnerships have been central to the Blue Charter's progress: nine formal partnerships have been established to assist countries to define, manage and protect their ocean spaces. One significant milestone was the signing of an MOU with the Government of Cyprus to establish a Blue Charter Centre of Excellence in Larnaca. This centre will promote sustainable blue economy governance and marine research across Commonwealth island and coastal states, with a focus on aquaculture and marine sustainability.

Impact

- From 2019 to 2024, 25 Action Group meetings, chaired by Champion Member Countries, were held to foster collaboration and knowledge sharing.
- Between 2020 and 2024, more than 640 officials from over 50 Commonwealth countries and overseas territories received training in 15 specialised ocean courses.
- National ocean policy technical assistance was provided to five countries – Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu – as well as to the territories of Anguilla and Montserrat, strengthening their ocean governance frameworks.
- The Secretariat supported Seychelles with innovative ocean financing solutions, such as debt-for-nature swaps, enabling the protection of 30 per cent of its marine protected areas by 2020.
- In 2020 the Secretariat published dynamic, interactive coral reef maps of Commonwealth countries, in partnership with the Allen Coral Atlas, offering live data access to support member countries to manage, restore and protect coral reefs.⁴
- In 2021 the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Group on Ocean Acidification published *A Policymakers' Handbook for Addressing the Impacts of Ocean Acidification*, which provides comprehensive strategies to mitigate ocean acidification impacts.
- Between 2022 and 2023, and in collaboration with UNEP, we piloted blue economy rapid readiness assessments (RRAs) in Antigua and Barbuda and Trinidad and Tobago in order to evaluate the preparedness of national systems and stakeholders for transitioning to sustainable blue economies (see the case study below). Furthermore, in collaboration with the Stimson Center, coastal climate RRAs were piloted in Barbados, Kiribati and Sri Lanka between 2022 and 2023; a second phase was launched in Dominica and Mauritius between 2023 and 2024.

⁴ See thecommonwealth.org/bluecharter/coral-map

8. At the COMM meeting in April 2024, the Blue Finance Working Group was established in partnership with the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance, fostering collaboration between governments and stakeholders to develop financial instruments and platforms for sustainable blue economy projects.
9. Around 20 expert webinars were hosted, providing member countries with cutting-edge information and research on ocean sustainability.
10. More than 60 case studies highlighting best practices in ocean financing and conservation were disseminated among Commonwealth member countries, facilitating knowledge exchange and replication.

Case study: Transitioning to sustainable blue economies in Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua and Barbuda



As member countries seek to harness ocean resources for economic growth, they must balance development with environmental protection and climate resilience. To support this goal, the Secretariat partnered with UNEP, Howell Marine Consulting and the University of Portsmouth to assess the readiness of Trinidad and Tobago and Antigua and Barbuda to transition to sustainable blue economies.

This initiative utilised an innovative 'rapid readiness assessment' (RRA) methodology, which offers a detailed analysis of each country's existing policies, legal frameworks, systems and political landscapes. The assessments provided tailored recommendations for creating distinct blue economy transition pathways for both nations.

In Trinidad and Tobago, where the economy is deeply rooted in the oil and gas industry, tourism and fisheries, the RRA revealed a pressing need for faster integration of cross-sector ocean policies and legislation. Recommendations included fostering a shared vision for inter-ministerial co-ordination in sustainable development and the energy transition away from fossil fuels.

Antigua and Barbuda, by contrast, had already begun its transition towards a sustainable blue economy, the government having recognised its benefits in terms of economic and climate resilience. The RRA emphasised the importance of enhancing stakeholder collaboration, establishing marine spatial planning and improving co-ordination among government agencies.

The success of the RRA trials demonstrated its usefulness in different contexts, facilitating dialogue among stakeholders and providing practical steps for the transition journey. Continuous efforts and follow-up engagement will be necessary to sustain this momentum.

3.4 Living Lands Charter

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 60: *'Heads adopted the Commonwealth Living Lands Charter, A Commonwealth Call to Action on Living Lands'*

Background

The Commonwealth encompasses a quarter of the world's land area and is home to a third of the world's mega-biodiverse countries. More than 400 endemic species are found in its 25 small island states. However, the impacts of land-use change, resource over-exploitation, pollution and climate change are becoming increasingly severe across Commonwealth countries. Food insecurity is rising, soils are depleting and biodiversity loss is accelerating. These challenges demand bold and unified action, and the Commonwealth is leading the way.

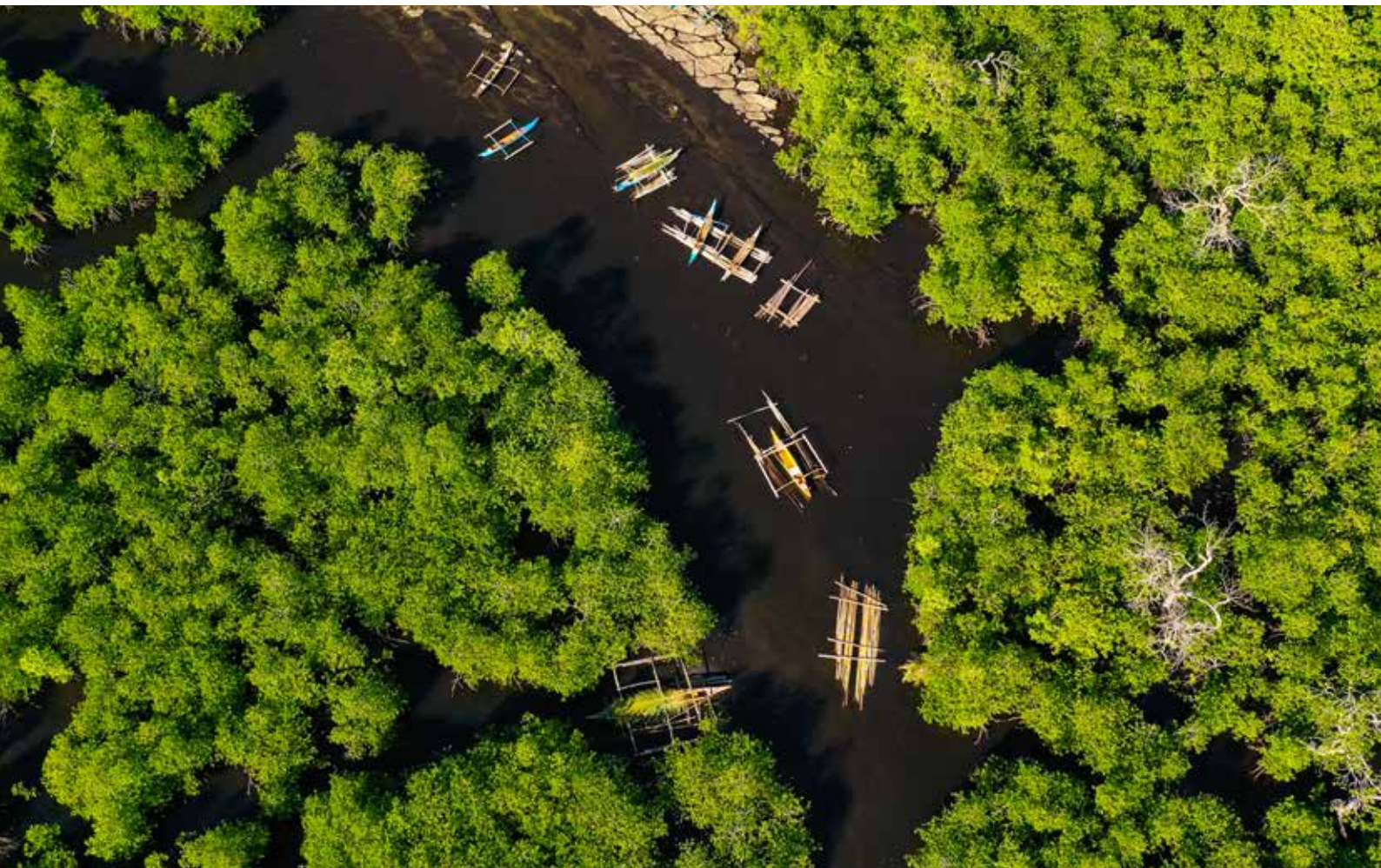
Objective

The Living Lands Charter: A Commonwealth Call to action on Living Lands commits all 56 member countries to safeguarding global land resources and taking co-ordinated action on climate change, biodiversity loss and sustainable land management.

Strategy

The Living Lands Charter, conceived under the visionary leadership of the Secretary-General, evolved rapidly from an idea to a landmark agreement adopted by leaders at the 2022 CHOGM. The Charter enables Commonwealth countries to synergise their efforts in implementing the commitments of the three Rio Conventions, directly impacting a quarter of the world's land area.

To operationalise the Charter, the Secretary-General launched an implementation framework at COP28, after consultation with member countries, fulfilling a CHOGM mandate.



This framework takes a comprehensive, system-wide approach, focusing on five thematic action areas:

1. climate-resilient agriculture for food security
2. soil and water conservation
3. sustainable green cover and biodiversity
4. carbon-neutral and climate-resilient livestock rearing and animal husbandry
5. indigenous and local people for climate-resilient development.

Within each thematic area, the Secretariat offers extensive support to countries – from mobilising financial resources to facilitating policy development and institutional governance – to help them achieve their commitments under the Charter.

Impact

- Several member countries have stepped forward to lead on key action areas within the Living Lands Charter. Malta and Zambia lead on soil and water conservation; Botswana on sustainable green cover and biodiversity; Kenya on climate-resilient agriculture for food security; and Fiji and Nigeria on indigenous people and local communities.
- The Charter is addressing critical water-related challenges in the Zambezi river basin through support to the Programme for Integrated Development and Adaptation to Climate Change in the Zambezi River Basin, which began in 2022. This has resulted in the first regional programme of support, to the value of \$64 million, from the Climate Investment Fund under the Nature, Climate and People Program.
- Investment projects for nature-based solutions are being developed in Zambezi river basin countries including Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

- The Charter has also provided technical assistance to Fiji on the role of nature-based solutions in Fiji's national biodiversity strategies and action plans, and to Namibia on mainstreaming gender for the 'Strengthening Climate Information and Early Warning System for Enhanced Adaptation Planning and Resilience in Namibia' proposal. It also developed a *Forest Carbon Toolkit* using examples from Guyana, Rwanda and other member countries.
- The Charter has led the way in mainstreaming environmental sustainability and climate into health and sport, leading to strong statements highlighting the importance of these elements at the Commonwealth's Health and Sport Ministers' Meetings respectively.
- Several key partnerships have been established to ensure that support to countries is of the highest quality in all respects. These include memorandums of understanding with the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, the African Union Development Agency – New partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), AGRA and the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund.

"The world is experiencing a triple planetary crisis, addressing climate change, protecting biodiversity, and nurturing ecological restoration of our land has become an urgent priority for all. As Commonwealth members, we are here to renew our commitment to work together towards this aim through the Call to Action on Living Lands Charter. We hope that our experience inspires Commonwealth countries facing similar tough challenges."

Prime Minister Robert Abela of Malta at the launch of the Implementation Framework of the Commonwealth Living Lands Charter at COP28

Key figures, 2016–2024

56

Commonwealth countries engaged

3

nature-based solution projects supported

\$64m

value of projects

3

partnerships formalised

3.5 Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition Agenda

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 70: *'Heads encouraged the development of further partnerships to support sustainable and clean energy transition and appropriate alternative energy infrastructure.'*

Background

Energy access is essential for sustainable development, but increasing global energy demand presents a significant challenge in the fight against climate change. Currently, energy production and consumption account for two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions. As of 2023, fossil fuels still make up 80 per cent of the global energy mix, underscoring the urgent need to transition to more efficient, sustainable and clean energy systems. Achieving the goals set out in SDG 7 for sustainable energy, and the Paris Agreement, will require a significant shift away from fossil fuel dependency.

Objectives

Accelerating the energy transition is paramount. In 2018, Heads encouraged member countries to co-operate in accelerating the transition to cleaner forms of energy in light of commitments made under the Paris Agreement.

Strategy

In response to a mandate from CHOGM, the Secretary-General hosted the inaugural Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Forum in 2019. This landmark event laid the foundation for the Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition (CSET) Agenda, focusing on three essential pillars:

1. inclusive energy transition
2. innovation and technology
3. enabling frameworks for investment and policy development.

These pillars form the backbone of collective efforts by Commonwealth countries to fast-track an equitable and just transition to low-carbon energy systems.

In 2021, the second Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Forum was held virtually, facilitating consensus-building and knowledge-sharing among member countries. The forum emphasised raising ambitions and commitments to achieving the goals of SDG 7 by accelerating the transition to clean energy systems. Member countries were also encouraged to step forward as champions to drive initiatives under the three CSET pillars of action.



At the 2022 CHOGM, three CSET Action Groups were launched.

1. **Geothermal Energy Action Group**, led by Kenya, to harness geothermal resources for sustainable energy transition.
2. **Energy Literacy Action Group**, led by Eswatini, to increase awareness of energy issues and promote inclusion in the energy transition
3. **Youth Action Group**, led by youth, to empower the next generation as leaders in the global energy transition.

“Energy access is essential for sustainable development.”

The momentum continued in 2023, with the third biennial Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition Forum attended by 29 member countries. At COP28 in December 2023, CSET announced the creation of the Rural Electrification and Energy Access Group, co-led by Nigeria and Malawi. It focuses on promoting the deployment of clean technology solutions to close energy access gaps in the Commonwealth. Also created at COP28 was the CSET Methane Action Group, led by Namibia, which focuses on sharing expertise, technology and policy solutions to reduce methane emissions, thereby advancing an inclusive, just and equitable transition to low-carbon energy systems.

“With assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat, we are strengthening our regulatory framework for methane, including through a near-zero methane emission policy and a methane action plan. Through this Commonwealth action group, we look forward to collaborating with various stakeholders to turn these commitments into reality.”

The Hon. Tom Alweendo, Minister of Mines & Energy, Namibia

Impact

- CSET has played a pivotal role in helping member countries overcome barriers to deploying clean energy technologies and innovative solutions.
- It has provided technical support to promote clean energy investment projects in several countries including Barbados, Seychelles and Dominica.
- In 2021 and 2023, the Commonwealth launched the two SIDS Clean Energy Toolkits, which helps SIDS to translate clean energy transition plans into viable business opportunities in the power and transportation sectors.
- A series of three children's books about energy has been published to educate young people in more than 40 countries about the sustainable energy transition.
- In 2023 the *Commonwealth Guide to Public and Private Sector Financing for Clean Energy* was published, providing comprehensive insights into the global financing landscape and offering member countries practical support with developing successful clean energy funding proposals.
- The *Improving Energy Literacy* report, published in 2023, sets out a roadmap to developing greater energy literacy across the Commonwealth, with a particular focus on the needs of small states and developing countries.

Key figures, 2016–2024

3

Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Forums held

3

countries provided technical support to promote clean energy investment

2

SIDS Energy Toolkits launched

3

children's books on energy published

3.6 Common Earth

Background

The sombre predictions of the climate crisis have become a reality. In every Commonwealth region – home to 2.5 billion people – fertile lands turn to dust, wells run dry, storms and floods overwhelm communities and the ocean rises. However, various IPCC reports offer a beacon of hope, providing ‘evidence of the benefits of combining scientific with local and indigenous knowledge to develop suitable options to manage climate change risks and enhance resilience’.⁵

One-third of the world’s indigenous people live in the Commonwealth. Many of them live with the harsh realities of climate change, but are at the same time guardians of rich knowledge and sources of inspiration as exemplars of sustainability.

5 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2019, September 25) ‘Choices made now are critical for the future of our ocean and cryosphere’, media release. www.ipcc.ch/2019/09/25/srocc-press-release

Objective

Upon taking office, the Secretary-General recognised the opportunity for the Commonwealth to not just mitigate or adapt to climate change, but to actively reverse some of its effects. She envisioned the Commonwealth as a leader in pioneering regenerative climate action, working alongside nature to create a truly sustainable future. Central to this vision was the invaluable wisdom of indigenous cultures, which hold a deep understanding of the symbiotic relationship between humanity and the environment. The Secretary-General believed that this holistic approach could be pivotal in the fight against climate change.

Strategy

This vision led to the birth of Common Earth, a groundbreaking initiative that marries the ancient ecological wisdom of indigenous communities with modern scientific advancements, technologies and



“The sombre predictions of the climate crisis have become a reality.”

innovations. Common Earth is designed to facilitate the development of regenerative climate models that can be replicated across regions – whether on land, in oceans or in the atmosphere. These models aim to restore the damage caused by climate change while achieving the targets of SDG 13 (climate action), the Paris Agreement and the Commonwealth Blue Charter.

"It is not game over in the battle against climate change – it's game on. Because this is about looking at practical, existing strategies to clean streams, restore forests and damaged ecosystems, protect marine health, educate our populations and challenge the economic and development approaches that led to the decline of our planet."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

In October 2019, the Secretary-General officially launched Common Earth at an event in London, bringing together more than 100 global environmental leaders, scientists, climate change experts and representatives from indigenous groups. Hosted in partnership with the Cloudburst Foundation, this gathering resulted in the creation of roadmaps for projects in three Commonwealth member countries. Participants committed to co-ordinated, regenerative action in their regions, establishing the Global Common Earth Network and launching new projects to combat climate change and restore ecosystems. As a result, three working groups were formed to provide free technical assistance to member countries:

1. the Commonwealth Small State, Climate Change Blue-Green Trade Working Group
2. the Gender and Climate Change Working Group
3. the Indigenous Affairs Working Group.

Impact

- Now established as a UK-based charity, Common Earth has been supporting the Commonwealth and other countries to make their diverse and often vulnerable communities sustainable and resilient in the face of climate change.
- Common Earth established the Regenerative Learning Laboratory, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Innovation Hub, as a means of promoting and learning from innovative climate initiatives across Commonwealth countries.
- Common Earth has supported Project CETI (Cetacean Translation Initiative), which uses AI to interpret the language of sperm whales to accelerate conservation efforts.
- In 2020, Common Earth launched the Common Earth Alliance, a creatively driven and self-organising association of diverse members united by a charter of shared purpose that has been signed by more than 30 organisations.
- Common Earth supported a city-wide effort aimed at regenerating Auckland's unique water systems.
- The initiative has equipped small farmers with regenerative agricultural techniques, helping them rise out of poverty while simultaneously combating climate change.
- Common Earth has assisted the work of authorities in Kiribati to help local communities holistically manage the Phoenix Islands, one of the world's largest protected areas.

3.7 CommonSensing

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 65: *'Heads also recognised that despite developing countries needing global support now more than ever to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in the ocean and on land, financial support remains insufficient.'*

Background

Climate-vulnerable Commonwealth nations, while contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions, face disproportionate impacts from climate-related disasters. To effectively mitigate these disasters and protect lives, livelihoods and infrastructure, countries need access to accurate, reliable and timely geospatial data. This data is also essential for making informed investments in climate resilience and securing much-needed climate finance.

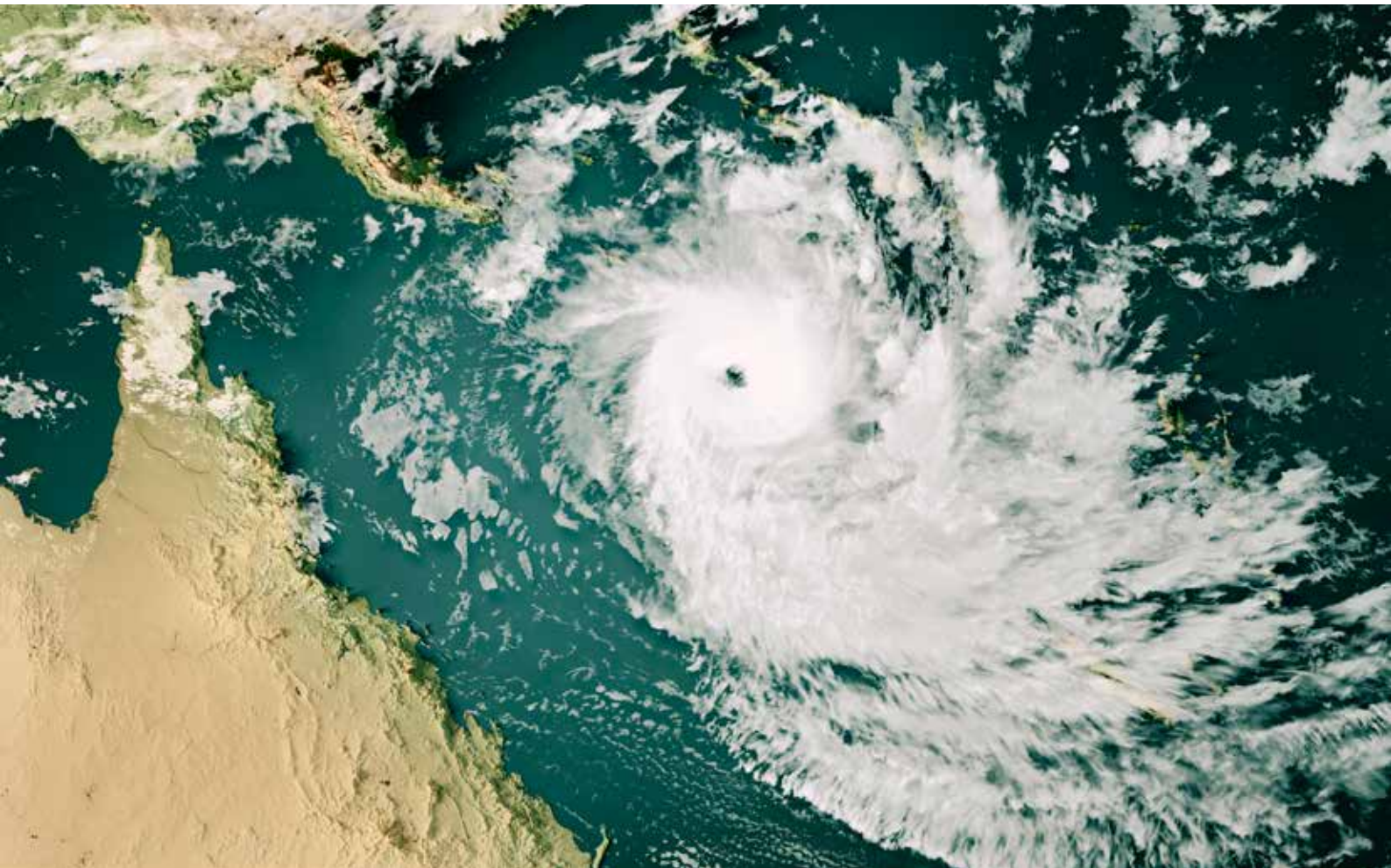
Objectives

Recognising the urgency of this issue early in her tenure, the Secretary-General identified satellite-derived technologies as a game changer in climate

action. She recognised their dual potential: not only to transform crisis response but also to facilitate access to climate finance. Acting on this vision, the Secretariat joined partners in the CommonSensing project – a pioneering initiative that equips countries with critical data to improve emergency decision-making and support viable applications for climate finance.

Strategy

The CommonSensing project enabled a cross-sectoral partnership between Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and a consortium of international organisations. The UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) leads this consortium, working closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Satellite Applications Catapult, Devex International, the UK Met Office, the University of Portsmouth (UK) and other partners. The project was funded by a £9.6 million grant from the UK Space Agency, complemented by contributions from project partners and the governments of Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.



At its core, CommonSensing harnessed cutting-edge satellite technology to generate high-quality geospatial data, providing a solid foundation for disaster response and climate action in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Within this initiative, the Secretariat – through the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub – is the thematic lead on climate finance. It provides critical technical assistance to the three Pacific nations, helping them utilise hard data from the CommonSensing platform to develop strong applications for climate finance.

“This collaboration has advanced climate action and disaster preparedness through satellite earth observation.”

A milestone in this effort was the formal partnership established in 2019 between the Secretariat and UNITAR. This collaboration has advanced climate action and disaster preparedness through satellite earth observation. The value of this partnership was demonstrated in the wake of Tropical Cyclone Harold in April 2020, when the Secretariat worked closely with government counterparts in Fiji and Vanuatu, mobilising rapid satellite mapping support through UNITAR-UNOSAT. In the cyclone's' aftermath the Secretariat hosted a virtual event to facilitate knowledge-sharing between Pacific

nations and Caribbean member countries, enabling the exchange of critical lessons in disaster response and preparedness.

While the CommonSensing project came to an end in March 2022, its work on geospatial data and information for enabling access to finance has continued through a partnership with UNITAR with funding support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation. UNITAR and the Secretariat have also continued to provide support to the Pacific countries of Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

“Responding effectively to these complex challenges of disease and disaster will rely more than ever on data that is accurate, reliable and timely, as well as country co-operation to share knowledge, experience and expertise.”

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

Impact

- Through CommonSensing, the Secretariat has supported Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to unlock climate finance to address climate impacts by deploying National Climate Finance Advisers.
- Noting the lack of women's roles in all aspects of climate action, the Secretariat has spearheaded efforts to mainstream gender across its climate change work, including the CommonSensing initiative.

CommonSpace

In June 2024, the Secretary-General announced the CommonSpace initiative, building on the success of CommonSensing. This forward-looking initiative is designed to use powerful space technology, data and research to help developing countries better predict, manage and recover from increasingly frequent and severe climate disasters.

In the long run this initiative will provide developing countries with essential data to make critical decisions, direct investment towards resilience-building projects, and safeguard the lives and livelihoods of those on the frontline.

Central to this initiative is a dedicated 'Space Data Hub' to promote the sharing of innovative space technology, data and research across Commonwealth countries. The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Science and Technology, Professor Manahel Thabet, will lead the CommonSpace initiative. Professor Thabet's broader work as Special Envoy focuses on harnessing technology to boost progress on the SDGs.

3.8 Commonwealth Disaster Risk Finance Portal

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 37: *'Heads called for concerted and coordinated efforts to rebuild resilient economies and build future preparedness to tackle natural disasters, considering the specific needs of developing countries, least developed countries, and SIDS.'*

Background

The growing intensity and frequency of natural disasters, including those brought about by climate change, has cost Commonwealth countries billions in damage and lost economic opportunities, and hinders their ability to achieve the SDGs. Adding to this challenge is the fact that mobilising the necessary disaster finance often involves the navigation of complex processes laden with bureaucratic obstacles.

Objective

In 2018, Commonwealth Finance Ministers tasked the Secretariat with developing a practical tool to address barriers to mobilising disaster finance and helping countries reduce disaster risk.

Strategy

Responding to their request, the Secretary-General initiated the development of the Commonwealth Disaster Risk Finance Portal, an innovative, user-friendly platform designed to simplify and expedite access to disaster finance.

"An innovative, user-friendly platform designed to simplify and expedite access to disaster finance."



Bahrain, a town in Pakistan's Swat Valley, in October 2022, shortly after one of a series of climate change-related floods in the country

An inter-agency team was commissioned to lead the project, working collaboratively to create a solution that addressed the most pressing challenges faced by member countries.

Launched at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting in October 2020, the portal serves as a one-stop shop for disaster finance. It consolidates various financing instruments offered by multilateral banks, international organisations and bilateral partners. It also demystifies the intricate funding processes, providing clarity on the differing eligibility requirements, access criteria and terms and conditions imposed by various funding bodies.

The portal also includes a simplified guide to assessing the risks, costs, benefits and timeliness of available funding. It encourages disciplined planning by offering an interactive platform where users can access case studies, a knowledge bank and information on development initiatives.

Impact

Since its launch, the Commonwealth Disaster Risk Finance Portal has received support from several countries, serving as a vital tool in disaster risk reduction.

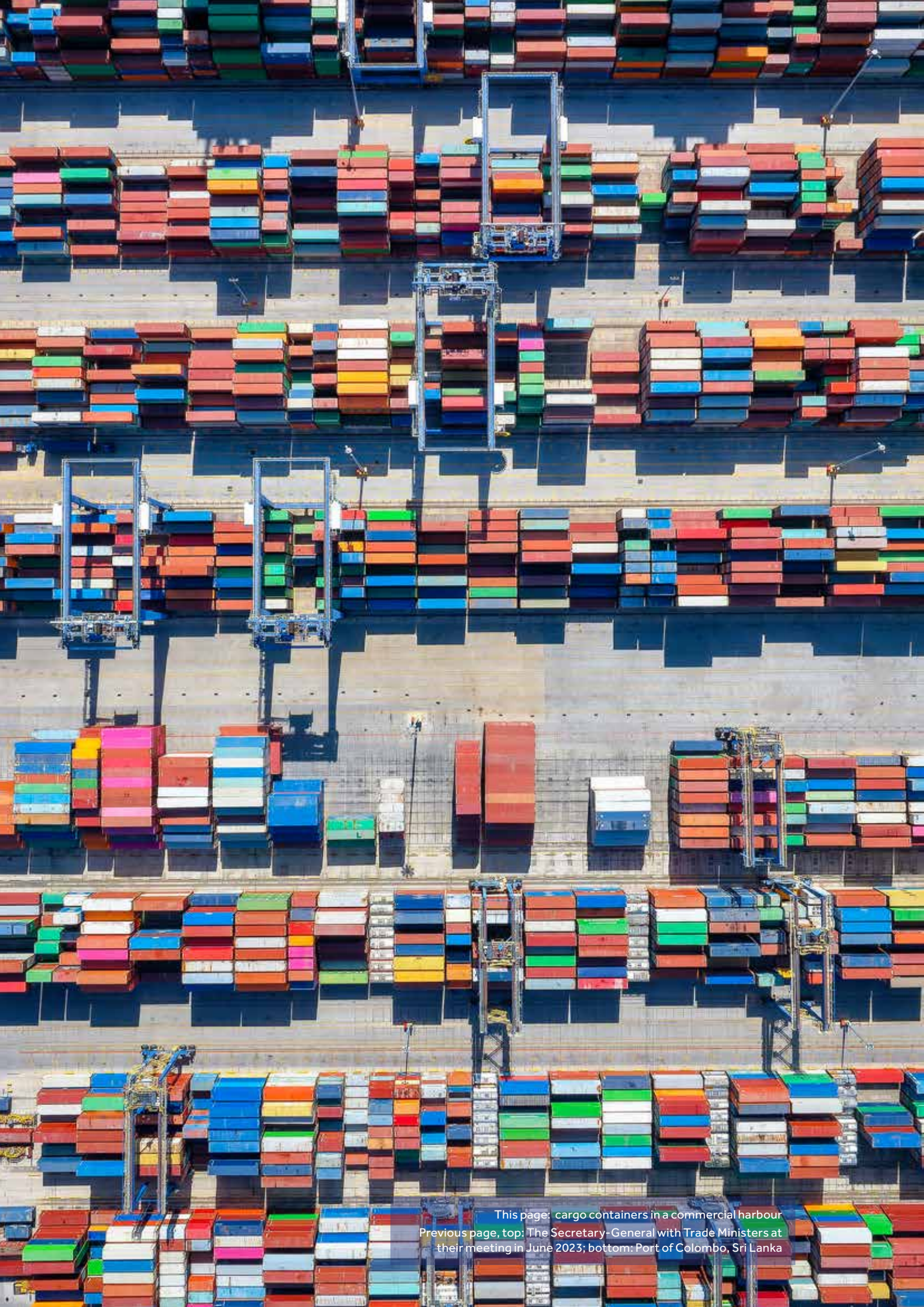
- The portal was welcomed by Commonwealth Finance Ministers at their annual meeting in 2020.⁶
- In response to demand from a number of countries, the Commonwealth Disaster Risk Finance Portal is set to evolve into the Commonwealth Disaster Risk Finance Centre, which is expected to be launched at the 2024 CHOGM in Samoa.

6 Ministry of Finance and Economy, Brunei Darussalam (2020, October 7) 'THE COMMONWEALTH FINANCE MINISTERS MEETING (VIRTUAL)', press release. [https://www.mofe.gov.bn/Press%20Room/Press%20Release%2007.10.2020%20\[English\]%20-%20Commonwealth%20Finance%20Ministers%20Meeting%20\(Virtual\)%202020.pdf](https://www.mofe.gov.bn/Press%20Room/Press%20Release%2007.10.2020%20[English]%20-%20Commonwealth%20Finance%20Ministers%20Meeting%20(Virtual)%202020.pdf)

4

Resilient Economy Key Projects 2016–2024





This page: cargo containers in a commercial harbour
Previous page, top: The Secretary-General with Trade Ministers at their meeting in June 2023; bottom: Port of Colombo, Sri Lanka

4. Resilient Economy: Key Projects 2016–2024

Introduction

Shortly after taking office in 2016, the Secretary-General outlined an ambitious vision for the Secretariat. Her mission, as mandated by Heads of Government, was to create a responsive, resilient and resource-efficient organisation capable of fully and skilfully meeting the needs of member countries, tackling some of our most pressing challenges and achieving the SDGs.

To bring this vision to life, the Secretary-General embarked on a series of bold institutional reforms, culminating in a dynamic Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan. These were built around five interconnected pillars: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership, interlinked with the SDGs and the values of the Commonwealth Charter

"We need a Secretariat that is a dynamic, innovative enterprise – better equipped to serve the needs of even more of our member states."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, in an early memo to staff laying the foundation for her reform agenda

Central to her strategy were ICT and innovation, which she identified as game-changers in transforming the Secretariat into a fit-for-purpose organisation. Under her leadership, the Secretariat aimed to become a global leader in artificial intelligence (AI) and digitalisation – both critical for bridging the widening digital divide, especially for small and other vulnerable states. With AI projected to add US\$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030,¹ her focus on digital solutions is particularly timely and relevant.

The Secretary-General, who is from the small island state of Dominica, has seen firsthand the devastating impacts of economic inequalities. Determined to address this issue, she championed improved debt management strategies and increased trade and investment opportunities for all

56 member countries, with a focus on small and other vulnerable states. Under the Secretary-General's leadership, total intra-Commonwealth investment stock has grown in each consecutive year, reaching around \$1.7 trillion in 2022. Furthermore, despite the Commonwealth not being a formal trading bloc, the costs of trade between member countries are 21 per cent lower on average than trade with non-Commonwealth countries.

Intra-Commonwealth exports are expected to surpass \$1 trillion by 2026,² demonstrating the value of the Secretary-General's focus on trade, connectivity and competitiveness as key drivers of economic strategy.

"The Secretary-General championed improved debt management strategies and increased trade and investment opportunities."

The Secretary-General's ingenuity, resourcefulness and drive for building a resilient future have given rise to several transformative and high-impact initiatives.

- **The Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment**, adopted under the Secretary-General's leadership, which is expected to boost intra-Commonwealth trade to \$2 trillion by 2030.
- **The Commonwealth Meridian debt management system**, launched by the Secretary-General, which is currently used by

1 PwC (2017) *Sizing the prize: What's the real value of AI for your business and how can you capitalise?* <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/data-and-analytics/publications/artificial-intelligence-study.html>

2 Commonwealth Secretariat (2022, October 24) 'New webinar series shines a spotlight on the Commonwealth Advantage', webpage. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/new-webinar-series-shines-spotlight-commonwealth-advantage>

42 countries to manage a combined portfolio of over \$4 trillion of public debt. The system is offered free of charge to Commonwealth countries, along with policy and advocacy support on formulating proactive prudent debt management strategies.

- **The Commonwealth Artificial Intelligence Consortium**, which the Secretary-General launched in 2023 to mobilise leading tech companies and universities to provide governance, advocacy and advisory support to help member countries bridge the digital divide, including the AI gap, with a focus on the Commonwealth's 33 small states.
- **The Commonwealth AI Academy**, which the Secretary-General unveiled in 2023, is equipping Commonwealth citizens, especially youth, with essential AI skills to prepare them for a future in which AI will play an integral role in daily life.

- **The 'Their Future, Our Action' project**, a multi-stakeholder partnership between the Secretariat and the University of Cambridge, designed to help small states gain access to sustainable finance for youth and biodiversity, both of which are crucial for sustainable development.

Throughout her tenure, the Secretary-General has harnessed the Commonwealth's unique convening power to foster consensus and co-operation, striving to build inclusive and resilient economies that deliver more benefits to people and businesses across our 56 member countries.

In recognition of her longstanding commitment to innovation, the Secretary-General was awarded the University of California, Berkeley's prestigious Global Leadership Award in 2023. She is the first Caribbean, Dominican and British person to receive the award, joining a list of distinguished past honourees including former US President Barack Obama and former President of India, Pranab Mukherjee.



4.1 Commonwealth Meridian

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 35: *'Noting that COVID-19 responses have put additional pressure on economies with limited fiscal space, resulting in increasing debt levels, particularly for small states and developing economies, Heads acknowledged the need for IFIs to develop appropriate mechanisms to meet their needs. They recognised a need for a long-term view on debt sustainability and for more innovative solutions to sovereign debt resolution challenges, such as natural disaster clauses in bond issues. Heads called on the G20 to work with the Paris Club of official creditors to make the process of the Common Framework for Debt Treatments (Common Framework) clearer and more coordinated among relevant stakeholders, and to support countries with debt vulnerabilities.'*

Background

More than half of Commonwealth developing countries are carrying debt-to-GDP burdens of over 60 per cent, and nearly a quarter carry over 80 per cent. This challenge is exacerbated by climate-related disasters, which can wipe out a country's entire GDP in minutes yet leave its government continuing to service debts to pay for infrastructure that has been destroyed. The impact of unsustainable debt on governments' ability to fund essential services such as health and education, and to direct funds to social and economic development, is dire and damaging.

Objective

Since 1985, the Secretariat's Debt Management Programme has been at the forefront of supporting member countries to manage their public debt portfolios. Through innovative tools, policy advice



and capacity-building initiatives, the programme aims to help member countries achieve debt sustainability, reduce long-term servicing costs, manage the risk of contingent liabilities and prevent debt distress.

Strategy

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Secretariat's Debt Management Programme has been transformed through the development of a state-of-the-art debt management system, known as Meridian. Launched in 2019, the sophisticated web-based platform marks a major upgrade from its predecessor, and supports countries to formulate, implement and monitor their debt strategies. Its enhanced features support accurate resource allocation, evidence-based policymaking and improved debt transparency.

"The sophisticated web-based platform supports countries to formulate, implement and monitor their debt strategies."

Key innovations of Meridian include the following.

- **Remote technical support:** For the first time, Secretariat staff in London can provide technical assistance to client countries remotely, eliminating the need for costly travel.
- **Seamless integration:** The system interfaces smoothly with major international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT).
- **Advanced real-time dashboards:** Users can track debt management against legislative requirements and sustainability metrics through intuitive, real-time dashboards.

In conjunction with Meridian, the Debt Management Unit introduced the Debt Data Quality Assessment framework in 2019. This integrated framework allows countries to monitor and enhance the quality of their debt data, streamlining the processes of recording, monitoring and disseminating information while reducing errors and omissions.

Since its inception, the Debt Management Unit has been providing regular training to new and experienced users of the Meridian system. Recent adopters – including Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Botswana, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Nigeria and Guyana – have received extensive training and data migration support. The training has been complemented with powerful knowledge products, such as the *Handbook on Public Debt Transparency (2023)*. The *Handbook* offers governments a clear roadmap to align their public debt operations with international standards, ensuring the compilation of accurate and reliable debt data that can support evidence-based decision-making.

Looking ahead, the Debt Management Unit plans to establish a Commonwealth-wide debt statistics portal, which will aim to support business continuity and strengthen disaster recovery planning, ensuring that debt management operations remain robust amid unforeseen disruptions.

"Our new debt management system is a game-changer. It not only provides an accurate snapshot of the debt portfolio, but also equips officials with the knowledge to make informed decisions, crucial for financial resilience."

Kagiso Sedumedi, Principal Finance Officer, Ministry of Finance, Botswana, during the migration of their debt databases to Meridian in June 2023³

Impact

- The Secretariat has supported 42 countries (38 member countries and four outside the Commonwealth) to improve debt data quality and transparency through the deployment of Commonwealth Meridian. The system is now being used to manage a combined portfolio of more than \$4 trillion of public debt.

3 Commonwealth Secretariat (2023, June 28) 'Botswana set to manage public debt with new Commonwealth software', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/botswana-set-manage-public-debt-new-commonwealth-software>

Key figures, 2016–2024

42

countries using Meridian

\$4tn+

in total public debt being managed by Meridian

289

debt managers from 40 countries have benefited from using the e-learning portal

- The majority of countries using the Secretariat's debt management systems (Meridian and our legacy system, CS-DRMS, currently used by two countries) use them to report their external debt to the World Bank.
- Meridian has improved debt transparency in member countries, helping them pass creditworthiness assessments while promoting debt sustainability and increasing the quality of public debt data.
- Meridian has helped foster greater confidence, both internally and externally, in the quality of member countries' data. For example, Eswatini's Central Bank received praise from the World Bank for its timely submission of quality debt data.
- Since its launch, the Debt Management Unit has conducted more than 50 in-country training workshops and 10 regional workshops, upskilling more than 600 public debt officials.
- As of June 2024, 289 debt managers from 40 countries have engaged with the system through a dedicated e-learning portal launched in 2022.
- Adopters of Commonwealth Meridian reported time savings, streamlined recording processes and ease of integration with other public financial management systems.

"As a country, the efforts we put in having complete and good quality data have even led us to do away with the so-called Excel based spreadsheets, we use Commonwealth Meridian 100% and have so much comfort and confidence in the results we are getting. We really thank The Commonwealth Secretariat for that!!!"

Andreas Themba Dlamini, Public Finance Economist, Central Bank of Eswatini⁴

4 Commonwealth Secretariat (2023) *Summary of Programmes and Implementation of Key 2022 CHOGM Mandates*.

4.2 Innovation

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 103: *'Heads reaffirmed their commitment to equipping citizens, especially women, girls, young people, and others facing inequality, with the skills necessary to fully benefit from innovation and opportunities in cyberspace. They committed to ensuring inclusive access for all, eliminating discrimination in cyberspace, and adopting online safety policies for all users, especially children, whilst upholding human rights.'*

Background

Innovation is a powerful engine of socio-economic development and a key tool for confronting global challenges such as climate change. Recognising its significance, the Secretary-General placed innovation, ICT and partnerships at the core of the Commonwealth's reform agenda.

"Innovation is a powerful engine of socio-economic development and a key tool for confronting global challenges."

Objective

To create a dynamic ecosystem that powers up sustainable development through innovation, the Secretary-General initiated two major interventions.

1. **Embedding Innovation in Strategic Planning:** Innovation and partnerships were integrated as cross-cutting outcomes of the Strategic Plans to ensure a consistent focus on innovation across all areas of the Secretariat's work.
2. **Establishing the Commonwealth Innovation and Partnerships Section:** A dedicated team was created in 2017 to champion innovative ideas, foster cross-sectoral collaboration and drive the exchange of cutting-edge solutions across member countries.

Strategy

Innovation for Sustainable Development Awards

To realise this vision, the Secretary-General launched the Commonwealth Innovation Hub at the 2018 CHOGM in London. The Hub is designed to spotlight innovations from across our 56 member countries, showcase all Commonwealth publications, incubate new ideas and support cross-sectoral partnerships (see below for more about the Hub).

Building on the success of the Hub, the Secretary-General launched the Innovation for Sustainable Development Awards in 2019 to recognise groundbreaking innovations from Commonwealth countries that contribute to one or more of the 17 SDGs. Held biennially, winners are selected from each Commonwealth region and receive funding to scale up their projects. Notable past winners include:

- **India** (2019) for developing a neonatal breathing support device, which was later adapted by WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic
- **Belize** (2019) for creating a research farm focused on degraded land restoration, food security and carbon drawdown
- **Cameroon** (2021) for innovating biodegradable sanitary pads made from banana fibre, which led to the winner forming a partnership with the World Bank.

In 2023, the Secretariat partnered with the Government of Kenya to deliver the 'Commonwealth Edition' of Kenya Innovation Week. This week-long innovation festival showcased a plethora of Commonwealth innovations, and hosted the award ceremony of the 2023 Secretary-General's Innovation Awards. At the ceremony, the Secretary-General and President William Ruto of Kenya presented awards to 15 individuals and groups for their outstanding achievements.

At Kenya Innovation Week, the Secretary-General also launched the Commonwealth Geospatial Expertise, Networking and Innovations for United Climate Solutions (GENIUS), a collaborative initiative



The Secretary-General with President William Ruto and other dignitaries at Kenya Innovation Week 2023: 'Commonwealth Edition', November 2023

designed to leverage AI and geospatial data to better understand and manage the impacts of climate change.

All winners are inducted into the Commonwealth Innovation Envoys Network, established in 2023, which facilitates the replication and scaling up of their innovations across the Commonwealth. The network also develops relationships between innovators, funders and knowledge-sharing platforms, fostering partnerships that tackle common challenges.

Fintech

With the rise of technology-enabled financial services (fintech) and their profound impacts on the production and delivery of financial services, Commonwealth Central Bank Governors expressed a desire for improved technical guidance on fintech implementation in 2018.

In response, the Secretary-General launched the Commonwealth Fintech Programme, which aims to provide practical capacity-building support and implementable toolkits to help member

countries take advantage of fintech while mitigating the associated risks. Two achievements of the programme are:

- The *Commonwealth Fintech Toolkit*, which helps senior leaders to develop their understanding of the building blocks of fintech, identify relevant policy interventions, and implement them effectively.
- Commonwealth Fintech Online Courses, developed in partnership with the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, designed to enable officials from member countries to build their expertise in fintech, which can then be leveraged to benefit and diversify their economies.

In partnership with the Reserve Bank of Fiji, the Secretariat supported the digitisation of Fiji's financial market infrastructure. This included the successful launch of a Central Securities Depository in 2022, which enhanced investment processes and facilitated the listing of Fiji's Sovereign Green Bond on the London Stock Exchange.

"The Reserve Bank of Fiji takes this opportunity to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat... for their invaluable contributions in laying the foundation for this project and their guidance from its inception phase..."

Ariff Ali, Governor, Reserve Bank of Fiji, in a letter of appreciation to the Secretariat⁵

Other innovations

In 2023, the Pacific Regional E-commerce Alliance (PacifEcom) was co-founded by the Secretariat and the Pacific Islands Forum to advance e-commerce across the Pacific region by mobilising resources, raising awareness and promoting partnerships. Other impactful initiatives include the Data Science and Innovation Ecosystem Workshops held across the Caribbean and Southern Africa, which bolstered data science skills and fostered innovation ecosystems in those regions.

Impact

- More than 100 finance officials from 41 Commonwealth countries have attended the Secretariat's online fintech courses.
- Innovation Award winners have gained global recognition, accessing new opportunities to partner with governments and development agencies and replicate their innovations across the Commonwealth.
- The Secretariat's efforts have improved the capabilities of member countries in data science and open data, strengthening their statistical processes and national innovation ecosystems.

4.2.1 Commonwealth Innovation Hub and Fund

Mandate

2018 CHOGM Communiqué, para 7: *'Heads highlighted the seminal role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and Science, Technology and Innovation in supporting good governance, promoting inclusion and sustainable development, and reducing the digital divide. They*

encouraged member countries to prioritise access to ICT for all in their national development plans, including through a gender and equity lens and agreed to share innovations in this area, including through the recently launched Commonwealth Innovation Hub.'

Background

The Secretary-General launched the Commonwealth Innovation Hub at the 2018 CHOGM as a key part of the Secretariat's reform and renewal process.

Objectives

The Hub aims to create an accessible digital platform that taps into the innovation potential of the Commonwealth. It serves as a 'one-stop shop' for sourcing, sharing and scaling up innovative ideas and practices from across our family of nations.

"The Innovation Hub is a peer-to-peer networking and information-sharing platform designed to facilitate collaboration across governments, Commonwealth organisations and international partners."

Strategy

The Innovation Hub is designed as a peer-to-peer networking and information-sharing platform to facilitate collaboration across governments, Commonwealth organisations and international partners, enabling them to exchange solutions and drive social impact. One of its priorities is unlock and to apply the genius of young people, who make up 60 per cent of the Commonwealth, to pursue sustainable development.

⁵ Commonwealth Secretariat (2022, December 15) 'Commonwealth support for new digital securities will benefit investors in Fiji', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-support-new-digital-securities-will-benefit-investors-fiji>

The Innovation Hub has five facets.

- The **display** space showcases ideas and innovation stories from across the Commonwealth.
- The **data** portal is a repository of Commonwealth information and knowledge resources, and includes thousands of publications.
- The **delivery** space is where anyone can download, read and use the knowledge products and toolkits created by the Secretariat.
- The **discovery** space is an innovation lab for incubating new ideas and accelerating innovations with maximum social impact.
- The **partnerships** aspect of the project reflects the Hub's pivotal role in helping the Secretariat foster partnerships with and between member governments, Commonwealth organisations and other national, regional and international groups in order to further and benefit from technological innovation.

A standout highlight of the Hub is an interactive portal for real-time satellite mapping of coral reefs across 12 Commonwealth countries. In a collaboration with Vulcan Inc., the platform provides free access to satellite data, helping Commonwealth member countries – home to nearly half of the world's remaining tropical coral reefs – to monitor and protect these vital ecosystems from climate change, overfishing and pollution.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hub proved invaluable by supporting the Commonwealth COVID-19 Dashboard – a platform that provided timely data and analysis to help member countries respond more effectively to the crisis.

In tandem with the launch of the Hub, the Commonwealth Innovation Fund was proposed to empower entrepreneurs and innovators in emerging economies. By providing early-stage funding and technical assistance to governments, the Fund aimed to support innovation in operations and service delivery, particularly benefiting those living on less than \$5 per day.

Impact

- The Innovation Hub has gained traction among member countries and partners – for instance, it was cited as a resource in the UK's Parliamentary Questions.
- The Hub delivered vital satellite data access to member countries, which promises to deliver dividends in terms of both innovation and conservation.

4.3 Artificial Intelligence

Mandates

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 103: *'Heads reaffirmed their commitment to equipping citizens, especially women, girls, young people, and others facing inequality, with the skills necessary to fully benefit from innovation and opportunities in cyberspace. They committed to ensuring inclusive access for all, eliminating discrimination in cyberspace, and adopting online safety policies for all users, especially children, whilst upholding human rights.'*

Background

Within months of taking office, the Secretary-General launched an ambitious programme to digitalise the Secretariat, ensuring that it would be fit-for-purpose in the 21st century. She recognised that technology could transform the lives of Commonwealth citizens, while bridging the growing and potentially perilous digital divide. Her vision was clear: the digital era must be inclusive, and no Commonwealth country should be left behind.

"The digital era must be inclusive, and no Commonwealth country should be left behind."

Objectives

As breakthroughs in AI accelerated globally, the Secretary-General realised that while many developed countries were advancing national AI strategies, the Commonwealth's 33 small states were at risk of being left behind in this digital revolution. Few of these states had developed the infrastructure or national AI plans needed to seize the opportunities of AI.

In response, she spearheaded the development of a pan-Commonwealth approach to AI, aimed at providing all Commonwealth countries, particularly small states, the opportunity to bridge the digital divide while focusing on their specific needs.

In addition to support the development of national AI policies, the approach focuses on the use of AI to:

- unlock human potential, with a special focus on addressing the gender divide and empowering young people with AI-related skills and opportunities
- strengthen preparedness for future pandemics, extreme weather events and natural disasters
- foster peace, stability and the democratic foundations of economies through AI-driven ethical solutions
- boost the productivity of industries and services across sectors, creating new opportunities for growth
- address ethical concerns and human rights challenges associated with transformative technologies like AI, ensuring responsible use that aligns with Commonwealth values.

Impact

These objectives, in line with the Commonwealth Charter and the SDGs, underpin each of the Commonwealth AI initiatives explored below.

4.3.1 Commonwealth AI Consortium

Background

The Consortium, launched in June 2023, aims to build the domestic AI capacity of its members, including small states.

Objective

The Consortium aims to provide governance, advocacy and advisory support to help Commonwealth small states responsibly adopt AI-driven technologies to drive safe, inclusive and sustainable growth.

Strategy

Launched by the Secretary-General, the Consortium is governed by a steering committee chaired by Rwanda, and draws expertise from diverse stakeholders including the private



The Secretary-General attends a demonstration by CAIC co-chair Keith Strier at the Silicon Valley headquarters of tech company Nvidia, April 2023

sector, think tanks and member countries. This collaborative approach is intended to empower policymakers with cutting-edge tools and the latest knowledge to support the development of robust digital infrastructure in small states. A key focus of the Consortium is bridging the digital divide, particularly for women and youth, by equipping them with skills in transformative technologies and AI.

The Consortium’s work is structured across four core working groups: research and innovation, capacity building, data and infrastructure, and policies. These groups are championed by The Gambia, Rwanda, Bangladesh and Malta, offering strategic guidance and support for member countries to effectively adopt and integrate AI technologies into their national frameworks. The consortium works in close collaboration with global tech firms, world-leading research institutions and non-profit organisations.

4.3.2 Commonwealth AI Academy

Background

In an era in which AI is rapidly becoming an essential aspect of modern life, upskilling citizens and government leaders is crucial to ensure that everyone benefits from this technological revolution.

Objectives

Responding to this need, the Secretary-General established the Commonwealth AI Academy in 2023 to provide essential tools and foundational knowledge to help Commonwealth citizens thrive in an AI-powered future.

Strategy

The Academy aims to upskill individuals across the Commonwealth with the skills necessary to engage with AI and emerging technologies, and to equip

government officials to safeguard their citizens' interests through informed policy and strategic planning.

The Academy, in partnership with Intel, offers a series of six online courses through the Commonwealth eLearning Platform. These courses are tailored to various audiences and cover key AI topics, including:

- Introduction to AI for Youth
- Introduction to Generative AI
- Introduction to Web 3.0
- Introduction to Responsible AI Skills
- Demystifying Intel® Rev Cloud
- Demystify AI and OpenVINO™ toolkit.

These self-paced, free and accessible courses are designed to equip individuals with the skills to navigate and innovate within the rapidly evolving AI landscape. They also help to foster a culture of responsible AI development and use.

The Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders Programme, introduced in 2023, is specifically targeting at senior-level officials in Commonwealth countries. The course demystifies emerging technologies and offers an overview of AI, its applications and the current state of digital readiness in each participant's country. It empowers public sector leaders with the knowledge to craft policies that embrace innovation while protecting citizens' rights.

Building on the Academy's success, the Secretariat embarked on a three-year collaboration with Open Weaver in 2024. This partnership kick-started the Accelerating Entrepreneurship Using AI and Digital Programme, designed to support business owners across the Commonwealth.

4.3.3 Commonwealth AI Entrepreneurship Make-A-Thon

Objectives

Launched by the Secretary-General, the 'Commonwealth AI Entrepreneurship Make-A-Thon' initiative aims to empower small and medium-sized businesses to build websites and mobile applications using no-code platforms. It is particularly focused on women-led micro, small

and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), providing them with the tools, knowledge and support to develop practical, scalable digital solutions.

Through the initiative, selected entrepreneurs gain access to education, capacity-building and industry-ready resources that empower them to take their businesses to the next level. In addition, Open Weaver has committed \$4 million in cloud credits over the next three years, ensuring that enterprises can continue to grow and innovate without the financial burden of cloud services.

Commenting on the initiative, the Secretary-General, who has championed the role of technology in fostering inclusion and addressing global challenges, said:

"The world is facing unprecedented challenges, so there is a pressing need for us to deliver solutions that are collaborative, inclusive and stamp out inequities. I see technology, and in particular, the use of AI tools to be central to the process of uniting the world to help solve our common ills. I have been unequivocal about the path ahead – it is digital.

"As a person from a small island state, I also understand and have seen the effect of inequity. So, it is crucial that we ensure that all who can learn about these tools can get access to them. The world needs our innovative approach, global leadership, and commitment to joint action to truly advance. And, the Commonwealth's continued resilience depends on it."

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, at the opening of the Make-A-Thon, April 2024⁶

4.3.4 Commonwealth AI Policy Toolkit

Objective

In partnership with Intel, the Secretary-General has launched an AI-driven policy toolkit which enables Commonwealth countries to develop AI policies and strategies using tried-and-tested practices from around the world, with options that can be customised to local circumstances. Its development has been informed by input

⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat (2024, April 11) "We must leave no one behind" – the Commonwealth Secretary-General urges greater adoption of digital technology', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/we-must-leave-no-one-behind>

from Oxford Insights, Sustainable Living Lab and policymakers from several Commonwealth countries.

The toolkit was developed as a result of the efforts of the Policy Working Group of the Commonwealth AI Consortium, led by Rwanda.

Impact

- Through the Secretariat's partnership with Open Weaver, more than 10,000 businesses will benefit from \$4.1 million in cloud credits over the next three years. The funds will ensure micro, small, and medium Commonwealth enterprises can grow and innovate without the financial burden of cloud services.
- The Commonwealth AI Academy is offering six Intel-certified training courses, valued at millions of dollars, to youth and policymakers. These courses enable youth to acquire job-ready skills in emerging technologies, and strengthen the capacity of policymakers to develop informed national AI strategies to safeguard citizens' interests and boost economic growth.

4.4 Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda

Mandate

2018 CHOGM Communiqué, para 17: *'Heads adopted a Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment and mandated the Secretariat to develop an accompanying action plan that considers capacity building and hard and soft connectivity.'*

Background

Commonwealth member countries share deep connections through commonalities in language, legal systems, business practices and regulatory frameworks. These connections result in what the Secretary-General has described as the 'Commonwealth Advantage': when member countries trade with one another, the costs of doing so are 21 per cent lower than when trading with non-members. Harnessing this advantage to boost trade and investment was a key priority in the Secretary-General's manifesto.

Objective

Upon assuming office, the Secretary-General prioritised economic growth, with a dual focus on increasing intra-Commonwealth trade and ensuring that small and least developed countries benefit from increased commerce and investment. The overarching vision was to develop a co-ordinated and comprehensive strategy to enhance intra-Commonwealth trade by capitalising on the Commonwealth Advantage. This ambition gave rise to the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment (CCA), adopted at the 2018 CHOGM, at which leaders committed to increasing intra-Commonwealth trade to \$2 trillion by 2030 and expanding investment flows across member countries.

Strategy

Under the leadership of the Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda Action Plan was adopted to translate the 2018 Declaration into tangible actions and measurable goals. This is being achieved through three key channels: convening, equipping, and advising.

The CCA follows a bottom-up, member-led approach, harnessing the collective strength of the Commonwealth to foster growth, create

employment and share expertise across its diverse member countries. Five interconnected member-led Connectivity Agenda clusters were established to facilitate this collaboration, each focused on a specific dimension of trade and digital connectivity.

- **Physical Connectivity:** Focuses on leveraging digital infrastructure to bridge the digital divide.
- **Digital Connectivity:** Aims to support digital transformation and the development of national digital economies.
- **Regulatory Connectivity:** Works on advancing regulatory frameworks to facilitate trade and investment.
- **Supply Side Connectivity:** Applies digital solutions in agriculture and fisheries to enhance trade.
- **Business-to-Business Connectivity:** Promotes paperless trade transformation and private sector exchanges to enable digital trade.

In response to a mandate from Commonwealth Trade Ministers in June 2023, the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda also established a Working Group on Legal Reform and Digitalisation.

Impact

Since its inception the Connectivity Agenda has delivered a range of impactful initiatives, building capacity, fostering collaboration, and enhancing digital infrastructure in member countries.

- **Cluster Weeks:** Since 2019, the Connectivity Agenda has hosted annual Cluster Weeks that bring member countries together to share best practices and progress on digital transformation, regulatory improvements and sustainable trade strategies.
- **Capacity-Building Workshops:** Workshops in the Maldives and Kiribati have helped women entrepreneurs leverage digital infrastructure for e-commerce and digital marketing, enabling them to participate in global supply chains. These efforts informed the creation of an e-learning course on 'Digital Infrastructure and the Digital Divide'.



"The CCA follows a bottom-up, member-led approach, harnessing the collective strength of the Commonwealth."

- **Agricultural Data Dialogues:** National dialogues in Ghana, Malawi, Bangladesh and Barbados have focused on improving agricultural data management practices, forming part of a broader project to develop a 'Digital Public Infrastructure' model to support digital agriculture strategies.
- **South-South Learning Exchanges:** The Connectivity Agenda facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges between businesses and policymakers from SIDS in the Pacific and Africa, focused on best practices in the fisheries sector. Workshops on Effective Legal Frameworks for Digital Economies were held in Fiji, targeting e-commerce legislation in the Commonwealth Pacific.
- **Regulatory Co-operation:** The development of the Commonwealth Good Regulatory Practices Principles has improved regulatory co-operation and coherence across the Commonwealth. Training workshops and technical assistance have advanced the use of Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs), with the publication of a Guide on Designing and Implementing RIAs supporting this effort.
- **Digital Industrial Policy Support:** In Mauritius, the Connectivity Agenda delivered workshops on Manufacturing 4.0 technologies, equipping policymakers and manufacturers with the knowledge to adopt automation and data-driven processes. *A Policymaker's Guide to Manufacturing 4.0* was later published to assist member countries, particularly LDCs and SIDS, to navigate the digital industrial landscape.
- **Digital Trade Law:** The Connectivity Agenda's Business-to-Business Cluster established a Legal Reform and Digitalisation Working Group to help member countries transition toward paperless trade, including the development of a Commonwealth Model Law on Digital Trade.
- **Repository of Digital Policies and Regulations:** This online repository provides Commonwealth countries with access to policies and regulations, serving as a reference for creating an enabling environment for digital trade.
- Additional key publications include:
 - *The State of the Digital Economy in the Commonwealth*, a comprehensive analysis of digital transformation within member countries, its impact on global economic activities and the need for appropriate policy responses
 - *The State of Digital Agriculture and Digital Fisheries*, two investigations into how these critical sectors can leverage digital innovations and tools to drive sustainable economic growth.
 - *The Digital Infrastructure Divide in the Commonwealth*, a review of disparities in digital infrastructure and targeted policy recommendations for bridging those gaps.

Key figures, 2016–2024

21%

lower cost of trade between Commonwealth countries

\$1 trillion

projected value of intra-Commonwealth trade by 2026

\$2 trillion

projected value of intra-Commonwealth trade by 2030

Case study: Manufacturing 4.0 capacity building in Mauritius

Recognising the importance of manufacturing for development, economic growth and job creation, the CCA provided capacity-building support to Mauritius through a series of workshops in December 2023. The CCA assisted the Ministry of Industrial Development, SMEs and Co-operatives to train policymakers and manufacturers across priority sectors on the adoption of 'Manufacturing 4.0' technologies and processes. The programme, delivered in collaboration with the University of Warwick, identified pathways for implementing or increasing automation, improving data collection and analysis, and introducing positive organisation-wide changes in culture and approaches to digital transformation.

- **Tailored, multi-sector focus:** The approach centred on sector-specific strategies, requiring analysis to address the unique needs of eight companies across six diverse sectors – fish and food, jewellery, medical devices, food processing, printing and packaging, and tyre rethreading. Despite this diversity, the multi-sectoral perspective promotes cross-sectoral collaboration, knowledge-sharing and a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and barriers inherent to each sector.
- **Policymaker engagement:** The programme included targeted capacity-building sessions for policymakers, providing them with the knowledge needed to align policy settings with the principles of Manufacturing 4.0 adoption. In addition, specialised half-day workshops were held to raise awareness among enterprises and Ministry officials about the numerous benefits of Manufacturing 4.0.
- **Customised capacity building:** Recognising the need for tailored solutions, the programme was designed to guide selected Mauritian enterprises as they embraced Manufacturing 4.0 technologies and processes. This approach was customised to meet their unique demands and sector-specific nuances. The capacity-building programme aimed to empower these enterprises to assess industrial digital technologies and identify sustainable Manufacturing 4.0 solutions for successful execution.
- **Road-mapping blueprint:** The approach also included establishing key performance indicators to evaluate enterprise performance and sustainability. It provided a road-mapping framework in the form of a blueprint, offering guidance to the selected companies for the seamless implementation of Manufacturing 4.0 within their operations.

4.5 Natural Resources

Mandates

2018 CHOGM Communiqué, para 30: *'Heads committed to work together for the prudent and sustainable use of energy and natural resources and recognised the critical importance of sustainable energy to economic development. They agreed to share best practice in effectively developing, governing and managing natural resources on the basis of sustainability, equity, transparency, good governance and wealth creation, including via the Commonwealth Secretariat's ongoing programme of technical assistance on natural resource management.'*

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 69: *'[Heads] reaffirmed their commitment to the sustainable development of energy and natural resources, finding them essential to an inclusive and resilient economic recovery.'*

Background

The 56 Commonwealth countries collectively cover a quarter of the world's land area and one-third of its coastal oceans, holding vast and valuable natural resources with immense potential to drive economic growth, job creation and government revenues. However, resource extraction also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss and pollution. This necessitates responsible and sustainable management – yet small and least-developed states lack the technical expertise to do so effectively.

For more than 55 years, Commonwealth countries have benefited from the Secretariat's independent and impartial guidance on the sustainable governance and development of their natural resources, especially in complex sectors such as mining and petroleum.

Objective

The Secretariat's Natural Resources Programme is designed to help member countries to maximise the socio-economic benefits and mitigate the risks of the development of natural resources, while supporting a just energy transition. Its core aims are to promote responsible resource management, protect national interests, boost government revenues and drive broad-based socio-economic development.

Strategy

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Programme has evolved to address emerging issues such as emissions reductions, methane, decarbonisation, Paris Agreement-aligned sovereign wealth funds, carbon pricing and a just energy transition. The Programme's success is rooted in a hands-on, interactive approach combined with long-term partnerships, and is delivered in four key areas.

1. **Tailored, on-demand technical assistance** to member countries on policy development, taxation and revenue management, legal frameworks and regulatory drafting.
2. **Pan-Commonwealth initiatives** to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and co-operation through consensus-building.
3. **Capacity-building activities** through workshops, knowledge networks, collaborations and resources.
4. **Advocacy** on behalf of member countries at international forums such as the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development (IGF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Impact

During the Secretary-General's tenure, the Programme has provided more than 200 technical outputs to support national strategies and sector reforms, resulting in stronger transparency, accountability and sustainability in resource management. These outputs include advisory reports, economic models, revised policies, laws, regulations and training sessions.

Key achievements include the following.

- **Guyana's Natural Resource Fund Act:** The Secretariat acted as the lead technical adviser, helping to establish and operationalise Guyana's sovereign wealth fund, which now holds US\$2 billion. This fund is expected to manage \$135 billion by 2050.



- **Petroleum and Mining Sector Reforms:** Support was provided to 15 member countries through 20 bilateral technical assistance projects, resulting in notable achievements such as:
 - 2016 Petroleum Act and Regulations, Bahamas
 - 2019 Seabed Minerals Act, Cook Islands, which led to the exploration of seabed minerals valued at \$227 billion
 - in 2019, the first East African Community (EAC) regional taskforce workshop implemented the Secretariat's recommendations on EAC Regional Mineral Value Addition Policy and Strategy, in support of the EAC's industrialisation policy
 - 2022 Revised Mining Policy, Botswana
 - 2022 Petroleum Local Content Policy, National Field Development Plan in Namibia
 - 2023 completed delivery of the \$500,000 India-UN-funded Energy Local Content Development Project, Barbados
 - 2023 National Petroleum Policy, Malawi
 - National Mineral Sector and Petroleum Policies, Vanuatu
 - Exploration Planning Framework, Petroleum Agreement Compliance Tool, and Petroleum Emergency Response Fund, Belize
 - five health and safety regulations for mining operations, eSwatini
 - seabed minerals exploration regulations, Kiribati.
- **Commonwealth Energy Producers Network:** The Secretariat established this group, consisting of 13 small and emerging energy producers: Barbados, Bahamas, Belize, Ghana, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Uganda. The network has doubled in size over the past seven years. It now has a membership of more than 700 government officials. Eight international annual meetings and four national seminars have been held to discuss critical matters facing governments and context-appropriate solutions.

- **Commonwealth Sovereign Wealth Fund Forum:** Launched by the Secretary-General in 2019, the Forum has brought together senior leaders from 21 sovereign wealth funds, managing over \$1 trillion in assets, to discuss scaling up investments in climate resilience.

Major resources developed by the Programme:

- the *Commonwealth Oil and Gas Decommissioning Toolkit* (2022) supports member countries to safely decommission mature oil and gas fields, incorporating best practices to mitigate risks.
- *Field Development Plans: A Handbook for Government Officials* (2023) ensures that new oil and gas projects align with national

interests, and promotes transparency, risk management and reduced emissions. Several countries including Belize, Ghana, Namibia, Suriname and Uganda are currently implementing its recommendations.

- the *Commonwealth Carbon Tax Model Law* (2023) provides governments with a framework for imposing carbon taxes on fossil fuel companies, contributing to emissions reductions while boosting revenue for clean energy investments.

Through capacity building efforts, the Secretariat has strengthened the institutional capacity of 23 member countries, training more than 1,000 government officials in the petroleum and mining sectors on key topics such as contracts, emissions, deep-sea mining and energy transition.

Key figures, 2016–2024

1,000+

officials benefitted from our natural resources' capacity-building initiatives

700+

official members of the Commonwealth Energy Producers Network

21

sovereign wealth funds engaged in Commonwealth Sovereign Wealth Fund Forum

Case study: Supporting Sustainable Petroleum Production in Namibia

The discovery of several billion barrels of oil in Namibia will have a transformational impact on the country's economy, people and environment. In November 2022 the Secretariat held a workshop for Namibian officials to review Namibia's legal framework for field development plans (FDP), to develop zero draft national FDP guidelines using the Commonwealth *Field Development Plans Handbook's* model template, and to facilitate the development of an intra-government process.

Other capacity-building initiatives in this period covered economic modelling, government negotiations, decarbonisation of the petroleum sector, minimising emissions, energy transition and understanding the 'resource curse'.

As part of its multi-faceted approach, the Secretariat has also provided policy and legislative support to Namibia for the development of a local content policy; recommendations to strengthen the fiscal, legal and environmental regulatory frameworks; and help in drafting amendments to the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act, the Petroleum Taxation Act, the Petroleum (Upstream) Regulations, the Model Petroleum Agreement and the National Field Development Plan Submission Guidelines.

Contingent on sufficient CFTC funding, the Secretariat will continue to support member countries to implement the *FDP Handbook*, which is currently being used in Ghana, Namibia and Uganda and even in non- Commonwealth countries such as Suriname.

4.6 Their Future, Our Action (Commonwealth-Cambridge project)

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 38: *'[T]ransitioning to low carbon, climate-resilient economies must be just and will require adequate and predictable climate finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity building'*.

Para 41: *'[Heads also] recalled the COP26 Glasgow Climate Pact, which encourages relevant providers of financial support to consider how vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change could be reflected in the provision and mobilisation of concessional financial resources and how they could simplify and enhance access to finance'*.

Background

Access to sustainable finance remains a significant challenge for small island developing states (SIDS), limiting their capacity to service debt, invest in climate action and fund sustainable development. SIDS often face lengthy delays in securing climate finance, with reports indicating that it can take up to three years to develop a climate proposal and an additional year to navigate legal and implementation hurdles before funds are received and projects can commence.

Recognising this critical gap, especially for the 25 Commonwealth member countries that are SIDS, the Secretary-General launched the 'Their Future, Our Action' initiative in partnership with the University of Cambridge's Centre for Resilience and Sustainable Development (CRSD).

Objective

Guided by the Secretary-General's leadership, the initiative is designed to address the financial access barriers faced by SIDS, and to help bridge the 'evidence gap' in creating sustainable, investable projects, with the goal of improving socio-economic resilience in the post-COVID-19 era. It builds on the Secretariat's well-established expertise in supporting SIDS with climate finance and public debt.

Strategy

The project utilises a 'whole of system' approach by applying the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CRSD) Action-Research methodology to accelerate access to sustainable finance for SIDS. It is designed to connect SIDS with vital



financial instruments and ensure their readiness for implementing climate and sustainable development projects.

In 2022, the third phase of the project launched with the introduction of two innovative data tools:

- **the Political Economic Resilience Index**, a data collection approach that identifies investment opportunities in nature and youth and demonstrates the impact of those investments
- **the Commonwealth-Cambridge Sustainable Investment Marker**, a tool that co-ordinates financing mechanisms for SIDS.

The partnership expanded in 2023 with the Cambridge Policy Boot Camp, where 40 experts collaborated to design a novel financial system to attract sustainable investment for SIDS. This resulted in the development of the Common Pool Asset Structuring Strategy (COMPASS), which streamlines financing for SIDS. In October 2023, the Commonwealth-CRSD Legal Experts Committee was formed to develop the legal framework underpinning COMPASS.

"It was heartening to see how motivated legal minds could, under the expert guidance of the CRSD and Commonwealth Secretariat teams, in just one afternoon, workshop so many positive courses of action. I look forward to continuing the conversation."

Deborah Zandstra, Partner, Clifford Chance LLP, at the inaugural working group, October 2023⁷

In February 2024, the initiative's final workshop brought together High Commissioners from Commonwealth SIDS to examine strategies for unlocking new funding streams.

The initiative engaged more than 500 experts, 200 policymakers and 5,000 citizens across the Commonwealth, bringing together multilateral agencies, regional development banks and civil society. This was delivered entirely online, incorporating interactive evaluation, monitoring and training to strengthen policy systems and resilience thinking.

"This collaboration with the Commonwealth is a game-changer engagement for us... We are overcoming the disciplinary limitations, institutional conservatism, and traditional understanding of investment processes and diversifying who can leverage existing mechanisms to attract investors to SIDS."

Dr Nazia Mintz Habib FRSA, Founder, CRSD, ahead of the final workshop, February 2024⁸

The initiative's final report, which maps out the next steps, stresses:

- the need for a SIDS-specific financial institution to help overcome the challenges SIDS face in accessing blended and private sector funding
- the significant investable assets that SIDS have – in terms of exclusive economic zones, biodiversity, cultural richness, traditional knowledge and youth populations – can be utilised to combat climate change and biodiversity loss, and build resilience
- the initiative improved participants' capacity for policy systems and resilience thinking in policy-making.

Impact

- The 'Their Future, Our Action' initiative has made significant progress in unlocking sustainable finance for SIDS. It secured more than \$10 million in private financing by mid-2022, despite still being in its research phase.
- The initiative has engaged more than 500 experts, 200 policymakers and 5,000 citizens across the Commonwealth, and produced two cutting-edge data instruments.
- Those two instruments – the Political Economic Resilience Index (PERI) and the Cambridge-Commonwealth Sustainable Investment Marker (CSIM) – are now available for member countries to use.

7 Commonwealth Secretariat (2023, October 24) 'Commonwealth and CRSD launch Legal Experts Committee to drive COMPASS initiative for sustainable finance', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-and-crsd-launch-legal-experts-committee-drive-compass-initiative-sustainable>

8 Commonwealth Secretariat (2022, December 2014) 'Commonwealth partnership develops new tools to improve climate finance attractiveness for vulnerable countries', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-partnership-develops-new-tools-improve-climate-finance>

4.7 Trade and Economic Resilience

Mandates

2018 CHOGM Communiqué, para 16: *'[Heads] welcomed initiatives to strengthen the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva through the provision of additional resources and the sharing of technical expertise that enables small and developing states to participate in the multilateral trading system and benefit from trade-related economic growth'.*

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 43: *'Heads welcomed the revitalised collaboration among Commonwealth Trade Ministers, who met in October 2019, and... agreed that [they should] reconvene by June 2023. [...] [Noting] the need for more ambitious action to boost intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 trillion by 2030, and the impact that trade can have on tackling poverty, Heads reiterated the importance of trade in goods and services and investment for inclusive and sustainable economic growth and prosperity.'*

Para 47: *'Heads... reaffirmed their commitment to free trade and they recognised the importance of targeted Special and Differential Treatment as a tool to support least developed and developing countries, where necessary, to fully implement WTO*

Agreements in a transparent, inclusive, fair and open, rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core; taking into account the special circumstances of least developed countries and small and vulnerable economies, including SIDS and landlocked developing countries.'

Background

Trade is recognised as an indispensable tool for inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the role of international trade, both directly and through its indirect influences in other areas, in achieving many SDG targets. Furthermore, trade empowers women and youth by creating economic opportunities, driving innovation and fostering inclusive growth.

Objective

Recognising the transformative potential of trade, the Secretary-General has made international trade a key focus of her leadership to support member countries in their efforts to achieve the SDGs. Her leadership has made trade a key component of the Secretariat's Strategic Plans, with dedicated support



Case study: Improving the process of starting a business in the Caribbean

Regulatory reforms to improve competitiveness are integral to any strategy that aims to reduce transaction costs for companies. Improving the business climate through regulatory reforms can lead to significant increases in annual FDI inflows, employment growth and a better business environment. Economies with less streamlined business regulations have higher levels of unemployment on average.

In 2018, the Secretary General received a request from the Caribbean Association of Investment Promotion Authorities (CAIPA) for technical assistance to support reforms aimed at improving the business climate to facilitate increased investment in the region. The participating countries were Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

In response to this request, the Secretariat's Trade Competitiveness Section facilitated a report that analysed procedures for starting a business in the 12 countries, and recommended country-specific action plans for reform to address the shortcomings of current processes.

In 2023, as a direct follow-up to this intervention, a request was made to the Caribbean Development Bank to assist CAIPA members with implementation of the action plans developed with the support of the Secretariat. This request was approved, and the Caribbean Export Development Agency received over \$500,000 to support the implementation of the reforms recommended in the action plans.

for member countries through targeted initiatives, including the placement of trade advisers in the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva, where global trade organisations are based.

Strategy

Although the Commonwealth is not a formal trading bloc, the Secretary-General has consistently championed the 'Commonwealth Advantage'. Through her efforts, this advantage – of trade costs that are 21 per cent lower, on average, between Commonwealth countries compared to non-members – has revitalised policy discussions and sparked business interest to boost trade and investment across the Commonwealth.

Facing down growing threats to the rules-based global trading system, the Secretary-General formally convened the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting in London in 2019. This landmark event saw ministers collectively affirm their support for free trade in a transparent, inclusive, fair and open multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization (WTO) as its core institution.

Recognising the need for closer collaboration with global trade organisations, the Secretary-General forged formal partnerships with the WTO, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) for Least Developed

Countries, and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). These partnerships have strengthened inter-agency collaboration, resulting in impactful joint initiatives that address the specific trade and development challenges faced by small and other vulnerable states.

In response to direct requests from member countries for trade and investment technical assistance and capacity building support to improve their competitiveness, the Secretary General approved the provision of assistance across a wide range of projects aimed at improving their trade competitiveness. This included technical assistance in the development and implementation of export strategies in Belize, Botswana, Brunei, The Gambia, Jamaica, Grenada, Malawi and Mozambique, and on other trade-related policies in the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, St Kitts and Nevis, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Kenya, India and Mozambique. The Secretariat also supported e-commerce and small business development in Cameroon, The Gambia, Nigeria, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Sri Lanka, Tonga and the Southern African Customs Union; implementation of trade facilitation initiatives in the East African Community, Seychelles and Barbados; and various other initiatives related to, for example, institutional capacity building in Antigua

Case study: Gambia's national export strategy

The Commonwealth supported The Gambia Investment and Export Promotional Agency (GEIPA), in partnership with its Ministry of Industry, Trade and Regional Integration, to design and implement the country's second national export strategy (NES) for 2021–2025. The strategy enhances trade development, and aims to wean the country away from over-dependence on a narrow range of primary goods.

The project to design the NES II began in February 2020 with stakeholders from across the public, private and third sectors, civil society and the International Trade Centre. NES II was officially launched in November 2021 by the Vice President. In early 2022, the Secretariat held a two-day exporters' stakeholder forum aimed at identifying the most efficient means of implementation, with participation from high-level government officials and private sector leaders. The Secretariat also developed two high-calibre promotional videos for tourism and exports as well as an e-commerce platform.

and Barbuda, Zambia, Nigeria, Saint Lucia, Lesotho, Mauritius, Pakistan and Belize, and investment promotion and facilitation initiatives with CARICOM.

Impact

Over the past nine years, Commonwealth member countries have engaged in unprecedented collaboration on trade and investment issues, leading to significant achievements.

- In March 2017, the inaugural Commonwealth Trade Ministers Roundtable was held at Marlborough House.
- At the first Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting in over 15 years, in October 2019, Ministers adopted a Statement on the Multilateral Trading System. The second ministerial meeting in June 2023 reactivated the dormant Commonwealth Working Group on Trade and Investment, and established a Sub-Action Group on Investment tasked with developing an investment plan of action by CHOGM 2024.
- At the 2017 WTO Ministerial Conference, Commonwealth member countries, represented by Malta as the Chair-in-Office, delivered the first-ever joint statement in support of strengthening the multilateral trading system. Similarly, Rwanda delivered a joint statement⁹ at the 2024 WTO Ministerial Conference.
- A caucus of all Commonwealth WTO members was convened for the first time in Geneva, creating a forum for Geneva-based representatives to engage in informal exchanges of views. This caucus has met four times between 2018 and 2023.
- The Secretariat secured extra-budgetary resources to sustain the Trade Adviser project at the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva, including the appointment of a second Trade Adviser in 2019.
- The Secretariat conducted extensive research and analysis on Commonwealth trade and investment, as well as the implications of emerging issues in global trade, to support evidence-based policymaking in member countries. This includes the publication of three *Commonwealth Trade Reviews* in 2018, 2021 and 2024, as well as a major report on sustainable production and trade in response to the call at the 2022 CHOGM to focus on 'sustainably sourced products'.
- The Secretariat successfully delivered 10 multi-stakeholder consultations on multilateral, regional and emerging trade issues across Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific regions, contributing to enhanced capacity for international negotiations.
- The Commonwealth Trade Competitiveness programme has supported increased competitiveness in the Commonwealth through the provision of technical assistance on trade and investment to 29 member countries, and has facilitated four regional projects.

9 With an exception to India.

5

Resilient Society Key Projects 2016–2024





5. Resilient Society: Key Projects 2016–2024

Introduction

Upon assuming office in 2016, the Secretary-General introduced a holistic model of sustainable development, integrating interconnected social, economic and environmental elements. This approach transformed the Secretariat's policies, frameworks and programmes and enabled it to step up its efforts to support the people of the Commonwealth to fulfil their potential with dignity and equality in a healthy environment.

During her two terms in office, the Secretary-General has emerged as one of the world's foremost advocates for social development, mainstreaming the needs and interests of vulnerable people – especially women and youth, who make up a majority of the 2.7 billion people living in the Commonwealth.

"When women are empowered, they become powerful agents for change, wherever they are in the world and in whatever capacity they are able to direct their talents. They are the backbone of our societies and in many places, are already leading the way to a more sustainable future. No-one knows this more than our distinguished Secretary-General, Patricia Scotland, who hails from a small island developing state in the Caribbean and is a living embodiment of the leadership women can provide."

Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, 6 June 2017¹

Guided by mandates from ministers and Heads of Government, the Secretary-General enacted ambitious policies and spearheaded pioneering initiatives, grounded in hard evidence, to respond to a range of needs identified by member countries. Some highlights from this work include the following.

- **A whole-of-society 'Commonwealth Says NO MORE' campaign**, which offers culturally sensitive and easy-to-use resources to governments, businesses, community leaders and bystanders to prevent and tackle cases of gender-based violence. Since its launch, four Commonwealth countries – Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana and Tanzania – have set up national chapters to amplify advocacy and action at the grassroots level; Zanzibar has also established its own chapter.

"When women are empowered, they become powerful agents for change."

Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji

- **A renewed focus on mainstreaming youth participation in development and decision-making** through the Commonwealth Youth Programme, which includes 12 youth networks and a pan-Commonwealth youth council. In recognition of the Secretariat's work, leaders designated 2023/24 as the Commonwealth Year of Youth at the 2022 CHOGM. The Secretary-General also launched the second, third and fourth iterations of the triennial Youth Development Index.
- **The pioneering 'Peace at the Crease' initiative**, which builds on the unifying power of sport to bring young people from different backgrounds together to promote Commonwealth values such as peace, tolerance and equality. The initiative organised four cricket matches, engaged thousands of people and received endorsements from leaders and athletes alike.

1 Bainimarama, J. V. (2017, June 6) 'Hon. PM Bainimarama Opening Remarks At "A Blue Commonwealth" – High Level Roundtable at the Oceans Conference', speech delivered at A Blue Commonwealth: High-level roundtable, UN Oceans Conference, New York.

- **High-level commitments and action on health targets**, including concerted action to reduce the disproportionate burden of disease – non-communicable diseases, malaria, cervical cancer, avoidable blindness and other conditions – in Commonwealth countries. The Secretary-General put universal health coverage – the provision of healthcare for all – at the top of the agenda of the Secretariat's health programme.

Recognising the urgent need for swifter, broader and more effective action, the Secretary-General entered into partnerships with several international organisations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), to deepen and broaden the delivery of practical support to member countries across all levels. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people, especially women and youth, across the Commonwealth were empowered to live and thrive in their communities with dignity, safety and equality.

5.1 Gender Mainstreaming

Mandates

2018 CHOGM Communiqué, para 3: *'Heads committed to ratifying and implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), through legislation, policies and programmes that mainstream and promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in social, economic and political life.'*

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 27: *'Heads adopted a Commonwealth Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.'*

Overview

Acting on these mandates, the Secretary-General mainstreamed gender as one of the cross-cutting outcomes of the Strategic Plans, to be pursued

through the monitoring and evaluation systems, policies and processes of the Secretariat. As a result, the Secretariat has strengthened its ongoing efforts to pursue the Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality, as articulated in SDG 5, through a range of initiatives in the following areas.

5.1.1 Research

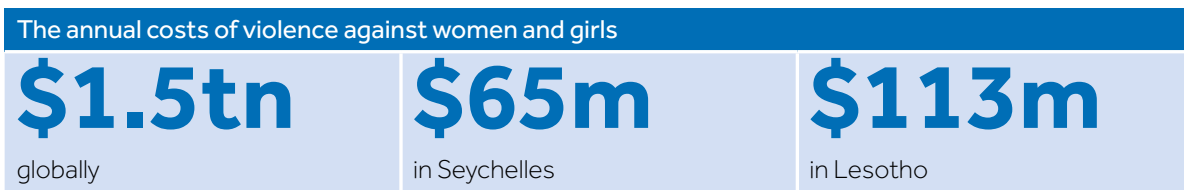
Measuring the economic cost of violence against women

Background

Violence against women and girls is not only one of the most pervasive human rights violations: it also has significant economic costs. The global economy loses \$1.5 trillion every year due to



A woman selling betel nuts at the market, Kokopo, Papua New Guinea



the consequences of violence against women,² which range from money spent in hospitals to the income lost when victims or survivors miss work. However, while global figures are available, many Commonwealth countries lack the capacity to measure the economic cost of violence against women and girls within their jurisdictions.

Objective

In response, the Secretary-General spearheaded the development and rollout of a groundbreaking methodology to help member countries measure the direct, indirect and induced costs of violence against women and girls.

Strategy

The methodology makes a strong economic case for addressing violence against women and girls by measuring how much a country loses when it intervenes *after* the abuse has occurred, as opposed to preventing it from happening in the first place.

Impact

- Upon request from the Government of Seychelles, the Secretariat applied the methodology in the small island state and revealed that the country lost \$65 million each year to violence against women and girls. On the basis of one of the recommendations of its report, the Secretariat assisted Seychelles in finalising a new Domestic Violence Bill, which was passed in 2020.

Similarly, the Secretary-General deployed a team to implement this methodology in Lesotho at the request of its Government. The findings revealed that Lesotho lost 5.5 per cent of its GDP – equivalent to \$113 million annually – as a result of insufficient action on violence against women

and girls. This equates to a loss of \$50 per citizen per year. Building on the report’s recommendations, Lesotho’s Department of Gender undertook a number of significant actions, the most notable of which were cross-ministry gender audits in 2023. These audits, along with the report, supported the Government’s decision to pilot Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Ministries of Health, Education and Training, Social Development, and Gender for the financial year 2024/25.

“The report will help Lesotho come up with appropriate strategies that will help eradicate violence against women and girls as we are now aware of its causes and economic implications. The report calls for immediate action through which my ministry will embark on a project to ensure the protection of women and girls.”

Mahali Phamotse, Minister of Gender and Youth, Sport and Recreation, Lesotho, on the launch of the report, September 2020³

In 2022 the Secretary-General launched a publication developed on the basis of the successful rollout of the methodology in Lesotho and Seychelles: *Measuring the Economic Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls: Facilitator’s Guide* in 2022. This comprehensive toolkit enables policymakers across the Commonwealth to measure the economic cost of violence against women and girls on an ongoing basis. By regularly evaluating the financial impact, countries can assess the efficacy of their efforts and use the findings to strengthen their response towards eliminating this pervasive violation.

2 Puri, L. (2016, September 21) ‘The economic costs of violence against women’, speech, UN Women high-level discussion on the Economic Cost of Violence against Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/speech-by-lakshmi-puri-on-economic-costs-of-violence-against-women>

3 Commonwealth Secretariat (2020, September 25) ‘Report: Violence against women costs Lesotho economy \$113 million annually’, media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/report-violence-against-women-costs-lesotho-economy-113-million-annually>

2021 Kenyan Gender Equality Award

On 8 March 2021, the Secretary-General received the Kenya Gender Equality Award in Nairobi for her tireless efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment across the Commonwealth.

Professor Margaret Kobia, Cabinet Secretary of Kenya's Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, presented the award to the Secretary-General at an event marking International Women's Day.



Past recipients of the award include Her Excellency Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of Kenya, and Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Defence Dr Monica Juma.

5.1.2 Integrating gender in climate action

Background

The Commonwealth Charter recognises 'gender equality and women's empowerment as critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development'. The 2024 CHOGM communiqué also

"recognised that women and girls are still underrepresented in decision-making processes, including in situations of conflict and crisis, environmental-related disasters, and humanitarian settings and are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination."

Integrating gender into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) is an iterative process of increasing ambition to meet gender equality goals at the national, Commonwealth and global levels. However, many countries, particularly those with limited resources, lack the technical expertise needed to incorporate gender considerations into their climate action plans at the speed and scale required.

Objective

To address this gap, the Secretariat developed a practical user guide aimed at assisting policymakers and practitioners across the Commonwealth to integrate gender equality into national climate action plans, processes and programmes.

Strategy

The guide, entitled *Gender Integration in Nationally Determined Contributions: A Commonwealth Best Practice Guide*, provides detailed, evidence-based

approaches to incorporating gender equality within NDCs under the Paris Agreement. The guide's overarching goal is to ensure that all sections of society, including women – who comprise half of the global population – are engaged as positive agents of change. It promotes their inclusion in all aspects of climate action, from decision-making to implementation, across the 56 Commonwealth nations.

To ensure the guide reaches the right policymakers, the Secretary-General launched the guide at a high-level event during COP27, in the presence of Commonwealth ministers, policymakers, business leaders and civil society representatives.

Impact

The guide has been made available to all 56 Commonwealth countries as a critical resource for improving the integration of gender in NDCs, which is key to successful climate action. Several member countries have welcomed the guide and expressed strong interest in rolling it out nationally, demonstrating its potential to drive meaningful progress toward gender equality and climate resilience.

Fiji, for instance, has discussed plans to continue incorporating actions from the guide into future revisions and updates of their NDCs, particularly its approaches to comprehensive stakeholder consultations, adherence to international guidelines and leveraging international support.



5.1.3 Reform

Equality in Law for Women and Girls

Background

While many countries have laws in place to protect the rights and opportunities of women and girls, not all are compliant with international standards or obligations. As a result, many women and girls face significant barriers to exercising their rights, accessing equal opportunities or pursuing grievances through established legal channels. These legal gaps perpetuate gender inequality and undermine development efforts.

Objective

A number of member countries requested the Secretariat to assist them with identifying and reforming any laws that discriminate unjustly on grounds of gender, in order to better protect the rights of all women and girls.

Strategy

In response to this challenge the Secretariat, in collaboration with partners and led by UN Women, launched 'Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030: A Multi-stakeholder Strategy for Accelerated Action'. This initiative aims to fast-track the repeal of discriminatory laws and close legal loopholes that deny women and girls equal rights, reinforcing the message that gender discrimination is unacceptable and must be eradicated.

Impact

- At the request of the Government of The Gambia, the Secretariat worked in partnership with other stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive review of the country's legal framework. The resulting report uncovered several discriminatory laws and identified legal loopholes that allow gender-based discrimination to persist.
- The report made a series of recommendations, including the amendment of 19 laws and the repeal, in whole or in part, of a further 10. Additionally, it proposed the enactment of two new laws to ensure The Gambia's legislative framework aligns with its international obligations on gender equality.

"I endorse this report and its recommendations as my government's step towards the implementation of equality in law for women and girls by 2030. It serves as the framework for achieving full de jure equality, which in turn, is the foundation for de facto and substantive equality."

Abubacarr Ba Tambadou, Justice Minister, The Gambia, on the launch of the report in September 2020⁴

4 Commonwealth Secretariat (2020, September 21) 'Report recommends changes to laws that discriminate against women in Gambia', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/report-recommends-changes-laws-discriminate-against-women-gambia>

Key figures, Gender Responsive Budgeting programme

26+

countries supported to develop and implement gender-responsive budgeting since 1995

60+

officials received training in Lesotho in 2021

5.1.4 Capacity-building

Gender Responsive Budgeting

Background

Gender inequality can lead to unintended consequences in fiscal policies – even those that appear gender-neutral. These policies can inadvertently widen existing divides, or fail to achieve their intended development outcomes.

Gender-responsive budgeting, a concept pioneered by the Commonwealth, helps countries incorporate gender perspectives throughout the planning and evaluation of revenue-raising measures and expenditure allocation at all levels. Gender analysis of budget proposals is a critical tool that enables policymakers to understand and address the different needs and priorities of various genders.

Since establishing a dedicated 'gender responsive budgeting' programme in 1995, the Secretariat has supported more than 26 member countries to develop and implement gender-responsive budgeting, which is crucial for achieving gender and fiscal justice and inclusive economic growth.

Objective

In 2021, responding to a request from the Government of Lesotho, the Secretary-General deployed an expert team to deliver a gender responsive budget training programme. The objective was to support four pilot ministries – Gender, Sport, Youth and Recreation; Education and Training; Social Development; and Health – to mainstream gender considerations across legislation, policies and budgets.

Strategy

The Secretariat organised a hybrid expert training programme in Lesotho, targeting more than 60 senators, parliamentarians and ministry officials. The programme equipped participants with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the unique needs of women, men and other vulnerable groups. This understanding was then applied to

the preparation, delivery and evaluation of national budgets, ensuring that gender considerations were integrated into every phase of the fiscal planning process.

Impact

- More than 60 senators, parliamentarians and ministry officials enhanced their skills and abilities to lead and co-ordinate the integration of gender-responsive budgeting within the budget planning processes of the Ministry of Finance and the four pilot ministries.
- The Social and Economic Development Cluster Committees of the Lesotho Parliament, alongside selected senators, have been empowered to thoroughly assess draft budgets from a gender perspective, strengthening Parliament's oversight role.

"The assistance provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat significantly strengthened our parliamentarians' knowledge and capacity in gender-responsive budgeting, enabling them to integrate gender considerations across all aspects of their work. This support also fostered a strong alliance between the legislative and executive branches, ensuring greater collaboration and gender emphasis in decision-making."

Hon. Mokhothu Makhwanyane, Chairperson of Committees Chairpersons, Parliament of Lesotho

Enhancing women's political participation

Background

Women's equal representation in politics is essential for democracy and development. It leads to better outcomes not only for women and girls but for society as a whole. The argument for women's political participation is undeniable – democracy cannot thrive if half of the population is not equally engaged in decision-making.

Under the Secretary-General's leadership the Secretariat has supported several countries to improve laws and mechanisms to enhance women's political participation. One such country is

Key figures, enhancing women's political representation in Malawi

16%
 proportion of Malawi's parliamentary seats held by women *before* May 2019 election

23%
 proportion of Malawi's parliamentary seats held by women *after* May 2019 election

Malawi where, despite having robust legal and policy frameworks to promote gender equality, women's political representation remains low.

Objective

In 2019, the Secretariat was requested by Malawi's Minister of Gender to support the country's efforts to prepare women candidates for its 2019 general election. The goal was to increase women's participation in politics by equipping female candidates with the necessary skills and support for effective campaigning.

Strategy

In preparation for the election, the Commonwealth partnered with Malawi's Ministry of Gender, the 50:50 Campaign Management Agency, the National Initiative for Civic Education, the Centre for Multi-Party Democracy and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The collaboration aimed to prepare female candidates across political parties for the upcoming elections.

The strategy involved providing women candidates with training in political leadership, campaigning and constituency outreach skills. The Secretariat also

supported district and constituency-based training and outreach efforts, which mobilised broader support for female candidates and enhanced their visibility and effectiveness in the campaign trail.

Impact

These concerted efforts to develop the campaigning skills of women candidates had a significant impact on Malawi's 2019 elections: the proportion of parliamentary seats held by women increased from 16 to 23 per cent, marking a notable improvement in women's political representation.

"Political skill building technical assistance provided to female candidates by the Secretariat in partnership with the Ministry contributed immensely to the milestones achieved."

Mary Navitcha, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Malawi, at a plenary session on 'Women and Other Voices from the 2019 Tripartite Elections', October 2019⁵

5 Commonwealth Secretariat (2019, October 29) 'Malawi women reflect on political advancement', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/malawi-women-reflect-political-advancement>





The 12th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, September 2019

5.1.5 Convening

Women's Affairs Ministers Action Group

Background

All 56 Commonwealth member countries are committed to achieving SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment. Under the leadership of the Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Secretariat has intensified its advocacy, research and support efforts to help member countries realise that target. A key platform for this multilateral action has been the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (WAMM), which convenes every three years to assess the status of gender equality, share experiences and accelerate progress towards equality.

Objective

While the triennial WAMM provides valuable opportunities for collaboration, several member countries identified the need for more frequent gatherings to address emerging challenges, monitor progress on CHOGM mandates and make strategic recommendations to the Secretariat.

Strategy

With the support of the Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers established the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Action Group following their 2019 meeting. Initially comprising 10 member countries, the Action Group was tasked with monitoring and accelerating progress on CHOGM mandates and other ministerial commitments related to gender equality.

In 2020, the Action Group held its first virtual meeting to address the unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, including the alarming rise in domestic violence. Throughout the pandemic, the Group met annually to discuss targeted interventions, ensuring that government assistance packages adequately supported women and safeguarded those at risk of violence.

Impact

Over the past four years the Action Group has made significant contributions to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, supporting women and girls across the Commonwealth to fulfil their potential with dignity and equality in a safe and healthy environment.

The Action Group's contributions were unanimously recognised by all Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers at their 2023 triennial meeting in The Bahamas. In their ministerial statement, ministers 'agreed to support the continuation of the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Action Group to help maintain the momentum'.

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, at the 2019 WAMM ministers also recommended that the Commonwealth Declaration for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women 2020–2030 be presented for consideration at CHOGM. This ambitious, action-oriented Declaration was adopted by Commonwealth leaders at the 2022 CHOGM in Rwanda, setting out the Commonwealth's position on and priorities for scaling up efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment by 2030. The Declaration, which also guides the Secretariat's policy and programmatic support to member countries, is

expected to directly benefit 1.3 billion women and girls living in the Commonwealth. Significant progress has already been made on the priorities agreed by member countries.

"Our Women's Affairs Ministers meeting is a fine example of multilateral collaboration in action – and indeed, the Commonwealth shines as a beacon for what can be achieved when countries cooperate to pursue inclusiveness and equality together."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

5.1.6 Advocacy and Action

Commonwealth Says NO MORE

Background

According to the World Health Organization, one in three women worldwide experiences domestic or sexual violence at least once within their lifetime. This pervasive violence not only devastates the lives of women and their children but undermines the economic and social health of families, communities and entire countries. Despite the scale of this global problem, the response to it has been far from adequate.

"The Says NO MORE campaign is ramping up advocacy and action to end domestic and sexual violence."

As a lifelong advocate for ending violence, the Secretary-General has made tackling violence against women and girls a cornerstone of her leadership of the Commonwealth. In 2016, under her guidance, Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers declared ending violence against women and girls as one of the four Commonwealth Priorities for Gender Equality at their triennial meeting in Samoa.

Objective

Recognising the urgent need for unprecedented action across all levels, the Secretary-General led the Secretariat in partnering with the NO MORE Foundation to create the groundbreaking



The Secretary-General launches the Zanzibar Says NO MORE campaign, Zanzibar, March 2024

Case study: Zanzibar Says NO MORE to violence against women and girls

In March 2024 the Secretary-General joined forces with Zanzibar's First Lady, Mariam H. Mwinyi, to launch 'Zanzibar Says NO MORE'.

The need for such initiatives is stark. According to the UN, 14 per cent of women in Zanzibar experience physical violence, and nearly one in 10 face sexual violence. Many incidents go unreported due to fear and shame.¹

This local Zanzibari chapter of the global 'Commonwealth Says NO MORE' campaign is promoting the safety and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of women and girls in the Tanzanian archipelago. It provides ministries, businesses and individuals with culturally sensitive toolkits to raise awareness, offer better support to victims, challenge harmful social norms and encourage bystanders to react appropriately.

"Through this campaign, all of you now have a shared platform to work together as active allies to break the silence on violence, support victims, hold perpetrators accountable, be effective bystanders and challenge harmful gender stereotypes. What you will do today will ensure that the suffering and pain of women and girls become a thing of the past."

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

"Our [Ongoing] Plan Will Seamlessly Integrate With The Zanzibar Say No More Campaign To Raise Community Awareness, Provide Rehabilitation Services To Gender-Based Violence Survivors, Including Psychosocial Support, Address Post-Violence Health-Related Challenges, Challenge Harmful Social Norms, And Ensure That No One Is Left Behind."

Mariam H. Mwinyi, First Lady of Zanzibar, statement on the launch of Zanzibar Says NO MORE, 6 March 2024²

- 1 Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children (MoHCDGEC) [Tanzania Mainland], Ministry of Health (MoH) [Zanzibar], National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Office of the Chief Government Statistician (OCGS), and ICF (2016) *Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey (TDHS-MIS) 2015-16*. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR321/FR321.pdf>
- 2 Commonwealth Secretariat (2024, March 8) "'Zanzibar Says NO MORE' campaign launched to tackle domestic and sexual violence', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/zanzibar-says-no-more-campaign-launched-tackle-domestic-and-sexual-violence>

'Commonwealth Says NO MORE' campaign. Launched in 2020, this campaign is designed to significantly ramp up advocacy and action to end domestic and sexual violence in support of efforts to achieve Commonwealth priorities and the relevant SDG 5 targets.

Strategy

As part of the NO MORE campaign, the Secretary-General spearheaded the creation of the first pan-Commonwealth digital portal.⁶ Armed with an array of easy-to-use, culturally sensitive advocacy and action resources, the portal engages governments, civil society organisations,

community leaders and individuals in tackling domestic and sexual violence while providing long-term strategies to end the problem.

Governments, particularly those with more limited resources, can download toolkits to establish local campaigns that tackle domestic and sexual violence, support victims and those at risk, and train community leaders on the ground. The portal is specifically designed to help victims understand and recognise violence, and to give them one-stop access to critical information including local hotlines, shelters, safety plans and legal guidance.

The portal offers guidance to support citizens to speak up when they see violence occurring among their family and friends or in their local communities. It also features good practice from across the Commonwealth for preventing abuse, delivering services and protecting survivors.

6 See thecommonwealth.org/our-work/commonwealth-says-no-more

2019 Distinguished Champion Award

In recognition of her leadership and contributions to women's equality and empowerment across the Commonwealth, the Secretary-General was awarded the Distinguished Champion Award in Washington DC by WEConnect International, a US-based non-profit organisation. The award recognised her commitment to making gender mainstreaming a core element of the Commonwealth's programme work, and to urging bold action to close the persistent economic gender gap between men and women around the world.

The title is bestowed annually to a person or organisation in recognition of significant contributions to women's economic empowerment; previous recipients include the World Bank Group.



Impact

Several Commonwealth countries – Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, and Tanzania (including Zanzibar) – have established national chapters under the 'Commonwealth Says NO MORE' umbrella as part of their efforts to end domestic and sexual violence. These chapters, supported by the Commonwealth's campaign and existing chapters in Australia, Cyprus and the UK, work to promote the safety and wellbeing of hundreds of thousands of women and girls.

By joining the campaign, each participating country gains access to a wealth of free-to-use toolkits and templates. These resources empower ministries, businesses, non-profits, communities and bystanders to take decisive action against domestic and sexual violence.

Since its launch, numerous leaders and high-profile public figures have joined the Commonwealth's call to say 'no more' to violence, including:

- Taneti Maamau, President of Kiribati
- Sir Rodney Williams, Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda
- The First Ladies of Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Zanzibar
- Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, former President of Mauritius
- Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand
- Amina J. Mohammed, UN Deputy Secretary-General

- Mitcy Larue, Minister of Family Affairs, Seychelles
- Fatou Kinteh, Minister of Women Children and Social Welfare, The Gambia
- Aishath Mohamed Didi, Minister of Gender, Family and Social Services, Maldives
- Prof. Margaret Kobia, Cabinet Secretary for the Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, Kenya
- Leilua Lino, survivor and activist, Samoa
- Shabana Azmi, Indian actress and advocate for women's rights
- Geri Horner, British singer and Royal Commonwealth Society Ambassador
- Colin Salmon, British actor
- Mahira Khan, Pakistani actress
- Heather Small, British singer
- Joselyn Dumas, Ghanaian actress
- Jaya Ahsan, Bangladeshi actress

"Initiatives such as the Commonwealth New Portal, Commonwealth Says NO MORE, and the UN-EU spotlight initiative, provide a vehicle to prevent violence, provide services to victims, and accountability for those who perpetuate abuse."

Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, at the campaign's launch, September 2020⁷

7 Commonwealth Secretariat (2020, September 9) 'Commonwealth Secretariat and NO MORE Foundation launch campaign against domestic and sexual violence across 54 countries', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-secretariat-and-no-more-foundation-launch-campaign-against-domestic-and-sexual>

5.2 Youth

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 89: *'Heads committed to increasing meaningful representation of youth in decision-making processes and mechanisms, including in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.'*

Background

Given that three of every five citizens of the Commonwealth are under the age of 30, young people are clearly the primary stakeholders in and contributors to the Commonwealth's achievement of the SDGs by 2030. Yet despite possessing immeasurable talent, ideas and drive, young people often lack the opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the social, economic and political development of their countries.

Objective

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) was established in 1973 as a pioneering intergovernmental initiative to champion the all-around development of young people. The Secretariat is mandated to support member countries to mainstream youth priorities into national development policies and plans, and to promote youth participation at all levels of decision-making that directly impacts them.

Strategy

Upon entering office, the Secretary-General mainstreamed youth across all areas of the Secretariat's policies, processes and programmes. The CYP has since grown stronger in terms of its offering, reach and impact. A few highlights include the following.

Youth Mainstreaming

At the ninth Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Uganda in 2017, youth ministers endorsed the guide, *Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives*.⁸ The guide helps member countries to mainstream youth across all levels of national development policies and plans. The guide was distributed to government ministries, and six regional awareness-raising workshops were subsequently held to sensitise member countries on youth mainstreaming frameworks.

The Secretariat has offered tailored assistance to countries to implement youth mainstreaming strategies. So far, implementation plans have been developed for Belize, Ghana and Kenya. Through a

⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat (2017) *Youth Mainstreaming in Development Planning: Transforming Young Lives*. <https://www.thecommonwealth-ilibrary.org/index.php/comsec/catalog/view/742/742/5614>



Key figures, youth mainstreaming			
6 regional workshops on youth mainstreaming	5 e-learning courses	Postgraduate training for 20 ministersfrom 19 countries

partnership with Coventry University, 20 ministers and senior government officials from 19 countries received certified postgraduate training on youth mainstreaming.

Between 2022 and 2023, the Secretariat launched five e-learning courses on youth mainstreaming, evidence-based youth policy, ethics and safeguarding in youth work, and youth participation. These courses, developed in collaboration with the UK's Open University, have benefited both Secretariat staff and member countries.

The Youth Development Index

In 2016, the Secretary-General launched the second edition of the groundbreaking Global Youth Development Index (YDI), which charts the social, political and economic situation for young people in 185 countries. This standard-setting advocacy tool supports evidence-based youth-centric planning, data disaggregation and monitoring.

The tool has generated significant global interest and become a focal point for regional and national activity. The United Nations Development Programme recognised the YDI report and asked for it to feature in their Human Development Index and Report. Its methodology and approach have been adopted by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and the African Union (AU), with the Secretariat supporting the AU to produce a regional report, and Pakistan and Namibia to develop national indices. The report was also by Australia to develop a national-level YDI. Officials from youth ministries and national statistics offices in the Pacific and Caribbean have also received training and used the YDI toolkit to inform regional and national plans for monitoring youth-related SDG progress.

The Secretariat has since published third and fourth iterations of the Youth Development Index, with the most recent published as a fully online resource in April 2024.



Key figures, Youth Development Index

Number of YDI indicators

2013: 15

2016: 18

2020 & 2023: 27

YDI methodology adopted by

3 IGOs

Top-ranked Commonwealth country, 2023:

Singapore

Commonwealth Youth Awards

Spearheaded by the Secretary-General, the annual Commonwealth Youth Awards have helped to fund and promote youth-led initiatives that are providing life-changing support to Commonwealth populations and helping countries achieve their SDGs. Finalists and winners have had their projects promoted globally, resulting in further funding and the growth of their initiatives.

Youth Work

The professionalisation of youth work has been a priority under the Secretary-General's leadership. The Commonwealth Alliance for Youth Work Associations, launched at the 2017 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting, serves as a collective voice for youth workers across the 56 member countries.

Between 2019 and 2020, the Secretariat partnered with the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth (India) and the Namibia College of Open Learning to support more than 330 youth workers from Asia, the Caribbean, Canada and Europe. Grants were provided to five national youth worker associations to formally register themselves, draft constitutions and increase their membership.

The Secretariat supported training for more than 100 senior government officials in youth work, youth employment and youth entrepreneurship policy in 2019–2020, with the aim of strengthening youth participation frameworks across several countries including The Bahamas, Uganda and the UK.

Through various workshops and grants, youth workers in countries including Seychelles and Saint Kitts and Nevis have benefited from training on

qualification pathways, youth skills development and the finalisation of national youth policies.

Youth Digital Skills Training

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Secretariat maintained a laser-sharp focus on developing young people's digital skills. In 2023 the Secretariat partnered with Simplilearn to offer 2,000 free e-learning courses to young people from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. These courses, developed with leading experts from IBM, Microsoft and Meta, focus on building skills in AI, cybersecurity and software development. The initiative aims to deliver 10,000 course places - worth \$5 million - across 29 Commonwealth countries.

Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting

In September 2023, after a six-year hiatus, the Secretariat supported the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in London. Chaired by Pakistan, the meeting brought together 46 countries, six UK overseas territories and 35 government ministers. It marked a significant step forward in galvanising efforts to deliver greater support for young people across the Commonwealth.

Youth Participation and Empowerment

The Secretariat created and implemented its Youth Participation Framework research project – designed to help Commonwealth countries understand and address barriers to youth participation. Findings and recommendations have been shared with member countries.

The Secretariat continues to support 11 Commonwealth Youth Networks, representing more than 948 youth organisations and 1,100 youth

Key figures, youth digital skills training

10,000
course places...

...worth

\$5 million

...for

29

Commonwealth countries

Case study: Commonwealth Youth Leaders' Summit

Young people, who represent three out of every five Commonwealth citizens, are primary stakeholders and contributors to the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.

As part of the Commonwealth Year of Youth, the Secretary-General hosted a two-week Commonwealth Youth Leaders' Summit in London from 6–17 March 2023. The summit brought together 60 youth leaders from member countries and 13 Commonwealth youth networks to map out their ideas and strategies for advancing youth development.

During the summit, youth leaders engaged with prominent leaders, government officials and development practitioners to hone their skills in leadership, policy development, strategic planning, partnership building and resource mobilisation. The Secretary-General also joined the youth leaders to relaunch yourcommonwealth.org

The impact of the summit on the participants was profound, with many saying that the experience had enhanced their knowledge and opened up new opportunities. They pledged to share that new knowledge with other young people in their respective countries, thereby amplifying the summit's impact.

The summit culminated in a call to action from the youth leaders, urging all stakeholders to ensure the Year of Youth is:

"dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development and called on all stakeholders at all levels to renew and strengthen their commitment to youth engagement and empowerment".



The Secretary-General with youth leaders at the Commonwealth Youth Leaders' Summit, Marlborough House, London, UK, March 2023

leaders, focusing on critical issues such as climate change and human rights. This support enables network leaders to participate effectively in national and regional initiatives to achieve the SDGs, and to bring the youth perspective into international development and decision-making. Highlights include the launch of the pilot Commonwealth Young Women's Mentorship Scheme to empower future women leaders.

Newly established networks included the Commonwealth Youth Health Network, endorsed by health ministers, and the Commonwealth Youth Human Rights and Democracy Network. The Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network was also relaunched as part of a broader initiative to engage youth in peacebuilding, supported by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

Impact

- The Secretariat's comprehensive support has led to four countries – Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, Dominica and Solomon Islands – adopting new national youth policies.
- With the Secretariat's support, national youth work associations have been established in New Zealand and Jamaica, and youth work has been prioritised in Malaysia's national policy.
- One of the Secretary-General's key achievements is the landmark Kigali Declaration on Childcare and Protection reform, agreed at the 2022 CHOGM. The Declaration commits all 56 Commonwealth countries to protecting and promoting the rights of children following the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing in particular on the most marginalised and excluded.

The Commonwealth Secretariat supports

11Commonwealth Youth Networks,
representing...**948**

... youth organisations and...

1,100

... youth leaders

- With the CYP's support, the Commonwealth Youth Council and Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network developed the Blue-Green Economy Toolkit and Small Islands Developing States Youth Advocacy Toolkit, equipping youth leaders with tools to engage with global processes such as COP summits.
- The Secretariat also supported the adoption of youth mainstreaming strategies in Kenya and Ghana, and a youth mainstreaming approach within Belize's National Trade Policy.
- Building on the YDI, the Secretariat has assisted Pakistan and Namibia to develop national indices, while Namibia has requested support with implementing a Sport Development Index.

5.2.1 The Commonwealth Year of Youth**Mandate**

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 91: *'Heads acknowledged the significant contribution made by the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) in promoting youth development and youth work globally. In honouring the commitment made by Heads to establish the CYP in 1973, Heads declared 2023 a year dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development and called on all stakeholders at all levels to renew and strengthen their commitment to youth engagement and empowerment.'*

Objective

The 2023/24 Year of Youth is dedicated to celebrating and empowering the 1.5 billion young people across the Commonwealth. The aim of this two-year observance is to accelerate progress on youth-related development issues, with an emphasis on recognition, empowerment and action.



Attendees of the Youth Leaders Meeting, held in the wings of the 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting, Marlborough House, London, September 2023

Strategy

Since it was launched by the Secretary-General in 2023, the 'Year of Youth' initiative has delivered a wealth of new projects, while supporting well-recognised existing platforms such as the Commonwealth Youth Games.

"The 'Year of Youth' initiative has delivered a wealth of new projects, while supporting well-recognised existing platforms."

Some project highlights include the following.

- The Youth Mainstreaming Training Programme, which seeks to ensure youth perspectives are integrated into policy and decision-making at all levels.
- A two-week Youth Summit in London in 2023, which brought together 60 youth leaders from across the Commonwealth, including 13 Commonwealth youth networks, to map out action-oriented strategies for youth development.
- The Aspiring Youth Empowerment Programme, developed in partnership with CARICOM, which provided 300 Caribbean young people with job-ready skills and training in 2023.
- A refreshed yourcommonwealth.org website, which better enables Commonwealth youth networks to showcase their work, connect with peers and share their ideas globally.
- The Youth Lead SDG 14 Action Challenge, which engaged 131 youth leaders from across the Commonwealth to showcase their climate and ocean solutions.
- Through CYP's support, youth leaders from Commonwealth countries issued a powerful statement to governments at COP27, calling for youth to be recognised as equal partners and solution-providers in the fight against climate change.

- At COP28, the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network engaged in a dialogue with world leaders and published a report proposing specific actions to empower youth in climate decision-making more meaningfully.

"Young people are at the heart of the Commonwealth Charter. The Commonwealth's future success rests with them. So here today we commit to investing in and promoting their development and engagement at community, regional, national and pan-Commonwealth levels throughout this year and beyond."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, at the launch of the Year of Youth, January 2023

5.2.2 Faith in the Commonwealth

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 11: *'Heads stressed the importance of the right to freedom of expression through peaceful, open dialogue, and the free flow of information.'*

Overview

Young people are the most valuable Commonwealth resource. The Commonwealth's collective security and prosperity are dependent on realising the vast potential of this rising generation and channelling their energy and dynamism in positive directions. To this end, the Secretary-General launched the Faith in the Commonwealth initiative, in partnership with the Khalili Foundation, in 2017.

Objectives

Faith in the Commonwealth aims to mobilise young people to act as change-makers in pursuit of inter-faith understanding and global citizenship throughout the 56 Commonwealth countries.

Strategy

The initiative achieves its objectives through a global citizenship education toolkit delivered in partnership with Commonwealth universities, and through 'Youth Training of Trainers' workshops targeting young community leaders.

During the design and delivery of the pilot programme several core elements emerged as key to the Faith in the Commonwealth pilot approach:



The Secretary-General and Professor Sir Nasser D. Khalili (centre), Founder and Chairman of the Khalili Foundation, with faith leaders at the launch of the Commonwealth Faith Festival, February 2024

- ongoing communication and networks
- transformational workshops and tools
- an 'indirect' approach, focused on mindsets, relationships and transferable skills
- testing ideas, then seed-funding
- adaptive learning journeys
- partnerships and Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network.

Impact

1. More than 132 young people completed the Youth Training of Trainers workshops in Bangladesh, Kenya and Trinidad and Tobago.
2. An additional 370 social action initiatives were undertaken involving 9,162 community members from eight Commonwealth countries.
3. Around 100 per cent of workshop participants reported improved skills for dialogue and discussion; around 97 per cent reported improved respect and understanding for people from different backgrounds.

Next steps: Commonwealth Faith Festival

As part of the Faith in the Commonwealth initiative, the Secretary-General launched the Commonwealth Faith Festival on 14 February 2024 at an event attended by dozens of youth leaders, peacebuilders, faith groups, academics, High Commissioners and non-profit organisations. Since its launch, the Festival has supported and amplified the peacebuilding efforts of youth and youth-led organisations through certified training courses, seed funding awards and mentorship opportunities.

"Why faith? Your faith in humanity matters. It binds us together; it is the essence of who we are. We believe in the power of the Commonwealth's youth, we believe in our shared Commonwealth values, we believe that we can together reduce tensions and build a better world."

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, at the launch of the Commonwealth Faith Festival, February 2024



5.2.3 Education

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 95: '*Heads recognised the importance of human capital for sustainable development and welcomed the outcome of the recent 21st Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers, which focussed on resilience and sustainability; learning technologies; leadership in education; transitions within and outside the education system; addressing disparities; and financing of education.*'

Background

Education is the key to achieving many of the SDGs. However, progress towards quality education (SDG 4) was slower than required even before the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID exacerbated this situation, causing widespread education losses in the majority of countries and highlighting the urgent need for stronger measures to tackle the learning crisis.

Objective

The Secretariat has intensified its efforts to support member countries to align their national education policies towards the delivery of the SDGs, guided by CHOGM and Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) mandates.

Strategy

Under the Secretary-General's guidance, the Secretariat has launched a comprehensive education programme to strengthen learning systems in member countries. The programme seeks to:

- harness new technologies to benefit disadvantaged groups
- innovate through partnerships and collaborations
- harmonise the Commonwealth's interventions in education and learning to complement existing global and regional strategies.

Notable developments include the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Secretariat and the Commonwealth Council for Education, Administration and Management (CCEAM) to develop a Commonwealth school leadership and management framework and modules. The Commonwealth Education Partnership between Commonwealth of Learning, the Association of Commonwealth Universities and other partners has also been strengthened to further a 'one Commonwealth' approach to education to support implementation at country level.

More recently, at the 22nd CCEM in London in May 2024, ministers reaffirmed their commitment to addressing inequality in learning opportunities, including gender and disability-related disparities, and to adapting education to meet the demands of a rapidly advancing technological landscape. In his opening remarks, the meeting's chair, Hon. Ezekiel Machogu, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary of Education, emphasised the need for 'urgent and accelerated Commonwealth-wide action to facilitate the recovery of education systems and the achievement of SDG 4'. The outcomes of the meeting will shape the policy agenda for the upcoming Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa.

- To strengthen the education workforce, the Secretariat and CCEAM developed the *Commonwealth Educational Leadership Handbook*, endorsed by Education Ministers in 2022. The Handbook supports the integration of school leadership development into educational professional development processes. Using this handbook, the Secretariat conducted training of school principals and education officers in The Bahamas and Mauritius in 2023/24.

Impact

- In 2016, Fiji and Jamaica piloted the Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) self-assessment tool, enabling both countries to identify gaps in their TVET systems – a key focus in the SDGs. The *TVET Self-Assessment Toolkit* and *Entrepreneurship Guidelines* were subsequently rolled out in Sri Lanka in 2020.
- CFTC technical assistance to the Ministry of Education in Mauritius concluded with the delivery of the Mauritian Higher Education Bill 2017, which included the establishment of an independent Higher Education Quality Assurance Agency.
- In 2018, the Secretariat supported 10 SADC members – Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania – to develop action plans for the rollout of the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework. As a consequence, Tanzania strengthened its communication of education policies and guidelines at different levels across the education system. Similarly, Seychelles strengthened its monitoring and evaluation processes around policy planning and performance.
- The Secretariat also supported boys' education projects in Jamaica and Saint Lucia, with both governments committing to take ownership of future delivery under alternative funding arrangements. Further support was provided in 2018 to Jamaica to consider a multisectoral approach to address boys' educational underachievement.



5.3 Sport

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 101: *'Heads reaffirmed their commitment to sport and physical activity as enablers of sustainable development.'*

Background

Well designed sport policies can significantly contribute to human and social development while promoting Commonwealth values such as peace, equality and tolerance. Yet many Commonwealth countries, particularly those with more limited resources, lack the capacity to design sport policies that support both sport and sustainable development.

Objective

The Secretariat is mandated to assist member countries to develop, implement and evaluate policies and strategies that maximise sport's contribution to national development plans and the SDGs.

Strategy

Under the Secretary-General's leadership the Commonwealth has made 'sport for development and peace' a dedicated outcome in its Strategic Plan. The Secretariat's Sport for Peace and Development programme has grown in scope and strength, delivering technical assistance and

training to sport policymakers and practitioners across member countries. This work focuses on sport as a tool to advance socio-economic development and strengthen governance, gender equality, inclusion and the protection and promotion of human rights in and through sport.

The Secretariat has been recognised as a global leader in sport for development and peace, and plays a key co-ordinating role in building consensus among member countries and liaising with UN and intergovernmental organisations, sports bodies, academia and civil society.

Providing in-country technical assistance

Between 2016 and 2019 the Secretariat provided direct technical support to seven member countries, assisting them to develop national policies that integrate sport with sustainable development and peacebuilding. Some highlights include:

- ringfenced budgeting for sport for social inclusion in Mauritius
- the inclusion of sport for development pillars in Zambia's national policy
- support for the development of Botswana's National Gender and Sports Strategy.

Building on this momentum, between 2019 and 2020 the Secretariat developed a Sport Sector Results Framework aligned with national development plans and relevant SDGs. This framework has since been utilised by several countries including Jamaica, Mauritius, Canada, Fiji, Lesotho, Namibia and St Kitts and Nevis.

“Well designed sport policies can significantly contribute to human and social development.”

Frameworks and resources

In 2020, the Secretariat developed the Commonwealth Consensus Statement on Promoting Human Rights In and Through Sport, which was adopted by Commonwealth Sports Ministers in 2020 and endorsed by Heads of Government in 2022. This landmark document commits all 56 Commonwealth countries to combatting racism and discrimination in sport while promoting good governance, human rights and the integrity of sport.

Another key milestone was the *Enhancing the Contribution of Sport to the Sustainable Development Goals* report, published by the Secretariat in 2017. The first of its kind in terms of providing policy-focused recommendations on sport’s

contribution to the SDGs, the report shifted the global discourse on sport and development, directly influencing UNESCO’s global framework for sport policy implementation. Building on this, in 2024 the Secretariat partnered with UNESCO to develop the *Global Sport and Sustainable Goals Baseline and Initial Impact Report*, the first global baseline report on sport’s contribution to the SDGs.

In 2023 the Secretariat published the *Commonwealth Model Law on Protection of Vulnerable Persons Against Abuse by Persons in Positions of Trust*. It provides exemplary legal protections for vulnerable persons against abuse by persons in positions of trust, and can be adapted to the specific needs, circumstances and existing legislative arrangements of any Commonwealth country.

Training courses and workshops

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat pivoted its efforts towards online learning and resources. In July 2020, the Secretary-General launched the first-ever global mass open online course (MOOC) on designing policies and programmes for sport and development.⁹ This course, developed in collaboration with the International Platform on Sport and Development and the Government of Australia, quickly became a popular tool for policymakers around the world.

9 See futurelearn.com/courses/sport-for-sustainable-development



Case study: Developing national sport policy in Jamaica

In response to a request from the Government of Jamaica in 2018/19, the Secretary-General sent a team to support the development of an Enhanced Results Framework and a Measurement and Evaluation System. These two models were designed to quantify the positive contribution of sport for Jamaica's National Sport Policy and National Development Plan (Vision 2030).

To ensure regular and seamless reviews, the Secretariat's team trained 50 government officials on using these models to monitor, evaluate and enhance the contribution of sport to national development.

The newly developed Results Framework fostered consensus among stakeholders and clearly demonstrated the alignment of the national policy with both the national development plan and the SDGs.

The Secretariat also established the Online Sport and Coronavirus Resource Hub, which provided countries with digital tools and shared resources to help navigate the pandemic's impact on the sport sector.

In June 2022 the Secretariat partnered with the Football for Peace Foundation UK and the Football Association of Maldives to deliver a series of workshops and a football tournament in Maldives. These initiatives empowered more than 200 young people, helping to build resilience against extremism through football while enhancing digital literacy to combat online recruitment by extremist groups.

"It was great to continue our work with the Commonwealth Secretariat... Through this partnership, we hope to establish a framework that will drive action and active participation in using football as a tool for social impact."

Anjum Afzal, Director of International Relations,
Football Association of Maldives, July 2022¹⁰

Advocacy for Sport, Enterprise and Development

In January 2024, the Secretary-General appointed Ambassador Amina Mohamed, former Kenyan Cabinet Secretary, as her Special Envoy for Sport, Enterprise and Development. Ambassador Mohamed will support efforts to align sport with the SDGs and drive economic growth through sport-led initiatives.

¹⁰ Commonwealth Secretariat (2022, July 7) 'Football workshops teach young people new skills including resilience to extremism', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/football-workshops-teach-young-people-new-skills-including-resilience-extremism>

Impact

The Secretariat's work on sport is making a measurable difference across the Commonwealth.

- Between 2017 and 2021, the share of Commonwealth countries with national policies that address sport and sustainable development increased from 40 to 61 per cent.
- The MOOC has been a tremendous success, with more than 2,000 learners registering within its first two months. By February 2024 more than 6,500 learners from 185 countries had completed the course, which has now been translated into French, Spanish, and Arabic.
- In the 2022 CHOGM Communiqué, Heads welcomed the Commonwealth Consensus Statement on Promoting Human Rights in and through Sport.

5.3.1 Peace at the Crease

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 101: *'Heads reaffirmed their commitment to sport and physical activity as enablers of sustainable development.'*

Background

While we promote all sports as means to furthering peace and development, cricket – a popular Commonwealth sport – holds a special significance. For decades cricket has, when used strategically, contributed to healing, post-conflict reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Case study: Sports for All in Mauritius

Sport is among the Commonwealth's highest-profile shared traditions and most valuable assets. Yet employing sport for health and as a catalyst for social and economic development is underutilised in many Commonwealth countries.

Mauritius was one of the first countries to express interest to the Secretariat in 2014 when the Sports for Development and Peace initiative was introduced. The government was concerned about the prevalence of diabetes in Mauritius, and the attendant increased risks of severe health complications if uncontrolled. According to the WHO around 20 per cent of the country's population has diabetes.¹

With Secretariat support, in 2017 the Government of Mauritius launched its first ever Sports for All policy. This has been the driving force for transformation in the fight against diabetes. National statistics showed that only 23 per cent of the population were physically active as per WHO standards in 2015. In 2018, a target of 35 per cent by 2030 was set.²

As part of the Sports for All policy, Active Mauritius was launched in 2018 with a 12-hour run for fun and health every Sunday. Free-for-all, age-specific programmes included Move It for 5–11-year-olds, Youth on the Move for 12–14-year-olds, Aging World for 24–65-year-olds and Elderly Fitness for over-66-year-olds.

Before the Sports for All Policy was passed in 2017, the Government allocated an annual budget of \$1.7 million for all sports activities. After the launch of the policy and advocacy from the Secretariat, the budget was increased to \$5 million in 2018. With consistent advocacy and technical support from the Secretariat on the budgeting process at the highest level, the budget increased to \$20 million.

Now over 400 sports facilities are active, and close to 10,000 sports coaches have been recruited to work with the population. In an example of sports and health integration, the NCD Clinic can now prescribe exercise, and a full-time exercise consultant has been added to the clinic, which already has a dietician and a diabetes specialist.

At the time of review in November 2022, Active Mauritius had over 1,000 participants, including the Prime Minister, and Mauritius was on course to achieve its 35 per cent target early. The target year was therefore brought forward to 2024.

1 World Health Organization (2022, November 17) 'World Diabetes Day 2022: Mauritius launched Health Promotion Clubs in the Public Service to promote health and fight diabetes and other NCDs', media release. <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/mauritius/news/world-diabetes-day-2022-mauritius-launched-health-promotion-clubs-public-service-promote-health-and>

2 Republic of Mauritius (2018) *National Sport and Physical Activity Policy for the Republic of Mauritius, 2018–2028*. <https://www.active-mauritius.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/National-Sport-and-Physical-Activity-Policy.pdf>

Objective

As a lifelong cricket fan, the Secretary-General is a firm believer in the sport's unifying power to bring people together and break down barriers. Growing up, her passion for cricket began with the West Indies cricket team, which brought diverse Caribbean countries together in collective pride and solidarity. Drawing on this personal connection, in July 2018 the Secretary-General launched the Peace at the Crease initiative, which draws on the power of cricket to bring people of different faiths, races, nationalities and languages together in the spirit of peacebuilding and development.

Strategy

The initiative adds to the pioneering approaches championed by the Secretary-General in mobilising sport-based interventions for the promotion of the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, such as peace, equality, tolerance and respect.

The initiative kicked off on 6 July 2018 with a match at Lord's Cricket Ground in London, between the Interfaith XI and the Vatican and the Archbishop of Canterbury XI. It has since become an international movement, garnering support from several Commonwealth leaders, cricket legends and sport clubs. Since then, a series of exhibition matches



The Secretary-General receives a signed cricket bat, in honour of Peace at the Crease, from Sri Lankan High Commissioner Manisha Gunasekera and cricket team captain Dimuth Karunaratne at a reception at the country's High Commission in London, May 2019

have been organised across the Commonwealth. One particularly notable cricket match was organised during the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda. The match, played between Tutsi XI and Hutu XI, was a powerful gesture that supported the continued healing of the scars of the genocide.

More recently, under the Secretary-General's leadership, the Secretariat has signed a number of partnerships with cricket associations and foundations to organise cricket-based peacebuilding initiatives to foster respect, inclusion and co-operation within and among communities.

"There will be two teams but one goal, to bowl-out inter-communal and other tensions and to hit a six for peace, inclusion and community cohesion."

The Rt Hon. Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

Speaking at the launch in July 2018, cricket legend Sir Clive Lloyd spoke about cricket's past role as a catalyst for peace and progress.

"When we [as a team] did not visit South Africa a couple of decades ago, sport caused them to change their thinking. Their apartheid system was then changed because of our action. So, to me, sport plays a very important role in bringing peace to the world."

Impact

Peace at the Crease is now a registered charity in the UK. It has assisted a number of cricket associations and foundations to host a variety of cricket activities designed to empower young people and promote the values of the Commonwealth Charter.

- Since its launch, more than 2,000 people, and young people in particular, have directly benefited from Peace at the Crease activities.
- Numerous leaders, ministers and cricket legends have endorsed the initiative and have committed their support.

5.4 Health

Mandate

2022 CHOGM Communiqué, para 82: *'Heads renewed their commitment to promoting good nutrition and fighting malnutrition, and determined to take bold, multisectoral coordinated action to reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).'*

Background

A healthy population is the bedrock of thriving societies and prosperous economies. However, persistent global disparities in healthcare access and quality have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, delaying progress toward SDG 3 on good health and wellbeing.

Objective

The Secretariat has ramped up its advocacy, research and convening efforts to support member countries progress towards achieving SDG 3 and to ensure good health and wellbeing for all Commonwealth citizens.

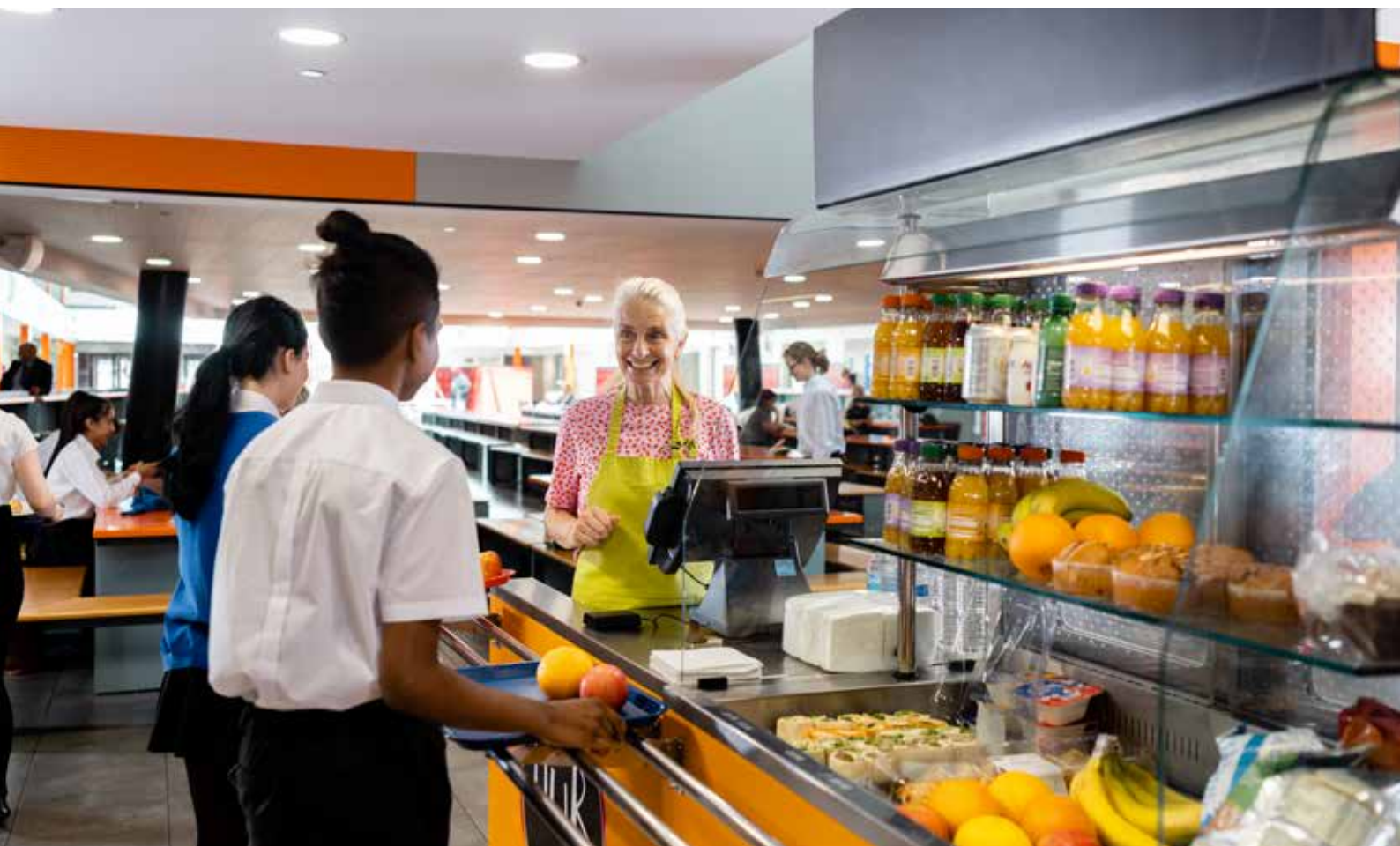
Strategy

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, health has become a core priority for the Commonwealth – one that is integrated across critical overlapping areas of work such as climate change, gender equality and youth development. By aligning with global, regional and national health agendas, the Secretariat has boosted its engagement with member countries.

Universal Health Coverage

As a platform for multilateral and co-ordinated action, Commonwealth Health Ministers have been meeting regularly ahead of the World Health Assembly to discuss shared priorities for the wellbeing of their people and practical ways to strengthen their health systems, particularly through universal health coverage, with a focus on safeguarding women, children and other vulnerable groups.

The Secretariat has been working on a toolkit and advocacy guide to help member countries accelerate the implementation of universal health coverage across the Commonwealth, with a





The Secretary-General with chair Hon. Dr Tinte Itinteang, Kiribati's Minister of Health and Medical Services, and Professor Dame Carol Black, at the 36th Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, Geneva, Switzerland, May 2024

focus on political economy. The proposed toolkit was reviewed by Health Ministers at their annual gathering in 2019.

COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary-General's decisive advocacy and actions positioned her as a global health champion. In 2020 she hosted the first virtual Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM), which brought together representatives from 31 member countries to co-ordinate a collective response to the pandemic. Ministers committed to eliminating fees for COVID-19 tests and treatment and endorsed a voluntary mechanism for sharing medical supplies such as ventilators and testing kits.

The Secretary-General also engaged with global leaders and institutions, including the WHO and World Trade Organization, to advocate for expedited and equitable vaccine distribution, especially for small states grappling with the pandemic's far-reaching consequences.

In response to the needs identified by countries, the Secretary-General established the Commonwealth COVID-19 Response Centre, which provided essential data and powerful tools to guide the national responses to the pandemic.

In 2020, the Secretary-General formalised its partnership with the WHO through an memorandum of understanding, strengthening their collaboration on a wide range of public health issues of particular concern to Commonwealth countries.

Acute shortages of essential health supplies, drugs, equipment and tests were a significant challenge during the pandemic. Even prior to the pandemic, the Secretariat was developing a Voluntary Information and Price-Sharing Database aimed at cutting the costs of essential medicines, vaccines and technologies, especially for poorer countries. The Secretary-General launched the database in October 2021.

Five key priorities

More recently, the Secretariat has been working closely with accredited organisations and partner agencies to assist member countries on mandates arising from the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Significant progress has been made on five priority areas.

Malaria

In partnership with Malaria No More, the Secretary-General launched a malaria tracker and progress report to help Commonwealth countries monitor

their progress towards halving malaria cases by 2023 and eradicating the disease by 2030. This builds on commitments made at CHOGM meetings in 2018 and 2022.

Trachoma

The *Eye Health in the Commonwealth* report, produced by the Vision for the Commonwealth Coalition and supported by the Secretariat, revealed substantial progress towards the elimination of trachoma across Commonwealth countries. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of people at risk of the blinding disease nearly halved, demonstrating the possibility of eradicating trachoma entirely.

Cervical cancer

At the 2022 CHOGM, leaders pledged to ensure that, by 2025, all girls receive the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine by age 13, alongside equitable access to screening and treatment for cervical cancer. In response, the Secretariat joined forces with the Union for International Cancer Control to form a multistakeholder taskforce with the objective of preventing and treating cervical cancer, with milestones extending through 2030.

In 2023, the Secretariat partnered with Lancet Oncology to launch the Cancer in the Commonwealth Lancet Commission, an initiative that brings together global experts to develop evidence-based strategies for reducing cancer rates in Commonwealth countries.

Non-communicable diseases

Pacific island states face some of the highest rates of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The Secretary-General has deployed teams to provide legislative drafting support to member countries in the Pacific to address gaps in non-communicable diseases legislation. Between 2022 and 2023 the Secretariat assisted the drafting of new tobacco control laws for Tonga, and gap analyses of liquor regulations for Nauru, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu.

In November 2023 the Secretariat unveiled the *Addressing the Rising Burden of NCDs in the Commonwealth* framework. This resource offers practical guidance to governments, encouraging multi-sectoral collaboration and youth engagement to combat physical inactivity and poor diets – key contributors to NCDs.

“The Commonwealth family is well-positioned to provide leadership and to act as a global and regional catalyst for pulling together major stakeholders involved in the fight against NCDs including cancers.”

HE Mariam Mwyiny, the First Lady of Zanzibar, at the launch of the NCD Framework, November 2023¹¹

Climate and health

Recognising the intersection between human and planetary health, the Secretariat has taken a leadership role in addressing these interlocking challenges. At COP28 in December 2023, the Secretary-General and PATH launched the Accelerator for Resilience in Climate and Health, an end-to-end platform that sources, deploys, finances and scales innovations that help public health systems and communities to address climate impacts.

A roadmap for healthy ageing

In January 2024 the Commonwealth signalled a new focus on ageing populations by appointing Professor Dame Carol Black GBE as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Ageing Well. Drawing on decades of experience, she is offering guidance to countries and partners on safeguarding and promoting the rights of older people in the implementation of the SDGs.

Under the guidance of the Secretary-General, Dame Carol has led the development of *Ageing Well in the Commonwealth: A Roadmap for Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course*, a practical guide that highlights the critical importance of healthy ageing to the governments and people of Commonwealth countries. The roadmap recommends select objectives and key actions for policy-makers to consider and adapt when formulating or reviewing national policies on healthy ageing.

Additionally, the framework promotes a whole-system approach which enhances healthcare and social services, encourages older people to participate in the labour market, fosters environments that support wellbeing and active involvement in local communities, and combats 'ageism'. It furthers the Commonwealth's aim to support older people to live autonomously and with dignity, and to encourage useful, enjoyable and meaningful later years of life.

11 Commonwealth Secretariat (2023, December 2) 'Commonwealth intensifies efforts to reduce NCD risk behaviours in children, adolescents and youth', media release. <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/commonwealth-intensifies-efforts-reduce-ncd-risk-behaviours-children-adolescents-and-youth>



Case study: Tackling Non-Communicable Diseases in the Pacific

NCDs such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer are the leading cause of premature death in the Pacific islands, responsible for over 70 per cent of the region's total deaths.¹ Contributing factors include unhealthy diets, tobacco use, alcohol misuse and lack of physical activity.

In response to a request from Pacific Health Ministers, the Secretariat partnered with the Pacific Community (SPC) to develop a legislative framework to help countries in the region reform laws related to food, alcohol, tobacco and tax. To support this work, the Secretary-General deployed a legislative drafter within SPC to help draft the framework, providing expertise not readily available in the region. The initiative is also supported by the WHO, UNICEF and the McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer.

In April 2019, drafters from 12 Pacific countries, alongside development agencies, reviewed the framework. Their feedback highlighted the framework's potential to close legislative gaps, reduce alcohol and tobacco use and empower consumers to make healthier choices. Future priorities identified by the group include regulating breast-milk substitutes and controlling sugar, salt and trans fats.

At their seventh regional meeting, Pacific Health Ministers highlighted the need for laws targeting tobacco industry interference, trans fats and the marketing of unhealthy food products to children. They identified legislative reform as essential for advancing the Pacific NCD Roadmap and the WHO Global Action Plan on NCDs.

¹ World Bank (2014, July 12) 'Pacific Islands: Non-Communicable Disease Roadmap', media release. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/07/11/pacific-islands-non-communicable-disease-roadmap>



To be presented at CHOGM 2024, the Ageing Well framework has been a collaboration between Dame Carol, the Commonwealth Secretariat, CommonAge and other Commonwealth accredited organisations and partners.

Impact

- Under the Secretary-General's leadership, participation in the annual Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting increased from 34 to 44 countries between 2016 and 2019.
- The Secretariat provided legislative drafting support to four Pacific small states to help them address gaps in non-communicable diseases legislation.

The consultation also provided drafters with opportunities to build their capacity, increase their knowledge about NCDs and develop relevant legislation. The Pacific NCD Legislative Framework was slated for presentation to Pacific Health Ministers in August 2019 for further consideration, with the Pacific Community requesting continued support in this area.

5.4.1 Commonwealth Moves

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about an alarming decline in sport and physical activity. Even before COVID-19 emerged, the world was facing a silent crisis: the 'pandemic' of immobility. This was, in turn, fuelling a surge in NCDs, which in 2018 accounted for 41 million deaths annually

– 71 per cent of global mortality.¹² Inactivity alone has been estimated to cost the global economy \$68 billion annually in direct healthcare and lost productivity costs.¹³

Objective

The Commonwealth has long worked with governments on leveraging sport as a means to improve physical and mental health. Building on previous advances, the Secretary-General launched the Commonwealth Moves initiative in 2020, designed to support countries to increase physical activity levels while complying with pandemic restrictions. In the longer run, it aims to strengthen the resilience of the sports sector and populations against future challenges.

Strategy

The Commonwealth Moves initiative is anchored in three key pillars, strategically designed and backed by robust research.

Policy development and adaptation

Commonwealth Moves works with member countries to reshape policies and delivery models for sport and physical activity. Critically, it ensured compliance with COVID-19 safety guidelines while continuing to promote active lifestyles.

12 World Health Organization (2023, September 16) 'Noncommunicable diseases', webpage. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

13 Ding, D., Lawson K. D., Kolbe-Alexander, T. L., Finkelstein, E. A., Katzmarzyk, P. T., van Mechelen, W. and Pratt, M. (2016) 'The economic burden of physical inactivity: A global analysis of major non-communicable diseases', *Lancet* 388(10051): 1311–1324. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(16\)30383-X/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(16)30383-X/abstract)

Research and analysis

The Secretariat spearheaded a comprehensive research initiative to explore policy options for resourcing the recovery and sustainability of the sports sector. This research informed innovative strategies aimed at diversifying investment, revitalising domestic markets and reinforcing the sector's role in employment, health and community wellbeing.

Partnerships and resources

Through collaborations with sport-based organisations, the Secretariat developed and curated a range of online resources, including workbooks, lesson plans and videos, designed to encourage safe physical activity during the pandemic. These partnerships also supported a broader research initiative focused on how policies and delivery models could be adjusted across the Commonwealth to facilitate the 'new normal' in sport and activity after the pandemic.

Impact

- The Commonwealth Moves initiative was a forward-thinking response to a global health crisis that continues to shape policy and practice in member countries.
- The Commonwealth Moves *Policy Analysis Tool for Community Sport and Sport for Development in Response to COVID-19* was vital in helping communities promote mental health and physical activity.
- The lessons learned from Commonwealth Moves serve as a blueprint for ensuring that sport and physical activity remain integral to global wellbeing, and remain resilient in the face of future challenges.

6

Envoys and Partnerships





This page, top: signing an MOU with WTO Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, June 2022; bottom: with Shipping Deputy Minister of Cyprus Marina Hadjimanolis and CEO of the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute, Zacharias Siokouros, having signed an MOU establishing the Blue Charter Centre of Excellence, April 2024.

Previous page, top: leaders of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations at their 14th structured dialogue with the Secretary-General, December 2022.

6. Envoys and Partnerships

6.1 Secretary-General's Special Envoys and Champions

With only six years left to achieve the SDGs, the latest report by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network reveals that progress – both globally and in Commonwealth countries – is not on track.¹ Urgent action and innovative partnerships are now essential to bridging this gap, as highlighted by SDG 17, which underscores the importance of collaboration in achieving all SDGs.

In response, the Secretary-General has taken decisive action, not only partnering with leading global organisations but also addressing the expertise gaps faced by many Commonwealth countries. She has appointed renowned experts as her Special Envoys and Champions, tasking them with providing strategic, pro bono support to member countries to accelerate progress on SDGs while minimising the strain on national resources.

At the heart of this initiative is the exceptional expertise and experience that the Special Envoys and Champions bring to the table. Currently, seven Special Envoys and three Champions are working with member countries, each offering targeted advice and hands-on support on key issues aligned with the SDGs. Backed by their expertise, the Secretariat has been able to deliver far more comprehensive and holistic assistance to member countries in their journeys towards implementing the SDGs.

The 10 individuals currently serving as Special Envoys and Champions are as follows.

Justin Mundy

Former director of The Prince of Wales's International Sustainability Unit, Justin Mundy is the Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Climate Change, Environment and Socio-Economic Affairs. He has been supporting the Commonwealth's climate strategy with a focus on preparing for the UN's Climate Change Conferences and mobilising resources to help achieve the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement and relevant SDGs in member countries.

¹ Sachs, J. D., LaFortune, G. and Fulle, G. (2024) *The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future: Sustainable Development Report 2024*. Dublin University Press. 10.25546/108572



Richard Sezibera with the Secretary-General, June 2019

Richard Sezibera

Richard Sezibera, Rwandan medical doctor, diplomat and politician, served as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Health and Education. His role focused on the attainment of the SDGs relating to health and well-being (SDG3) and quality education (SDG4).

Professor Prajapati Trivedi

Professor Prajapati Trivedi, former economic adviser to the Government of India, is the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for SDG Implementation. He is responsible for supporting the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 SDGs.



Professor Prajapati Trivedi briefing political office bearers from Namibia on government performance management on 17 June 2022



Anne Wafula Strike MBE speaking at a Commonwealth event on disability and inclusion through sport, London, July 2024

Anne Wafula Strike MBE

British Paralympic athlete Anne Wafula Strike is the Secretary-General's Champion for Equality in Sports. Her role involves connecting sporting initiatives, supporting the implementation of SDGs relating to sport, peace and development, and improving equality in sport.



Prince Edward and the Secretary-General presenting the Commonwealth Young Person of the Year Award to Maya Kirti Nanan, London, September 2023

Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh

Prince Edward, Duke of Edinburgh, is a Champion for the Commonwealth Year of Youth, an initiative dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development. In this role, Prince Edward is responsible for promoting and raising the profile of issues facing young people in the Commonwealth.

Professor Manahel Thabet

Renowned scientist Professor Manahel Thabet is the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Science and Technology. She brings to the role a wealth of knowledge and a deep understanding of harnessing technology to boost progress on SDGs, especially on targets related to technology, research and innovation. Professor Thabet is frequently ranked among a very select group of luminaries with exceptionally high IQs.

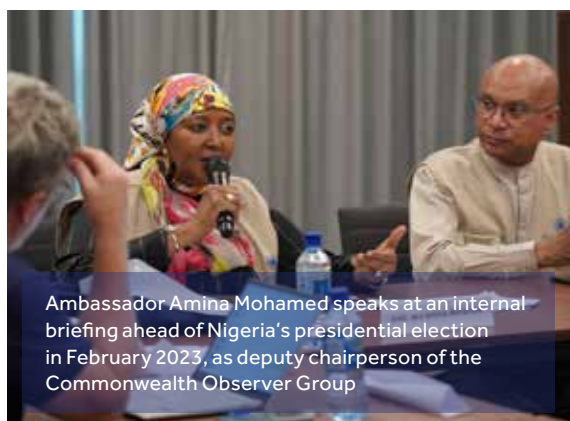


Secretary-General with Professor Manahel Thabet at an event hosted by the Lord Mayor of the City of London at Mansion House, London, June 2024

Ambassador Amina Mohamed

Ambassador Amina Mohamed, former Kenyan cabinet secretary, is the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Sport, Enterprise and Development. In this role, she provides strategic direction to mobilise support and rally leadership for SDG targets related to sport, development and economic growth.

As a Special Envoy, Ms Mohamed also contributes to various Commonwealth gatherings focused on sport, including ministerial meetings and the Secretary-General's Peace at the Crease initiative.



Ambassador Amina Mohamed speaks at an internal briefing ahead of Nigeria's presidential election in February 2023, as deputy chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group



Secretary-General with Professor Dame Carol Black at the 36th Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, Geneva, May 2024

Professor Dame Carol Black GBE

Professor Dame Carol Black GBE, Chair of the British Library and Chair of the Centre for Ageing Better, is the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Ageing Well. Drawing on decades of experience, she offers guidance to countries and partners on safeguarding and promoting the rights of older people on the implementation of the SDGs. Professor Black was awarded the Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE) in The King's New Year's Honours List 2024. She is the first female doctor to be made a Dame Grand Cross, and one of fewer than 80 women to ever receive this honour.

Darasing Khurana

Indian actor and philanthropist Darasing Khurana is a Champion for the Commonwealth Year of Youth, an initiative dedicated to youth-led action



Lady Denta Amoateng MBE and Darasing Khurana hosting Youth Live on 12 August 2024

for sustainable and inclusive development. In this role he is responsible for promoting and raising the profile of issues facing young people in the Commonwealth. Darasing Khurana was the co-host of a pan-Commonwealth 'Youth Live' programme, which celebrated youth contributions to the SDGs on International Youth Day on 12 August 2024. He has just received the 2024 Mahatma Gandhi Leadership Award at the University of Oxford.



Secretary-General with Professor Richard Susskind OBE KC, London, September 2024

Professor Richard Susskind OBE KC

Professor Richard Susskind OBE KC (Hon) is the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Justice and Artificial Intelligence. He is responsible for supporting the 56 Commonwealth countries to achieve SDG 16, ensuring equal access to justice for all by 2030, using AI.

During her tenure, the Secretary-General has also deployed three short-term Special Envoys, each tasked with addressing a time-bound political issue at the request of member countries. These assignments have been completed successfully, leaving lasting impacts in the regions served.

- **Professor Ibrahim Gambari**, a Nigerian academic and diplomat who served as Chief of Staff to the President of Nigeria, acted as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Zambia in 2017.
- **Dr Rajen Prasad**, a former Member of Parliament in New Zealand, served as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Lesotho in 2016.

- **Dr Willy Mutunga**, former Chief Justice of Kenya, served as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Maldives in 2016.

Key highlights

Some key highlights from the work of the Secretary-General's Special Envoys and Champions include the following.

- Professor Prajapati Trivedi has developed a Strategic Management and Accountability for Results Toolkit (SMART). It provides a comprehensive, whole-of-government strategy aimed at improving government performance, boosting efficiency and ultimately enhancing the delivery of public services.
 - Nearly 2,000 public policy officials from Commonwealth countries have been trained in the SMART Governance Programme. This includes regional training programmes for Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific.
 - Country-specific on-demand programmes have been delivered in six countries: The Gambia, Kenya, Uganda, Barbados, Nigeria and Namibia.
- Working with the Secretary-General, Professor Manahel Thabet has produced an in-depth analysis of each Commonwealth country's progress towards all SDG targets. This has been complemented with analyses of digital governance, alongside assessments of progress towards implementing clean, green, sustainable energy solutions in every country. These analyses have laid the groundwork for targeted, evidence-based interventions that are already driving change across member countries.
- Professor Thabet has also been supporting the Secretary-General in launching a new 'CommonSpace' initiative, designed to help developing countries leverage space technology to better predict and manage natural disasters and build climate resilience.
- Professor Dame Carol Black GBE has recently developed *Ageing Well in the Commonwealth*, a pioneering roadmap for healthy ageing, set to be an important point of discussion at the 2024 CHOGM.

6.2 Partnerships

In 2016, recognising the growing challenges of an interconnected and interdependent world, the Secretary-General introduced a partnership programme designed to make collaborative action a cornerstone of how the Secretariat delivers on its mandates. By 2018 a dedicated strategy was launched, incorporating a rigorous due diligence process to ensure that all partners adhere to the values and principles outlined in the Commonwealth Charter.

Since then, the Secretariat's innovative cross-sector partnerships have:

- brought together diverse knowledge and expertise
- supported the delivery of our programmatic work across countries
- provided sponsorship for technical assistance to member countries
- offered access to platforms that have advanced the interests of Commonwealth citizens
- granted the Secretariat observer status in key forums and organisations, ensuring Commonwealth representation in the creation of models and policies.

These partnerships have empowered the Secretariat to engage constructively in global dialogues, champion the voice of small and other vulnerable states and stakeholders, address pressing global challenges and promote shared values of prosperity, democracy, and peace. All collaborations are closely aligned with Commonwealth strategic priorities, programmes and projects, tailored to the needs identified by member countries.

The below table provides key highlights of the Secretariat's work with strategic partners. While not exhaustive, it illustrates the breadth, ambition and value of these partnerships, as described in detail in previous chapters.

AI partnerships

Under the Secretary-General's leadership, AI has been a particular area of focus for the Secretariat's partnerships in recent years – one that is delivering tangible and valuable support for Commonwealth

citizens as they adapt to and benefit from technological advancements. For instance, four notable joint projects, discussed below, are delivering more than US\$40 million in assistance to Commonwealth countries.

SAS

The Secretariat's recently announced partnership with SAS, a global leader in analytics, aims to develop the AI and analytics capabilities of learners and educators across all 56 Commonwealth countries. The partnership will provide individuals with access to valuable educational resources and opportunities to participate in international AI competitions which will foster both practical experience and global recognition, while promoting responsible and ethical use of AI and data analytics. The SAS's donation of AI software, computing resources and training, which has been valued at \$10 million, will benefit 10,000 learners and educators in the next five years.

"This collaboration will bring AI capacity to populations that haven't always benefitted from the technological advances that power the world's largest economies. These students will not only gain AI skills coveted by employers around the world, but they will also learn how to wield these powerful technologies ethically, in ways that benefit society."

Reggie Townsend, Vice President of Data Ethics, SAS

Open Weaver

Signed in 2024, the Secretariat's three-year partnership with Open Weaver supports the 'Accelerating Entrepreneurship Using AI and Digital Programme', and is empowering business owners across the Commonwealth. As part of this programme, the joint 'Commonwealth AI Entrepreneurship Make-A-Thon' initiative is empowering small and medium-sized businesses to build websites and mobile applications using no-code platforms. Under this partnership, Open Weaver has committed \$4 million in cloud credits over the next three years of the collaboration, to help enterprises grow and innovate without the need to meet the costs of cloud services.

Table 6.1 Notable ongoing partnerships, by theme

Organisation	Area of partnership	Theme
Commonwealth Lawyers Association	International commercial arbitration	Government
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association	Elections	Government
CARICOM	Intergovernmental regional body	Government
United Nations	Intergovernmental body	Government
PATH	Health and climate change	Environment
Cambridge University	'Their Future, Our Action' project	Environment
Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance	Established the Blue Finance Working Group	Environment
UNFCCC	Climate and environment	Environment
UNITAR	Climate and environment	Environment
UNOPS	Energy	Environment
Bloomberg Philanthropies	Blue Charter	Environment
Open Weaver	The Accelerating Entrepreneurship Using AI and Digital programme, supporting business owners across the Commonwealth	Economy
Simplilearn	e-learning and skills for the digital economy	Economy
SAS	AI, data analytics and digital readiness	Economy
Intel	e-learning, 'Digital Readiness for Public Sector Leaders'	Economy
World Trade Organization	Trade	Economy
UNCTAD	Trade	Economy
UNOSSC	Debt management	Economy
ITC	Trade	Economy
EU	Aid for Trade (Hubs and Spokes programme)	Economy
Khalili Foundation	Faith in the Commonwealth	Society
Commonwealth Universities Association	Education	Society
UNESCO	Sport, health and the SDGs	Society
WHO	Health	Society
NO MORE Foundation	Gender, ending violence against women and girls	Society



Simplilearn

Announced in 2023, the Secretariat's partnership with Simplilearn, is offering 10,000 places – worth \$5 million – on e-learning courses on AI, cybersecurity and software development skills developed with leading experts from IBM, Microsoft and Meta across 29 Commonwealth countries.

Other partnerships

The Secretariat's partnerships with OBREAL Global, the Association of African Universities and Symbiosis International University on the Effective AI Incubator for Youth is valued at \$2 million, and additional joint projects with Intel on Digital Readiness for the Public Sector, the AI Academy and the AI Policy Toolkit at a combined \$11 million. The Secretariat also has a further \$6.7 million in the pipeline as part of its partnership with the DLT Science Foundation on blockchain for development.

The Centre for Resilience and Sustainable Development

The Commonwealth Secretariat's partnership with the University of Cambridge's Centre for Resilience and Sustainable Development (CRSD) is a ground-breaking action-research project which builds on the Secretariat's expertise in supporting SIDS with

climate finance and public debt by bridging the evidence gap on creating sustainable, investable projects. These will help improve socio-economic resilience in the post-COVID-19 era.

In 2022, while still in its research phase, the project secured more than \$10 million in private financing – a 50-fold return on investment. It has engaged more than 500 experts, 200 policymakers and 5,000 citizens, and provided Commonwealth countries with cutting-edge data instruments such as the Political Economic Resilience Index (PERI) and the Cambridge-Commonwealth Sustainable Investment Marker (CSIM).

The project's final report introduced the pioneering Common Pool Asset Structuring Strategy (COMPASS), a financial model designed to attract sustainable investment towards youth and nature. The Secretariat and the CRSD are now pursuing the implementing of COMPASS in order to reshape the financial landscape and contribute to a sustainable future for SIDS.

6.3 Accredited Organisations

"Accredited organisations have done much to support Commonwealth countries, in the face of grave challenges facing our world, from the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, to the impacts of climate change. Partnership between the public, private, and non-profit sectors will be important for the Commonwealth to meet and overcome the numerous difficulties it will confront in future years."

Secretary-General, foreword to *The Contribution of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations to Advancing the Commonwealth Charter: An Independent Study*, October 2023

The 93 Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (AOs) – which span associated organisations, civil society, professional bodies, academic institutions and other networks – are essential parts of the Commonwealth family. They advance the values

and principles of the Commonwealth Charter and positively impact millions of lives across numerous sectors.²

According to an independent study commissioned by the Secretariat and published in October 2023,³ AOs play a key role in 'popularising' the Commonwealth and reaching important and influential constituencies. The study found that AOs often respond to emerging issues and crises in nimble and rapid ways – one example is the support provided by the Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work, the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League and other AOs to the Government of

² For a full list of Commonwealth AOs see thecommonwealth.org/organisations.

³ Commonwealth Secretariat (2023) *The Contribution of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations to Advancing the Commonwealth Charter*. <https://thecommonwealth.org/publications/contribution-commonwealth-accredited-organisations-advancing-commonwealth-charter>



Commonwealth Day celebrations, London, March 2024

Table 6.2. Commonwealth Accredited Organisations reporting annual expenditure in excess of £1 million, 2022

Accredited Organisation	Expenditure
Rotary International	£55.6m
Sight Savers International	£53.2m
Chartered Insurance Institute	£35.7m
Royal Commonwealth Ex-Services League	£4.1m
The Institute of Certified Bookkeepers	£4.0m
Towards Zero Foundation	£3.3m
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association	£1.8m
Association of International Accountants	£1.6m
Association of Commonwealth Universities	£1.2m
Total	£160.5m

Malawi in the wake of Cyclone Freddy in 2023. They also bring additional resources and partners into the Commonwealth's sphere.

That study found that, in 2022, eight AOs' expenditures exceeded £1 million (see table A.2 above), which gives a sense of the scale of resources that they contribute to furthering the Commonwealth's objectives and values. To this must be added the international reach, voluntary effort and specialist knowledge that they bring to bear on our shared priorities, and their dissemination of the Commonwealth 'brand', values and principles among specialist groups 'from accountants to vets' and among civil society more widely.⁴

4 Ibid.



Speakers at the Commonwealth People's Forum during CHOGM 2022, Kigali, Rwanda, June 2022

6.4 Memoranda of Understanding

The below list details all of the 75 memoranda of understanding that the Commonwealth Secretariat has signed since the Secretary-General took office in 2016.

2016

B Team Headquarters Inc

British Council

Government of Malta, on the Establishment of the Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence

Royal Society

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

2017

Association of Commonwealth Universities

Central Bank of The Bahamas

Cloudburst Foundation

Department for International Development, United Kingdom

Khalili Foundation

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

University of Southampton

2018

Bangladesh Open University

British Red Cross Society

Caribbean Community Secretariat

CARICOM Development Fund

Commonwealth Education Partnership for Sustainable Development

Daffodil International University

Department for International Development, United Kingdom

Foundation for the Graduate Institute of Internal and Development Studies on behalf of the Small Arms Survey

Global Centre on Cooperative Security

Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance

International Trade Centre

Nekton Foundation

University of Durham, UK

United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation

United Nations System Staff College

University of the West Indies (St. Augustine Campus)

World Bank

World Trade Organization, acting on behalf of the Executive Secretariat for the Enhanced Integrated Framework

2019

African Institute for Mathematical Sciences - Next Einstein Initiative Foundation

Bloomberg Philanthropies

Global Innovation and Technology Alliance

International Solar Alliance

Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector within the Parliamentary Secretariat for Youth, Sport and Voluntary Organisation of the Republic of Malta

Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Commission

NO MORE Foundation

South Australian Cricket Association and Peace at the Crease

Swinburne University of Technology

United Nations

United Nations Environment Programme

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Vulcan Inc.

Wilton Park Executive Agency

World Leadership Alliance Club De Madrid

2020

African Development Bank and African Development Fund

GHD Australia Pty Ltd and the Swiss Academy of Development

GSM Association

National Youth Agency

United Nations Development Programme (Multi Country Office, Jamaica)

United Nations Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries

Shipping Deputy Ministry (Cyprus) and the Cyprus Marine and Maritime Institute

Space Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan under the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport of the Republic of Azerbaijan

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and The Pacific

United Nations Industrial Development Organization

2021

African Union Development Agency - New partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) and United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

Arizona State University

International Computing Centre

2022

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture

International Hydropower Association

International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation

International Maritime Organization

Islamic Development Bank

PATH

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

World Health Organization

World Trade Organization

2023

Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund

AGRA

Khalili Foundation

National Youth Agency

Qatar Foundation

2024

Alliance for Rural Electrification

Common Earth and Cloudburst Foundation

Heartfulness Institute

7

Transparency, Accountability and Financial Performance





Annual Commonwealth
Finance Ministers
Meeting
Washington DC, Thursday 10 October 2019
The Commonwealth

SAMOA

ST VINCENT AND THE GARDINERS

SAINT LUCIA

The Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting, Washington D.C., October 2019

7. Transparency, Accountability and Financial Performance

7.1 Transparency and Accountability

Under the Secretary-General's tenure, the Secretariat has been fully committed to, and has increasingly prioritised, accountability and transparency in achieving its mission and mandates, and in the use of member and donor funding.

External audits

The Secretariat prepares regular financial statements for its three funds – the Commonwealth Secretariat (Comsec), the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), and the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) – in accordance with International Public Sector Accounting Standards. For over a decade, the Secretariat has continued to receive unqualified, signed audited financial statements for each of these funds.

Internal audits

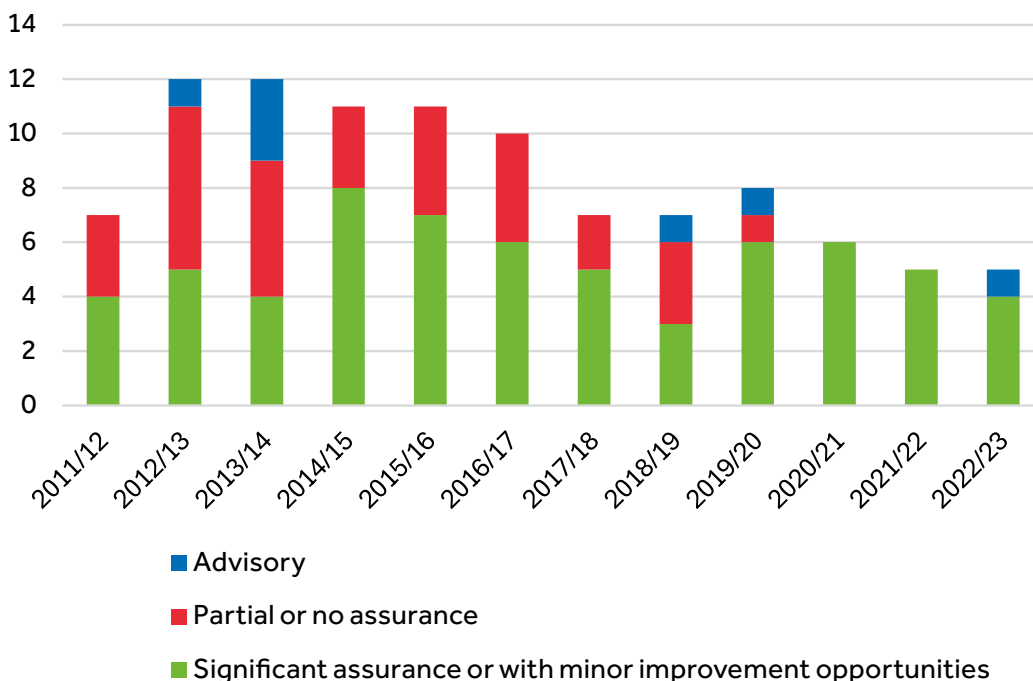
The Secretariat has an internal audit programme to provide independent, objective assurance to Senior Management, the Audit and Risk Committee and the Board of Governors on Governance, Risk and Control. The internal audit programme is performed by externally appointed auditors.

Over the last seven years the internal auditors have conducted 48 audits and reviews, covering 34 different areas. Of the audits conducted, 78 per cent received a green rating of 'significant assurance or with minor improvement opportunities'.

Enterprise Risk Management

The Secretariat continues to improve organisational risk maturity and embed enterprise risk management systems within the organisation. This has led to the development of an online risk management system to better manage divisional

Figure 7.1: Audit ratings, 2011/12–2022/23*



*Note: the final report of the 2023/2024 Internal Audit remained under review at the time of writing.

and strategic risk registers as well as the delivery of a range of enterprise risk management training, including on the policy.

Procurement

The Secretariat has a robust procurement framework in place to support the implementation and delivery of the Secretariat's Strategic Plan, ensuring value for money; fairness, integrity and transparency; and effective competition.

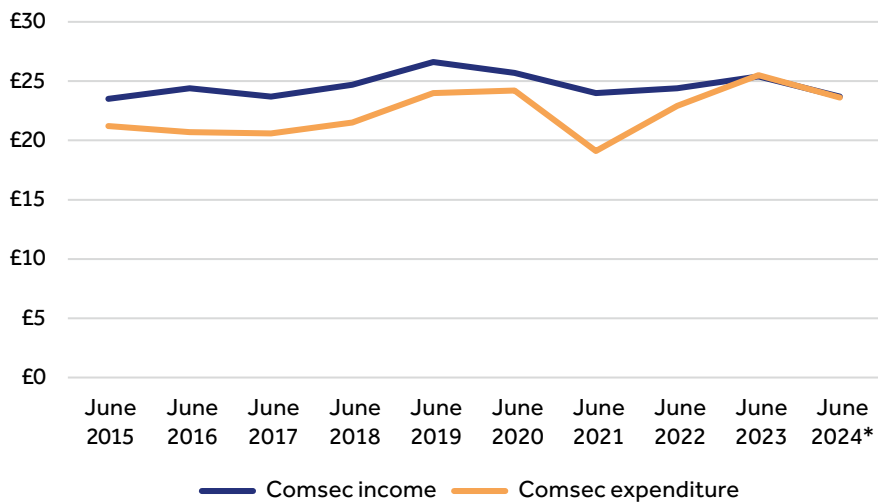
7.2 Financial Performance and Sustainability

The Secretariat is dedicated to prioritising the delivery of mandates from Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, in alignment with agreed Strategic Plan outcomes. The Secretariat’s financial performance remains strong and has been kept in line with the budget over past 10 years.

Summary of Income and Expenditure

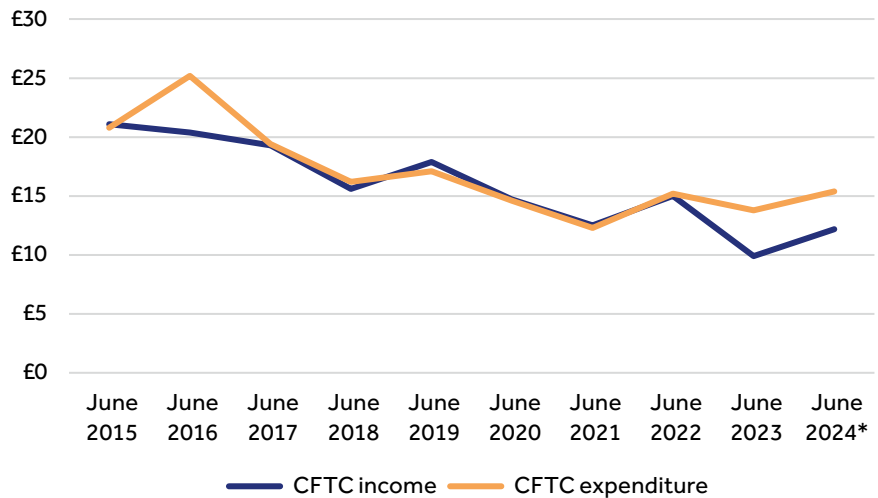
Despite declining funding in CFTC, the Secretariat has maintained the delivery of agreed strategic outcomes. Over the 10-year period June 2015–June 2024, ability to spend versus income received is 96 per cent, compared to the target 95 per cent.

Figure 7.2a: Ability to spend versus income (GBP, millions), Comsec fund, June 2015–June 2024*



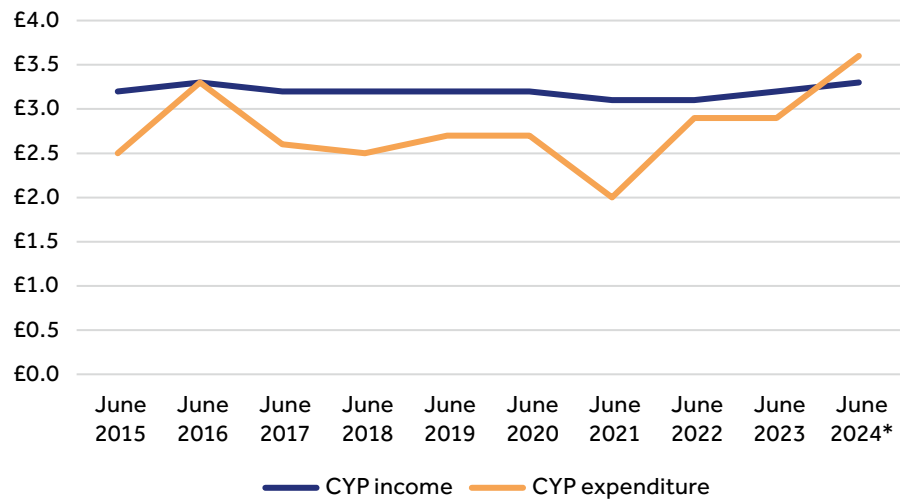
*Note: June 2024 figures are forecasts only.

Figure 7.2b: Ability to spend versus income (GBP, millions), CFTC fund, June 2015–June 2024*



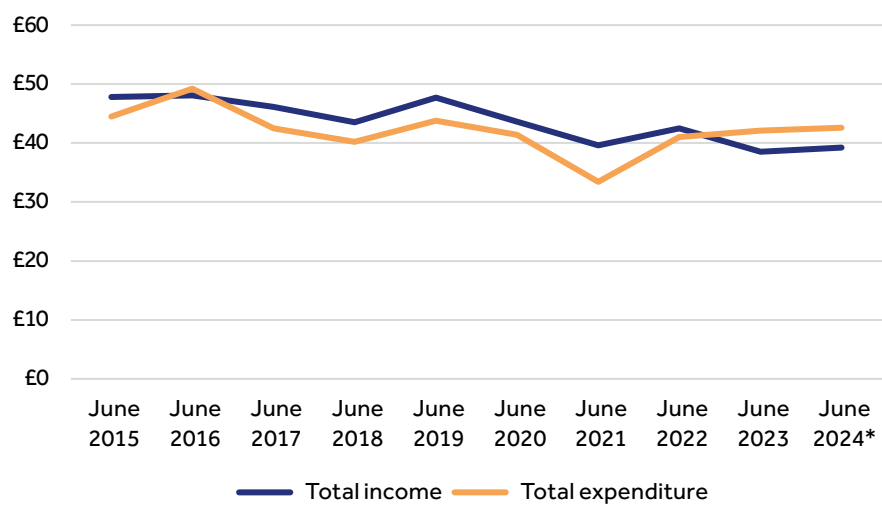
*Note: June 2024 figures are forecasts only.

Figure 7.2c: Ability to spend versus income (GBP, millions), CYP fund, June 2015–June 2024*



*Note: June 2024 figures are forecasts only.

Figure 7.2d: Ability to spend versus income (GBP, millions), all funds, June 2015–June 2024*



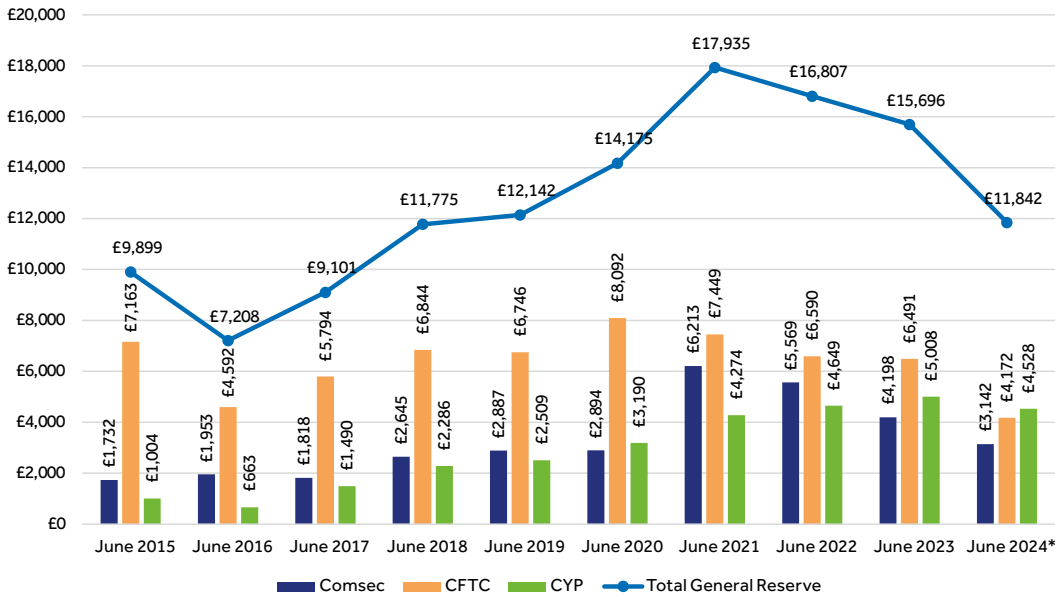
*Note: June 2024 figures are forecasts only.

General reserve

The general reserve is carried forward after accounting for contributions, other sources of income and expenses for all programme-related and administrative categories. It is unrestricted and available for general purpose.

The projected general reserve as of June 2024 was £11.8 million. This represents a 20 per cent increase relative to its £9.9 million level in June 2015.

Figure 7.3: General reserve, and reserve by fund (GBP, thousands), June 2015–June 2024*



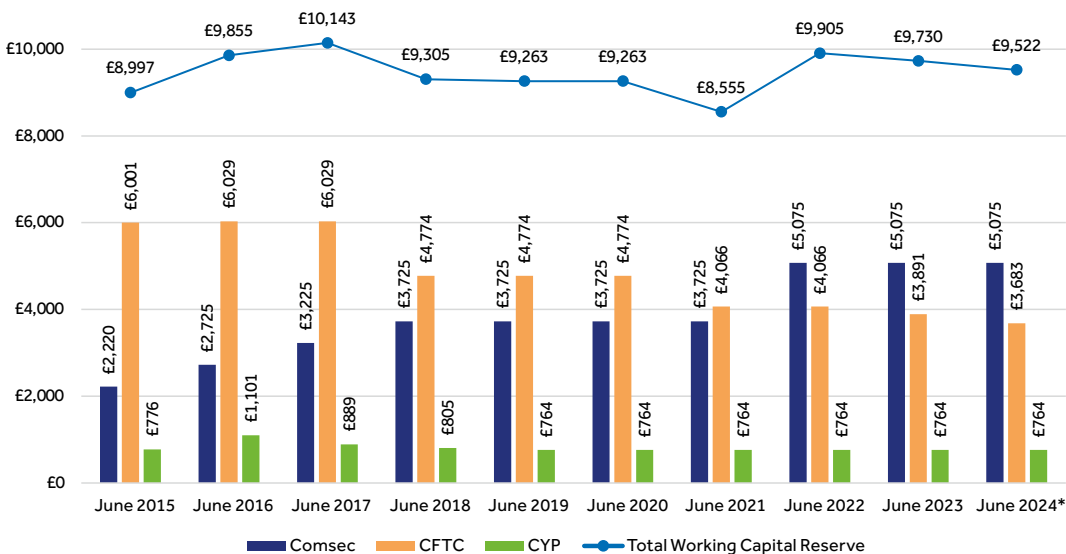
*Note: June 2024 figures are forecasts only.

Working capital reserve

The working capital reserve, known as the operational fund, is for unexpected situations and to protect the Secretariat against temporary

liquidity constraints. The projected working capital reserve in June 2024 was £9.5 million, compared to £9.0 million in June 2015 – a 6 per cent increase over that 10-year period.

Figure 7.4: Working capital reserves, and breakdown by fund (GBP, thousands), June 2015–June 2024*

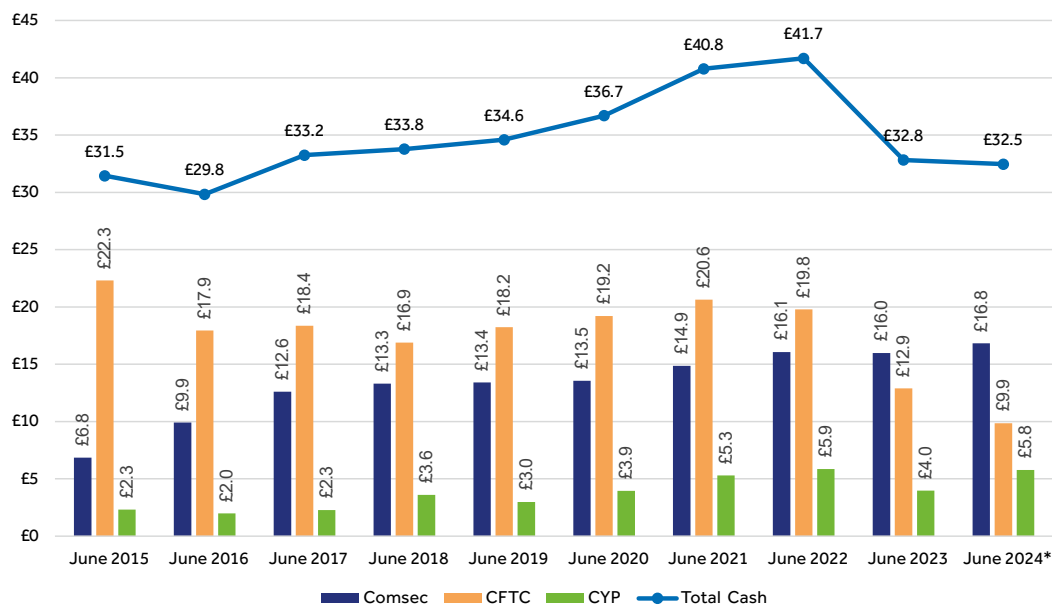


*Note: June 2024 figures are forecasts only.

Cash and investment

The Secretariat's cash and investment balance remains healthy, and is closely managed on a daily basis. The projected cash balance as of 30 June 2024 was £32.5 million, an increase of 3 per cent compared to the balance in June 2015.

Figure 7.5: Cash and investment balance, and breakdown by fund (GBP, millions), June 2015–June 2024*



*Note: Figures for 2015–2023 are extracted from audit financial statements. Figures for 2024 are projected on the basis of management accounts prior to year-end adjustments.

8

Awards and Honours 2016–2024





This page: the Secretary-General with her Global Africa
Champion Award in Accra, Ghana, January 2024
Previous page, top: receiving the Kenyan Gender
Equality Award, Nairobi, Kenya, 8 March 2021; bottom:
at the ceremony for the Heartfulness Institute's
Heartfulness Changemaker Award at Kanha Shanti
Vanam, India

8. Awards and Honours, 2016–2024

The Secretary-General has, throughout her distinguished career in law, government and diplomacy, established a number of 'firsts'. In 2007 she became the first woman to be appointed Attorney General of the UK since the creation of the office in 1315; and in 2015, she was elected as the first woman Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

Over her eight-year term as Secretary General she has continued to be a trailblazer through the numerous awards and honours she has received from governments, universities, intergovernmental organisations, charities, social enterprises and *Vogue* magazine. Many of these accolades have recognised her leadership on gender equality and the empowerment of women; on innovation and science; on peace and justice; on development; and on the advancement of young people.

To cite just one example, in 2023 she became the first Black woman, and the first Caribbean, Dominican and British person, to receive the University of California, Berkeley's prestigious Global Leadership Award in recognition of her exceptional contributions to improving lives through innovation and technology.

The selection of honours listed below and overleaf are testament to the global prominence and impact of the Commonwealth, and the quality of our work and relationship-building, under the Secretary-General's leadership.

"This prestigious award is... a poignant reminder of the responsibility that accompanies such honours. It propels me to work even harder, to continue doing what I believe I do best – serving humanity."

The Secretary-General, upon receiving the Global African Champion Award, January 2024

Awards received, 2016–2022

Award/honour	Awarding body	Date
GG2 Leadership Awards: Woman of the Year	Asian Media & Marketing Group	October 2016
Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University	Griffith University, Australia	January 2018
Honorary Doctor of Law Degree	University of Roehampton, UK	July 2018
Distinguished Champion Award	WEConnect International	April 2019
Recognition Award for work on gender equality and the empowerment of women in Kenya and the Commonwealth	Ministry of Public Service and Gender, Kenya	March 2021
Eminent Caribbean Jurists Award for Pioneering Caribbean Women Jurists	Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) Academy for Law	March 2021
Lifetime Achievement Award	Amity Group, Amity University, India	April 2022
Lifetime Achievement Award and the Global Justice Medal	O.P. Jindal Global University, India	June 2022



Above: receiving a Lifetime Achievement Award and Justice Medal from O.P. Jindal Global University, New Delhi, India, August 2022; inset: with colleagues at the ceremony for the UC Berkeley Award for Global Leadership, April 2023.



Awards received, 2023–present

Award/honour	Awarding body	Date
UC Berkeley Award for Global Leadership	University of California, Berkeley	April 2023
Climate Resilience Leader	Sustainable Development Policy Institute	August 2024
Ranked #2 on <i>Vogue's</i> 25 Most Powerful Women in Britain list	<i>Vogue</i> magazine	August 2023
GUBA Exemplary Leadership Award	Grow, Unite, Build Africa (GUBA)	September 2023
Nobles of Commonwealth Nations Award	World Book of Records	September 2023
Lifetime Achievement Award	Caribbean Global Awards	September 2023
Heartfulness Change Maker Award	Heartfulness Institute	January 2024
Sir Arthur Cotton Innovation Award 2024	Chaitanya Group	January 2024
Global Africa Champion Award	Africa Prosperity Network	January 2024
2024 Co-Founders Award	LINKS	June 2024
CARICOM Day 2024	CARICOM	July 2024
EmpowHER Council Award – Woman of Legacy, Inspiration & Power Award 2024	World Heritage Cultural Center, USA	September 2024



Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom
thecommonwealth.org

