

The Commonwealth

Leading Through Change

From Renewal to Results

Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, 2026



Leading Through Change

From Renewal to Results



The Commonwealth

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Foreword

56
members

2.7 billion
people

60%
of Commonwealth population under 30

33
small island developing states

103
accredited organisations

3
intergovernmental organisations

Eighteen months ago, Commonwealth leaders entrusted me with a mandate to renew our institution so it could serve our countries with greater focus, urgency and transformative effect. I accepted that responsibility with humility and a conviction, honed as Ghana's Foreign Minister, that nations prosper when they work together.

Since taking office, that conviction has deepened. The international order, which had not delivered the stability, fairness, opportunity, growth and prosperity our people in the developing world expected, no longer works for any of our countries. Now even the predictability that has been its strength is breaking down. Climate shocks erase years of development. Debt blocks investment. Conflict disrupts supplies of food and energy. We are increasingly exposed to forces no nation can control alone.

For many, the instinctive response is retreat: to raise barriers and narrow our horizons. For some, the solution is to recreate a more democratic version of the old system, with winners and losers. It is understandable, but it mistakes the nature of the problem. Interdependence cannot be repealed. Protectionism may promise control, but in practice it fragments markets, raises costs and leaves countries more vulnerable to decisions taken elsewhere.

The choice is not between national strength and international co-operation. Properly organised, co-operation is how nations build strength. The question is whether the terms of that co-operation are fair, purposeful and capable of delivering.

This is where the Commonwealth has a distinctive role. Our 56 countries span every region and stage of development but meet on equal terms. Our shared values, institutions and networks – built across more than seven decades – create trust. When we organise that trust behind common priorities, we can shape rules, unlock investment and widen the choices available to every member.

Members asked for focus, discipline and results. Together, we are responding. Our nations agreed a new Strategic Plan centred on democratic, economic and environmental resilience, with young people, women and small and vulnerable states at its heart. We are reshaping the Secretariat around delivery and accountability, focusing meetings on outcomes and building partnerships that bring expertise and investment to national priorities.

Early results show the progress we are making. We have supported nine member countries on electoral integrity. Intra-Commonwealth trade is increasing. This year alone, the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub has mobilised almost US$100 million and supported the approval of 15 projects. Across our work, ministers are turning agreement into action.

These results belong to a wide partnership. Member governments set the direction; our institutions and networks bring experience, innovation and reach; partners add capital and capability. My responsibility is to bring those strengths together and ensure that co-operation leads to resilience and shared prosperity across the Commonwealth.

As we meet in Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth is ready for the next phase. We have laid stronger foundations. Now we must use them to promote democracy, expand trade and investment, secure fairer finance and lead global action for those most exposed to climate change. The progress outlined in this report shows that the means to achieve these ambitions exist across our family – our task is to organise them behind a common purpose.

Our Commonwealth endures because its purpose reaches beyond the interests of any one government or generation. It has never stood still. Each set of leaders has renewed it, drawing fresh strength from shared values, common interests and the capacity of sovereign nations to act together while remaining proudly independent. Those bonds have carried us through profound change.

Today, stronger purpose and deeper partnerships are creating fresh momentum across our family. We must sustain it and fulfil the Commonwealth's potential, matching our effort to the urgency of this moment – with the fortitude to withstand the pressures of our age and the confidence to shape what comes next.

At a time when the choices available to many countries are narrowing, our purpose is to widen them. That progress lies within our power. I look forward to achieving it with you.

The Hon. Shirley Botchwey,
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

1. The Commonwealth Challenge



'The Commonwealth will deepen co-operation within its family of nations to strengthen democratic resilience, expand economic opportunity, respond to climate and ocean challenges and ensure that women and young people are at heart of our transformative agenda.'

The Secretary-General assumed office at a moment of profound global disruption. Across the world, the rules-based international order is under strain, geopolitical competition is reshaping alliances, multilateralism is increasingly fragmented and global trade and economic co-operation are becoming more uncertain. Trust in institutions is declining, while climate change, debt pressures, inequality, technological disruption and persistent conflicts are creating new risks and vulnerabilities for countries across the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth, like many international institutions, confronts questions about relevance, visibility and impact, as well as a sharp global contraction in development assistance. Shrinking or stalled economic growth, reversible or unsustainable development, cyclical financial crises and the growing impact of climate change, as well as conflict-induced increases in defence spending, expose the limits of governments and multilateral institutions in responding to the needs and expectations of our 2.7 billion population. As confidence shrinks globally and uncertainty fuels nativism and extremism, the urgency of addressing the structural limitations of the global financial and governance architecture becomes a Commonwealth challenge.

United by common values and a history of reaching consensus on the most intractable issues, the Commonwealth sees an opportunity to rise above the global fractures by deepening co-operation within its family of nations to strengthen democratic resilience, expand economic opportunity, respond to climate and ocean challenges and ensure that women and young people are at heart of our transformative agenda.

This is the leadership challenge of our time. As Secretary-General not only of an institution but of a family of nations and citizens, the Hon. Shirley Botchwey has charted a path that brings together governments, multilateral organisations, ministries, leaders, civil society, businesses and young people around shared solutions. Her ambition is to ensure that the lessons of today guide our co-operation for tomorrow: preparing our young people for the world of work and entrepreneurship; expanding intra-Commonwealth trade and high impact investments to create a market that drives prosperity and Commonwealth business expansion; and, above all, responding fully to the climate ambition of all our member countries and safeguarding our small island states. The goal is a Commonwealth where the success of each member country is the success of all member countries – putting the model of the future that world leaders agreed to at the United Nations in 2024 into practice.

2. From Commitments to Reforms



The Secretary-General assumed office on 1 April 2025 with a clear mandate from Commonwealth Heads of Government: to renew the relevance, impact and effectiveness of the Commonwealth and ensure its institutions are equipped to respond to the evolving needs and aspirations of its people. She established **six leadership commitments** to guide the Commonwealth's future direction, building on the Commonwealth's enduring strengths while responding to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

1. **Turning Commonwealth Dialogue into Collective Action**
   Ensuring that Commonwealth co-operation delivers practical benefits and measurable outcomes for citizens.
2. **Renewing Trust in Democratic Governance**
   Promoting peaceful, accountable and inclusive societies underpinned by democratic values and the rule of law.
3. **Expanding Opportunity and Shared Prosperity**
   Advancing inclusive growth, trade, investment and economic resilience, while championing reforms to debt treatment and access to concessional finance.
4. **Championing Climate, Ocean and Small State Resilience**
   Elevating the priorities of vulnerable member countries and accelerating action on climate finance, ocean governance and environmental resilience.
5. **Investing in Future Generations**
   Ensuring that young people, especially girls, are active participants in shaping Commonwealth opportunities and institutions.
6. **Building New Partnerships for Greater Impact**
   Mobilising governments, business, philanthropy, civil society and international partners around shared Commonwealth priorities.

This reform is both an institutional and a global imperative, ensuring that the Commonwealth remains a credible champion of multilateral co-operation, collective action and shared values at a time when geopolitical tensions and fragmentation are testing international unity.

These commitments have been translated into action through three interconnected reform agendas.

Firstly, **a new strategic direction** has been established through the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025-2030, providing a clearer framework for prioritisation, delivery and accountability across the organisation.

Secondly, **a renewed approach to Commonwealth convening** is being advanced through the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The new format and investment- and partnership-focused approach is being delivered across ministerial meetings to ensure they are platforms of catalytic action.

Finally, **a programme of governance and institutional reform** is modernising the Secretariat through new organisational structures, strengthened performance and accountability frameworks, enhanced monitoring and evaluation systems and a renewed focus on impact and results. This includes reforms to workforce planning and communications, and a new approach to resource mobilisation that seeks to leverage partnerships with philanthropy, development finance institutions and the private sector to augment traditional funding sources.

Significant progress has already been achieved across all three areas. Together, these reforms are helping build a stronger, more agile and more accountable Commonwealth, better positioned to deliver on its commitments and respond to the priorities of its members.

3. Building Bridges, Shaping Change

The Secretary-General recognised that meaningful and lasting change could only be shaped by the voices, priorities and aspirations of Commonwealth member countries. She therefore embarked on an ambitious programme of outreach across every region of the Commonwealth, engaging governments, institutions, partners, civil society, youth and business leaders. These engagements helped identify shared priorities, strengthen relationships, build consensus around the Commonwealth's renewal and guide the development of a new strategic direction for the Secretariat.

The Secretary-General's outreach has directly informed institutional reform, reinvigorated partnerships across the Commonwealth family and reinforced the Secretariat's commitment to delivering practical, impactful and relevant support. The milestones below are not an exhaustive account of this engagement, but rather illustrative examples of the Secretary-General's leadership and focus on delivery, and how these have contributed to advancing the Commonwealth's collective priorities and ambitions.

Select Milestones

- **Commonwealth Business Summit in Namibia** — JUN 2025
  Launched during the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting, this inaugural summit explored investment opportunities, digital transformation and the strengthening of supply chains.
- **Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting, Fiji** — FEB 2026
  Convened Law Ministers and Attorney-Generals with 250 delegates from 36 countries; agreed the Nadi Declaration on Democratic Resilience and Participation.
- **CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting, St Kitts and Nevis** — FEB 2026
  The Secretary-General delivered a key statement.
- **26th Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting, UK** — MAR 2026
  Introduced a new 'retreat' format, and was widely attended.
- **Commonwealth Health Co-ordination Meeting, Switzerland** — MAY 2026
  Focused on 'Shaping the Future of Cancer', held at the World Health Organisation.
- **Commonwealth Oceans Ministers Roundtable, Kenya** — JUN 2026
  Held in the wings of the Our Ocean Conference; announced Commonwealth Blue Charter Incubator grants.
- **12th Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting, UK** — JUL 2026
  Delivered in partnership with Commonwealth Sports, on the margins of the 23rd Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Note: this list is a selection of highlights rather than an exhaustive list of engagements.

4. Strategy in Action

A defining feature of the Secretary-General's first year has been a commitment to Commonwealth renewal. Within this broader context, she has led the transformation of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Guided by extensive consultation with member countries and informed by the stewardship of the Board of Governors, the Secretariat developed the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025–2030.

Responding directly to calls from member countries for more focused and targeted support, the Plan prioritises three areas where the Commonwealth can deliver distinctive value:

- **democratic resilience,** through inclusive governance (page 15)
- **economic resilience,** through stronger market participation and equitable access to opportunity (page 17)
- **environmental resilience,** through climate action, ocean governance, energy transition and sustainable natural resource management (page 19)

The Plan also recognises that resilience depends on investing in people. It embeds the needs of women, young people, small states and vulnerable countries across all areas of work, while placing greater emphasis on partnerships as a catalyst for delivery and impact.

The following sections highlight early progress across these priorities and demonstrate how the Secretary-General's commitments are being translated into tangible outcomes for member countries and citizens across the Commonwealth.

New and renewed partnerships

During the Secretary-General's tenure, the Secretariat has signed memoranda of understanding with the following partners:

- Singapore International Mediation Centre
- International Trade Centre
- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure
- United Nations Office for Outer Space
- World Health Organisation.

5. Democratic Resilience



The Commonwealth is supporting member countries to navigate complex political challenges, build stronger democratic institutions, protect civic space, strengthen electoral integrity and uphold the rule of law and human rights.

Drawing on the Commonwealth's established strengths, the Secretary-General has recalibrated its approach. Rather than focusing solely on election events, we are offering targeted support in pre- and post-election contexts. This leverages the leadership of specialist good offices envoys to facilitate quiet diplomacy, while helping strengthen the institutional foundations on which resilient democracies depend. It focuses resources on areas in which the Commonwealth can offer unique value and partners can augment impact. Early successes suggest that collaboration with the United Nations and regional bodies are ensuring that democratic participation is sustained over the longer term.

Supporting Electoral Integrity

Demand for Commonwealth electoral assistance remains strong: between October 2025 and June 2026, support was provided to **nine member countries**, the highest level of electoral engagement post-COVID. This reflects growing confidence in the Commonwealth's **whole-of-electoral-cycle approach**, which combines electoral observation, technical assistance, institutional strengthening and post-election follow-up to support more credible, inclusive and resilient electoral systems.

To strengthen its ability to anticipate risks and support member countries more effectively, the Secretariat has made early warning a major component of its governance agenda. It will initiate development of a Commonwealth Democratic Resilience Index – a practical, evidence-based tool that will help governments identify strengths, vulnerabilities and emerging pressures within democratic systems

Commonwealth Convenings

The Commonwealth has revitalised its unique convening mechanisms. The Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting secured one of its highest ever attendances, and trialled a unique retreat format when it was hosted by the United Kingdom in the wings of 2026 Commonwealth Day celebrations.

The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group has met seven times since the 2024 CHOGM and deliberated on a range of matters. An informal working group of the Board of Governors, with South Africa as chair, reviewed the Secretary-General's proposals for reforming Commonwealth membership procedures.

The 2026 Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Fiji demonstrated how Commonwealth convening can translate into tangible outcomes. Ministers:

- reaffirmed the right of states to **maintain their maritime zones** regardless of climate-change-related sea-level rise
- adopted the **Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan**, providing a framework for advancing inclusion and participation
- endorsed the **Nadi Declaration on Democratic Resilience and Participation**, which reaffirms the importance of accountable institutions
- agreed a **Model Law on Stablecoins** as a shared framework for regulating emerging digital financial instruments.

6. Economic Resilience



The Secretary-General has sought to leverage the Commonwealth Advantage to unlock trade, investment and inclusive economic opportunity at a time when many Commonwealth nations face high debt burdens, unfavourable terms, rising financing costs and increasing competition for capital.

Mobilising Investment for Shared Prosperity

Recognising that the public sector alone cannot meet the challenges of our times, the Secretariat's leadership has strengthened engagement with investors, development finance institutions, the private sector and strategic partners.

This enabled the Secretary-General to lead the inaugural Commonwealth Business Summit in Namibia, in the wings of 2025 Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting in Namibia. This landmark event, a collaboration with the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, brought together business leaders, policymakers and trade experts from across the Commonwealth. They explored investment opportunities, digital transformation and the strengthening of supply chains to drive sustainable growth.

The Secretariat brokered two high-profile platforms for Commonwealth investments.

- The Commonwealth Investor Network was launched in March 2026. The first phase presented micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) from across 25 small island developing states (SIDS). The second phase launched in September 2026.
- The Commonwealth co-hosted Invest London 2026 with Reuters, where several member countries were able to present critical infrastructure projects to investors.

The Secretariat has engaged with the International Monetary Fund, African Development Bank and Asian Development Bank to deepen its support to members on debt transparency and restructuring, and to promote broader adoption of the Commonwealth's field-leading Meridian public debt management system.

Countries receiving debt management technical assistance:

41
members

7
non-members

Member country debt managed in Meridian in 2025:

US$4.2 trillion

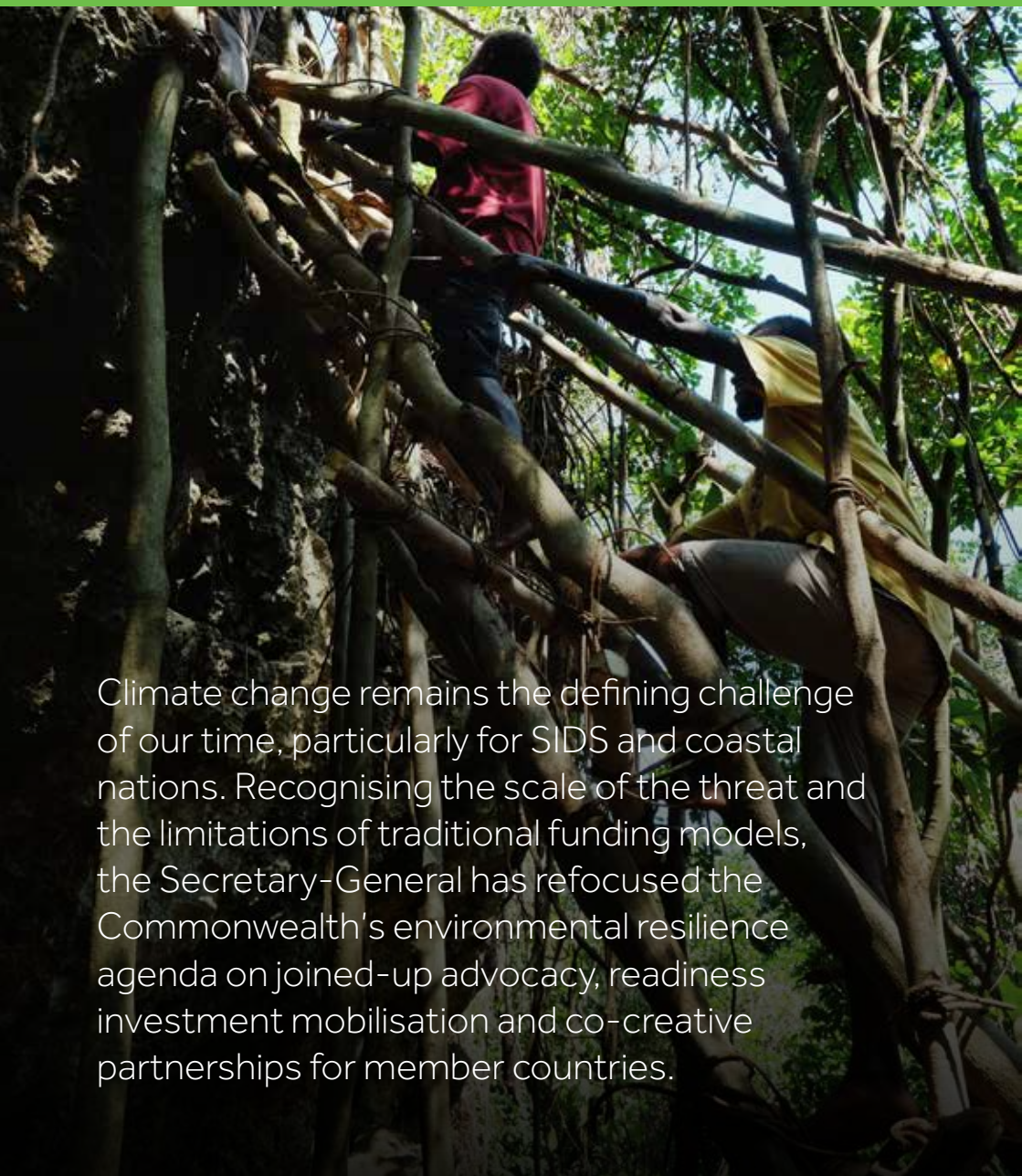
By 2030 this figure is set to grow to

US$6.1 trillion

Policy support, legal advice and partnership building, as well as a new Commonwealth Trade Portal, aim to support small states to eliminate trade barriers and capitalise on the Commonwealth Trade advantage; improve access to finance and markets for MSMEs and tackle the digital divide that continues to constrain youth employability, entrepreneurship and participation in modern economies.

Together, these initiatives reflect a decisive shift towards practical action, investment mobilisation and partnership-led solutions that strengthen economic resilience, unlock opportunity and support the long-term prosperity of Commonwealth nations.

7. Environmental Resilience



Climate change remains the defining challenge of our time, particularly for SIDS and coastal nations. Recognising the scale of the threat and the limitations of traditional funding models, the Secretary-General has refocused the Commonwealth's environmental resilience agenda on joined-up advocacy, readiness investment mobilisation and co-creative partnerships for member countries.

The Secretary-General has sharpened the Commonwealth's focus on delivering against the 2024 Apia Ocean Declaration by accelerating efforts on the blue economy and ocean governance, hosting the first Commonwealth Ocean Ministers Roundtable in Kenya in June 2026. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of collective Commonwealth action and new partnerships to advance the interests of coastal and small island states and support long-term ocean resilience. They also agreed to strengthen collaboration on the BBNJ Agreement (or High Seas Treaty), sustainable ocean management and blue finance – which the Secretariat has taken forward through the *Commonwealth Guide on Blue Bond Issuance*, which guides member countries through innovative blended funding models.

A key priority has been renewal of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH), which over 10 years has helped member countries secure more than US$594 million in climate finance. CCFAH has increased its advisory capacity, fostered national collaboration across climate actors, and initiated engagement with the domestic and international market actors. This year the Hub mobilised a further US$99.47 million and supported the approval of 15 climate projects.

New partnerships – with organisations such as the Sustainable Markets Initiative, the Global Environment Facility, the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, CAF and OpenAg, among others – are expanding the Commonwealth's capacity to support member countries, and creating new opportunities for investment in climate adaptation, ocean protection and energy resilience. The Commonwealth has also strengthened its role as a platform for advocacy through a range of dialogues, including at London Climate Action Week and at COP31 in Belém, Brazil.

Together, these efforts are helping position the Commonwealth as a stronger voice for vulnerable countries and a more effective catalyst for climate, ocean and energy action.

US$644.7 million
mobilised by CCFAH for projects across 19 countries and two regional initiatives

51
CCFAH advisers and managers deployed to member countries

30
countries are receiving support on energy transition and sustainable use of natural resources from the Secretariat

38
Commonwealth countries have ratified the BBNJ Agreement

The Commonwealth–COP29 Joint Declaration, has unlocked US$10 million for climate adaptation, ocean protection and sustainable energy investment in Commonwealth SIDS. This support is also strengthening Commonwealth countries' capacities to utilise earth observation, space data and artificial intelligence (AI) for climate action and disaster risk management.

8. Social Resilience



The Secretary-General's whole-of-Commonwealth approach recognises that the challenges facing young people, women, small states and vulnerable communities, including people with disabilities, are interconnected and cut across every aspect of the Secretariat's work. As a result, social resilience is embedded across the Commonwealth's democratic, economic and environmental pillars, ensuring that investment in people, inclusion and wellbeing remains central to building resilient societies and sustainable development.

The key to this approach is the reorientation of the **Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)** – the Commonwealth's longest-standing youth development platform – towards higher-impact policy engagement, systems change and youth participation. The CYP will ensure that young people are not only beneficiaries of development but active partners in shaping the Commonwealth's future.

The Commonwealth has also strengthened collaboration across its wider ecosystem, bringing together Commonwealth Accredited Organisations, governments, multilateral agencies and private sector partners around shared priorities. This was showcased through the **Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting**, convened alongside the Commonwealth Games, and the inaugural **Commonwealth Health Co-ordination Meeting**, aligned with the World Health Assembly.

Preparations for the **2026 Commonwealth Youth Forum** and **Commonwealth Women's Forum** have brought together key partners including women's organisations and leaders, the Commonwealth Youth Council and the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to ensure that young people help shape the Forum's agenda and policy outcomes.

The Commonwealth's commitment to gender equality has also continued through engagement with national women's ministries and stakeholders and targeted work on women's economic empowerment, climate justice and support for women-owned businesses.

Taken together, these efforts evidence a decisive shift towards mainstreaming youth, gender and vulnerability considerations across all of the Secretariat's areas of work, ensuring that policies and partnerships deliver meaningful opportunities and lasting benefits for the Commonwealth's 2.7 billion citizens.

Small states

The **Commonwealth Small States Office** (CSSO) in Geneva and New York provides a platform for small states to advance their interests within multilateral agencies. In Geneva, the CSSO continued to support small states' missions through trade and human rights advisory assistance to strengthen their capacity, voice and visibility in UN human rights mechanisms as well as World Trade Organisation engagements.

Members have appreciated the CSSO's valuable support, which elevates small states' positions in global fora. Australia, the UK, New Zealand, India, Singapore, Malaysia and Cyprus continue to support this Commonwealth commitment to support small and vulnerable states.

The latest editions of the *Small States Bulletin* and the *Small States Economic Review*, covering the latest findings and analysis from across the Commonwealth, were published in 2026.

The CSSO hosts:

7

resident missions, including the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), in Geneva

11

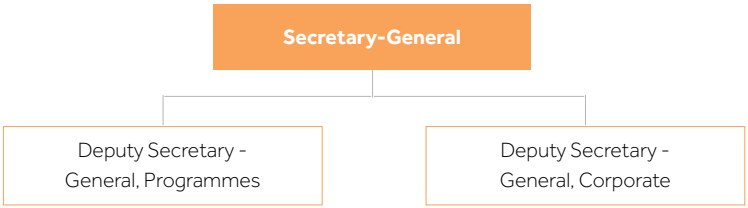
resident missions, including CARICOM, in New York

9. Building a Modern Commonwealth Secretariat



The Secretary-General's vision for a more relevant, responsive and impactful Commonwealth has been matched by an equally ambitious programme of institutional renewal. She has prioritised reforms that strengthen the Secretariat's ability to deliver results, demonstrate value and respond more effectively to the evolving needs and increasingly complex challenges of Commonwealth member countries.

A new leadership structure aligns the organisation's staff more closely with its strategic priorities. Responsibilities for programme delivery and for corporate services have been apportioned to two Deputy Secretaries-General, strengthening accountability while ensuring greater focus on delivery and organisational performance. This restructuring has been accompanied by workforce planning, an organisational redesign and the redeployment of resources towards areas of greatest strategic relevance and impact.



The reform agenda extends beyond structure. The Secretary-General has introduced a new monitoring, evaluation and learning framework. This will enable the Secretariat to better track results, demonstrate impact and apply lessons learned across its portfolio, and represents a fundamental shift from measuring activity to measuring outcomes for member countries.

At the same time, the Secretariat is rethinking how it communicates. New communications and brand initiatives will ensure that member countries, partners and citizens better understand how the Commonwealth and its partners deliver practical benefits and support national priorities.

The Secretary-General has also advanced a more distributed and partnership-driven model of Commonwealth engagement. Consultations are under way on a Commonwealth Pacific Office, a regional office embedded in the African Union and a Commonwealth Biodiversity Centre of Excellence in Guyana. These build on existing regional initiatives such as the Anti-Corruption Centre in Botswana, the Centre of Excellence for the Blue Economy in Antigua and Barbuda and the Trade Finance Facility in Malta. The vision is to connect global expertise with local priorities, and provide new platforms for collaboration, innovation and capacity-building.

Despite continued pressures on core funding, the Secretariat has maintained delivery while strengthening financial oversight, improving governance and implementing efficiency measures. It has done this by concentrating resources on high-impact priorities, securing stronger partnerships, and through more disciplined management of operational expenditure. However, **a recommitment to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation is critical to advancing the Strategic Plan and delivering the mandate of Heads of Government.**

A defining feature of the Secretary-General's approach has been renewed engagement with the Board of Governors. Through more frequent dialogue, informal consultations and increased transparency on performance and reform, the Board has been positioned as a more active strategic partner that shapes the organisation's future.

Ultimately, these reforms are guided by a simple principle: the Commonwealth is a member-led organisation. The Secretariat exists to serve its members, and its success will be measured by its ability to support their priorities, amplify their voice on the global stage.

10. A Commonwealth Family Delivering Together



The Secretary-General has placed renewed emphasis on the strength of the Commonwealth family, recognising that the Commonwealth's greatest asset is not any single institution, programme or fund, but the collective power of its relationships, networks and shared values.

The Secretary-General has championed a more connected approach across the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL). This has included personally engaging with their board meetings, and strengthening governance arrangements through their participation as observers in the Secretariat's Board of Governors. It also is ensuring that their expertise helps inform ministerial processes, CHOGM preparations and wider Commonwealth priorities. This reflects a commitment to a more joined-up Commonwealth, where institutions work together in pursuit of shared outcomes while maintaining their unique mandates and strengths.

The Secretary-General has also made efforts to strengthen both organisations' long-term sustainability, visibility and partnerships. Particular attention has been given to resource mobilisation for CoL to expand its remit and deliver the Commonwealth's commitment to expanding access to learning, skills development and opportunity for young people across all member countries.

Through direct engagement with Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (CAOs) the Secretary-General has gained a deeper appreciation of the extraordinary diversity, expertise and reach they bring to the Commonwealth family. The network has now grown to more than 100 CAOs, with interest in accreditation continuing to expand.

The value of CAOs lies in their ability to deliver directly for the people of the Commonwealth. Operating across every region and sector, they are the Commonwealth's presence on the ground, advancing issues of importance to member countries through professional associations, civil society networks, academic institutions, youth organisations and business communities.

Looking ahead, strong governance remains fundamental to maintaining confidence in the accreditation system, while new approaches are needed to raise their profile, strengthen connections across the Commonwealth family and create pathways for resource mobilisation and fundraising. By enabling these organisations to thrive, the Commonwealth can further extend its reach, relevance and impact in communities across the world.

IMPACT STORY: The Association of Commonwealth Universities

By bringing together researchers, technical experts and policymakers, the Association of Commonwealth Universities has helped strengthen the evidence base that underpins Commonwealth action on ocean resilience and sustainable blue economy development. This partnership demonstrates how Commonwealth networks can connect global expertise with the practical needs of member countries.

The Secretary-General remarked:

> *'The Commonwealth's greatest strength is its ability to bring together governments, institutions, experts and citizens in pursuit of common goals.'*

11. What Next?



The reforms and results outlined in this report represent the beginning of a broader journey of Commonwealth renewal. The next phase will focus on scaling impact, strengthening resilience and positioning the Commonwealth as a leading platform for co-operation in an increasingly uncertain world.

A Commonwealth that anticipates rather than reacts: The Commonwealth will strengthen its role as a proactive partner in democratic resilience through new tools for foresight, risk analysis and preventative engagement. Building on its trusted convening role, its electoral assistance, technical support and Good Offices work will increasingly be delivered through an integrated model that helps countries strengthen institutions before challenges become crises.

A Commonwealth that unlocks opportunity: The next phase of economic co-operation will focus on translating the Commonwealth Advantage into tangible prosperity. Greater emphasis will be placed on expanding intra-Commonwealth trade and investment, supporting debt sustainability through horizon scanning and improved regulations. The Commonwealth will galvanise strategic advocacy for and with small states, especially on reform of international financing lending systems, achieving maximum impact by speaking with one united voice. The ambition is to build a stronger Commonwealth economic ecosystem, connecting governments, investors, development partners, entrepreneurs and markets through bankable projects, investment platforms and practical business opportunities.

A Commonwealth that powers a just transition: The Commonwealth will continue to champion climate finance access, ocean governance and protection, and the transition to sustainable energy systems. Future efforts will focus on mobilising larger flows of finance, supporting countries to implement their ocean, decarbonisation and climate commitments. These efforts will ensure that small and vulnerable states can access the technologies, partnerships and investment needed to build resilient low-carbon economies.

A Commonwealth that invests in future generations: The Commonwealth's long-term success will depend on the opportunities available to its young people. Working across the Commonwealth family, the focus will increasingly be on digital skills, science, emerging technology and entrepreneurship. The ambition is to equip young people not only to participate in the future, AI-enabled economy, but to shape and lead it. Alongside this, the Commonwealth will support the emergence of a stronger ecosystem of youth-led enterprises and Commonwealth MSMEs, helping them access skills, markets, investment and cross-border opportunities

A Commonwealth that delivers together: The Commonwealth will increasingly position itself as a trusted convenor at the intersection of the defining challenges and opportunities of our time: the future of work, the green energy transition, digital transformation, sustainable finance, trade reconfiguration and demographic change. Building on its unique ability to connect governments, business, philanthropy, academia, civil society and citizens, the Commonwealth will mobilise partnerships that translate ideas into action and shared challenges into shared prosperity.

The ambition is not simply to convene conversations but to help build the ecosystems that enable opportunity, connecting youth with skills, entrepreneurs with markets, innovators with capital and member countries with the finance, technology and partnerships needed to accelerate resilience and growth. In an increasingly fragmented world, the Commonwealth will leverage its convening power to help shape the networks, partnerships and solutions that define the future economy and ensure that no member country is left behind.

> **The Commonwealth's future relevance will be measured not only by the challenges it helps members overcome, but by the opportunities it helps them seize.**

'...[W]e have a clear opportunity to demonstrate what this organisation can deliver – for our member states, for the people we serve, and for the principles and goals of multilateralism itself. That will require focus, collaboration and continued openness to doing things differently. I am confident in what we can achieve – because I have seen this over the past year. Today is a personal milestone for me, but it is also a chance for all of us to reflect and look ahead – with clarity and purpose – and to renew our commitment to building a Commonwealth that delivers.'

The Hon. Shirley Botchwey, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, on her first year in office.



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