Foreword by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

That trade is central to achieving inclusive prosperity was recognised when the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by the international community in 2015. Within this context, intra-Commonwealth trade and investment are of immense importance. In the Commonwealth, we collaborate on policy mechanisms to increase trade through enhanced access to markets. This creates opportunities for higher employment and business growth.

We have established that when Commonwealth countries trade with one another they enjoy a 19 per cent cost advantage over comparable country pairs. This is the product of factors such as our common language, strong cultural connections, similar systems of government and administration, and the Common Law. These combine to make trade among Commonwealth counterparts easier and measurably more efficient.

Now, through more detailed sectoral analysis within traded services sectors such as commercial banking, transportation and distribution, we have examined the degree of regulatory convergence there is among Commonwealth countries. Findings published in this report show how the application of best practice to the measurement and identification of policy barriers to services trade within the Commonwealth could further boost trade and investment, including intra-Commonwealth flows, and help towards lowering services trade costs by reducing regulatory disparities.

Commonwealth countries rely more heavily than the rest of the world on trade in services for employment and foreign exchange earnings, yet surprisingly policy data on these sectors is out of date or completely unavailable for many of our member countries. These knowledge gaps need to be filled, and businesses need readily available information on end-markets in order to leverage new trade opportunities and to achieve export diversification within high value services sectors.

It is pleasing to see that our partners in this research are already building on its findings with, for example, the recent publication by the City of London of 'The Commonwealth Connection: growing trade in services'. When the Commonwealth collaborates and innovates in devising new approaches towards increased trade, immense potential opens up for more inclusive and sustainable prosperity in all our member countries. This is what I mean when I say – as I have on many occasions – that my focus is on putting 'wealth' back into the Commonwealth, and the 'common' back into 'wealth' – for the benefit and wellbeing of each and every one of our 2.4 billion citizens.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth