

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting CHOGM 2022

Submission by Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (COs)
April 2022



The Commonwealth

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Preamble

Commonwealth Organisations (COs) are pleased to present this considered analysis and recommendations on the CHOGM 2022 sub-themes under the overarching mission of *Delivering a common future: connecting, innovating, transforming*. The ‘third pillar’ of the Commonwealth (civil society and its institutions) stands alongside member states and Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations as core elements of the Commonwealth architecture. The process of achieving a consensus for this submission over a two-year period was open to all and enabled accredited organisations to participate, facilitated by the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO) working with the Secretariat Partnerships Office.

The Commonwealth faces an array of challenges. These require integrated responses rooted in agreed Commonwealth values. They offer an opportunity to show global leadership by helping to secure consensus between groupings of member states. Major challenges include co-operation on health and wellbeing (the pandemic has shown the speed at which rich countries can develop and deploy vaccines, but access to vaccines has been strikingly unequal); climate change and its intensifying impacts in rising sea levels, floods, drought, forest fires and depleted fisheries, which threaten small states, especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (yet the Commonwealth failed to speak with one voice at COP26 as they had at COP15); threats to freedom of expression, especially for journalists, human rights activists and academics; armed conflicts and fleeing refugees and migrants; setbacks to gender equality; rapid urbanisation; and health risks from lifestyle changes.

The war in Ukraine and other ongoing conflicts have long-lasting impacts on global multilateral frameworks, economic development, food security and migration flows, among other consequences. We call on member states to demonstrate their commitment to international peace, security, democracy, and the human rights of all people. We support the Secretary General’s call for a cessation of Russian aggression and we call on member states to demand respect for the territorial integrity of all UN member states, to demand an end to violence against civilians, to support humanitarian efforts, and to coordinate security monitoring to prevent incidents of exploitation and trafficking of persons.

Commonwealth Organisations offer resources and initiatives to address some of these challenges. Particular initiatives and collaborative projects undertaken by COs are highlighted throughout this document and contribute in a remarkably cost-effective way. Yet there are limited resources available to them. Commonwealth Organisations – the ‘third pillar’ of the Commonwealth -- can aid new initiatives in these and other areas but require improved support infrastructure and resources to be able to do so.

The shared values outlined in the Commonwealth Charter need reaffirmation and implementation. COs emphasise in all their recommendations and activities gender equity and the need to address Commonwealth citizens of all ages so that developmental needs of young children, youth and the needs of the elderly should be assumed as embedded in all recommendations, as should the rights of women and marginalised groups (e.g. LGBTI+, persons with disabilities).

In this submission, COs address the sub-themes of CHOGM, while recognising that these are interdependent issues. Our recommendations have at their heart the desire for a more equitable Commonwealth that reaffirms its core values.

Governance, Human Rights and Rule of Law are fundamental to the Commonwealth Charter. The Commonwealth has the opportunity to show global leadership in the protection and promotion of

fundamental rights and democratic values. CHOGM 2022 is built upon the foundation of these shared commitments which are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These are roadmaps for the implementation of the Commonwealth's fundamental values, in line with the mission of *Delivering a Common Future* for its peoples. Around the world, civil society has come under attack, evident in crackdowns on peaceful protests; disruptions of digital spaces and internet access; intrusive surveillance; assaults on minority groups; restriction of free expression; and intimidation or detention of human rights defenders and journalists. The pandemic should not be used as an excuse to illegitimately restrict democratic freedoms and communications.

Sustainability appears more urgent in the face of the climate emergency, and yet more elusive as a result of the pandemic. 2020 marked the first increase in global poverty in recent memory. The interdependent impacts of the pandemic, climate change and violent conflict are having devastating effects on human health and hunger across the Commonwealth, in particular in Africa and small states. Intra-Commonwealth trade has fallen and the UN's Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on financing development, off track before the pandemic, requires bold corrective action. The Commonwealth needs an integrated vision of recovery and resilience promoting good stewardship of the environment and a green new deal, sustaining positive economic development, ensuring public health and wellbeing, delivering growing prosperity and income and gender equality within and between nations. Failure to take radical steps to address the unsustainable debt burden of poor countries and individuals will result in substantial social and political upheaval. There is a need to 'build back better', as highlighted at COP26, in terms of a circular economy, a Green New Deal, and changes to the trade regime such as the proposed ban on fishing subsidies. Green technologies and transitioning to renewable energy sources offer two pathways to energy and food security, alongside the Commonwealth's Blue Charter and Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment (CCA) and proposed Living Lands Charter.

Health and Wellbeing are key to global security and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). COs and partners are working to implement practical solutions and services to enhance health and wellbeing across the Commonwealth, including health care, research and development and lifestyle guidance. Lifestyle conditions and the incidence of interpersonal violence have different impacts across countries and groups. Differential access to, or take-up of vaccines leads to outbreaks of preventable infectious diseases. Yet COs have shown how major diseases (e.g. polio) can be eradicated.

Young people have been profoundly affected by the pandemic in respect of education losses, significant increase in youth unemployment, reduced social engagement and mental well-being. Many have been subjected to violence and abuse, including online sexual exploitation, while others have been hard hit by rising levels of poverty and widening inequality. A decade-worth of gains in human capital outcomes have been lost with long-term negative consequences for Commonwealth countries in respect of economic productivity, sustained inclusive growth and the ability to compete in the modern global economy. Countries also face persistent challenges in the youth labour market, as new technology, digitalisation and automation are rapidly changing the nature of work and require more highly skilled workers. Some groups of young people are marginalised, discriminated against or have special needs or vulnerabilities, such as young refugees or those on the move crossing international borders, young people with disabilities, orphans and young carers. Youth leadership development is essential for post-pandemic recovery, for achieving Agenda 2030 and to impact climate action and achieve gender equality. A resilient Commonwealth of equality, sustainability and prosperity needs to invest more in young people and assure their physical, mental and social well-being and safety and protection.

Technology and Innovation are now central to people's lives, transforming the way people produce, work, study, interact and live, and such changes have been accelerated by the pandemic. Some developing economies have been creative adopters of digital solutions, as mobile technology and banking has spread.

Yet a deep digital divide remains, with unequal access across groups and geographies. These inequalities need to be addressed, as does governance of the web, as outlined in the Contract for the Web.

Education is integral to human development, the realisation of fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as to the transition to a green, circular economy to meet the SDGs, and must necessarily be part of the focus of CHOGM and of an interconnected Commonwealth approach to pandemic recovery, leaving no-one behind. Commonwealth Education COs play an indispensable role in supporting meetings of the Education Ministers and can provide a valuable resource for post-COVID recovery programmes and plans of action. COs strongly recommend that the Commonwealth Secretariat restore staffing and resources to support Health and Education for their roles in post-pandemic recovery.

Partnerships are key to delivering a better common future for the people of the Commonwealth in this challenging global context of increased conflict, pandemic recovery, and limited resources. There are many examples of close co-operation and productive joint projects between Commonwealth Organisations and the Secretariat. Commonwealth Organisations welcome joint work to develop a consistent approach to partnership working, such as a new Charter for Engagement between Commonwealth IGOs and the accredited organisations, defining expectations and providing guidelines for co-operation, including agreed principles and procedures for access to Commonwealth Ministerial meetings.

Commonwealth Organisations have found the process of creating this submission a vital contribution to our own collaborative and inter-agency working and partnership. The broad approach set out in this document is strongly endorsed. However, some of the recommendations go beyond the agreed policies of some COs which do not necessarily endorse every recommendation. Commonwealth Organisations are willing partners in our shared endeavour to create a Commonwealth for all which leaves no one behind.

Governance, Human Rights and Rule of Law

Against the rise of populism and threats to multilateral cooperation and global peace, the Commonwealth must stand to show global leadership in the protection and promotion of good governance, rule of law, fundamental rights, and democratic values. CHOGM 2022 is built upon the foundation of these shared commitments which are enshrined in the Commonwealth Charterⁱ, Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principlesⁱⁱ, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These are more than merely inspirational commitments - they are roadmaps to implementation of the Commonwealth's fundamental values. In line with the mission of *Delivering a Common Future* for its peoples, Commonwealth governments must adhere to the principles of good governance and rule of law in order to realise the Commonwealth's shared goals of peace and prosperity for all.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Civil Society and the Impact of Covid-19: Around the world, the rights and freedoms of civil society have been curtailed through crackdowns on peaceful protests, disruptions of digital spaces and internet access, intrusive surveillance technology assaults on minority groups, restriction of free expression under 'fake news' laws, and intimidation or detention of human rights defenders and journalists.ⁱⁱⁱ Exacerbating these restrictions, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to some exceptional government responses which have been used as a pretext for even greater clamp-downs on sectors of civil society, concentration of power in executive branches of government, and a reduction in democratic and judicial oversight.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Promote and protect the rights and work of civil society organisations and human rights defenders, by safeguarding civic space and removing barriers which prevent civil society from upholding rights and empowering marginalised groups.
- Ensure that the rule of law, good governance and democratic principles are respected by all institutions across the Commonwealth whether in times of crisis or not, through judicious use of emergency powers and the implementation of adequate safeguards against limiting human rights on grounds of national security or health.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Strengthening CMAG: Commonwealth organisations are concerned about growing divergences from the values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and lack of adherence to those values.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Strengthen the role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to ensure the principles of the Commonwealth Charter are upheld.
- Ensure CMAG fulfills the expanded brief it was given in 2012 to respond to threats to civil society and the media, and to the three freedoms of expression, association and assembly.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Democracy and Good Governance, including strengthening of institutions: In view of commitments under the Commonwealth Charter to the rule of law as an essential protection and to maintaining the integrity of the roles of the Legislature, Executive and Judiciary^{iv}, we call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Uphold the doctrine of separation of powers by continuing to support the implementation of the

Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles, including through the roll out of the Latimer House Principles toolkit,^v encouraging greater use of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)'s Model Law for Independent Parliaments,^{vi} and supporting an independent judiciary and judicial appointment processes.

- Continue to promote Commonwealth fundamental values and best practice on democracy, through mechanisms such as the CPA's Recommended Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures^{vii}, and by strengthening the Commonwealth Secretariat's mandate to observe elections in line with the Revised Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation in Member Countries^{viii}.
- Ensure judiciaries are adequately resourced, in line with the Commonwealth Principles on Funding and Resourcing of the Judiciary^{ix} to ensure access to justice, and uphold human rights and the rule of law.
- Promote the use of the Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks^x to guide states to reduce the risk of corruption in both public and private sectors.
- Ensure that legislatures have robust, independent and transparent mechanisms to hold Ministers to account.
- Noting the importance of properly drafted legislation so as to recognise and strengthen the Rule of Law, the utility and desirability of having a centralised legislative drafting office in each Commonwealth jurisdiction that is properly staffed with well-trained, experienced and competent legislative drafters, and the scarcity of experienced legislative drafters in many parts of the Commonwealth, particularly in smaller jurisdictions; ensure that the Commonwealth Secretariat is provided with adequate resources to build and enhance capability in legislative drafting through training and development programs, mentorship by experienced drafters and other forms of support, working with other expert bodies, such as the Commonwealth Association of Legislative Counsel (CALC).

RECOMMENDATION 4

Freedom of Expression, Access to Information, and Media Freedoms: New restrictions on access to information and new powers to impose penalties for misinformation have compounded longer-term threats to media independence and the safety of journalists.^{xi} These developments also underline the vital importance of the right to information (RTI). In 2018 the Commonwealth Working Group on Media and Good Governance developed the *Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance*^{xii} which complement the Latimer House Principles.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Reaffirm their commitment to freedom of expression through peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information, including through a free and responsible media, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter.
- Recognise the vital importance of reliable information, which has been especially evident since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, guarantee the safety of journalists and uphold the critical role of independent media in promoting the public interest and protecting democratic and accountable government.
- Welcome the progress made by the Expert Working Group of member states in developing a set of media principles for the Commonwealth and look forward to considering them at the next CHOGM after their review and approval by Law Ministers.
- Ensure the adoption and effective implementation of right to information legislation in line with globally accepted legal frameworks and standards of good practice.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Non-discrimination and inclusion: Eradicating discrimination, overcoming inequality and addressing prejudiced social norms is essential for building inclusive and prosperous societies that leave no one behind and ensure all citizens benefit from protection of the law. Collective and sustained efforts by civil society organisations have contributed to advancing equality and non-discrimination in policy and legislation.^{xiii} However, many Commonwealth states have not reformed laws that criminalise, discriminate against, or fail to protect women, girls, LGBTI+ people, people with disabilities, and indigenous and other historically oppressed peoples. The Covid-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted on already-marginalised and vulnerable groups, especially women and girls.^{xiv}

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Update legislation to meet international human rights obligations including the repeal of laws criminalising same-sex intimacy, introduction of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, additional reproductive rights protections, and legislation to tackle harmful practices such as FGM/C.^{xv}
- Ensure customary laws and religion exemptions do not contradict national laws as they relate to the rights of women, girls, LGBTI+ people, and indigenous peoples, particularly by ensuring that early, child and forced marriage is illegal for all.
- Implement the 2019 Women’s Affairs Ministers’ Meeting agreements to accelerate gender equality.^{xvi}
- Commit to the free and full participation of women, LGBTI+ people, and people with disabilities and other marginalised groups in political processes.^{xvii}

RECOMMENDATION 6

Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: One person in 150 in the Commonwealth is living in modern slavery. Of the 40.3 million people enslaved globally, including 24.9 million in forced labour and 15.4 million in forced marriages, approximately 40% reside in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) and the Commonwealth 8.7 Network^{xviii} have collectively raised awareness about rising levels of modern slavery and human trafficking^{xix}. Despite commitments to SDG Target 8.7 in the 2018 CHOGM Communiqué^{xx}, progress to tackle modern slavery in the Commonwealth is slow, and the Covid-19 pandemic has reversed progress and driven exploitation further underground.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Commit to redoubling efforts to meet SDG Target 8.7, including reiterating the need for timely, proactive and effective measures to address forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including the lawful recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.
- Ratify and implement relevant outstanding international agreements, including the ILO’s Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention,^{xxi} and align national legislation with international norms, ensuring all forms of exploitation are criminalised, laws are enforced and penalties are appropriate.
- Improve cross-border collaboration and data-sharing on modern slavery and human trafficking, including strengthening international cooperation agreements and collaborative initiatives with member states, international organisations and civil society.
- Ensure all responses to modern slavery and human trafficking are informed by the meaningful participation of survivors, and survivors are provided opportunities to engage in such efforts on their terms.

- Strengthen the evidence base on modern slavery and to support efforts to share good practices.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Safety and Protection of Children: Every child has the right to be protected from all forms of violence, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing drivers of violence against children and child sexual exploitation, and increased opportunities for abusers, off- and online. The CommonProtect^{xxii} legal reform initiative is a Commonwealth partnership to identify necessary improvements to existing national laws, including extra-territorial legislation. Meeting SDG Target 16.2 by ensuring children’s safety and protection from abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence must be a Commonwealth priority.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Become parties to the Hague Convention 1996^{xxiii}, which covers civil measures of protection concerning children, including establishing co-operation between the authorities of the Contracting States; and to the Lanzarote Convention^{xxiv} for Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (CSEA) which requires criminalisation of all kinds of sexual offences against children; ensure that all Commonwealth states ratify ILO Convention 138 as they have Convention 182, and strengthen legal and protective systems to support child survivors, prosecute perpetrators and prevent CSEA offences.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Access to Justice: Access to justice is critical for the realisation of human rights and the reduction of inequalities. Across the Commonwealth, the resistance to reforming police systems into a professional, accountable, and responsive service fully trained in upholding human rights and enforcing anti-corruption measures persists. The Covid-19 pandemic further exposed deficiencies in police practices including the of disproportionate and arbitrary use of force, on the grounds of enforcing lockdowns and curfews , for example, documented in India by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)^{xxv}. The ability of people to physically and financially access courts and legal remedies to secure their rights was also impacted by the pandemic and emergency legislation, which was exacerbated by the lack of adoption by the majority of Commonwealth States of an effective state funded legal aid system.

Access to justice also means access to effective alternatives to publicly funded court proceedings or arbitration such as mediation for resolving legal disputes. In November 2019 the Commonwealth Law Ministers conference in Colombo endorsed a Report on Arbitration^{xxvi} for inter-Commonwealth business disputes. Support for mediation as an integral part of civil justice is also required, particularly since the opening for signature on 7 August 2019 of the Singapore Convention on Mediation.

Despite the existence of international and domestic standards,^{xxvii} the realisation of the rights of prisoners in the Commonwealth remains unfulfilled. Only 18 Commonwealth countries have a prison occupancy rate of less than 100 percent. The proportion of pre-trial detainees is over 50 percent in 11 Commonwealth countries.^{xxviii} Prisons are at high risk for Covid-19 outbreaks due to the infeasibility of physical distancing and lack of adequate health and hygiene provisions. States must implement effective measures to ensure equal access to justice for all.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Uphold the absolute prohibition against torture and all forms of ill-treatment.^{xxix}

- **Police Reform.** Ensure police adherence to human rights obligations by adopting progressive legislation and provisions for adequate training; strengthening oversight of the police including through independent complaints bodies and effective prosecution for police misconduct.
- **Arbitration and Alternatives to Court.** Ratify the Singapore Convention on Mediation^{xxx} to ensure agreements reached in mediation can be readily enforced in cross-border disputes.
- Adopt a robust state funded legal aid system to promote equal access to justice for all.
- **Prison Reform and Pre-trial Detention.** Strengthen internal and external monitoring of prisons to ensure conditions adhere to basic human rights principles; and address overcrowding in prisons by reducing pre-trial detention rates.

Sustainability

Commonwealth societies are facing fast changing national, regional, and international landscapes marked by a fractured global economy and rapid socio-economic and political shifts, as well as deepening inequality and heightened vulnerabilities. The global pandemic, together with deepening threats from climate change and food and energy insecurity and accelerating technological changes, are exposing the fragility and unsustainability of the global environmental and economic system. To adequately address these challenges, it is necessary to implement new approaches that consider the needs of all segments of Commonwealth societies, particularly small and developing states. The Commonwealth needs an integrated vision of recovery and resilience promoting good stewardship of the environment and a green new deal, establishing new pathways to environmentally sustainable long-term economic growth, to build resilience, to eradicate inequality and poverty, and to ensure public health and wellbeing.

From COP26, the implementation of green technologies and the transition to renewable energy sources offer a way forward. Both are capable of increasing productivity and growth, improving market access and integration in regional and global value chains, and of achieving energy and food security and sustainability for Commonwealth developing countries and citizens. Alongside the Commonwealth's Blue Charter and the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment (CCA), they are also capable of building resilience, improving sustainable livelihoods for vulnerable communities – particularly those most dependent on natural resources, supporting regional integration and enhanced transparency, and empowering women. Improving data and informatics management, as well as access to data visualisation tools, particularly for agriculture and fisheries but also health and professional services, can amplify the impact of these pathways and should be at the core of the Commonwealth's work going forward.

Commonwealth Organisations (COs) are increasingly well positioned to support Commonwealth governments and stakeholders with harnessing trade for sustainability by achieving the expansion of Commonwealth trade envisioned by the CCA by localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). COs can also collaborate by accelerating and expanding access to data and artificial intelligence related to trade, biodiversity, climate and environment, and to digitalization and the use of informatics; by playing meaningful roles in sharing knowledge, strengthening collaboration and convening networks; and by fostering the economic and social empowerment of women.

Developments since the 2018 CHOGM in London need to be acknowledged and accelerated. This includes addressing gender barriers preventing women from fully participating in the economy and international trade. An analysis of 73 trade agreements by ITC revealed that 67% of the agreements have 'limited' gender responsiveness and about 40% make no explicit reference whatsoever to gender. That said, some Commonwealth countries including the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are now showing leadership by adding gender provisions to new FTAs and while this is welcomed, language needs to be stronger and clearer and include areas such as procurement, promoting financial inclusion, fostering women's entrepreneurship, and supporting economic opportunities for diverse groups of women in trade and investment.

The CCA includes a commitment that 'member countries will mainstream inclusive and sustainable trade as a cross-cutting issue' and leveraging trade and investment for inclusive and sustainable growth was a major discussion topic at the 2019 Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting. However, it remains unclear how the CCA is taking such an approach.

We therefore call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to adopt the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Renew and reaffirm international climate commitments

We urge Commonwealth states to:

- Commit to the objectives of the Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration and the Paris Agreement.
- Raise the ambition of Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement with the ambitions consistent with the 1.5 degrees target.
- Renew commitments to climate and technological solutions under the Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration that promote development, sustainable manufacturing, effective transition to low-emission economies, and cleaner, more affordable and renewable energy sources.
- Continue working on the Curriculum Framework for Sustainable Development^{xxxix} which includes a commitment to formal and informal lifelong education for developing the awareness and skills needed to meet climate and biodiversity commitments.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Protect livelihoods and natural resources related to the blue economy

We urge Commonwealth states to:

- Protect fisherfolk livelihoods, marine biodiversity, and inshore fishing grounds.
- Regulate industrial fishing and deep-sea mining.
- Support the regeneration of coastal environments.
- Ensure trade agreements promote sustainable development and climate change mitigation, adhere to climate-friendly environmental policies and standards, and remove trade-distorting agricultural and fisheries subsidies.
- Promote diversification in tourist-dependent Small Island Developing States (SIDS) economies.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Promote supply chain transparency

We urge Commonwealth states to:

- Disclose carbon emissions and biodiversity impacts in supply chains.
- Ensure universal labour standards and promote safe and healthy working conditions, with supply chains that are free from contemporary forms of slavery.
- Take a lead on creating policies that protect the rights of migrant workers.
- Hold businesses to account through periodic independent, rigorous, and transparent supply chain audits.
- Implement mechanisms and regulatory frameworks based on mandatory due diligence to promote respect for human rights and the environment.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Take a gender-responsive, equitable, and sustainable approach to trade, development, and economic growth

We urge Commonwealth states to:

- Strengthen the 2018 CHOGM commitment to ‘take a gender-responsive approach to the development of trade policy’ by strengthening women’s voice and agency in trade policy formulation and in multilateral trade negotiations.
- Make more systematic and widespread use of gender impact assessments in decisions about trade to mainstream gender and consider wide-ranging gender-differentiated impacts.
- Systematically collect and collate accessible, comparable and measurable gender-disaggregated trade data.
- Ensure women’s participation in the development of standards and conformity assessments.
- Adopt the ITC’s Ten policy recommendations (2020) for mainstreaming gender in Free Trade Agreements with model clauses.
- Target Aid for Trade for women’s economic empowerment.
- Support trade promotion organisations, women’s business associations, and youth through inclusive trade missions.
- Close the gender digital divide, advance the use of e-commerce, and empower women entrepreneurs in the digital economy to close gender gaps in low- and middle income countries.
- Provide access to finance from existing and emerging areas so women and youth can start and grow their businesses.
- Prioritise and leverage government and private procurement to use diverse suppliers, including women-owned businesses who currently secure less than 1% of contracts.
- Renew commitment to a multilateral, rules-based trading system to reduce poverty and promote women’s economic empowerment.
- Ensure International Financial Institutions and the private sector play a key role in addressing existing debt and global financing needs to build productive capacity for enhanced trade flows.
- Focus on trade-related capacity building - especially in growing service sectors - to enhance competitiveness and participation in local, regional, and global supply and value chains, while harnessing opportunities for ‘Born Global’ firms.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Recognise the value of Commonwealth Organisations (COs) and the role they play in sustainability

We urge Commonwealth states to:

- Recognition of the aggregate value that COs bring to address the myriad sustainable development challenges faced by Commonwealth countries, communities, and stakeholders.
- Embrace COs as viable partners in helping to build economic resilience and achieve sustainable development goals.
- Support the implementation of new measures to ensure that the work of international organisations and development agencies take on more of a Commonwealth face.

Health and Wellbeing

Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (COs) share a deep commitment to health and wellbeing as a key component of global security and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. COs and partners are already actively working to enhance health and wellbeing, working together and also with Commonwealth institutions to implement practical solutions and services to enhance health and wellbeing across the Commonwealth.

COVID-19 has highlighted and exacerbated pre-existing health and social inequalities with significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of peoples of all ages across the Commonwealth. There has been a differential impact of COVID-19 between and within countries and groups, adversely affecting those already marginalised and/or socially disadvantaged. Health conditions, particularly non-communicable diseases as a result of, or exacerbated by, lifestyle circumstances or choices such as obesity, diabetes and heart conditions, alongside social factors such as sexual and gender-based violence, are affecting growing numbers in all parts of the world with a significant social and financial impact. Outbreaks of infectious disease have increased as fewer children are reached with routine immunisations against vaccine preventable diseases due to competing demands on health workers and increased vaccine hesitancy by families. The success in reducing health threats, for example the malaria, HIV and polio campaigns, shows what is possible, but also underlines the risk of reversal.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Commonwealth Heads of Government confirm their support for the Helsinki Statement on Health in All Policies^{xxxii} and actively embrace the WHO 'One Health' approach^{xxxiii} of addressing human health, environmental health and animal health so that action is coordinated and integrated across all sectors.

The interdependency of health and wellbeing have been clearly exposed by the pandemic as has the negative impact of: social inequalities; climate change; air pollution; loss of biodiversity; suboptimal living environments with inadequate housing, lack of access to clean water and sanitation; food insecurity and malnutrition; and insecure and unsafe work with inadequate occupational health and safety. Ultimately, human health and wellbeing depends on our ability to recognise and take action to mitigate present and future threats, which are pushing essential life systems to unsustainable limits. Making progress on climate change, on biodiversity loss, on access to potable water and essential food, and on ensuring sustainable urbanisation and liveable settlements, for example, will produce an enormous health dividend. The Commonwealth has considerable convening power and potential to take a strong stand and lead the world in these actions.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Commonwealth Heads of Government strengthen the health section within the Commonwealth Secretariat with adequate personnel and resources to coordinate and lead the Commonwealth response to COVID-19 and other current and emerging health issues, coordinated and integrated across all sectors, particularly in relation to the health and wellbeing workforce and the increasing incidence of mental health issues.

In the past, the Commonwealth Secretariat maintained a dedicated health team which coordinated and built on Commonwealth accredited civil society organisation (CSO) networks and capacity to achieve common goals identified by Commonwealth Health Ministers. The health team within the Secretariat was dismantled in 2017, leaving minimal capacity to engage with CSOs, deliver Ministerial commitments or lead a Commonwealth response to critical health issues. The loss of a dedicated health section within the Commonwealth Secretariat has hindered the credibility of the Commonwealth in its response to the pandemic and its ability to represent and advocate for Commonwealth nations within international platforms. CSOs and partners call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to reinstate a dedicated health section within the Secretariat.

The impact of the pandemic has created significant individual harm and stress for many of those working in essential health and social services. Commonwealth Heads of Government are urged, as a priority, to implement measures to support the existing health and social services workforce and address workforce shortages which are contributing to their distress.

Mental health services, legislation, policy and practice are under-developed in most Commonwealth countries resulting in considerable distress for individuals and families and lost productivity for states. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports a 25% increase in the global burden of anxiety and depression as a result of COVID-19 and its 2020 Mental Health Atlas shows that governments worldwide spent on average just over 2% of their health budgets on mental health. There are significant economic benefits for states in addressing mental health issues. Commonwealth Heads of Government are urged to increase the percentage expenditure on mental health in health budgets to meet the increasing demand for mental health services.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Commonwealth Heads of Government and their Health Ministers support and resource the promotion of equity in access to medicines and vaccines and formally support^{xxxiv}:

- (a) local manufacturing and the proposed temporary waiver of the TRIPS Agreement to enable more countries to fast track the production of large quantities of lower-cost COVID-19 vaccines; and***
- (b) collaboration in sharing of pricing information to increase transparency and facilitate more informed price setting for medicines and vaccines.***

Access to medicines and vaccines is not equitable across the Commonwealth. This includes COVID-19 vaccines where many Commonwealth countries still do not have access to sufficient vaccines. During the COVID-19 pandemic many regions experienced shortages of essential medicines due to diverted supplies and as a consequence of closed borders and travel restrictions. Commonwealth governments failed to grasp the opportunity to demonstrate to the world the value of a Commonwealth of Nations by pursuing the equitable distribution of vaccines among and between Commonwealth countries; vaccination rates range from 3% in low-income Commonwealth countries to 92% in high income Commonwealth countries (March 2022). Unequal distribution of vaccinations constitutes discrimination and frustrates the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Until everyone is protected, the virus will continue to mutate and spread across borders.

There is global variation in how much countries pay for medicines and vaccines. How prices are set in each country is often unclear and impacted by a number of factors, including political arrangements, trading deals with industrial partners, costs of regulatory processes in different regions and the corporate private sector drive for profit. Global databases to share pricing information can help countries understand what others have paid and ensure that price agreements are fair and equitable.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Commonwealth Heads of Government develop and strengthen collaboration with concerned civil society organisations for a Commonwealth response to the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing^{xxxv} and ensure the effective incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities^{xxxvi} into legislation, policy and practice that protects and promotes the rights of persons with physical or mental disability.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) introduced a paradigm shift in the provision of services for people with physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments. People with disabilities have been disproportionately negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated the lack of equity in all areas of their life including health, housing, education, employment and the exercise of their rights as equal citizens of the Commonwealth. COs request the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop a database of Commonwealth legislation pertinent to people with physical and/or mental disabilities and promote compliance with the CRPD. Additionally, in the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, the Commonwealth should actively and publicly engage in activities to promote the rights of older people across the Commonwealth, to mark their contribution to society, and to learn from their wisdom and experience.

Youth: Delivering a Brighter Common Future for Young People

In 2018, Commonwealth Heads of Government identified the social and economic integration of young people in the Commonwealth as a major challenge.^{xxxvii} Since then, the pandemic has affected young lives even more profoundly in respect of education and learning losses, significant destruction of jobs and youth unemployment, and reduced social engagement and mental well-being. Many young people, lacking social protection, have also been hard hit by rising levels of poverty and widening inequality, added to which is insecurity arising from climate change, natural disasters and conflict. The World Bank^{xxxviii} estimates that a decade-worth of gains in human capital outcomes have been lost, which will ripple across generations. The long-term negative consequences for economic productivity and sustained inclusive growth will increase vulnerability and perpetuate gender inequality and make the Agenda 2030 promise made by leaders to leave no young person behind impossible to achieve. There is an urgent need for gender equitable investment in youth, to protect and rebuild their human capital for a more inclusive future.

Countries face persistent challenges in the youth labour market, including wide disparities between the participation of young women and men, which threatens the achievement of SDG 8. The surge in youth population in some regions of the Commonwealth results in formal sector job creation not keeping pace with the increased number of secondary and tertiary school graduates. Youth transitions to the world of work remain protracted and insecure with two out of three young people in developing economies not in education or training (NEET), unemployed, or engaged in irregular/informal employment, sometimes in hazardous conditions. Additionally, forces such as the so-called 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) with its new technology, digitalisation and automation, pandemic and climate change crises, and shifting global demographics, are rapidly changing the nature of work, bringing both opportunities and risks.^{xxxix} Many children currently in primary school will work as adults in jobs that do not yet exist. The frontier for skills and new learning is moving rapidly: the more highly skilled jobs of the future require new technological know-how, advanced cognitive and socio-behavioural skills, as well as soft skills such as creativity. Unless countries invest in young people to strengthen human capital, including addressing the needs of vulnerable young individuals, they will not be equipped to meet the challenge of the future of work offered by technology and innovation and will not thrive in the modern global economy.

The current 'peak youth' generation is the largest and most educated in history, the most culturally diverse of all age groups in their societies, and the most connected to global knowledge. Young people are also the inheritors and creators of culture and mediators between cultural tradition and change. As they transition to adulthood, youth mobilisation is essential for post-pandemic recovery, for achieving Agenda 2030 and to impact climate action and achieve gender equality. Youth-led action can help governments fill gaps in policy, programmes and implementation. A resilient Commonwealth of equality, sustainability and prosperity needs creative minds and inspired young leaders with the leadership skills, values and attitudes to thrive in an increasingly complex and diverse society.

Young people are rightly concerned about their future, their place within it and the slow progress on Agenda 2030 and the climate emergency. They are finding new ways to self-organise, using new technologies to engage and drive high-impact social movements to tackle the world's most pressing challenges. There is much to learn from them through inter-generational partnerships. As partners, Commonwealth organisations commit ourselves to amplifying youth voices, to supporting youth participation in shaping policies and action, and to developing young leaders. We note and welcome Commonwealth young people's own Declaration for the 12th Commonwealth Youth Forum. A strong

partnership with youth is critical to the achievement of a brighter common future for all Commonwealth peoples.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to adopt a Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Commonwealth governments should protect human capital development and commit to the human capital reform and investment agenda^{xi} with a whole-of-government approach that strengthens education, health and social protection systems, nurtures human capital for the future and learns from the pandemic.

Taking a long-term life-cycle approach and investing structurally in young people through nutrition, health care, quality education, jobs and skills develops their capability, resilience and agency and advances their rights. Ensuring they are educated, empowered, and employed and do not suffer long-lasting negative impacts from the pandemic is key to ending extreme poverty and creating more inclusive and peaceful societies. Yet there are worrying signs of substantial disinvestments in human capital at critical turning-points in the life cycle of today's young people. There needs to be a Commonwealth effort to accelerate progress toward a world where all young people can achieve their full potential.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Commonwealth Governments should invest equitably in human capital and increase skills to heighten productivity and incomes and sustainably reduce poverty by adopting a multi-sectoral approach to improve young people's transition to the labour market.

Skills shortages are a formidable barrier to economic transformation and increased creation of productive jobs. Young people must have a range of pathways for continuing to acquire skills. For increasing numbers of young people, self-employment is the most viable way out of unemployment and poverty. Yet young graduates from secondary school lack many job-relevant and entrepreneurial skills and cannot take advantage of most work opportunities or self-employment and are generally limited to vulnerable and low-productivity jobs. The highest unemployment rates are experienced by young people with disabilities and other marginalised groups, who are often outside the labour force and face discrimination, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and child trafficking. Youth entrepreneurship and innovation are crucial drivers of self-employment, small enterprises, jobs and growth.

A Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth should:

- Accelerate efforts to bring back on track structural transformation in support of SDG 8 to reduce informality and decent work deficits, to eradicate the worst forms of child labour, and to ensure gender equity and to achieve full and productive employment for young people and substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training.^{xii} Quality jobs for young people should guarantee a decent living wage, good working conditions in safe and healthy workplaces, as well as trade union representation and bargaining rights.
- Accept the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work recommendations to secure a 'human-centered agenda' in response to the disruptions and opportunities that lie ahead.^{xiii}
- Encourage the creation of more, better and bluer/greener jobs for young people through the economic potential of adapting to and mitigating climate change.

- Re-orientate technical and vocational education, training and apprenticeship systems to improve the capabilities of new job entrants to meet the knowledge, skills, and competencies the labour market demands and address the skills miss-match between what businesses need and what job-seekers offer, especially in ICT, digital know-how and STEM.
- Provide greater support for youth entrepreneurship by starting entrepreneurial learning as early as possible in school and the community to foster an entrepreneurial mindset, engaging with the entrepreneurship ecosystem and the private sector. Commonwealth civil society mentoring initiatives are adding value and are scalable.^{xliii}
- Build the capacity of youth micro and small enterprises to survive and grow in order to support income growth and creation of better jobs by improving the general business environment. Targeted interventions are needed to improve the returns to self-employment, including facilitating access to productive assets, coaching, business creation advisory services, removal of barriers to accessing finance, promotion of financial literacy and encouraging social support measures.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Commonwealth governments should offer all young people a high-quality Commonwealth Youth Leadership Compact that is rights-based, inclusive, gender transformative,^{xliv} builds on Commonwealth values, and works at the intersection of youth, innovation and sustainable development; it should be implemented with and by youth-serving organisations in the Commonwealth.

Positive youth development is a foundation for maximising human and social capital investment by building youth assets and competencies and preparing young people for adult and professional life. Young people need the opportunities provided by leadership development to act as resilient and engaged citizens, able to promote and protect rights and hold governments accountable for delivering a 2030 Agenda that leaves no one behind. Youth leadership development, structures and networks are also vital to channel young people’s collective voice into policy spaces and develop their expertise and advocacy skills.

A Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth should:

- Recognise youth work as non-formal education for participation and life-long learning, and the essential contribution of youth workers and volunteers.^{xlv}
- Be rights-based and build on successful inspirational Commonwealth youth leadership initiatives,^{xlvi} youth mobility, scholarship, internship and early career development programmes.^{xlvii}
- Endorse and encourage youth-led initiatives such as the Global Disability Children and Young People’s Charter, the Girls in Crisis Commonwealth Call to Action, and #Reform53 – Together for Legal Reform Campaign to reform discriminatory laws in the Commonwealth.^{xlviii}
- Encourage wider youth opportunities, Commonwealth challenge competitions and hackathons to develop creative capacities to generate and act on original ideas.^{xlix}
- Ensure better cross-sectoral working between Youth, Education, Sport, and Health sectors.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Commonwealth governments should prioritise mobilisation of the necessary attention, efforts, and resources to assure the physical, mental and social well-being and safety and protection of our young people.

For good health and well-being, young people need to be active, safe, healthy and achieving and have a proper childhood. The pandemic resulted in massive and widespread changes to daily life, including lockdowns and school closures, which impacted young people's mental, emotional, social and physical well-being and subjected many to violence and abuse, including online sexual exploitation. Increasingly, many young people find themselves on the move, including across international borders, and vulnerable, separated from family due to conflicts, trafficking, migration and natural disasters.ⁱ Commonwealth accredited organisations have formed a Children's Interest Group to enable better collaboration on children's issues. We welcome the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, the Global Framework for Youth Mental Health and the mental health legacy inspired by the Birmingham Commonwealth Games and the Commonwealth Moves initiative. We also recognise that some groups of young people are marginalised, discriminated against or have special needs, such as those with disabilities, refugees, orphans and young carers. We welcome the Global Disability Children and Young People's Charter and development of the Commonwealth Charter for Young Carersⁱⁱ led by young people themselves; and the attention on orphans and unparented children in the proposed Kigali Statement on Child Care Reform and child safety. We are greatly disturbed, however, that in our Commonwealth over 1.5 million young people aged 10-24 years die each year – nearly 5,000 every day, often needlessly. It is unacceptable that road traffic injury is the leading cause of death for children and young people aged 5-29; and that over one-third of global drowning deaths occur in Commonwealth countries.

A Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth should:

- Address the deterioration in young people's mental well-being, anxiety and depression and worries about the future. Greater attention should be given to well-being and stronger complementarities with mental health and sports activities and safeguarding in general.
- Encourage member states to join the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children.
- Recognise the rights and special needs of marginalised and discriminated against young people and the contribution, challenges and support needs of those in the role of carer.
- Commit to implement and help meet the road safety related SDGs and the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 target of reducing road deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Commit to implement the WHO Preventing Drowning recommended interventions and implementation strategies.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Technology and Innovation

Technological advancements continue to transform the way people produce, work, interact and live. The COVID-19 pandemic catalysed transition to digital infrastructures, but also exposed inequalities in relation to digital access, participation, and rights online. In the absence of coordinated action by all relevant actors, the digital divide is likely to increase. For example, the most recent GSMA data shows that there is a substantial gender gap in mobile internet use.^{liv} The increasing use of AI and Machine Learning can accentuate already existing institutional biases against some groups. Furthermore, while cybersecurity legislation and policies aim to govern the online space, they may risk infringing on or limiting the specific rights of some groups and individuals for example through online abuse and misogynistic trolling. Online violence against women has become normalised and routinised to such an extent that it has almost been rendered invisible and imperceptible.

Organisations across the Commonwealth have a proud history of strategic partnerships designed to harness the benefits of technological innovation - for example, the Commonwealth Education Trust,^{lv} the Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology & Mathematics Educators (CASTME),^{lvi} and the initiatives implemented during the pandemic by the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN) and the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO).^{lvii} CBWN held the first Commonwealth Women's Entrepreneurship Summit in May 2021 with the UK Government and other partners, which focused on women's entrepreneurship across emerging technology sectors such as agritech, fintech and fashiontech. The Summit outlined the transformation of business by emerging technology and how women from diverse backgrounds are and can be a key part of this innovation ecosystem.^{lviii}

Nevertheless, there is a need to address the challenges and significant barriers to Technology and Innovation across the Commonwealth. Increased international cooperation is required, including in digital platforms' governance, to promote data flow with trust, safety and confidence in their use, in accordance with national regulations and relevant international commitments. Several countries are performing above expectation on innovation relative to their level of economic development with Sub-Saharan Africa the region with the largest number of over-performing economies and an increasing number are rising up leading global metrics and rankings of innovation.^{lix} Indeed several Commonwealth countries are global leaders in innovation in Financial Technology (fintech),^{lx} providing an opportunity for greater sharing of knowledge, information and experiences among Commonwealth members in this area. The utilisation and sharing of good practices in digital technologies can contribute to reducing gaps and inequalities in developing countries.

Recent International initiatives and measures also play an important role, such as the EDISON Alliance^{lxi} which aims to accelerate digital inclusion and address inequality and is driving change to deliver impact in digital inclusion across healthcare, financial services, and education, and the [Bridgetown Covenant](#)^{lxii} from UNCTAD 15 which addresses a number of urgent priorities for the timely attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the digital divide which spans several domains, including infrastructure, regulations, policies, enforcement capabilities and institutions. The internet and digital platforms enable many firms and entrepreneurs in developing countries to access international markets, yet the role of most of these in digital value chains remains marginal. It is crucial that people and businesses can take part in both domestic and cross-border e-commerce but also make use of various digital solutions which are now more crucial than ever for building resilient economies. Special attention should be given to the building of capacities and quality infrastructure, and accessibility and affordability of the digital economy.

Narrowing the technological gap and closing the digital divide between and within developed and developing countries are important means for implementing the 2030 Agenda, as they provide an opportunity for structural transformation, economic diversification and reducing the vulnerabilities of the most disadvantaged groups, particularly women and children. Adaptation to rapid technological change should be considered not only as a function of sustainable development and the spreading of information and communications technologies, but also as a key step towards gender equality, the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

There is a strong opportunity for the Commonwealth to use its involvement in key spaces by member countries - including incoming Chair-in-Office Rwanda - to champion, cohere and make concrete the opportunities identified in Technology and Innovation to build consensus, foster collaboration and drive change.^{lxiii} The next IT Ministers Meeting convened by CTO and expected in London in 2023 should also be seen and seized as a key opportunity to take this agenda forward.

For the Commonwealth to uphold a cyberspace that supports economic and social development and rights online and leverages technology for development, we call on the Commonwealth Heads of Governments to consider the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 1

Facilitate and safeguard equitable access to technology and online platforms

We urge Commonwealth member states to:

- Respect the right to freedom of expression and freedom to information by refraining from intentionally disrupting, censoring or denying users access to information.
- Entrench human rights in the digital space as set out in the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration 2018 by standardising regulations governing data usage, technology and digitalization. The Commonwealth should also commit towards establishing a global standard of governance of digital platforms, in line with the Commonwealth Standards Network.
- Ensure digital services and infrastructure are secure, accessible, and affordable for all communities, with emphasis on low-income, remote, and low-density areas.^{lxiv}
- Promote safe, accessible and inclusive digital participation, and provide education and training to combat online violence and online child exploitation, sexual and gender-based harassment, cyber bullying, and hate speech against a person or group based on discrimination of any kind.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Encourage and harness technology towards achieving sustainable development

We call on Commonwealth member states to:

- Facilitate knowledge exchange by establishing a framework for inter-country travel for skilled people to achieve the exchange of innovative technology and best practice envisioned in the Connectivity Agenda.
- Establish a Commonwealth Innovation Fund earmarked for financing the indigenous development of 'traditional', community-based technologies that operate in emerging areas, including digital health and women in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics), and work towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Acknowledge that innovation can also be facilitated through non-digital technology, including mechanical, agricultural and small scale, by expanding the definition of technology used in the Digital Connectivity Agenda. A wider definition as used in the UN Secretary General's Strategy on New Technologies, better reflects the diverse socio-economic agendas of all Commonwealth countries.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Utilise technology to promote and achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality)

We urge Commonwealth member states to take all necessary steps to:

- Develop women and girls' digital literacy and confidence by investing in education and digital skills initiatives and greater effort to encourage and enable girls to study STEAM subjects [as agreed at UNESCO](#) and mainstreaming digital (including mobile-based) skills into school curricula
- Strengthen interdepartmental coordination between ministries of Technology and Innovation, Trade, Education and Women's Affairs to develop initiatives tackling the gender digital gap.
- Coordinate the collection and distribution of granular, reliable, gender-disaggregated data on the gender digital gap to better inform policies and strategies to drive digital inclusion for all. Such data helps in setting targets and budgets, as well as in tracking and evaluating progress.

Education for a Common Future: An integrated human development response

Education is central to the present and future of every individual, family, community, and government in the Commonwealth. It is a foundation for attainment of all the Sustainable Development Goals and the realisation of all human rights and freedoms. It is integral to human development and must necessarily be part of the focus of CHOGM and of an interconnected Commonwealth approach to pandemic recovery, in line with ongoing Commonwealth commitments to leave no one behind.

The Commonwealth has a well-established and strong collective capacity in education with organisations bringing expertise from a wide range of sectors and disciplines to the education space.^{lxv} They can provide a valuable resource for post-COVID recovery programmes and plans of action.

On this basis we ask Heads of Government to take full account of the outcomes from the 21st Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (21CCEM) in Nairobi in April 2022, and to consider the following four key recommendations in relation to Commonwealth action on education.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Put education at the heart of an integrated Commonwealth Action Plan for delivering a Common Future.

We urge Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- **acknowledge that quality education at all levels is crucial to unlocking the innovation and transformation needed to address the CHOGM theme** and sub-themes, and to mainstream it as a key consideration across the CHOGM agenda;
- **ensure that human development has a more strategic and significant place in Commonwealth Secretariat work and resource allocations.** Linkages between education, youth, health, gender, and employment should be strengthened through cross-sectoral expert groups, joint work programmes, and an integrated approach to human development across Commonwealth Ministerial agendas;
- **restore and adequately fund professional education capacity** – so seriously depleted at present - within the Commonwealth Secretariat; and in order to maintain momentum following the necessarily foreshortened 21CCEM in April 2022, commit to a fully-fledged 22CCEM, incorporating stakeholder-led parallel fora, before the end of 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Commit to increased investment in public education and training.

We call on Commonwealth member states to:

- **commit to progressively fund education at levels consistent with international benchmarks.** [The Global Education Monitoring \(GEM\) report \(2021\)](#) estimates that only a third of Commonwealth countries have met the international benchmarks of either at least 15% - 20% of national public expenditure or at least 4-6% of National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spending on education;
- **commit to practical action on raising domestic tax revenues and reducing international debt burdens** in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This is the surest route to expanding resources

for education and training. Commonwealth countries should endeavour to introduce ambitious and progressive tax reforms to increase tax-to-GDP ratios by five percentage points by 2030; and seek to renegotiate external debts when debt servicing precludes adequate education and training spending.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Build resilience and flexibility into Commonwealth education systems as they strive to achieve the target of SDG 4 to provide 12 years of quality education for all.

We urge Commonwealth member states to:

- **make their education and training systems more resilient** in the face of pandemics and other emergencies by providing dedicated education contingency funding and planning. During emergencies continuity of learning at all levels must be ensured. Support for displaced and migrating children affected by conflict, crises and climate change requires priority attention. Girls must be assured of equal access to education;
- **engage families and communities** more closely with the provision of education and training;
- **focus on teacher recruitment, retention, training and continuous professional development** with greater emphasis on acquisition of proficiency in learner-centred pedagogies, assessment methods, and use of ICT. Greater use should be made of the Commonwealth of Learning's expertise on digital engagement;
- **create flexible learning environments to address learning needs** from the crucial early years to higher education and lifelong learning within an integrated system of formal, informal, and non-formal learning; create multiple and flexible learning pathways catering to the needs of learners and marginalised and displaced communities;
- **introduce special 'catch-up' and 'second chance' provision** for those seriously affected by school and college closures during the pandemic and in order to minimise drop out; particular gender groups (youth and adolescent girls or boys) may require enhanced attention and provision.^{lxvi}

RECOMMENDATION 4

Rethink curricula and learning spaces to meet today's needs.

We ask Commonwealth member states to take all necessary steps to:

- **undertake competency-based curriculum reforms** relevant to national development and to transition to greener and bluer economies. The skills and knowledge necessary for work-readiness, self-employment and economic independence are critical for preparing young people for the future of work and the 4th Industrial Revolution. Key skill sets include foundational skills^{lxvii} such as literacy and numeracy and fluency in the language of instruction, 21st century skills and entrepreneurship,^{lxviii} technical and vocational skills, digital proficiency and STEAM. Closer engagement with labour market stakeholders and the entrepreneurship ecosystem is desirable to provide quality TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) and apprenticeships and better prepare learners for future working life.
- **strengthen ICT infrastructure and its accessibility** to education and training providers and individual learners to enhance educational quality and access. Ways must be sought and found to address digital inequalities, so evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **develop the awareness, commitment and skills required to ensure planetary survival and the exercise of citizenship responsibilities**, particularly those relating to environment and climate change, by education for sustainable development, human rights education (education about, through and for human rights), conflict prevention and peace building. Institutions of learning should ensure they not only teach values of respect, equality and inclusion but practise them by providing environments that are welcoming, peaceful and safe to learn, free from discrimination, including gender discrimination, physical and sexual violence, coercion, and bullying.

Endnotes

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- ^{xi} UNESCO (2022), *Journalism Is a Public Good: World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development*, p.84. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380618/PDF/380618eng.pdf.multi> [accessed 14/04/22].
- ^{xii} Commonwealth Journalists Association, Commonwealth Lawyers Association, Commonwealth Legal Education Association, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (2018), *Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance*. Available at <https://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/Publications/Commonwealth%20principles%20on%20freedom%20of%20expression%20and%20the%20role%20of%20the%20media%20in%20good%20governance.pdf> [accessed 11/04/22].
- ^{xiii} See for example, the work of The Equality Network (TCEN) on measuring impact of COVID-19 on LGBT+ civil society: <https://www.commonwealth-covid19.com/> And to Human Dignity Trust's resources page which provides information on some of the legislative work that has been done with respect to hate crime: <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/hdt-resources/>.

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- ^{xxi} Including the International Labour Organisation's P029 Forced Labour Protocol (2014); the 2011 Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189); and the UN Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and its Protocols
- ^{xxii} CommonProtect is a Commonwealth legal reform advocacy programme led by It's A Penalty and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association. See <https://itsapenalty.org/>
- ^{xxiii} Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, opened for signature 19 October 1996, entered into force 01 January 2002. Available at <https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/full-text/?cid=70> [accessed 11/04/22].
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^{xxxiii} <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/one-health>

^{xxxiv}

<https://docstore.ohchr.org/SelfServices/FilesHandler.ashx?enc=4slQ6QSmIBEDzFEovLCuW1AVC1NkPsgUedPIF1vFPMKseJUC1Cl6FclakFK95v85g4Ik7k7QBI8EdfqmCITMrneFvtX1lOIL8hktDGNgWJc7FBC2uG%2b%2fdxsnIN1jrczo>

^{xxxv} <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>

^{xxxvi} <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

^{xxxvii} Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting [Leaders' Statement 2018](#)

^{xxxviii} The [World Bank Human Capital Project](#) year 3 report estimates that globally we have lost a decade worth of gains in human capital outcomes. Over 225 million jobs were lost, and 1.6 billion children were out of school at the peak of school closures. Global poverty is set to significantly increase for the first time in 20 years.

^{xxxix} The World Bank. 2019. [World Development Report 2019: The Changing Nature of Work](#). Washington DC.

^{xl} [The Human Capital Project](#) (HCP) is a global effort to accelerate and scale up more and better investments in people for greater equity and economic growth with a strong focus on women's empowerment, leveraging technology, and accelerating innovation, among other priorities. The project is led by the World Bank Group. As at February 2022, 83 countries are participating, 16 are members of the Commonwealth.

^{xli} ILO Report, July 2019: [Time to Act for SDG 8: Integrating Decent Work, Sustained Growth and Environmental Integrity](#).

^{xlii} Work for a Brighter Future, 2019, ILO [Global Commission on the Future of Work](#) and ILO [Centenary Declaration](#) for the Future of Work 2019

^{xliii} Successful and innovative mentorship programmes developed in the Commonwealth include: [Queen's Young Leaders](#) ; Queen's Commonwealth Trust <https://www.queenscommonwealthtrust.org/>; Rotary International's [young women's mentorship programme](#).

^{xliv} A gender transformative approach attempts to promote gender equality by addressing the causes of gender-based inequalities and transforming harmful gender roles, norms and power relations and promoting the relative position of women, girls and marginalised groups.

^{xliv} [Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers Association](#) (CAYWA) is endorsed by Commonwealth member governments and aims to raise the standard and status of youth work across the Commonwealth.

^{xlvi} Examples of inspirational Commonwealth youth leadership programmes include: [Duke of Edinburgh's International Award](#); [Queen's Young Leaders](#) Commonwealth Programme; [QCT Young Leaders](#) (Queen's Commonwealth Trust); Association of Commonwealth Universities' [Commonwealth Futures](#) programme; Commonwealth Jewish Council youth leadership programme and the [Inter-Religious Commonwealth Youth Alliance \(IRCYA\)](#).

^{xlvii} CAM (Commonwealth Association of Museums) developed an international [internship programme](#) for unemployed graduates to help the transition to the workplace, under Young Canada Works, Building Careers in Heritage programme.

^{xlviii} Examples of recent youth-led campaigns from Commonwealth youth networks can be found at: Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network (CCYDN) [Global Disability Children and Young People's Charter](#); Our Vision: [A Call to Action by Girls in Crisis](#) Commonwealth Campaign by young people with Plan International UK; Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network ([CYGEN](#)) [Reform53: Together for Legal Equality](#) campaign

^{xlix} Experiential learning programmes such as: [Nesta Challenge Prizes](#) which incentivise people to solve problems through innovation, including the Amazon [Longitude Explorer Prize](#) and the Ghana Science and Tech Explorer Prize ([GSTEP](#)) for young people; the Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network (CBWN) ran the Commonwealth [Creativity and Innovation](#) Challenge online during the pandemic; [Social Storm university hackathon on the SDGs](#), in partnership with CBWN, challenges participants to apply theory to a real life social problem; the Royal Commonwealth Society runs the annual Queen’s Commonwealth [Essay Competition](#).

^l [CFAB](#) (Children and Families across Borders), which is part of International Social Service, works to protect and reunite the children of Commonwealth families who cross international borders.

^{li} [The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work](#) (COSW) has been working with young carers in East Africa and across the Commonwealth to highlight their needs and contribution and develop a Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers.

^{lii} Towards Zero Foundation (TZF) has developed a [Commonwealth Road Safety Initiative](#) to help tackle child road deaths.

^{liii} The Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) - Commonwealth works to reduce drowning by its [Commonwealth Drowning Prevention](#)

^{liv} <https://www.gsma.com/r/gender-gap/>

^{lv} The Commonwealth Education Trust is investing and partnering with governments in the one consistent and most impactful resource in classrooms across the globe – teachers. Their Teach2030 initiative provides teachers in lower income countries access to digital, bite-size learning courses, with teachers in Zambia and Jamaica reporting increased confidence in their ‘core’ teaching skills.

^{lvi} CASTME links educators through regional groups in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Europe.

^{lvii} CBWN and CTO provided thought-leadership on these issues at their online conference on *Technology, Trade and Innovation in a COVID World* in June 2020. This included the importance of bridging the digital divide through e-commerce and investments in a data-driven economy, the formulation of supportive legal and regulatory framework on ‘data infrastructure’, and the development of ‘smart’ agriculture and fisheries technologies.

^{lviii} The [conference report and recommendations](#) was submitted at the request of the UK as Commonwealth and G7 Chair into the G7 meeting in 2021.

^{lix} WIPO, Global Innovation Index 2021 and the Startup Genome-Global Entrepreneurship Global Startup Ecosystem Fintech Report (2020)

^{lx} Commonwealth countries are rising up leading global metrics and rankings of innovation including the Startup Genome’s Global Startup Ecosystem Fintech Report (2020) and WIPO’s Global Innovation Index (2021).

^{lxi} The EDISON Alliance [accessed 20/04/22]. Available at <https://www.weforum.org/the-edison-alliance/about>. It is important to note that Paula Ingabire, Minister of Information and communications technology and Innovation in Rwanda, is on the Board of the Edison Alliance.

^{lxii} United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, The Bridgetown Covenant, UN Doc. TD/L.435, 6 October 2021 [accessed 20/04/22].

^{lxiii} This includes the Action Coalition for the UN Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality on Technology and Innovation, WIPO’s Global Innovation Index Advisory Board; and the EDISON Alliance Board; and the GSMA Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona every February (especially as GSMA is a Commonwealth partner and incoming Chair-in-Office Rwanda hosts MWC Africa annually in October).

^{lxiv} Council of the European Union (2021), Lisbon Declaration: Digital Democracy with a Purpose. [accessed 13/04/22]. Available at <https://www.lisbondeclaration.eu/learn-more/>

^{lxv} Inter-governmental institutions (Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth of Learning) and mechanisms (Conferences of Education Ministers) are complemented by a wide array of non-governmental bodies (including the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), hub of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan).

^{lxvi} The 2021 [G7 Leaders’ Declaration](#) on gender equality and delivering on 2026 girls’ education objectives, the [Girls Education Challenge](#) and UNESCO’s 2022 report on [boys’ disengagement](#) from education refer.

lxvii The [World Bank](#) has drawn attention to the importance of foundational learning and the issue of [Learning Poverty](#), estimated to have increased by 10% due to school closures and disruption caused by the pandemic.

lxviii 21st century skills (21CS) and entrepreneurship have become an increasing area of focus in international education discourse. The [Global Partnership for Education](#) (GPE) has looked at how to embed 21CS in education systems and the [Mastercard Foundation](#) has researched reforming secondary education in Africa.