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# Commonwealth Foundation

## Strategic Plan 2021-2026

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# Strategic Plan 2021-2026

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‘We recognise the important role that civil society plays in our communities and countries as partners in promoting and supporting Commonwealth values and principles, including the freedom of association and peaceful assembly, and in achieving development goals.’

### The Commonwealth Charter

# Introduction and overview of the planning process

The Foundation has taken the opportunity of the new strategic plan to refresh our vision, mission and theory of change, and to adapt our structure accordingly. We have reflected on, and absorbed the lessons of, the past four years and carefully considered both the challenges and opportunities presented by our rapidly changing operating environment. In doing so, we have sought to develop a strategy that provides the flexibility and responsiveness necessary to increase the relevance of the Foundation to both the Commonwealth and Commonwealth civil society.

Our future focus is firmly on solidarity with the people of the Commonwealth: using our resources, expertise, platforms and partnerships to amplify their voices and advance their interests.

## Our future focus:

**Support** the active and constructive participation of Commonwealth citizens in all aspects of their governance

**Nurture** the growth of vibrant and free civil societies in all Commonwealth countries

**Advance** the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth

Our work on the draft strategic plan was undertaken in two phases. The first phase, which took place between August and December 2020, involved a review of our current plan by external experts. The review focused on creating shared forward-looking insights regarding the Foundation's value, niche and potential. It involved extensive consultation within the Foundation as well as with our governors and other partners.

An interim report on the review process and its outcomes was provided to the Executive Committee of the Foundation's Board of Governors in December 2020. The Committee endorsed the proposal that the next strategy should cover a five-year period (2021-2026), with a 'stop and reflect' step built in at the end of years two and four. It was agreed that this approach would provide the Foundation with the right combination of flexibility and certainty.

The final review report was shared widely, including with all governors. Feedback confirmed that it provided a strong roadmap for the future. This enabled the Foundation to begin work immediately on the next phase: development of the new strategic plan. That work took place over a four-month period from January to April 2021.

In May 2021 a Peer Review Group was convened to solicit high-level feedback on the draft. The Group comprised the Chair of the Foundation, Chair of the Executive Committee, Assistant-Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Their recommendations for strengthening were all accepted and have been incorporated in the present draft.

# Part 1:

# The Strategic Plan

## 1.1. Context

The Commonwealth Foundation is unique among intergovernmental organisations in being explicitly mandated, by its Member States, to advance the interests of Commonwealth civil society. Its establishment by Heads of Government in 1965 reflected the commitment of Member States to ensuring that the Commonwealth family would be as much an association of peoples as of governments.

As one of the three intergovernmental pillars of the Commonwealth, the Foundation operates within that critical space between government and the people. Since its establishment, the Foundation has worked to bring the voice of civil society into all aspects of governance, supporting civil society engagement in shaping the policies and decisions that affect people's lives. Over the past decade, it has delivered that support through a range of mechanisms including grant-making, capacity development and cultural initiatives to amplify less-heard civic voices in communities throughout the Commonwealth.

In developing its plan for the future, the Foundation has been acutely aware of the uniquely challenging and unstable environment within which it is operating. Faith in multilateral institutions is fracturing at the same time as global cooperation and solidarity is most urgently needed. The year 2020 will soon be a memory. But the threats to our common future that came to the fore in that year: from pandemic disease to climate change, from inequality to injustice, are not going away. The need for solidarity, at a global level but also within the Commonwealth, is urgent.

As we move forward it is essential to acknowledge that governments and business cannot even begin to address these challenges without the direct and substantive involvement of civil society. Across our Commonwealth, civil society groups are fighting for accountability and transparency; they are on the front lines of service delivery; they are ensuring that the people are helping to shape the policies and decisions that affect their lives. The Foundation's task is to support this vital work: to enable and nurture the growth of vibrant and free civil societies across our Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth stands tall as a symbol of shared humanity. But it can be much more. As we find ourselves at this crossroads, the values which lie at the heart of our beloved organisation—human rights, democracy, justice and equality—must remain front and centre. It is those values that must guide us into a brighter future.

## 1.2. Building on what we've learned and achieved

The work undertaken in preparing this draft strategic plan—including the review of the Foundation's Strategic Plan 2017-2021, as well as subsequent partner feedback and our analysis of their conclusions—supported the following strategic decisions about focus, programming approach and structure.

### Strategic decisions: orientation of the Foundation and its work

- A more explicit Commonwealth and intergovernmental focus
- Firmly directed towards upholding—and advocating for—Commonwealth values and principles (ensuring that this links in with global priorities enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals)
- Maximising the Foundation's capacity to lead and advocate including through leveraging the Foundation's intergovernmental role within the Commonwealth family.

### Strategic decisions: programming

- Flexible and adaptive approach to programme conception and delivery, aimed at increasing relevance and impact and securing greater involvement of Member States
- Maintaining focus and generating impact through sharpened grant-making that includes adoption of a thematic approach and a focus on small and vulnerable Member States
- Leveraging of the Foundation's unique 'creative' function to more explicitly serve its vision and mission
- Gender and inclusion consistently integrated into all aspects of programming and functioning
- Cultivation of strategic partnerships across the Commonwealth system.

### Strategic decisions: structural adaptations

- Flexible and adaptable grants streams that harness our strengths while meeting changing needs
- Reorientation away from 'in-house' initiation of projects and towards a more explicitly partner-led approach that utilises grants as the delivery vehicle
- Consolidation of all Foundation advocacy and outreach under one programme
- Strengthened communications and monitoring and evaluation systems to deliver whole-of-Foundation service
- Consolidation of core functions, including finances and people management, under the Directorate.

# Part 1:

## The Strategic Plan

### 1.3. Our vision and mission

The Foundation’s **vision** is of a Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies.

Our **mission** is to contribute to that vision by:

- Supporting the active and constructive participation of Commonwealth citizens in all aspects of their governance
- Nurturing the growth of vibrant and free civil societies in all Commonwealth countries
- Advancing the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth

#### Linking our work with the 2030 agenda for sustainable development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been an important reference point for the Foundation and will continue to guide our work during the next strategic period.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on decision-making with particular reference to participation of vulnerable groups, such as women (SDG target 5.5), developing countries, least-developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small-island developing States and middle-income countries (SDG target 10.6) In the decision-making process. Furthermore, SDG target 16.7 aims to ‘Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels’.

### 1.4. Areas of focus

A core lesson we are bringing into the strategy is that **focus is important for impact**. By narrowing down our areas of concentration, we can deliver more to the people of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth system as a whole. A focused approach will also assist us in developing coherent and joined-up programmes, helping the Foundation cement its own profile and identity. Throughout this strategic period, selected focus areas will be kept under review and adjusted in response to feedback from partners and changes in our operating environment.

#### In order to be identified as an area of focus for the Foundation, the issue must:

- Be a clear priority for the Commonwealth system as a whole – as reflected in, for example, the Commonwealth Charter and CHOGM Communiqués
- Be a clear priority for Commonwealth civil society – as concluded from our own learning and outreach
- Reflect and advance the Sustainable Development Goals
- Complement and contribute to the work of our intergovernmental partners, most especially the Commonwealth Secretariat
- Have the potential to be enriched or advanced by the Foundation’s strategic and programmatic interventions.

By applying these criteria, the Foundation has established three areas of focus for the initial phase of this Strategic Plan. These will be reviewed after two years at the ‘stop and reflect’ point; changes may be made for the remainder of the planning period.

# Part 1:

# The Strategic Plan

## Focus area 1: Health

Commonwealth commitments to affordable health care and combating diseases are now in the spotlight as a result of Covid-19. Across the Commonwealth, the pandemic exposed highly varying—often gendered—differences in vulnerability. It also brought to light gross inequalities within and between countries, most especially in relation to access to adequate and affordable health services, medicines and vaccines. While health has not been a tier 1 concern for the Commonwealth, it is expected that the issue will be a major area of focus for the 2021 Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) Communiqué and for all Commonwealth institutions into the future.

### Access to health, education, food and shelter

*We recognise the necessity of access to affordable health care, education, clean drinking water, sanitation and housing for all citizens and emphasise the importance of promoting health and well-being in combating communicable and non-communicable diseases.*

**Commonwealth Charter XI**



**Sustainable Development Goal 3:**  
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

The pandemic also served to confirm that civil society involvement in this issue is critical across multiple fronts. Civil society organisations are vital partners in the delivery of health services. They also play an essential role in monitoring service delivery, exposing problems and challenges, identifying what is working and what is not. And it is the voice of civil society that is leading discussion, debate and policy formation around the big ideas that will matter in the years ahead: from the links between health and climate change to the practical steps needed to move towards truly universal access to health care.

In this first part of the Strategic Plan, the Foundation will prioritise health in our grant-making: supporting innovative projects that seek to bring civil society into relevant policy formation and decision-making. We will also bring creative voices into our work on health and use platforms such as *Critical Conversations* to spark debate, connection and action. We will target multilateral forums and appropriate Commonwealth spaces including the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings to communicate civil society ideas and positions. Our cross-cutting themes of gender equality and small and vulnerable States will feature strongly in our work on health.

## Focus area 2: Environment and climate change

Protection of the environment is now a major concern across all Commonwealth countries; Member States have consistently acknowledged the urgent need for action on environmental issues and climate change. It is expected that the next CHOGM Communiqué will reaffirm this as a Commonwealth priority for the coming years, singling out the need to focus special attention on smaller States that are facing existential threats from degraded natural environments and changing climate. The Commonwealth is recognised as a leader on these issues, and the Secretariat has a strong track record of working closely with Member States: for example, through helping small and vulnerable States secure finance to adapt or prepare for the impacts of climate change.

### Protecting the environment

*We recognise the importance of the protection and conservation of our natural ecosystems and affirm that sustainable management of the natural environment is the key to sustained human development. We recognise the importance of multilateral cooperation, sustained commitment and collective action, in particular by addressing the adaptation and mitigation challenges of climate change and facilitating the development, diffusion and deployment of affordable environmentally friendly technologies and renewable energy, and the prevention of illicit dumping of toxic and hazardous waste as well as the prevention and mitigation of erosion and desertification.*

**Commonwealth Charter X**



**Sustainable Development Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.



**Sustainable Development Goal 14:** Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.



**Sustainable Development Goal 15:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.



# Part 1:

## The Strategic Plan

It is now widely accepted that these are not problems which can be dealt with by governments alone. Civil society, along with the private sector, must be actively involved at all levels of discussion, debate, policy formation and decision-making, including in multilateral processes, most pressingly the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). And that participation must itself be purposefully inclusive, with the views and ideas of women, young people and those most severely affected being given prominence. The Foundation’s mandate places it in a strong position to help amplify the voice of civil society at a critical time for the planet and its people.

In this first part of the Strategic Plan, the Foundation will prioritise environment and climate change in our grant-making: supporting innovative projects that seek to bring civil society into policy formation and decision-making. We will also work to bring creative voices to bear on these issues and use platforms such as Critical Conversations to spark debate, connection and action. We will target multilateral forums and appropriate Commonwealth spaces to communicate civil society ideas and positions. We will bring an explicit gender equality lens to this work, taking up the priority of ‘gender and climate change’ identified by the Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministerial Meetings. We will also ensure that our focus on small and vulnerable States is strongly maintained throughout this area of work, which is so relevant to this group of Commonwealth countries.

### Focus area 3: Freedom of expression

Intergovernmental organisations have worked to elevate freedom of expression to the status of a universally recognised right: socialising us all to the idea that freedom of expression—including media freedom—is essential to the flourishing of democratic societies that support effective, accountable and inclusive institutions (SDG16), and a basic condition for development. The Commonwealth has played a leading role in this process: loudly and clearly affirming the right of every Commonwealth citizen to freedom of opinion and expression—and, critically, the obligation of every Commonwealth State to protect that right.

#### Freedom of expression

*We are committed to peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information, including through a free and responsible media, and to enhancing democratic traditions and strengthening democratic processes.*

#### Commonwealth Charter V



**Sustainable Development Goal 16:** Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. (Target 10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements).

The Foundation’s work, over many years, has confirmed that without freedom of opinion and expression, all else is at risk. From the right to food (Charter, Section XI), to the right to participate in government (Charter, Section I), to transparent and accountable governance (Charter, Section VIII): all hinges on the capacity of a society to understand what is going on and be able to speak out. The Foundation’s mandate, to support vibrant and free civil society throughout the Commonwealth, places a special obligation on us to help advance freedom of expression.

In this first part of the Strategic Plan, freedom of expression will be a core thread running through much of our creative and outreach work. Through our Creative Commonwealth programme, for example, we will work to support artists and storytellers as they realise their right to creative expression and seek to advance that same right for others. Through our People of the Commonwealth programme, we will provide spaces for Commonwealth civil society to speak freely and openly with each other—and engage with government—about issues of critical common concern.

# Part 1:

# The Strategic Plan

## 1.5. Cross-cutting themes

The Foundation’s work over the past four years, and the feedback we have received from partners including Member States, affirms the central importance of two themes to our overall portfolio of work: (i) gender equality; and (ii) the needs and aspirations of civil society in small and vulnerable States. We have also come to understand that it is insufficient to establish stand-alone initiatives to address one or both of these themes. Rather, they must become part of how we think and how we work: infusing our approach to civil society capacity development, outreach, creative expression and advocacy. The Strategic Plan also notes the importance of ensuring that our work focuses on, includes and resonates with young people: those who hold the future of the Commonwealth in their hands.

### Gender equality

The Foundation’s commitment to inclusive participation is informed by a recognition that social structures and systems are not neutral: rather, they are shaped by (and operate within) power dynamics that too often reflect and perpetuate inequality and discrimination. These power dynamics form the spaces within which people live, the constraints on their lives, and the ways in which they are able to participate in and influence wider social life.

Gender equality is a core value of the Commonwealth, enshrined in the Charter and reaffirmed in recent CHOGM Communiqués as well as in the outcome documents of Ministerial processes: not just the Women’s Affairs Ministerial Meetings but also those dealing with issues ranging from health to legal affairs. Gender equality is a major priority for the Commonwealth Secretariat and its commitments in this area are taken forward through mainstreaming approaches as well as dedicated programmes.

### Gender equality

*We recognise that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The advancement of women’s rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development.*

### Commonwealth Charter XII



**Sustainable Development Goal 5:**  
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

The Foundation understands that gender inequality is a major challenge to our vision of a Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies. We will work to ensure that our programming is geared towards meeting that challenge, and that it also reflects an understanding of how gender intersects with other bases of exclusion and oppression: paying close attention to the many factors that influence the capability of individuals and communities to shape lives of value and meaning. The risk that mainstreaming gender dilutes our focus and commitment will be actively managed, including through a system of monitoring, evaluation and learning that includes specific indicators of progress and change.

### Small and vulnerable States

The Commonwealth Charter explicitly affirms the role of the Commonwealth as a champion of small states, advocating for their special needs; providing policy advice on political, economic and social development issues; and delivering technical assistance. It recognises a special duty of the Commonwealth to support and advocate for the interests of small states as well as those that are otherwise vulnerable. These commitments have been taken forward in recent CHOGM Communiqués as well as in the outcome documents of Ministerial processes, not least the Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Small States. The Commonwealth Secretariat continues to prioritise small and vulnerable States through a range of initiatives that are focused on reducing their vulnerability across a range of fronts including climate change and public debt; improving their ability to access finance; and strengthening their participation in the international development agenda.

### Recognition of the needs of small States

*We are committed to assisting small and developing states in the Commonwealth, including the particular needs of small island developing states, in tackling their particular economic, energy, climate change and security challenges, and in building their resilience for the future.*

### Commonwealth Charter XIV

### Recognition of the needs of vulnerable States

*We are committed to collaborating to find ways to provide immediate help to the poorest and most vulnerable including least developed countries, and to develop responses to protect the people most at risk.*

### Commonwealth Charter XV

The Foundation strives to be an organisation for all its Members. The review of our Strategic Plan 2017-2021 confirmed that some of our Member States—principally but not exclusively smaller island States of the Pacific and Caribbean—require special attention and support. Often civil society in these States is comparatively less developed. This translates to differentiated needs, most especially when it comes to capacity development and helping to support a regulatory environment where civil society can flourish and grow. But it also points to the importance of the Foundation tailoring its own approaches (to grant-making, for example, as well as creative engagement) so as to ensure that individuals and civil society organisations in small and vulnerable States have the opportunity to actively participate in our projects and programmes. More generally, through our outreach and advocacy, the Foundation is well-placed to amplify issues disproportionately affecting small and vulnerable States: from access to vaccines and medicines to the problem of growing sovereign debt.

# Part 1:

## The Strategic Plan

### A note on young people

While not a formal cross-cutting theme, young people are central to the Foundation's mission and its vision for a future Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies.

#### Importance of young people in the Commonwealth

*We recognise the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures. The future success of the Commonwealth rests with the continued commitment and contributions of young people in promoting and sustaining the Commonwealth and its values and principles, and we commit to investing in and promoting their development, particularly through the creation of opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship.*

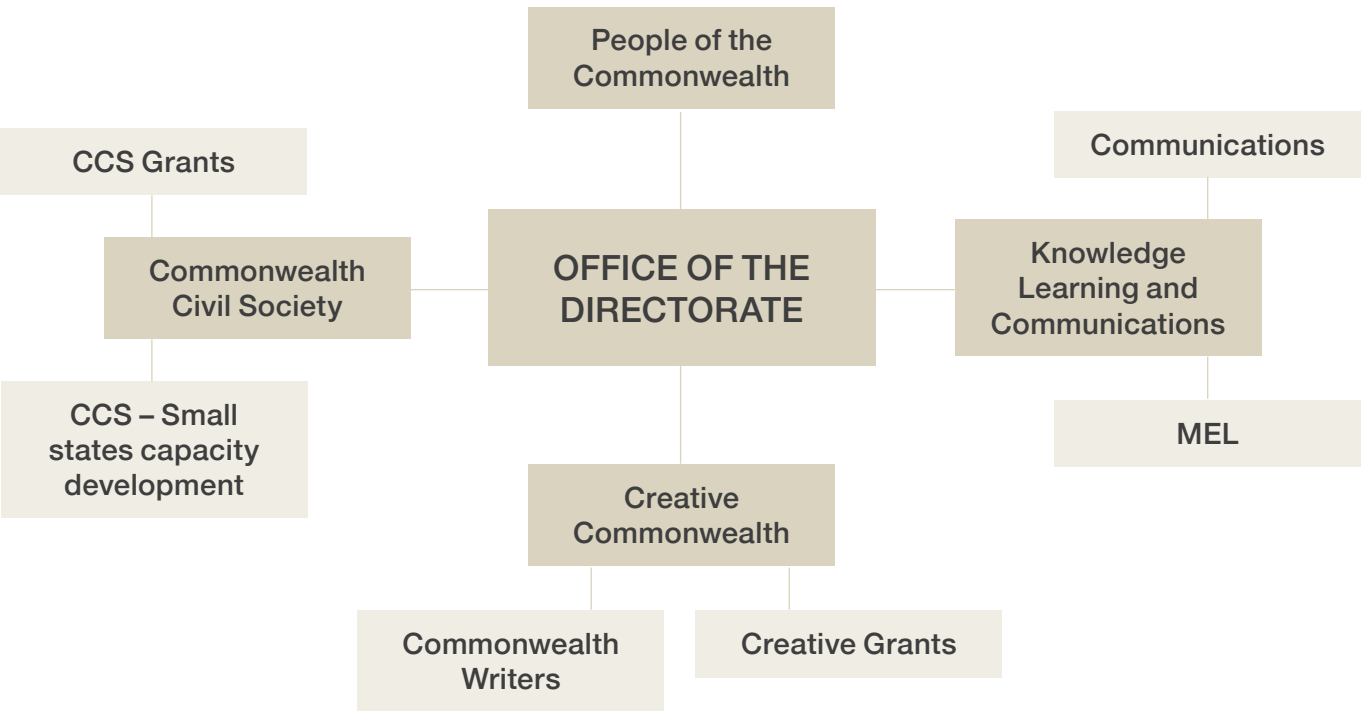
#### Commonwealth Charter XIII

We will work to advance the Charter's commitment to young people by ensuring that their involvement in the Foundation's work—from civil society strengthening to creative advocacy—is actively sought and encouraged. Through this work we will seek to support and advance the Secretariat's youth mainstreaming strategy: identifying areas and opportunities where collaboration can increase our impact.

### 1.6. Making it happen: three core programmes

The Foundation's work will be delivered through three core programmes (**Commonwealth Civil Society**, **Creative Commonwealth** and **People of the Commonwealth**) under the leadership of a **Directorate** which, in addition to overseeing all governance, strategic direction and planning, also delivers critical functions relating to finance, operations and people.

A fourth programme (**Knowledge, Learning and Communications**) brings together a range of functions critical to the Foundation's identity, coherence and visibility including oversight of an adaptive learning framework; management of information and infrastructure; leadership of the Foundation's monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) work; and all aspects of our communications including reporting (detailed further on page 23).





# Part 1:

## The Strategic Plan

### Commonwealth Civil Society programme

The Commonwealth Civil Society programme (CCS) works to contribute to vibrant and free civil societies across the Commonwealth by enabling citizens to constructively engage in core aspects of their governance in pursuit of the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter.

The programme will combine flexible grant-making with capacity development approaches, applying both rigour and flexibility to widen access, especially for civil society groups in small and vulnerable States.

The programme has two streams:

**CCS Grants** continues the current competitive open call, offering grants to civil society organisations (CSOs) for projects that seek to advance Commonwealth ideals and principles within the broad framework of ‘participatory governance’. CSOs will be supported to advance their organisational advocacy priorities and constructively engage in multi-layered policy processes.

**CCS Capacity Development** works to strengthen civil society organisations in small and vulnerable Commonwealth States and their capacity to influence policy processes through a combination of grant-making and tailored assistance.

Both streams will seek to encourage peer-to-peer learning and enhance coalition building to formulate collective advocacy positions on priority themes. The expected results of the programme will contribute to supporting Commonwealth civil society to secure spaces for inclusive, active and constructive engagement in governance and to advocate for the policies and regulations that are necessary to establish the enabling environment for a vibrant and free civil society to flourish.

Gender equality is identified as a cross-cutting outcome in this strategy and gender mainstreaming will accordingly be an integral part of the way in which the CCS programme develops, delivers and evaluates its grant-making. The programme will explicitly aim to challenge different layers of exclusion in making its contribution to just and equal societies.

For the first two years of the Strategic Plan, the CCS programme will adopt a thematic approach its work: explicitly directing its support to Commonwealth civil society in the priority areas of health, environment and climate change, and freedom of expression.

### Creative Commonwealth programme

The Creative Commonwealth programme (CC) is the Foundation’s cultural initiative: working to inspire and connect storytellers and artists across all regions of the Commonwealth, bringing personal stories to a global audience with a specific purpose of contributing to vibrant and free civil societies and advancing the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth.

The programme has two streams:

**Commonwealth Writers** maintains an established and highly regarded brand, the centrepiece of which is the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. Commonwealth Writers will continue the prize while also exploring opportunities to further expand its accessibility and reach through, for example, the inclusion of new languages and potentially additional formats or categories. Commonwealth Writers will also continue its commitment to introducing diverse voices and perspectives through its other creative expression and storytelling platforms including the online literary magazine *adda* and *Commonwealth Writers Conversations*.

**Creative Grants** will provide funding for individuals and organisations to advance freedom of expression and support the involvement of storytellers and artists in advocacy for change. This flexible facility will have a special focus on amplifying the voices of storytellers and artists within small and vulnerable States who are using their craft to contribute to change. The facility will further aim to support strategic inclusion of creative voices throughout the Foundation’s broader programme of work, from the *Critical Conversations* series to CCS Grants.

Creative Commonwealth will mainstream gender equality in all aspects of its work. For the first two years of the strategic period, it will adopt a thematic approach: ensuring that the creative voice of the people of the Commonwealth is a central part of our work around health, environment and climate change, and freedom of expression.

# Part 1:

# The Strategic Plan

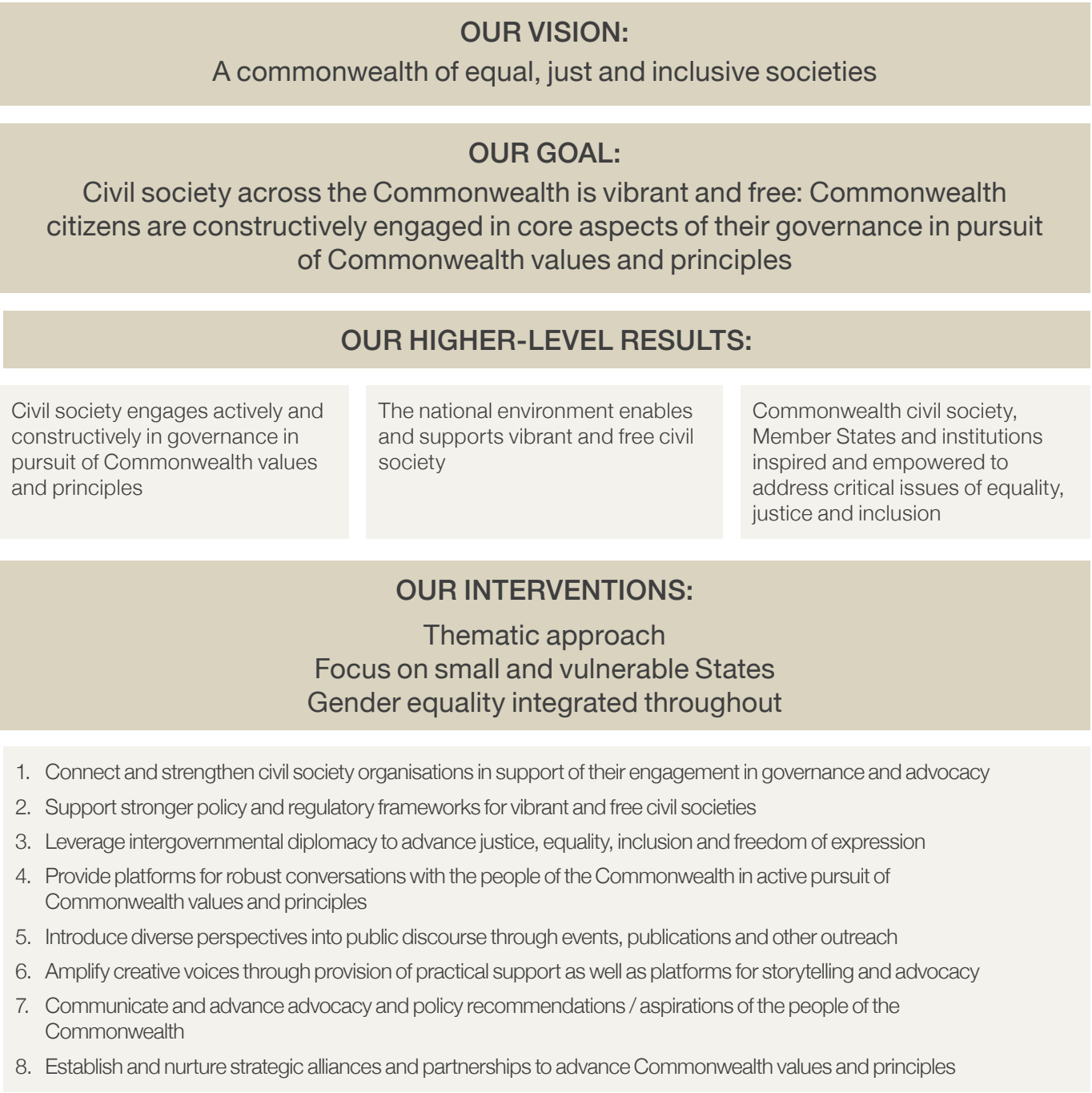
## People of the Commonwealth programme

The People of the Commonwealth programme (POC) is the Foundation's outreach and advocacy programme. Through multiple platforms, including the Critical Conversations series; the Commonwealth People's Forum; and engagement in Commonwealth policy spaces, People of the Commonwealth aims to bring Commonwealth citizens and their views into the centre of discussion and decision-making about critical issues that affect the lives of individuals and communities.

The programme will help convey and communicate the aspirations and recommendations of Commonwealth citizens to policy and decision-makers by convening Roundtables and robust discussions; promoting civil society engagement and representation of civil society interests in Commonwealth Ministerial meetings and other policy forums; and through amplifying diverse voices in support of Commonwealth values and principles (including through digital and print media).

As with the other two core programmes, its work will adopt a thematic approach during the first two years of the strategic period: prioritising health, environment and climate change, and freedom of expression. The programme will actively identify, build, and cultivate alliances and partnerships with other like-minded organisations within and outside the Commonwealth to develop strategic advocacy initiatives around our key thematic focus areas. As with the other core programmes, People of the Commonwealth will explicitly integrate a gender perspective into its work: ensuring that the voice of the people is fully representative of women and their experiences.

## 1.7. Bringing it all together: our pathway to change



# Part 2: How will we achieve (and measure) results?

## 2.1. Communications and outreach

The Strategic Plan 2021-2026 places communication and outreach front and centre through, for example, the People of the Commonwealth programme which is explicitly directed towards establishing platforms for both the Foundation and Commonwealth civil society to engage and influence. We will strengthen communications capacity across the Foundation, including through the allocation of additional financial and human resources. This is especially important in view of our embrace of digital technology for convening meetings. Our capacity to run large online events has increased rapidly, but must be further strengthened.

Over the next five years we will work to clearly communicate our vision and approach: not just to raise the profile of the Foundation but also to amplify the voices of Commonwealth civil society. We will use online media and new platforms alongside traditional means of communication to deliver our messages faster to key audiences, including civil society partners, governors and Commonwealth allies. Social media is expected to become more important for the Foundation during this period as we seek out broader, deeper and more diverse engagement across Commonwealth society. We will work with new and existing partners to further build our communications capacity and sharpen our messaging. We will generate and secure high-level placement of carefully timed and targeted opinion pieces on issues of concern that fall within the parameters of this Strategic Plan.

## 2.2. Governance and partnership

### Our governance, our strength

Membership of the Foundation is open to all Commonwealth States and we are proud that the overwhelming majority of Commonwealth countries are part of the Foundation family. Our Members are critical to the success of the Foundation’s mission. Through their participation in the Foundation’s governance bodies: Board of Governors, Executive Committee and Grants Committee, members provide much-valued guidance. And, as explored further in ‘Our finances’, their financial contributions are what enable us to do our work.

The Strategic Plan envisages a stronger role for the Foundation’s governors as both champions and guides. For example, the move towards grants as the principal vehicle for programme delivery means that the Grants Committee is expected to be more closely involved in advising on grant-making policies and approaches as well as in scrutinising and approving shortlisted applications.

We will encourage more targeted involvement of our valuable Civil Society Advisory Governors in other aspects of our work: for example, through their active participation in consultative groups and in advocacy campaigns related to the Foundation’s thematic areas of focus. We will be looking to all our governors for support in relation to two priority initiatives for this strategic period: (i) universal membership: bringing the remaining eight Commonwealth member States into the Foundation family; and (ii) arrears reduction and recovery: reducing the rate and level of arrears in contributions and recovering monies owed.

# Part 2: How will we achieve (and measure) results?

## Partnerships for results

The Foundation’s partnership strategy for this period is firmly focused on results. We seek to extend our support base by strengthening current partnerships and building new ones: aligning with organisations that share our vision and that are in a position to contribute to our mission and higher-level results.

Certain elements of our Strategic Plan help to direct our partnership approach. For example, the emphasis on our intergovernmental character supports greater outreach to other intergovernmental organisations that are in a position to complement and support our work. Such partnerships may also offer the Foundation opportunities to expand the policy discussion and negotiation spaces that it is seeking to carve out for Commonwealth civil society.

The strong focus on our Commonwealth identity is also highly relevant to partnerships and in this strategic period the Foundation will continue to cultivate strategic relationships with those Commonwealth institutions with which its vision and mission are most closely aligned.

### The Secretariat and the Foundation: mutual support, mutual benefit

The identity of the Commonwealth as an organisation of peoples, as well as of States, finds natural resonance in the partnership between the Foundation and the Secretariat. That relationship is crucial to the successful delivery of this Strategic Plan, which focuses so heavily on the Foundation’s intergovernmental character and which places the ideals and principles of the Commonwealth Charter at the centre of its work.

This Strategic Plan seeks to facilitate a further strengthening of the Foundation’s relationship with the Secretariat by ensuring close alignment in both priorities and approaches. At the leadership level, the Directorate will actively seek out opportunities to collaborate with the Secretariat’s senior leadership, helping to channel the voice of the ‘people of the Commonwealth’ where that is important and useful. We will also be active at the programmatic level in identifying areas where the Foundation can add value to the work of the Secretariat and vice-versa. Our thematic approach is expected to increase the depth and impact of this collaboration.

## 2.3. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

**Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is of critical importance to the Foundation: helping us understand the impact of our work and giving us the insight necessary to constantly refine and improve what we do and how we do it.**

The Foundation’s Strategic Plan 2017-2021 focused on results-based management (RBM) as the principal means of determining whether planned outcomes and interventions have been achieved. Results-based approaches continue to be an essential component of assessing progress towards our planned outcomes in the Strategic Plan 2021-2026. However, key aspects of the Foundation’s work such as our capacity building and advocacy require novel and tailored ways of monitoring and evaluating change that are not limited by rigid, predefined frameworks and indicators.

The Foundation has taken the opportunity of this new strategic period to review our approach to MEL so that it better reflects the range, diversity and complexity of our programming. MEL trials undertaken during 2019-2021, as well as our 2020 strategic review, underscored the value of a more harmonised, adaptive and mixed-methods approach that incorporates a higher-level analysis of results across regions and different stakeholders and that is easier to understand and share.

### Our pathway to change

Our pathway to change (page 19) articulates what the Foundation seeks to achieve and provides the guiding framework for our MEL. It provides the architecture for our strategic results framework and planned outcomes at strategic, intermediate and cross cutting outcome levels (see Annex 1).

While all our programmes contribute to the Foundation’s overall pathway to change, their outcomes and interventions differ, requiring interventions under each programme to be identified and mapped out.

To track the effectiveness of interventions, programme-specific progress markers have been developed to determine the progressive changes (both short and long term) towards achieving the strategic level results (Annex 1). Progress markers are more flexible than indicators and describe the concrete changes we expect to see in the short, mid and long-term.

The Foundation has identified and made clear the assumptions that underlie our pathway to change. Assumptions are critical to understanding our hypotheses to change; and the needs and interests of our stakeholders. Our MEL framework will track our assumptions and strategic choices over time so that we can analyse changes: our findings will be used to adapt and refine what we do and how we deliver our programme.

# Part 2: How will we achieve (and measure) results?

## Approaches and methods

Our choice of approach and method will depend on the nature of the project, its context and its monitoring and evaluation objectives. We have learned that a carefully curated selection of methods, as summarised below, will deliver strong and reliable results.

**Results-based approaches:** The Foundation is committed to results-based approaches and processes across all areas of its work as the principal means of capturing the degree to which original project objectives, and subsequent interventions, have been achieved. Methods include surveys and data collection; reporting and appraisal systems; and summative and mid-term evaluations. As part of our commitment to organisation-wide integration of gender, tools will include the means by which the Foundation can analyse its results from a gender perspective.

**Reflexive approaches:** The strength of results-based methods lies in asking pointed questions, but they can often only provide part of the answer. Collective learning and innovation processes do not evolve in a linear way and are often unpredictable. Given the complexity and dynamism of the environments in which we are working, and our commitment to learning, the Foundation will also employ more adaptive approaches that can better trace ‘cause and effect’ relations and that integrate a better understanding of project context.

Through reflexive approaches such as outcome harvesting, case studies and project accompaniment, we aim to understand (i) what has changed and (ii) our contribution to that change, by working backwards rather than charting a very rigid course. This involves building in opportunities to reflect on and review our assumptions, review pathways to change and develop higher-level learning questions. The ‘stop and reflect’ point built into this Strategic Plan is a key example of a reflexive approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning.

## Systems and capacity development

Systems for sharing data and knowledge are a key feature of this Strategic Plan. We will strengthen information management systems important for capturing and analysing the range of data generated by our projects and programmes. We will build up our information and content management platforms and better integrate collaboration tools. We will also explore information efficiency and automation, and a more centralised approach to data management.

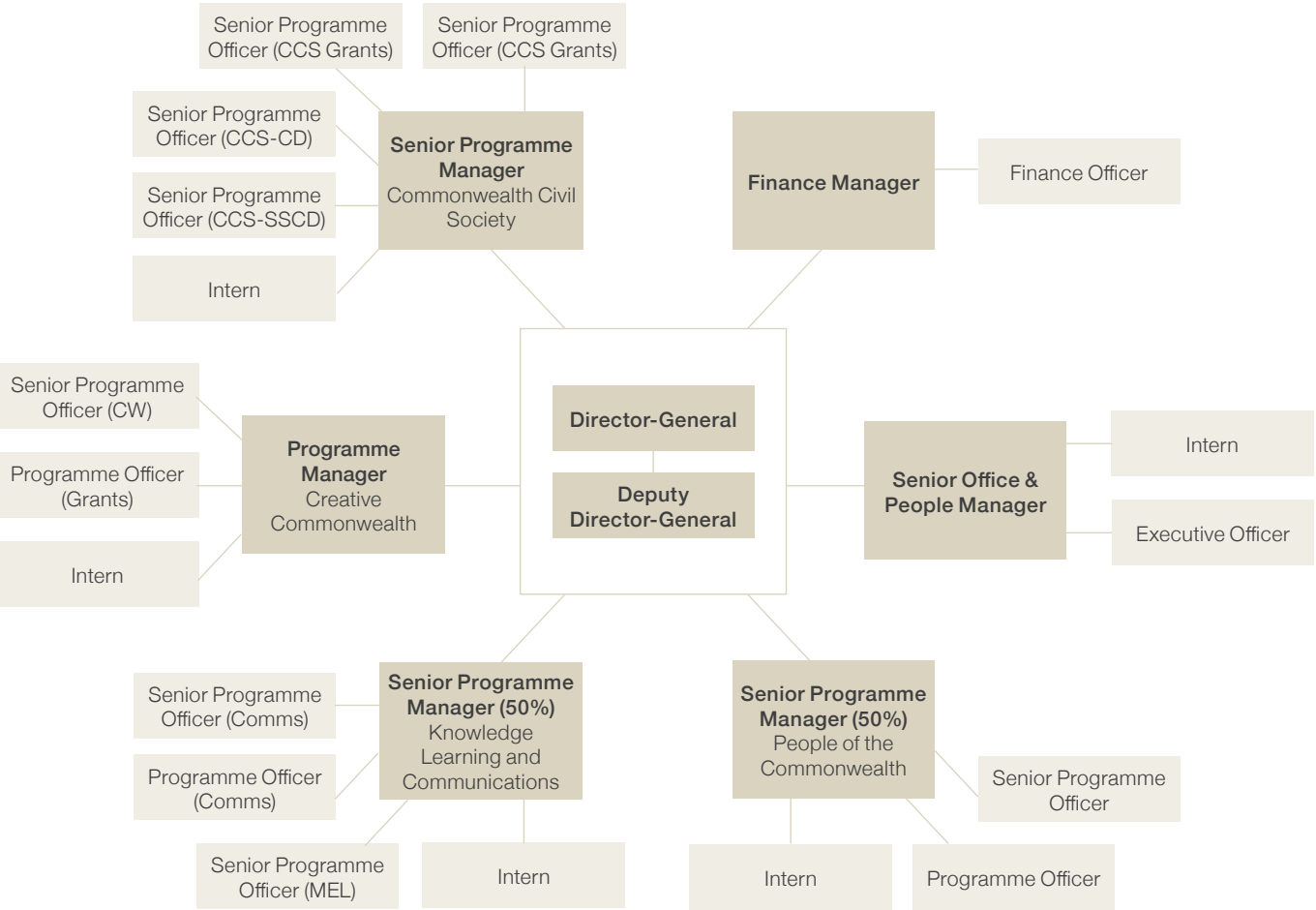
# Part 3: Resources for implementation

## 3.1. Our people

### A new structure for a new era

As part of its strategic planning process, the Foundation undertook a comprehensive review of its staffing structure. Through careful reorganisation of both roles and responsibilities we were able to meet our objective of maintaining the staff budget, while creating additional positions to service new areas as well as our growing work in communications and outreach.

The Foundation’s internship programme, which offers carefully planned and supervised placements for recent graduates, will continue to be an important element of our staffing plan. However, there will be significant changes. These include upgrading of intern remuneration to the London Living Wage and a recruitment and selection process that aims to ensure the programme is as accessible as possible to talented young people for whom such a life-changing opportunity might not be readily available.





Managing for success, wellbeing and growth

The Foundation’s people are its most precious resource, and we have taken the opportunity of the new Strategic Plan to collaboratively revise our values, as well as to refresh job descriptions: establishing clear requirements and responsibilities against a strong framework of required competencies. An updated and simplified appraisal process has also been introduced, incorporating a much-strengthened element of learning and development.

Other important changes include a strengthened Office of the Directorate, which encompasses core functions related to governance, finance and people management. A new position ‘Senior Office and People Manager’ replaces the former Human Resources Manager, providing much needed oversight of front office functions as well as enhanced attention to staffing matters.

Our values

Commitment to the Commonwealth and its Charter

We work to advance the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth.

Integrity

We act with transparency, honesty and fairness. We own our decisions and behaviours.

Respect

We treat colleagues and partners with appreciation and dignity.

Professionalism

We set high standards, give our best and are consistently reliable. We deliver on commitments.

Innovation

We encourage new thinking, listen to ideas and have an open mind. We are responsive to change.

Plurality of thought and expression

We actively encourage and provide space for the open and free exchange of opinions and ideas.

Collaboration

We cultivate and nurture honest, reliable and generous partnerships. We share challenges and successes.

The period of the pandemic has provided important lessons for the Foundation in relation to caring for our staff. As we move into the new strategic planning period, we will continue to proactively monitor individual and group wellbeing and morale, seeking rapid and creative approaches to addressing issues and challenges as they arise. Team members have amply demonstrated their capacity to operate productively out of the office and, moving forward, we expect to adopt more dynamic and flexible working practices that meet the needs of the Foundation while also ensuring the ongoing happiness and productivity of our people.

3.2. Our finances

The Foundation is principally funded by assessed contributions from Member States.

As custodians of public funds, we will continue to strive for the highest levels of transparency and accountability. Foundation accounts are independently audited to a level compatible with International Financial Reporting Standards. Moving into this new strategic planning period we reaffirm our target of completing our external audit process within four months of the end of the financial year and publishing the audited financial statements on our website.

The recovery of current accumulated arrears is critical to the financial health and sustainability of the Foundation and is, accordingly, a high priority. The Directorate will continue to take a proactive approach to current and accumulated arrears through a programme of targeted outreach, tailored payment plans and meetings with key Member States. The support and active involvement of all governors is essential to the success of the arrears recovery project.

Extra-budgetary resources (EBR) are additional funds for discrete projects within the workplan, sought from external sources in accordance with guidelines set by the Board of Governors. EBR have not been a significant part of the Foundation’s funding base until the final year of the Strategic Plan 2017-2021 when the Foundation secured substantial EBR from the Government of Canada to enhance our Special Grants Call in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Foundation will continue to adopt a measured approach to attracting income additional to individual Member State contributions. We foresee that the three grants streams established under this Strategic Plan: Creative Commonwealth grants, Commonwealth Civil Society grants; and Commonwealth Civil Society: Capacity Development, could potentially absorb EBR in a ways that would increase their reach and impact.

# Annex: Strategic Results Framework 2021-2026 (provisional)

## VISION:

A Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies

## GOAL:

Civil society across the Commonwealth is vibrant and free: Commonwealth citizens are constructively engaged in core aspects of their governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles

## STRATEGIC OUTCOMES:

1. Civil society engages actively and constructively in governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles

2. The national environment supports vibrant and free civil society

3. Commonwealth civil society, Member States and institutions inspired and empowered to address critical issues of equality, justice and inclusion

## INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES:

1.1. Commonwealth policy platforms and wider spaces accommodate and promote meaningful civil society engagement in governance  
1.2. Civil society contributing more effectively to national policy and practice around themed areas of focus  
1.3. Networks and partnerships within and across countries and regions actively feed into strategic advocacy around themed areas of focus

2.1. Commonwealth Member States affirm and support (through progressive policy, regulations and action) effective and inclusive civil society advocacy

3.1. The Foundation is recognised for providing well-curated spaces for the production of ideas, discussion and debate around critical issues  
3.2. Creative voices inspire action towards meaningful change around themed areas of focus  
3.3. New narratives about collective history and future that promote equality, justice and inclusion

## CROSS-CUTTING OUTCOMES:

### 1. Gender equality:

- 1.1. Greater attention to gender equality and inclusion by member states
- 1.2. Work on gender equality advanced by civil society
- 1.3. Increased focus on gender equality within new narratives

### 2. Small and vulnerable States:

- 2.1. Common interests of small and vulnerable states advanced in international development and financing mechanisms and global forums
- 2.2. Civil society and governments of small and vulnerable States working together to advance common interests in global forums
- 2.3. Increased policy and programme support for resilient recovery from natural disasters including the Covid-19 pandemic involving civil society

### 3. Young people:

- 3.1. Young people holding governments to account and championing Commonwealth values