



Commonwealth People's Forum 2022
Delivering a Common Future: Our Health, Our Planet, Our Future
21-22 June, Kigali, Rwanda

Summary of key recommendations

The Commonwealth People's Forum 2022 brought together over 250 delegates including civil society leaders, policy and decision makers, thematic experts, lawyers, journalists, academics, and activists from across the Commonwealth. Our planet and people are facing challenges on an unimaginable scale and the Forum set out to create an inclusive space for the free exchange of ideas, where Commonwealth citizens—in all their diversity—were free to discuss and debate some of the big issues of our time.

The Forum comprised six main sessions and 10 delegate-led sessions over two days. Sessions examined how civil society, our governments and those who exercise power can be held to account on critical issues including health, climate justice, financing, freedom of expression and people-centred governance. Participants discussed how we can better collaborate and re-fashion our institutions and the role the Commonwealth could—and should—play in creating a better, more equitable world for all.

An outcome [video](#) presenting the key discussion points and messages of the People's Forum was presented at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Foreign Ministers' Roundtable on 23 June and 25 June respectively.

The Commonwealth Foundation expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Rwanda for its excellent arrangements in hosting the Commonwealth People's Forum 2022.

1. Building Resilient and Equitable National Health Systems

This opening session explored lessons learned from the pandemic on what is needed to build resilient national health systems. The pandemic laid bare the fragility of health systems and widespread health inequalities throughout the Commonwealth. It also laid bare the apparent incapacity of international systems and institutions to provide support to those in need. Key drivers in securing universal health coverage (UHC); the role of civil society; and ways in which the Commonwealth can support the strengthening of health systems were examined.

Key recommendations

- 1.1 Ensure that basic, essential health services are strengthened and integrated into primary health care (PHC) systems and that community health workers are at the centre of PHC
- 1.2 Increase public investment in healthcare through increased taxation of citizens in the highest wage bracket. Public financing and local solutions are critical to achieving UHC
- 1.3 Recognise and nurture the role of civil society as advocates for the needs of marginalised communities, as partners in health system reform, and in holding governments accountable to their UHC commitments
- 1.4 Promote greater representation of women—who make up 70% of the world’s healthcare providers—in leadership and representation in global health organisations
- 1.5 Use the convening power of the Commonwealth for greater policy and thought leadership for national and global health system reform.

2. Climate Justice and Leadership for Change in the Commonwealth

The effects of climate change are being felt throughout the Commonwealth, with some Member States experiencing direct and immediate threats to their economies, their communities, and their way of life. The session began by briefly examining the main findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)’s Sixth Assessment Report and the impact of recent geo-political events in Ukraine and Russia. The session focused on how the

Commonwealth can lead on climate solutions relevant to its Member States; which priorities should be taken forward to the 27th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27); and how civil society can collaborate on priorities for action in the lead up to COP27.

Key recommendations

- 2.1 Recognise that the climate crisis impacts on all aspects of social and economic development, and that government ambition must rise to meet global human rights challenges
- 2.2 Shift to low carbon economies by reducing emissions, phasing out fossil fuels and ensuring a just transition to renewable energy that involves enhancing human skills and capacity
- 2.3 Support the demands of countries on the frontline to access promised climate finance and debt relief from the costs of mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage
- 2.4 Enhance the leadership role of the Commonwealth as a broker between wealthier nations and climate-vulnerable countries for finding new ideas and solutions to the climate crisis
- 2.5 Improve the transfer of climate-smart technology and mechanisms to facilitate information exchange and experiences between countries of the Commonwealth
- 2.6 Establish a World Environmental Court as a global dispute mechanism to address climate harm.

3. Health and Climate: Meeting the Immediate Challenge of Financing

Drawing on the discussions from the previous two, this session explored funding options for Commonwealth countries to respond to the overlapping crises of overburdened health systems, economic recovery post-pandemic and the climate crisis. Debt is surging to record levels, with low-and middle-income countries especially vulnerable. Speakers considered the roles of national governments, the international community and how global institutions, the private sector and civil society can work together to get much-needed funding and resources

to finance strong health systems, and to respond to even the most immediate impacts of climate change.

Key recommendations

- 3.1 Use the Commonwealth's influence to encourage wealthier states to increase their climate ambition and underscore the urgency of financing for both health and climate adaptation needs
- 3.2 Introduce innovative ways for Member States to widen the tax base and to better manage and direct wealth within countries. Harmonising tax systems, instituting regional and sub-regional tax policy standards and directing finance towards building resilience to address climate and health needs were recommended
- 3.3 Expand South-South cooperation among Commonwealth countries to strengthen regional organisations and develop a mechanism for inter-Commonwealth cooperation, for instance, through technology exchange
- 3.4 Focus on delivering a just transition to new, renewable forms of energy within Commonwealth countries which must be fair and equitable, especially for small island states, who suffer disproportionately from impacts of climate change
- 3.5 Involve the private sector in areas where there can be a return on investment, for instance, investment for the transition to renewable energy.
- 3.6 Lobby relevant Commonwealth countries, the United States and the European Union to address current unjust financing systems. The following specific recommendations were made:
 - A) Financing for climate adaptation, and loss and damage compensation, should be in the form of grant funds and debt cancellation for Global South countries. It is unjust that climate vulnerable countries must borrow money at high interest rates to recover from climate induced impacts from countries that caused the climate crisis.
 - B) Promised monies should be made available through the Green Climate Fund and other funding mechanisms.
 - C) A carbon tax on emissions should be implemented to help fund adaptation costs and ensure that polluting countries and industries make tangible contribution to climate adaptation and loss and damage compensation.

4. Innovations in Participatory Governance

The involvement of people in their governance is critical to democracy and democratic legitimacy. This session explored how citizens can play a central role in shaping policies and decisions that affect their lives. Examples were shared of innovations and lessons in people-centred governance approaches that have delivered tangible results, with a focus on lessons from Rwanda. Speakers looked at how to scale up positive examples of participatory governance from the local level to national contexts.

Key recommendations

- 4.1 Set up a knowledge bank on people-centred governance approaches within the Commonwealth. This knowledge bank should be widely accessible and draw on expertise of what works and how to facilitate processes at the local, national, and international levels, including in challenging contexts
- 4.2 Hold periodic reviews to assess the quality of Member States' citizen consultation and the effect on decision-making
- 4.3 Document and disseminate best practices to inform guidelines for the Commonwealth on effective platforms and how citizens can influence decision-making and change
- 4.4 Use the People's Forum and other such Forums as mechanisms to connect organisations that are doing innovative work that can be replicated
- 4.5 Create spaces where civil society, the private sector and government can engage in dialogue, ensuring that marginalised groups are seen, and their voices are heard
- 4.6 Civil society actors must reflect on their power and privilege and remain accountable in terms of who and what interests they represent.

5. Advancing Freedom of Expression in the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Charter affirms that freedom of expression, including media freedom, is essential to the flourishing of democratic societies and a basic condition for development. Freedom of expression is grounded in the Commonwealth's Latimer House Principles. This

session adopted a positive and forward-looking analysis: why does freedom of expression matter and how can it be protected? What can Commonwealth Member States and institutions do to support and advance free and responsible media? How can the proposed [Commonwealth principles on freedom of expression and the role of the media in good governance](#) help leverage positive change?

Key recommendations

- 5.1 Encourage and empower Commonwealth countries to promote and respect the principle of freedom of expression as laid out in the Charter
- 5.2 Improve awareness and understanding about the Commonwealth's Media Freedom Principles: encouraging dialogue aimed at ensuring they are fit for purpose and a positive reflection on the Commonwealth
- 5.3 Ensure more meaningful citizen and civil society involvement in oversight, regulation and reform of social media
- 5.4 Educate citizens on their rights to freedom of expression and how to exercise them
- 5.5 Improve collaboration and coordination of journalists and civil society to maintain independence
- 5.6 Explore opportunities for Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations and Accredited Organisations to raise specific issues around media freedom (including in relation to the intersection of this issue with gender, disability and climate).

6. A Commonwealth for All

Trust in the institutions and the values that hold the Commonwealth together are eroding at the very time that global cooperation on issues of common concern has never been more important. This final session opened with an address from Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland QC. Speakers and audience members discussed why the Commonwealth matters; how it can be an agent for change; how young people can be better involved and supported; how its institutions can better support civil society to fulfil the values of [the Commonwealth Charter](#); and the key priorities that civil society representatives should raise at the Foreign Ministers' Roundtable.

Key recommendations

- 6.1 Bring the voice of civil society into more Commonwealth decision-making spaces by creating new mechanisms for participation
- 6.2 Facilitate collective action and solidarity between small states on the global stage. Agreements such as the Blue Charter have effectively amplified the demands of small states at the global level
- 6.3 Convene spaces for young change-makers and governments to come together so that young leaders can engage in dialogue with policymakers to formulate bottom-up, organic solutions for policy change
- 6.4 Recognise the value of diverse, local actors—women, youth, children, indigenous communities, older people, and other marginalised communities—and support them to be active stakeholders for change
- 6.5 Reform repressive, discriminatory, and harmful colonial-era laws, such as those that criminalise the LGBTQI community. Bring ministers together to learn about repressive laws and how they can create change
- 6.6 Follow the recommendations of the 2011 Eminent Persons Group report by expanding the scope of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, so that countries are held accountable for violations of the Commonwealth Charter, beyond the most egregious cases. Consider the creation of a Commonwealth Commissioner for Human Rights.
- 6.7 Create a scorecard that tracks, provides evidence, and holds each Commonwealth Member State to account on commitments made at ministerial meetings and at CHOGM
- 6.8 Use indexes created by the UN, rather than duplicating existing indexes, to hold governments to account and for civil society to use as a benchmark
- 6.9 Provide a platform for civil society to evaluate the Commonwealth Charter principles and how it can move from promises to concrete action. The Commonwealth Foundation should facilitate this. The Charter should be a living document that can be revised and strengthened. For example, regarding LGBTQ+ rights and climate change
- 6.10 Build on the work of the Commonwealth of Learning to bridge the technology gap within Commonwealth countries and ensure people with different levels of technological access can still receive services, information, and resources.

6.11 Develop a process for civil society to maintain the momentum and take forward discussions in between CHOGMs. A separate cycle for civil society could be created for non-CHOGM years during which proposals for social change are envisioned, piloted, evaluated, and then shared.