



Annual Report

2022-2023



Commonwealth
Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is mandated by its Member States to advance the interests of Commonwealth civil society. Upholding a firm commitment to the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth, the Foundation seeks to nurture the growth of vibrant and free societies: championing the active and constructive participation of people in all aspects of governance.

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Cover photo: Participant at the 2022 Commonwealth People's Forum in Kigali, Rwanda

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Welcome from the Chair of the Board



As the Chair of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Foundation I welcome this annual report, which stands as a comprehensive record of the many ways in which the Foundation has sought to advance the values and principles of the Commonwealth and nurture the growth of vibrant and free civil societies across all our countries.

The past year has been marked by some memorable highlights, not least the Foundation's successful delivery of the 2022 Commonwealth People's Forum at the Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali. It was an honour to be part of the People's Forum, witnessing first-hand the Foundation's ability to bring together a broad range of compelling voices to discuss and debate some of the most important issues of our time. The roundtable between civil society representatives and Foreign Ministers, ably moderated by our Director-General, served as a clear reminder of the Commonwealth's unique identity as an association of peoples, not just of states.

I was delighted to be part of the High Commissioners' Festive Poetry Evening, held for the second time in December 2022. Culture is one of the ties that binds together the 56 very different countries that make up our modern Commonwealth. By creating an opportunity for High Commissioners to come together to celebrate their favourite national poets, the Foundation is reminding us of the richness of our individual cultures, as well as of the universal themes that serve to unite our countries across place, language and tradition.

Another highlight for me, as Chair, was to witness the leading role that the Foundation took in marking the tenth anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter. Through a series of events before and during Commonwealth Week, the Foundation curated a strong, intergenerational reflection on both the Charter and on broader questions around the identity

and future of the Commonwealth. These events built on work that the Foundation has been engaged in for several years. We have reason to be grateful that, within the Commonwealth, there exists an institution able to provide both the platform and the direction for these important conversations.

Leadership of the Foundation is a shared responsibility and I take this opportunity to thank our two other office holders for their much-valued contributions: Chair of the Executive Committee, H.E. Dr Farahanaz Faizal, High Commissioner of Maldives; and recently elected Chair of the Grants Committee, H.E. Dr Kevin M Isaac, High Commissioner of Saint Kitts and Nevis. A unique feature of our governance structure is of course the Civil Society Advisory Governors, whose presence serves as an important reminder of those the Foundation has been established to serve. During the reporting period the previous cohort completed their service, and I am delighted to welcome our new governors from Australia, Maldives, Malta, Nigeria, and Trinidad and Tobago.

This past year has, of course, marked the passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, who lived a life of steadfast and devoted service to the people of the Commonwealth. At the Commonwealth Foundation we remind ourselves of the values and principles that Her Late Majesty cemented so firmly within the identity and mission of this organisation. We honour her life and legacy by reaffirming our commitment to a Commonwealth that is unwavering in its duty to human rights, to equality, to justice and the rule of law; a Commonwealth that shapes global policy on issues that matter most to its people; a Commonwealth that is united in solidarity, most especially with its smallest and most vulnerable states.

Dato' Sudha Devi K.R. Vasudevan
Chair of the Board

Chair of the Executive Committee



H.E. Dr Farahanaz Faizal
High Commissioner of Maldives

Chair of the Grants Committee



H.E. Dr Kevin M Isaac
High Commissioner of Saint Kitts and Nevis

Civil Society Advisory Governors



Dr Justin Koonin
Australia



Safaath Ahmed Zahir
Maldives



Mario Gerada
Malta



Dr Helen Kezie-Nwoha
Nigeria



Darrion Narine
Trinidad and Tobago

Introduction from the Director-General



I am delighted to present the Foundation’s annual report for 2022–2023. After the recent difficulties and uncertainties that have affected us all, it has been a wonderful experience to lead the Foundation through 12 months of steady innovation and achievement. With a staff of less than 25, and an equally modest budget, the Foundation continues to deliver strongly for its constituency: our Member States and the 2.5 billion citizens of the Commonwealth.

The release of this report places the Foundation near the mid-point of our Strategic Plan 2021–2026. We have taken this opportunity to stop and reflect on what has been achieved so far, and what still needs to be done. This reflection affirms that the beating heart of our strategy is sound: our focus will remain firmly on solidarity with the people of the Commonwealth; using our resources, expertise, platforms and partnerships to amplify their voices and advance their interests. We will continue our thematic approach which anchors our work to three core areas: health, climate and freedom of expression—with further refinements to better pursue our mission and reflect our strengths. We will maintain our staunch commitment to the Commonwealth’s small and vulnerable states and to gender equality, while striving to make a substantial commitment to the ‘Year of Youth 2023’ by strengthening our connections with young people.

There are so many high points of the past year. We delivered a record number of grants to a record number of civil society organisations across the Commonwealth. We established a strong and effective presence at key international events including CHOGM, COP27 and Commonwealth ministerial meetings. We grew our community of Commonwealth citizens who are using the Foundation’s platforms to amplify their work, expand their networks, and

‘This reflection affirms that the beating heart of our strategy is sound: our focus will remain firmly on solidarity with the people of the Commonwealth; using our resources, expertise, platforms and partnerships to amplify their voices and advance their interests.’

‘The commitment of our Member States over the past year has been critical to our success and I am grateful to so many of the Foundation’s governors for their active participation—often extending well beyond the usual duties of governance.’

increase their impact. We led celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter: encouraging deep reflection on the identity and purpose of the Commonwealth and what role the Charter might play in shaping its future. In our creative work, we continued to champion Commonwealth culture as a unifying force—and a powerful means by which Commonwealth values of democracy, equality and human rights can be protected and defended.

The commitment of our Member States over the past year has been critical to our success and I am grateful to so many of the Foundation’s governors for their active participation—often extending well beyond the usual duties of governance. In the year ahead, I will again be calling on their support as I seek to firm up our financial position through recovery of arrears in contributions.

A major achievement of the reporting period was the comprehensive review of our Civil Society Advisory Governor (CSAG) mechanism: a unique feature of the Foundation’s structure that helps ensure our strong connection with Commonwealth civil society. Mandated by the Board of Governors, the CSAG review resulted in revised terms of reference which guided the recruitment of a new cohort of governors who will serve for two years from June 2023.

We were happy to recently welcome Gabon, one of the newest countries of the Commonwealth, as our 49th Member State. I plan to continue my close engagement with those few remaining Commonwealth countries that are not yet members. The Foundation deserves to be unequivocally Commonwealth-wide, and governors have a critical role to play in working with me to advocate for the Foundation and its central place in the Commonwealth intergovernmental family.

The Foundation has confirmed, this year, that we are on course to fully deliver on our ambitious strategic plan. For this, I pay tribute to the stellar team that I am privileged to lead, whose commitment and hard work shine out, through every page of this report.

Dr Anne T. Gallagher AO
Director-General

Our approach

The reporting period covers the second year under the Foundation’s Strategic Plan 2021–2026. Approved by the Board of Governors in June 2021, the five-year plan affirms the Foundation’s vision of a Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies. It articulates our mission as contributing 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

Our strategic plan is underpinned by a conviction that **focus** is important for **impact**.

Governors agreed that defined areas of focus would enable us to deliver more to the people of the Commonwealth and strengthen the Foundation’s contribution to broader Commonwealth priorities. It was further agreed that a more tightly focused approach would ensure coherent and joined-up programmes, thereby helping the Foundation cement its own profile and identity.

For the initial phase of the strategic plan we have focused attention and resources on three issues:



health



environment and climate change



freedom of expression

Two cross-cutting themes are prioritised throughout our work:



gender equality



small and vulnerable states

Our strategic plan also notes the importance of ensuring that our work focuses on, includes and resonates with:



young people

Building on what we have learned

When presenting the new strategic plan to the Board of Governors in June 2021, the Foundation proposed a ‘stop and reflect’ exercise at the end of the second year; aimed at ensuring we identify any adjustments to the strategic plan that might be necessary to achieve its ambitious goals.

The ‘stop and reflect’ exercise supported the following decisions regarding our strategy, our approach, and the way that we will work together for the remainder of the Strategic Plan 2021–2026.

1. We will sharpen our thematic approach by:

- Emphasising the unique position that the Foundation occupies. Our core themes will now be *climate justice, health justice and freedom of expression*.
- Targeting our work to be more explicitly based on where we can have the greatest impact in contributing to shifts in policy and practice: lending legitimacy and coherence to our approach.
- Leveraging expertise from our partners to strengthen synergies between different aspects of our programme: for example, linking grant-making and creative work to advocacy.

3. We will continue empowering our grant partners by:

- Accelerating our efforts to empower grant partners: ensuring appropriate levels of accountability while lessening reporting and other burdens on our partners so they can focus on achieving results.
- Continuing our regional approach for Capacity Strengthening and Creative Grants streams.
- Providing more deeply consultative support and light-touch oversight to smaller and less well-established grant partners.
- Supporting grant partners as change-makers: identifying opportunities to contribute to changes in policy and practice across our three thematic areas.
- Facilitating greater access to multilateral policy spaces, particularly for our grant partners and civil society organisations from small and vulnerable states.

2. We will redouble our efforts to champion Commonwealth values by:

- Using our platforms, networks and programmes to advocate for a values-based Commonwealth and to strengthen the Foundation’s profile as a champion of Commonwealth values.
- Continuing to build civil society awareness of the Charter and fostering use of the Charter as a tool for positive change.
- Leveraging our unique intergovernmental position to support civil society participation in governance and policy-making informed by Commonwealth values.
- Continuing to facilitate and engage in provocative and challenging discussions and supporting civil society to hold decision-makers to account.

4. We will further simplify how we measure results by:


- Working to a refined and simplified strategic results framework that better reflects all areas of our work, helping us assess change across all programmes.
- Remaining ambitious in our vision while ensuring progress markers are realistic and clearly understood.


Our Commonwealth partners

Working with the Commonwealth Secretariat

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.

Throughout the reporting period, the Foundation has identified points of synergy in our programming and multiple opportunities for collaboration.

 **Health:** collaboration between the Foundation and the Secretariat has supported wider and deeper civil society participation in the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting.

 **Environment and climate change:** the Foundation used the opportunity of COP27 to work with the Secretariat to bring the voice of the Commonwealth, through the Secretary-General, to a high-level discussion on climate justice and international law.

 **Freedom of expression:** the Foundation has continued to give high coverage to this critical Commonwealth issue through outreach and advocacy activities: supporting the Secretariat's efforts by organising an online event to discuss the draft principles on media freedom prior to their formal consideration (and adoption) by Commonwealth Law Ministers.

Relationships with the Secretariat were strengthened further through collaboration on the 'Year of Youth 2023', including the Foundation's participation in the adjudication committee to judge the Commonwealth Youth Awards as well as support to the Youth Leaders Summit.

Within the Directorate, efforts continue to seek greater understanding (and, as appropriate, alignment) between the Foundation and the Secretariat in areas such as finance and human resources. The Foundation is grateful to the Secretariat for extending important professional development activities to our staff.

The 2022-2023 workplan included a pilot initiative around election support: aimed at identifying a potential role for the Foundation in complementing the work of the Secretariat's Electoral Support Division (ESD). During the reporting period the Foundation participated in the Electoral Observation Mission in Kenya and discussions are underway with ESD on how to utilise the lessons learned in the second year of the pilot.

Working with—and for—our wider Commonwealth

The Foundation's vision, of a Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies, requires us to develop and nurture effective working relationships across the wider Commonwealth system.

Over the reporting period we have continued our strong engagement with a broad range of Commonwealth organisations and networks, paying special attention to those whose work aligns with our thematic areas. Examples include: (i) sponsoring the participation of delegates from Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (AO) to the Commonwealth People's Forum and the roundtable between civil society and Foreign Ministers; (ii) providing space for AOs to organise their own events at the People's Forum; (iii) involving key AOs in development and delivery of our event series including during Commonwealth Week; (iv) delivering regular

briefings on our work to individual AOs as well as to joint meetings convened by AOs; and (v) providing speakers, technical support and meeting space to events hosted by AOs.

During the reporting period the Director-General continued her role as a member of the editorial board of the Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs. She also served on the recruitment panel for the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission; participated in a Secretariat-initiated review of the collective contribution of AOs to the broader goals of the Commonwealth; and served as an adviser to the Expert Working Group of Member State representatives on the development of the *Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance*.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Commonwealth Secretary-General and H.E. Nikenike Vurobaravu, President of Vanuatu, *Critical Conversations* panellists at COP27



The Foundation at CHOGM: Commonwealth People's Forum 2022

The [Commonwealth People's Forum](#) was held in Kigali, Rwanda, immediately before the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June 2022. Its theme, *Delivering a Common Future: Our Health, Our Planet, Our Future*, directly reflected the Foundation's own strategic priorities. The Forum is a flagship event for the Foundation: an opportunity to bring Commonwealth citizens and their views into the centre of discussion and decision-making around some of the big issues and questions of our time.

Organised jointly with the Government of Rwanda, the forum brought together more than 300 delegates from 47 countries across the Commonwealth including civil society leaders, government officials and ministers, thematic experts, lawyers, journalists, academics and activists.

The forum set out to create an inclusive space for the free exchange of ideas. Six main sessions over two days followed the well-tested format of top-level speakers and interactive dialogue that the Foundation has refined through the [Critical Conversations](#) series. The power of the arts to effect change was brought to life through the weaving of creative elements throughout the programme. 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.

The Foundation invited Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (AOs) to run their own delegate-led sessions within the broader programme resulting in 10 sessions that brought new perspectives to the Forum and provided an opportunity for AOs to advance their work.

The Foundation utilised the CHOGM setting to announce and celebrate the winner of the [Commonwealth Short Story Prize](#): [Ntsika Kota](#), from Eswatini, was invited to Kigali to participate in a live event to coincide with the online prize ceremony.



Participant at the 2022 Commonwealth People's Forum

'Well done to the organisers. This was my first Commonwealth People's Forum. I saw a lot of synergies with the work that Slum Dwellers International does. I will be reaching out to see if there are areas we can collaborate more.'

Beth Chitekwe-Biti, South Africa (speaker)

Outcomes

The main messages to emerge were captured in an [outcome video](#) presented by the Director-General to the **Foreign Ministers Meeting** on 23 June. Two days later, on 25 June, the Foundation and the Secretariat co-hosted the **Foreign Ministers Roundtable**, which brought together Foreign (and other) Ministers with representatives of civil society for a dialogue which touched on a broad range of issues including freedom of expression, gender discrimination, financing, and climate justice. [A summary of key recommendations from the Forum is available on our website.](#)

'Thank you @commonwealthorg for organising today's roundtable dialogue between civil society and foreign ministers of the Commonwealth. Great opportunity to discuss the debt crisis with ministers from Jamaica, Gabon and The Gambia #CHOGM2022'

Heidi Chow, Debt Justice, UK (speaker)

The 2024 Forum

Planning for the Commonwealth People's Forum 2024 began during this reporting period, including initial discussions with Commonwealth Secretariat colleagues and other Forum leads. The Director-General visited Samoa in January and, with her team, also met several times with the High Commissioner for Samoa in the UK. The Foundation intends to work closely with the High Commissioner and the Secretariat in ensuring that the People's Forum in 2024 becomes a vehicle for widespread engagement—and a force for positive change for the people of the Commonwealth.

The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC speaking at 'A Commonwealth for All' during the 2022 Commonwealth People's Forum



'Thank you for the opportunity to host a side-event and for your support in the arrangements. We had a really successful event that has helped us in our programme design thinking but also developed partnerships that we are taking forward. So thank you again!'

George Lakey, Association of Commonwealth Universities, UK

The Foundation at COP27

COP27, which took place in Egypt in November 2022, provided a valuable opportunity for the Foundation to advance its strategic agenda relating to both climate change and the interests of the Commonwealth’s small and vulnerable states.

Before, during and after COP27, our Critical Conversations series amplified the voices of those countries that are on the frontline of the climate crisis. Prior to the conference, the Foundation convened activists and policy-makers for two events. The first of these focused on the issue of just transitions; the second on climate reparations, building on a growing body of Foundation work on climate-induced loss and damage.

During COP27 in Egypt, the Foundation took the lead in bringing the voices of the Commonwealth’s frontline countries to a global audience. Over two events that we hosted with the Government of Vanuatu, the Foundation drew attention to the ways in which some of the Commonwealth’s smallest and most vulnerable states are using the tools of international law to secure climate justice. Our panellists included the President of Vanuatu, the Prime Minister of The Bahamas, the Commonwealth Secretary-General and climate lawyers who are leading the charge through international courts and tribunals.

As detailed further on pages 36–37, the Foundation also worked to promote civil society engagement with COP27, focusing particularly on bringing in voices

from the Commonwealth’s small and vulnerable states. Our efforts included providing capacity development to young negotiators working on loss and damage. We also supported skills development of journalists seeking to bring the stories of COP27 to their countries, as well as to share the perspective of frontline states with a wider audience.

‘Thank you so much again to the Commonwealth Foundation for the incredible support to the world’s most vulnerable on this transformative initiative.’

Christopher Bartlett, Head of Climate Diplomacy, Government of Vanuatu



Speakers at the COP27 event ‘Climate justice through international law: a high-level dialogue’ (left-right) Elizabeth Wathuti, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, HE Nikenike Vurobaravu, The Rt Hon Philip Davis and the Hon Surangel Whipps Jr

‘We have a packed house at the Resilience Hub #COP27 for the High Level Vanuatu government side-event “Climate Justice through International Law”. [...] Secretary General applauds the pursuit to get clarity from the International Court of Justice amidst the disputes, the glaring impacts, and a code red.’

Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change

Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2022

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize has continued to grow, attracting new writers from more Commonwealth Member States. The 2022 prize was won by Ntsika Kota, from Eswatini, for his story ‘and the earth drank deep’. In a record year for entries, Ntsika became the first writer from Eswatini to be shortlisted for the prize, and the second overall winner from Africa.

Ntsika received the £5,000 prize at an online ceremony during the Commonwealth People’s Forum in June 2022, making his first public appearance as a prize-winning author in Kigali in front of a distinguished audience of delegates, government officials and writers. A hitherto unpublished author, his winning story was published online by *Granta* and he has since been interviewed by the 2021 Booker prize winner Damon Galgut. With Foundation support, he participated in the prestigious George Town Literary Festival in Penang, Malaysia in November 2022.

The award ceremony also celebrated the other four regional winners: Sofia Mariah Ma from Singapore; Cecil Browne from the UK and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Diana McCaulay from Jamaica; and Mary Rokonadravu from Fiji. An innovation this year was the inclusion of short video clips of the winners talking about and reading from their stories.

Details of the 2023 prize, the judging of which will be completed in June 2023, are provided on pages 32–33.

‘I think the prize has changed my personal relationship with writing for the better. I always knew, pretty much from the outset that I would never stop writing. However, it was only through involvement with the prize that I have started to think of myself as a writer.’

Ntsika Kota, Eswatini, 2022 winner



Ntsika Kota speaking at the 2022 George Town Literary Festival in Penang, Malaysia

Anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter

Ten years ago, Member States of the Commonwealth signed up to the **Commonwealth Charter**: a document that set out the Commonwealth’s fundamental principles and values: clearly affirming its commitment to democracy and the rule of law, human rights, international peace and security and sustainable development. The Charter begins with the words ‘We the People’ and was seen as the Commonwealth’s statement of its place and purpose: a single document that would unite the Commonwealth and guide its work.

Over the past several years the Foundation has made the Charter a core reference point for our work. We have sought to take forward the spirit of the Charter in a multitude of ways: in our increased focus on young people; in our values-based advocacy around issues of equality, justice and freedom; and in our resolute championing of the Commonwealth’s smallest and most vulnerable Member States.

The anniversary of the Charter provided a fitting opportunity to bring people and countries together; to reflect on the achievements and challenges of the past 10 years and to reaffirm the political values and aspirations that must guide us into the future.

In the lead-up to the anniversary on [Commonwealth Day](#), 13 March 2022, the Foundation launched a multimedia campaign to catalyse—and capture—a truly international conversation on the Charter’s relevance for the association and its citizens. In response to our campaign, which reached 600,000 people on social media, more than 5,000 individuals have ‘co-signed’ the Charter so far and over 300 have shared [self-recorded videos](#) discussing their vision for the future of the Charter.

The digital campaign culminated in two linked *Critical Conversations* during Commonwealth Week:

The first was an online event focused squarely on the young people of the Commonwealth, whose attitude to the association will surely determine its relevance in the future. Young people are rightly asking whether the Commonwealth is fit for purpose: whether it is equipped to address modern-day threats to democracy, peace, and the health of our planet. [A Decade of the Commonwealth Charter: Young Leaders’ Dialogue](#) on 14 March received almost 5,000 registrations, with 654 people from 56 countries joining live to participate in the discussion—our largest audience this year. Speakers included a historian of black history; a writer/poet; indigenous, anti-racist, gender and climate justice activists; and Belize City’s (youngest ever) Deputy Mayor. It was moderated by Makeda Mahadeo, a Rwandan-Jamaican media personality and DJ.

Young leaders spoke about the necessity of ensuring that the Charter drives meaningful and measurable action. They also emphasised the unlimited potential of Commonwealth youth to advocate for—and achieve—just and inclusive change.

‘That was so engaging, and so expertly facilitated behind the scenes! Thank you so much for putting this together, I feel I learned so much from my peers and I’m really looking forward to staying connected with y’all... I’m so excited to see what comes from this discussion.’

Larissa Crawford, Future Ancestors Services, Canada (speaker)

‘The conversation and exchanges were candid, energetic, interesting, insightful. Can’t wait to look back to the second decade with our Commonwealth young leaders leading forward.’

Jacqueline Wong, Malaysia (participant)

The second event, [A Decade of the Commonwealth Charter: Where to Now?](#) was held in person on 16 March, jointly hosted with the High Commission of South Africa in the UK. This intergenerational event explored the impact of the Charter and how it can be used to advance the principles and values it enshrines in the next decade. Speakers included Justice Michael Kirby AC AMG, Australian jurist and academic who was a member of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group and key driver of the Charter; Nondumiso ‘Noni’ Hlophe, a Queen’s Commonwealth Young Leader from Eswatini, recognised for her contribution in leadership and social impact; and Lady Phyll Opoku Gyimah, Executive Director of the Kaleidoscope Trust and co-founder of UK Black Pride. The conversation was moderated by Dr Linda Yueh, Executive Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

South Africa House was the perfect location for the dialogue, which drew an over-capacity crowd that included High Commissioners and other officials visiting London for Commonwealth Week, young Commonwealth leaders, activists, journalists, and Accredited Organisation representatives. In addition to the lively conversation, participants viewed a video of highlights from the earlier Young Leaders’ *Critical Conversation*, video contributions from the current and former Secretaries-General, a live music performance and a presentation of photographs from the Foundation’s photography exhibition: *A Lens on the Climate Crisis in Africa*.



Dr Linda Yueh and Dr Lady Phyll Opoku-Gyimah speaking at ‘A Decade of the Commonwealth Charter: Where to Now?’, South Africa House, London

© Mark Chivers

Programme overview from the Deputy Director-General



The thematic approach that structures our work has brought clarity and focus to the Foundation’s programming over the past year. In all three areas—health, environment and climate change, and freedom of expression—we have made bold steps in developing coherent and joined-up programmes, from which significant achievements were recorded during the reporting period. As we approach the mid-point in our Strategic Plan 2021–2026, our recent ‘stop and reflect’ exercise affirmed that the Foundation’s trajectory for programme delivery is very much on course to yield real and measurable results.

Our grants have continued to grow in reach and popularity, with the Open Call Grants—the Foundation’s largest grants stream—attracting close to one thousand applications this year from all regions of the Commonwealth, including from countries that have not traditionally been well represented. Our two new grants streams—Creative Grants and Capacity Strengthening Grants—support less well-established organisations in small and vulnerable Commonwealth States. The piloting of these new initiatives is now entering its second year with the Foundation expanding from the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions into the Africa region. Through careful stewardship of the three grants streams, the Foundation is able to report strong progress in realising its commitment to reaching as many civil society organisations, in as many Commonwealth countries, as possible.

‘Through careful stewardship of the three grants streams, the Foundation is able to report strong progress in realising its commitment to reaching as many civil society organisations, in as many Commonwealth countries, as possible.’

The Foundation is conscious of its emerging role as a major connector of Commonwealth civil society. During the past year we launched a new digital discussion platform to facilitate greater engagement, partnership development, and the free exchange of ideas between Commonwealth citizens. Membership has grown quickly, with more than 45 Commonwealth countries represented. The space has already demonstrated its purpose in connecting individuals and organisations that, despite working on similar issues and facing similar challenges, would never otherwise have known of each other.

Our power as a convenor has also grown over the past year. The *Critical Conversations* series continues to evolve its formats and approaches. During the reporting period we held six online events, as well as three in-person events that together convened almost 2,000 people, live, from every country of the Commonwealth. Most especially in the area of climate change, we were able to advance our strategic agenda as it relates to supporting the interests of the Commonwealth’s

small and vulnerable states. Our creative work is flourishing, increasingly interwoven into different programmes and platforms.

The ‘stop and reflect’ point of our strategic plan has provided a valuable opportunity for the Foundation to review progress across all programmes, assess our strategic-level achievements, make adjustments and set the programmatic direction for the remainder of the strategic period. Recent reflections on the anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter underscore the pivotal role this statement of Commonwealth values and principles plays in guiding our work. As we move into the next year, the Foundation affirms its commitment to learning and adapting in ways that will ensure we deliver our programmes with rigour and impact.

Shem Ochola
Deputy Director-General

*‘Our power as a convenor has also grown over the past year. The *Critical Conversations* series continues to evolve its formats and approaches. During the reporting period we held six online events, as well as three in-person events that together convened almost two thousand people, live, from every country of the Commonwealth.’*

Grant-funded support to Commonwealth civil society

The Foundation now spends more of its budget on grants to Commonwealth civil society than at any time previously with £1.2 million allocated across our three grants streams in 2022–2023.

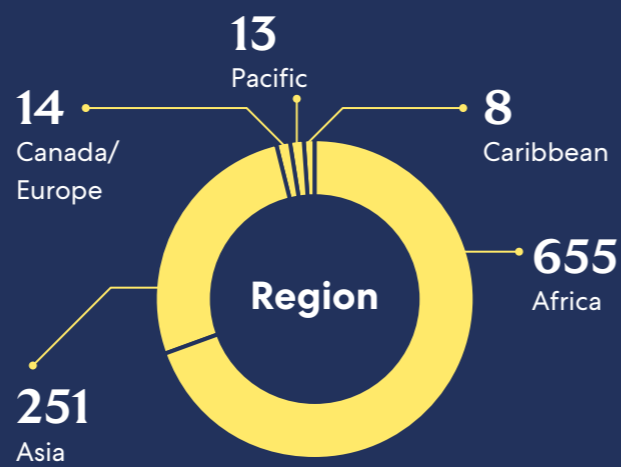
Open Call Grants

The [annual Open Call](#) is the largest of the Foundation's grant streams, providing support to organisations in eligible Member States (those not in arrears of more than two years) for projects that address one or more of the Foundation's thematic areas of focus. Organisations can apply for up to £30,000 a year, for up to two years.

In June 2022, the Grants Committee approved 18 Open Call Grants of which 13 included an optional creative component (one element of the pilot for our new Creative Grants stream). All grant partners in the 2021–2022 cohort are benefiting from a tailored programme of support to: (i) review their project strategy in order to enhance the potential impact of their work; (ii) develop the skills needed to gather evidence-based results; and (iii) increase understanding of the importance of gender considerations in their work.

2022–2023 applications

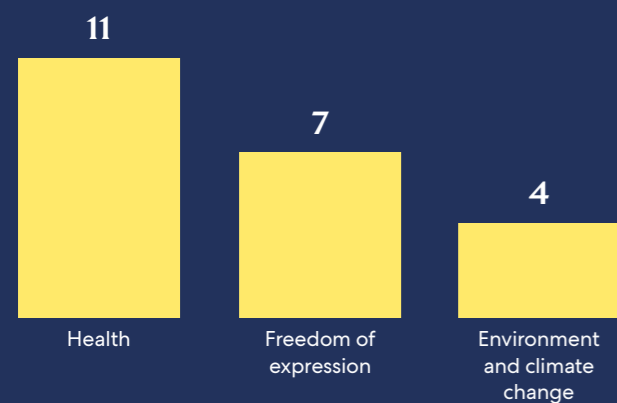
941 applications received | **18** projects selected for approval by the Grants Committee



This year, the Open Call attracted close to one thousand applications from all regions of the Commonwealth. Outreach efforts and streamlined application procedures contributed to an increase in applications from smaller and less well-established civil society organisations in countries that have not traditionally engaged with the grants programme.

At the time of writing, the Foundation has finalised a list of 18 projects that will be submitted to the Grants Committee in June 2023 for its consideration.

Thematic areas of focus addressed by the 2021–2022 cohort*



* projects may address more than one of the Foundation's thematic areas of focus

Capacity Strengthening Grants

Now in its second year, the Foundation's Capacity Strengthening Grants stream supports less well-established organisations in small and vulnerable Commonwealth States: enhancing their capacity to influence policy processes through a combination of grant-making and tailored assistance.

The facility was first piloted in the Pacific, Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions. Early in this reporting period, the Director-General approved grants for 17 organisations from these regions in line with a detailed procedure agreed to by the Grants Committee. In January 2023, Capacity Strengthening Grant partners were invited to a workshop to share reflections on their experience of the application process and discuss expectations around reporting as they commenced implementation. Information from this workshop is being used by the Foundation to refine our systems and approaches in ways that make the Capacity Strengthening Grants stream as accessible as possible.

'The application process was an interesting exercise for us because you got to know us, and we also got to know ourselves more. It was interesting for us to truly see where we stand regarding the things we want to improve. This for me was a very interesting process.'

CEO, [Eco-Sud, Mauritius](#)

'Sometimes the work that we're doing individually in our respective countries can have an impact in other countries and we can learn from each other in that way.'

Terry Ince, [CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago](#)

In the second year, with approval from the Grants Committee, the geographical focus of the pilot has extended to small and vulnerable countries of the Africa region, particularly those that have not traditionally engaged with the Foundation's grants work. That group has been provisionally identified to include Cameroon, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda and Tanzania. In accordance with agreed procedures for this grants stream, the Foundation has undertaken careful research to identify organisations that could benefit from the support we offer, and those organisations have been invited to submit an expression of interest.



Grant partner, Eco-Sud, using capacity strengthening funding to protect mangroves and other natural ecosystems in Mauritius

Creative Grants

The Creative Grants stream affirms the role that creative expression can play in contributing to the development of societies and promoting positive change. It comprises two elements: a creative component of the Open Call Grants and a small grants facility to strengthen the capacity of writers and artists to advocate for and influence positive change with a particular focus on the Foundation's thematic areas.

The first phase of the pilot for the small grants facility focused on small states of the Pacific region with six grants awarded in April 2022. All six projects are now in the final stages of completion. A full assessment of the results from this pilot is underway. Initial findings indicate that these projects have developed skills locally, strengthened communities and addressed the Foundation's focus areas of health, environment and climate change, and freedom of expression.

In Tonga, our Creative Grant enabled Selekā International to use mural design to uplift spirits following the volcanic eruption in January 2022 and to expose remote villagers, alongside the wider community, to the power of art. Prominent Tongan artist, Tevita Latu, worked with young artists to paint more than 15 murals—often on abandoned buildings—with the involvement of the local community.

As with the Capacity Strengthening Grants stream, the Creative Grants pilot continued in the current reporting period with a focus on small and vulnerable countries of the Africa region. Drawing on the experiences of the first phase, the Foundation took a highly consultative approach in assessing how to deliver support. Following a series of roundtable meetings with groups of creative practitioners in the targeted countries, we received 28 applications from 10 countries. Ten grants, each approximately £8,000, were awarded in April 2023 to creative practitioners from Botswana, Eswatini, The Gambia, Lesotho, Namibia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Togo for projects ranging from establishing new arts spaces to developing the acting, directing and production skills of theatre practitioners.



Mural design in Tonga, created by grant partner, Selekā International

'The murals have sparked conversations around art and its significance to our daily lives. We believe art is revealed most powerfully through these abandoned and derelict buildings as to say art is their saviour. They quite suddenly morphed into something more pleasant and acceptable to experience. This [project] has been the greatest gift for our country.'

Tevita Latu, Selekā International, Tonga

Spotlight: our commitment to gender equality

This year, the Foundation resolved to strengthen its gender focus: making sure that programming reflects the commitment of the strategic plan to integrate gender equality across all aspects of our work.

Gender mainstreaming is a core element of this year's Open Call Grants: applicants were required to outline how they would integrate a consideration of gender into their projects. For some, this involves ensuring equal participation of women and men or disaggregating data by gender; for others, the principal objective of the grant revolves around combatting gender injustices.

Six of the Open Call Grants awarded in 2022 specifically aim to increase participation of women and girls in policy-making, and to target gender inequalities.

In Uganda, our grant to Public Health Ambassadors Uganda is addressing inequalities in access to health and protection services by providing support for adolescent girls and young women to advocate for accessible, comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and HIV services.

With our grant, the Women Promotion Centre in Kenya is challenging the lack of recognition for women and girls in mental health policy and service provision by empowering young women to advocate for their rights to quality mental healthcare, free from discrimination and stigma.

A workshop for new grant partners held in September 2022 included a strong focus on integrating gender considerations in their projects and reporting.

Gender was a major focus of the Covid-19 Grants, over half of which sought to improve the integration of gender considerations within local and national responses and address the gendered impacts of the pandemic. The Foundation prioritised gender considerations at all stages: from the selection of grant partners to the identification of capacity needs and the provision of tailored support in relation to planning, implementation and evaluation. Overall, the cohort of organisations supported by the Covid-19 Grants reported and demonstrated a significant growth in their understanding of gender and their ability to apply this in their work. Gender also figured largely in reported impacts, which are documented on pages 40–43.

This year's Critical Conversations have amplified women's voices, perspectives and expertise in key thematic areas, including through an in-depth discussion on [Advancing Universal Health Coverage through gender equality](#), which brought together a formidable group of women health practitioners, policy-makers and advocates working on the frontline of global public health.

Within our creative work our judging panels, editors, readers, panellists and creative partners are carefully selected to ensure balance of perspective and representation, in ways that reflect our understanding of the intersections of many forms of discrimination.

The Foundation understands how language and framing can both obstruct and advance gender equality goals and, for this reason, we are especially attentive to language in our own public engagement including through social media.

'Gender mainstreaming and inclusion should have a broader outlook, where men, women and people with other sexual identities should have equal opportunity and enabling environment to participate actively and meaningfully. Most marginalised people should be availed the opportunity to participate and lead in inclusion.'

Covid-19 grant partner

Global grants portfolio

Over the reporting period, our support to Commonwealth civil society involved 44 Member States. A full list of grant-funded projects is provided as an [annex](#) to this report.

Grants

- Open Call Grants
- Capacity Strengthening Grants
- Creative Grants
- Covid-19 Grants

104
projects

44
countries

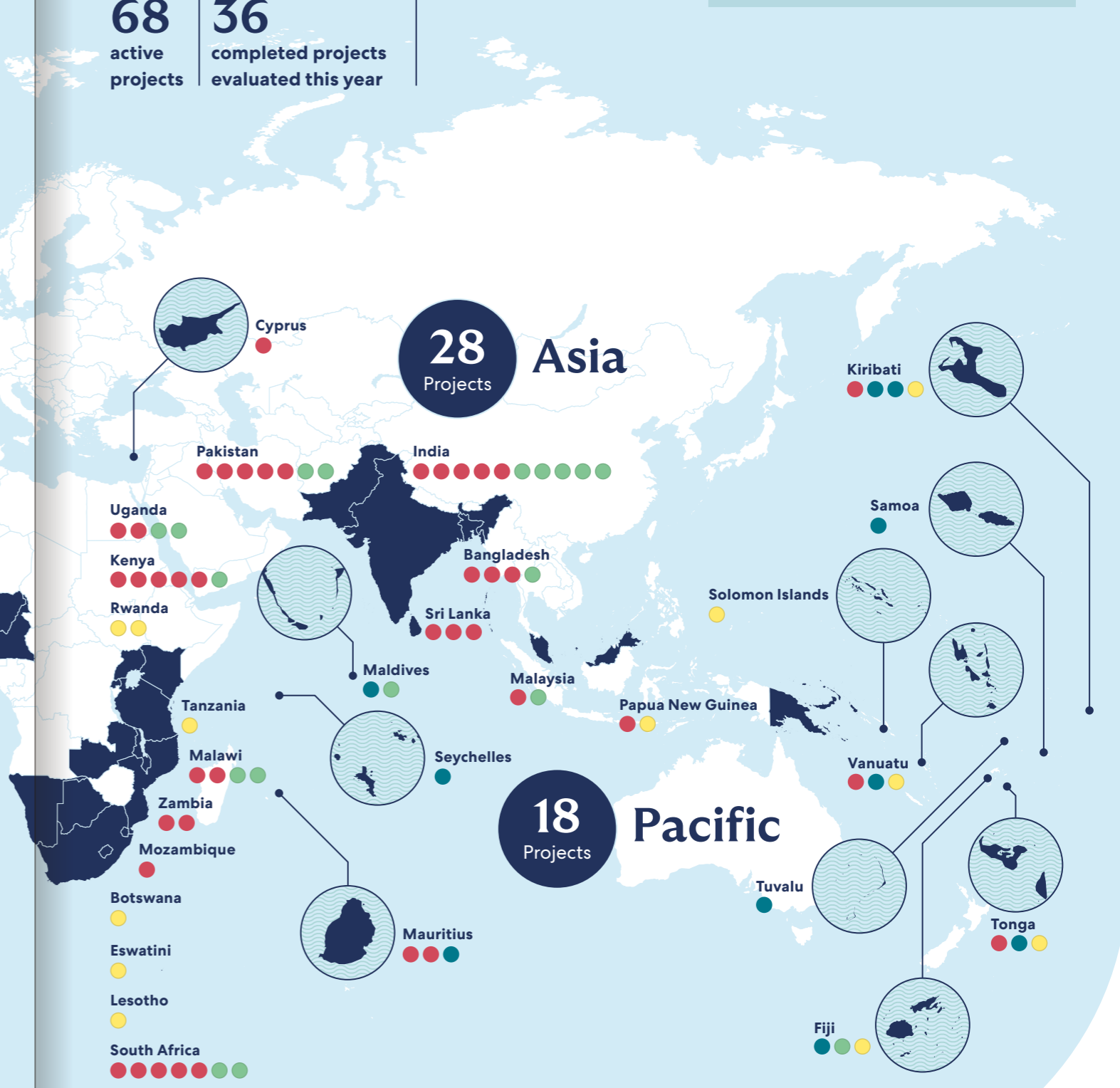
68 active projects | **36** completed projects evaluated this year

2 Projects
Canada and Europe



28 Projects
Asia

18 Projects
Pacific



Legacy grants

During the reporting period the Foundation continued to administer and support grants awarded under the previous strategic plan (prior to June 2021), some of which were granted extensions as part of our commitment to supporting grant partners during the pandemic. Ten legacy projects were completed and evaluated this year.

Advocating for the right to health for vulnerable people

Kenya, 2017–2021

The Constitution of Kenya entitles all citizens to the 'highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to healthcare services'. Our grant enabled KELIN to strengthen the capacity of civil society to monitor and improve the implementation of right to health commitments for vulnerable groups.

Training on health accountability and transparency in four counties of Kenya convened representatives of civil society, media and people living with and affected by HIV and TB. A network of project participants developed action plans to guide advocacy at county level. Multi-stakeholder dialogues increased collaboration between participants and county health officials on finding solutions for challenges faced by vulnerable groups when exercising their right to health.

Public awareness of the effects of accountability and transparency issues in the health sector on vulnerable populations was raised through media, supported by a reporting guide produced by KELIN as part of this project. A three-part documentary series 'Saving Esther' was produced in partnership with Africa Uncensored, an independent media house, highlighting barriers to accessing health services and accountability issues in the procurement of specialised medical equipment. These timely efforts came while the issue was being investigated by the Senate, who later produced a report on the matter.



114
citizens trained

2
multi-stakeholder dialogues

Shaping statutory regulation for civil society organisations

Nigeria, 2016–2020

This project contributed to a more supportive regulatory framework for civil society in Nigeria. Our grant enabled the Nigeria Network of NGOs (NNGO) to consult over 350 civil society organisations (CSOs) and advocate for revised regulations that are more responsive to the needs and realities of the sector.

Civil society perspectives on Part C of the Companies and Allied Matters ACT (CAMA) 1990, the key piece of legislation governing the CSO sector in Nigeria, were distilled in a report setting out recommendations for change. NNGO advocated with the Nigerian Corporate Affairs Commission (the regulatory body for the formation and management of companies in Nigeria) and the National Assembly. The work carried out during the project contributed to the repeal of Part C of CAMA and the enactment of its replacement, Section F of CAMA, which was signed into law in August 2020. The new law incorporated suggestions that emerged from consultations with CSOs. NNGO produced a guide for CSOs and provided training on the revised regulations.



240
CSOs from 33 states trained



406
women living with HIV sensitised on SRH rights

112
healthcare providers sensitised on SRH rights of women living with HIV

Increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls living with HIV

Nigeria, 2017–2021

In Nigeria, the National Reproductive Health Policy and Strategy assures availability and access to full sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and quality services. Our grant enabled International Community of Women living with HIV West Africa (ICWWA) to support women and girls living with HIV in three states of Nigeria to advocate for improved access to SRH services with healthcare providers.

Women were trained and a tool was developed to capture instances of violations of rights faced by women and girls living with HIV when accessing SRH services (including stigmatisation, discrimination, issues around consent and breaches of confidentiality). Information collected was used to advocate for changes in service provision through engagement with healthcare providers.

Sensitisation meetings with police officers and community leaders contributed to an increased understanding of the needs and rights of women and girls living with HIV. Women reported improved access to non-discriminatory SRH services and greater participation in healthcare provision overall.

Mobilising young women to participate in governance

Pakistan, 2017–2020

Pakistani legislation protects the rights of women to participate in political and electoral processes; however, women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) continue to face challenges. With our grant, Peace Direct and partner Aware Girls mobilised young women to exercise their civic rights and to advocate for greater provision for women’s participation in governance.

The project established a ‘Young Women’s Network for Good Governance’ which reached out to over 220 women through a series of peer-to-peer activities to raise awareness of their civic rights, including voting. A series of community sensitisation meetings reached over 600 people in three districts of KP (Mardan, Swabi and Peshawar). Training enabled young women to engage with decision-makers, including officials from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in KP. Advocacy carried out during the project contributed to steps taken by the ECP in KP to strengthen the protection of women’s political rights including increasing the number of polling stations accessible to women, collecting and releasing gender segregated data for elections, and establishing a gender working group within the ECP, with representation of civil society.



© Minority Rights Group

25
young women trained and mentored

Realising the rights of young people with disabilities

Kenya, 2017–2021

The Government of Kenya ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008. With our grant, Able Child Africa and partner Action Network for Disabled (ANDY) established a civil society coalition of 51 child-focused CSOs and Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) from eight counties in Kenya to engage with government to promote the rights of children with disabilities (CWDs).

The project strengthened the capacity of the coalition and facilitated engagement with government officials at district and county level. Advocacy with government contributed to changes in policy and practice, from ringfencing food aid for families of CWDs in Kwale County to the passage of a bill on Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in Machakos County. Coalition members raised public awareness through a disability rights campaign estimated to have reached over 10,000 people through radio shows and community talks.



Promoting inclusive practices in communities and schools

Pakistan, 2016–2020

This project contributed towards increased tolerance and respect for diversity amongst young people in Quetta, Balochistan. With our grant, Minority Rights Group International and partners Strengthening Rights and Equality by Empowering Teams (STREET) and Human Friends Organisation (HFO) used storytelling and theatre to raise awareness of minority rights issues among young people, parents and teachers.

A training and mentoring programme developed the skills of actor-activists and teachers in six schools to use storytelling and drama techniques to engage young people. In schools, 180 students formed ‘Bards of Peace’ clubs and many participated in a series of storytelling productions and ‘Stories of Peace’ festivals that promoted cultural respect and understanding among the wider community. Advocacy meetings at district and provincial level contributed to greater awareness of the importance of inclusion among policy-makers. Government officials were further engaged through attendance at the public festivals.



60
actor-activists and 100 teachers mentored and trained

Facilitating access to HIV health services for people who use drugs

Mauritius, 2018–2022

Mauritius has a high prevalence of HIV amongst people who use drugs. Our grant enabled Prévention Information et Lutte contre le Sida (PILS) to advocate for HIV and drug policies that can better contribute to a reduction in HIV transmission and prevalence.

Following advocacy efforts by PILS and other CSOs, the government set up the High-Level Drugs and HIV Council, under the Prime Minister’s Office, in January 2019, to promote stronger national coordination of HIV and drugs programmes. PILS was on the Council alongside representatives from other CSOs, government and private sector. The Council provided a platform for regular engagement and collaboration with government.

PILS submitted recommendations during a consultation process that contributed to the introduction of medicinal cannabis by the Ministry of Health through a pilot project in 2022. PILS also contributed to increased access to HIV prevention programmes and services for vulnerable groups including the relocation of methadone distribution from police stations to health and community centres, access to treatment for Hepatitis C and to pre-exposure prophylaxis for populations at greater risk of HIV infection, and greater availability of youth-friendly services.

1,800
community members engaged in awareness raising activities

20
advocacy meetings with the High-Level Drugs and HIV Council and committees under the National Drug Secretariat

Strengthening legislation and policy development on natural resource management

Papua New Guinea, 2017–2020

Papua New Guinea has legislation governing the use and management of natural resources; however, customary landowners are often unfamiliar with laws and policies that protect their land and their rights. Our grant enabled the Centre for Environmental Law and Community Rights (CELCOR) to conduct several legislative and policy reviews including the Forestry Act 1991, the Land Act 1996 and the Climate Change Management 2015, as well as to draft and finalise the Protected Areas Bill 2022.

CELCOR advocated for legislative changes that better reflect customary landowners' rights with tighter due diligence and enforcement measures on foreign developers and investors. CELCOR was invited by the government to participate in the Freedom of Information Open Government Partnership meetings and to be a member of a technical working group developing a Freedom of Information Bill.

CELCOR's contribution led to the establishment of a Customary Land Advisory Committee with responsibility for reviewing all Special Agricultural Business Leases (SABL) and playing a significant role in halting further issuance of non-compliant SABL, including the rejection of large-scale logging and mining projects in New Ireland and East New Britain provinces, while ensuring customary land is returned to traditional owners.

Fostering women's participation in governance

Pakistan, 2017–2021

This project nurtured the growth of women's participation in political and electoral processes. Our grant enabled Health and Rural Development (HARD) to support women to exercise their civic and political rights in two districts of Balochistan.

The project trained and organised a group of women in each district (Khuzdar and Mastung) to raise awareness of women's civic and political rights in their communities. Two women's political resource centres were established to provide support in obtaining identity cards and enrolling in the electoral system. The centres remained active after the project ended and have the support of the National Database and Registration Authority and the Electoral Commission of Pakistan.

Informal District Assemblies strengthened women's knowledge of local government systems and capacity to engage with decision-makers. HARD facilitated a dialogue with members of District and Provincial Assemblies which contributed to removing some of the barriers faced by women, in particular on the right to vote. As a result of the project, women have reported increased access to government programmes, some of those involved in project activities have joined political parties and there is greater awareness among community leaders of the civic and political rights of women.



14,860
women obtained
identity cards

18,051
women registered
to vote



6
meetings with
parliament officials

148
participants
trained

Monitoring implementation of the Tonga Strategic Development Framework

Tonga, 2017–2021

Sustainable development in Tonga is defined in the Tonga Strategic Development Framework (TSDF) 2015–2025. With our grant, the Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT) strengthened collaboration between civil society and government to monitor the implementation of TSDF, with particular emphasis on climate change and local governance issues.

CSOs were trained and equipped to assess the implementation of TSDF using a monitoring framework, designed by CSFT in consultation with CSOs. CSFT conducted an analysis of government commitments to implementing the TSDF compared

with progress towards the SAMOA Pathway, Sustainability Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. The project contributed to improved awareness among CSOs of government commitments to global, regional and national development goals.

At the time of writing, CSFT was in the process of securing endorsement to develop Tonga's first CSO and Government Engagement Framework and the first CSO Sector Plan to be linked to the Government Ministries Corporate Plan.

Cultural initiatives

Our cultural work is a unique feature of the Foundation, heralding the power of the arts to contribute to social change. We work to inspire and connect storytellers and artists across all regions of the Commonwealth, bringing personal stories to a global audience with the specific purpose of contributing to vibrant and free civil societies through our Creative Grants and a range of platforms. At the heart of this work is the [Commonwealth Short Story Prize](#): the world's most global literary award.

Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2023

Presented annually for the best piece of unpublished short fiction, the Commonwealth Short Story Prize brings new stories from emerging and more established writers to an international audience.

Tonga. We received a record number of entries in languages other than English with a strong increase in submissions in French following a targeted French language campaign.

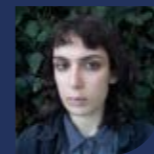
A comprehensive promotional campaign for the 2023 prize, reinforced by targeted outreach, resulted in 6,642 entries from 54 countries including the Commonwealth's newest Member States: Togo and Gabon. Efforts to increase entries from small and vulnerable states yielded solid results with an increase in submissions from The Bahamas, Belize, Cyprus, Jamaica, Kiribati, Maldives, Samoa and

The 2023 judging panel is chaired by Pakistani writer and translator Bilal Tanweer. His fellow judges are Rwandan-born writer, photographer and editor, Rémy Ngamije; Sri Lankan author and publisher Ameena Hussein; British-Canadian author Katrina Best; New Zealand's former Poet Laureate, Dr Selina Tusitala Marsh; and poet and novelist Mac Donald Dixon from Saint Lucia.

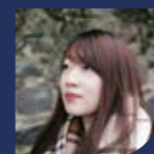
'Telling stories is not only important, it is necessary. Our stories are our voices. Our stories are our legacies. We build bridges across our differences by telling and sharing our stories.'

Cosmata Lindie, Guyana, shortlisted in 2023

Regional winners



Hana Gammon
'The Undertaker's Apprentice'
Africa (South Africa)



Agnes Chew
'Oceans Away From My Homeland'
Asia (Singapore)



Rue Baldry
'Lech, Prince, and the Nice Things'
Canada and Europe (UK)



Kwame McPherson
'Ocoee'
Caribbean (Jamaica)



Himali McInnes
'Kilinochchi'
Pacific (New Zealand)

Regional winners were announced in May 2023 drawn from a diverse shortlist of **28 entries** from **19 countries**. The overall winner will be announced in June 2023 in an online ceremony.

6,642

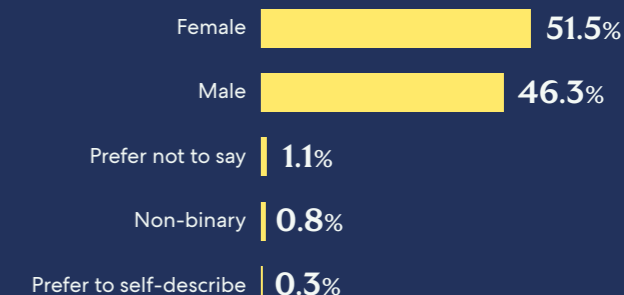
Total entries

54
Countries represented

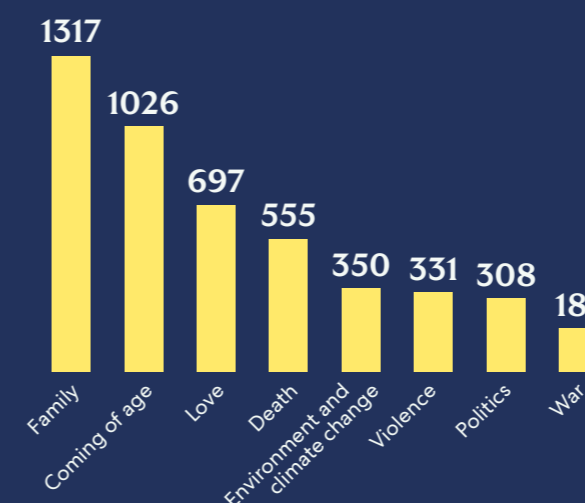
475
Entries in languages other than English

141
Entries translated into English from 40 languages

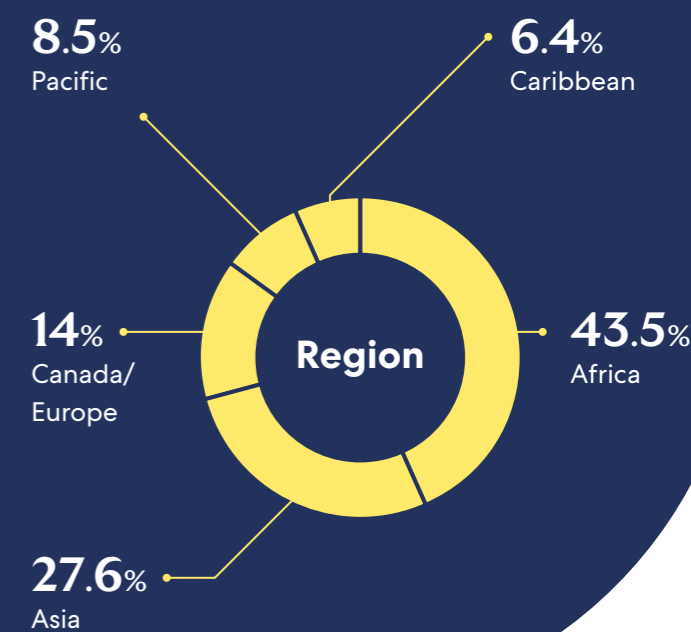
Gender



Entries by theme*



*1,877 other (including friendship, gender identity, homelessness, immigration, racial discrimination, religion, social isolation, technology, trauma, women's empowerment)



adda: sharing stories to connect people

Our online magazine [adda](#) is a platform for writers from around the Commonwealth to share new stories and narratives. We publish fiction, non-fiction and poetry, featuring authors who might not have the chance elsewhere alongside more established writers. The flexible online format enables us to deliver tailored and timely responses to contemporary issues and to address the Foundation's key themes.

adda gives visibility to talented writers emerging from the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. [Nineteen shortlisted stories from the 2022 prize were published over two issues in September and October 2022](#), with two of the stories published in both the original language and the English translation.

Two special editions that addressed the Foundation's focus areas of health and freedom of expression are outlined in more detail on pages 45 and 47.

Illustration for [Leticia Alvarez's 'The Guayacan Tree'](#) by Bushra Saleem, published on [adda](#)



'This support has been most critical to my development as a writer in the Pacific [...] The only times I have been given voice and space have been through adda and the prize. If it wasn't for these, I'd have given up writing a long time ago or just kept it to myself through time.'

Mary Rokonadravu, Fiji, [adda](#) contributor and CSSP 2022 regional winner

Translation Conversation in partnership with the Singapore Book Council

During the reporting period, the Foundation continued its partnership with the Singapore Book Council, this time through a virtual panel discussion that focused on judging translated literary works, as part of the Singapore Translation Symposium in September 2022.

Caribbean Voices

The Foundation's initiative to strengthen the craft of young emerging Caribbean filmmakers as well as the wider film infrastructure in the region, is now nearing completion.

Three films are complete and are at varying stages of local screenings and submissions to film festivals:

Forget Me Not by Grenadian filmmaker **Amanda John** underlines issues surrounding dementia in a realistic portrayal based on real-life events. The film had its Caribbean premiere at 12°N, 61°W Grenada Film Festival in October 2022.

Afieni by Belizean filmmaker **Felene Cayetano** examines indigenous communities and cultural rights.

Eating Pawpaw on the Seashore, by Guyanese filmmaker **Rae Wiltshire**, portrays a young same-sex couple navigating their relationship in a society that does not understand them. First shown in Guyana at the New Beginnings Film Festival, it was later selected by the British Film Institute to be screened at BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival in March 2023 and promoted online through the British Council's network in over 100 countries as one of their #FiveFilmsForFreedom.

Four films are in post-production:

Parable of the Bees by Barbadian filmmaker **Melanie Grant** highlights the climate crisis through a narrative which emphasises the importance of preservation and custody of the natural world.

Sonshine by Jamaican filmmaker **Kaleb D'Aguilar** is about a mother's grief after the death of her son.

The Fisherman by Bahamian filmmaker **Inderia Green** looks at the personal impact of alcoholism.

Chelonian Departure by **Eleni Chung** from Trinidad and Tobago explores the emotional challenges of leaving home to pursue educational and professional opportunities elsewhere.

'Getting a grant from the Foundation gave me hope that I can make films at home and celebrate Guyanese Stories. I have continued to share my knowledge and have even started productions on other Guyanese films because I want to give back because someone else has helped me.'

Rae Wiltshire, Guyana, Caribbean Voices filmmaker

© Brainstorm Media Solutions



Filming a scene from *Forget Me Not* by Amanda John, Grenada



Mark Luke-Edwards in *Eating Pawpaw on the Seashore*, Guyana

Our work on environment and climate change

The issue of environment and climate is of major concern to the Commonwealth, not least to its small and vulnerable Member States. During the reporting period, the Foundation accelerated its work in relation to this area of focus: seeking to take full advantage of opportunities to bring Commonwealth civil society together to secure tangible progress on critical issues including loss and damage, and just transitions.



The Rt Hon Philip Davis, Prime Minister of The Bahamas, *Critical Conversations* panellist at COP27

The Foundation at COP27

As noted in the highlights section of this report, the Foundation took the opportunity of COP27 to advance its strategic agenda relating to both climate change and the interests of the Commonwealth's small and vulnerable states.

Bringing the voice of Commonwealth civil society to this global forum was the primary objective of the Foundation's engagement with COP. Our primary vehicle was the *Critical Conversations* series, which we employed before, during and after COP27 to amplify the voices of those countries that are on

the frontline of the climate crisis. Our five climate-focused events received 7446 registrations from 58 countries.

Two pre-events provided a solid basis for two further in-person events co-convened at COP27 with the Government of Vanuatu which drew attention to the ways in which some of the Commonwealth's smallest and most vulnerable states are using the tools of international law to secure climate justice. Panellists included the President of Vanuatu, the Prime Minister of The Bahamas and the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

'@LossandDamage is at #COP27 advocating and negotiating for operationalisation of the #SantiagoNetwork and for #LossAndDamage Finance. Thank you @commonwealthorg for your support.'

Hyacinthe Niyitegeka, Loss and Damage Collaboration, Rwanda

Civil society support

With Foundation support, **Earth Journalism Network (EJN)** delivered its first virtual fellowship for five journalists from small and vulnerable states to cover COP27 as part of their Climate Change Media Partnership programme. With guidance from EJN trainers on the ground in Egypt, the climate reporters from Bangladesh, St Lucia, Solomon Islands, Jamaica, and Papua New Guinea published 18 stories. Fellows reported that, through the fellowship, they had gained valuable networking and mentorship opportunities, and improved their knowledge of the COP process. All said they believed that participation in the fellowship will help them in their careers. In Bangladesh, following on from coverage in *The Daily Observer*, EJN fellow Banani Mallick received an official invitation to participate in a programme on the post-COP outcome in Bangladesh. She also received government funding to travel to and report on the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15) in Montreal, Canada in December 2022.

A grant to *New Generation Young Negotiators*, an initiative of the **Loss and Damage Collaboration**, contributed to enhancing the skills, preparation and experiences of young negotiators from climate-vulnerable countries at COP27 and to elevate the voice of those countries on the climate crisis.

Critical Conversations

Before

Ensuring a just energy transition across the Commonwealth brought together activists and policy-makers to discuss how the move away from fossil fuels could be achieved in ways that would not inflict further economic and social costs on those countries that could least afford them.

Climate reparations: what must COP27 deliver? built on the Foundation's previous work on climate-induced loss and damage and provided an opportunity to build alliances, strategies and approaches to make meaningful progress on climate compensation at COP27.

At COP27

Small island states, climate justice and international law raised awareness of the international coalition working to make climate justice a reality.

Climate justice through international law: a high-level dialogue examined efforts to hold major polluters accountable under international law.

After

Art and climate justice: re-imagining the future convened artists and activists from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific to explore how the arts serve as a platform to challenge climate injustice and to elevate the voices and stories of those most affected by climate change.



18 October - 1 November
NEW THREE-PART EVENT SERIES

Commonwealth Small Island States at COP27

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

A Lens on the Climate Crisis in Africa

The Foundation curated and published [a digital photography exhibition](#) depicting the devastating impact of climate change on African communities. The exhibition features photographs by 24 photographers in 12 African Commonwealth countries, selected from an open call which attracted submissions from 150 photographers.

A video of the exhibition was first shown at the Commonwealth People's Forum in Kigali, Rwanda, in June 2022, with an introduction by Kenyan environmentalist and climate activist Elizabeth Wathuti. The photographs and video were published online to mark Africa Climate Week 2022 and featured on the home page of the UN Climate Champions website in October 2022. In March 2023, a selection of images was displayed at South Africa House, London, during an event held to celebrate the anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter (see pages 16–17).



Francis Torsu and family, victims of 2021 tidal wave, Keta, Eastern Ghana

Environment and climate change: grant highlights

In Vanuatu, our **Creative Grant** enabled **Wan Smolbag Theatre** to support climate change advocacy through a series of music workshops with local bands to produce, perform and distribute songs highlighting the loss of biodiversity on the island.

‘Fabulous concert last night at #wansmolbag on the themes of #climatechange and #biodiversity. Wonderful performances with important messages about the urgency of action to protect our planet.’

UK Deputy High Commissioner in Vanuatu

In Pakistan, with support from our **Open Call Grant**, the **Sustainable Social Development Organisation** is creating a network of youth citizen journalists to improve public awareness on the impact of climate change, identify and share stories from communities affected by environmental issues, and advocate for policy reform.

In Malawi, our **Open Call Grant** is supporting **Civil Society Network on Climate Change** and partner **Development Aid from People to People** to improve recognition of district-level civil society in climate change policies and track implementation of climate policies, frameworks and plans at both national and district level.

‘...behind every image there is a story, and these are stories of resilience, stories of what is happening on the ground, stories of the impacts that communities are facing every day and also stories of how communities have chosen not to be victims and the fact that they have decided to take action.’

Elizabeth Wathuti, Kenya, from the introduction to *A Lens on the Climate Crisis in Africa*

Spotlight: our commitment to small and vulnerable states

The Foundation’s decisive shift towards focusing on the needs of small and vulnerable states is now well-established. This cross-cutting element of our strategy has informed all aspects of our programming as well as how we work.

Our **Capacity Strengthening Grants** facility was specifically designed to support organisations in small and vulnerable states. During the first year of the pilot, these grants created opportunities for 17 less well-established civil society organisations and networks to access funding and bolstered their ability to engage in policy-making and advocacy in key thematic areas. Of the current cohort, seven projects are in the Caribbean (in six countries), seven in Pacific Islands and three in the Indian Ocean. As reported on page 21, the second year of the pilot has extended the geographical focus to small and vulnerable countries of the Africa region.

The **Creative Grants** stream also supports organisations in small and vulnerable states, with six grants awarded in different Pacific Island nations during the 2021-2022 reporting period and another tranche currently being finalised for the Africa region. Our creative programming—including the **Commonwealth Short Story Prize** and *adda*—has been recognised for generating opportunities for writers in small and vulnerable states who otherwise face barriers to publication, and for facilitating connections between them. This year, for the first time, the Short Story Prize invited entries from Togo and Gabon, and our Healthy Communities collection on *adda* featured the first-ever story to be published from Vanuatu.

‘It is very exciting to see what Civil Society is achieving related to Climate Change. One of the biggest opportunities for sustainability in the Caribbean is the further development of capacity and resources for civil society organisations.’

Matthew Aubry, The Bahamas
(Critical Conversations participant)

Our advocacy programme continues to champion issues of critical importance to small and vulnerable states, and to create accessible platforms for voices from these regions. The majority of speakers at our two in-person climate justice events at COP27 hailed from small and vulnerable states. Through our **Critical Conversations** series, we have sought to identify and amplify voices from small and vulnerable states and our targeted outreach has led to steady growth in participation from these countries. This year, across the series, almost half of all speakers and moderators were from these regions. Targeted outreach has ensured that civil society from the Commonwealth’s small and vulnerable countries is strongly represented on our digital discussion platform—established during the reporting period to facilitate dialogue between civil society organisations and individuals around our thematic areas.



© Mr Stephane Bellerose

Our work on health

Our strategic focus on health resonates strongly with the direction of the CHOGM 2022 Communiqué and continues to be affirmed by civil society as a major priority for the people of the Commonwealth. During the reporting period, the Foundation sought to further refine and consolidate its work on health: analysing the impact of our Covid-19 grants and creating opportunities for civil society to participate in policy-making around issues of long-term significance including universal health coverage.

Covid-19 Grants

In 2020 the Board of Governors approved a Special Grants Call, launched in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Through this facility, the Foundation was able to support 26 civil society organisations engaged in recovery and rebuilding efforts in 16 countries, resulting in strengthened Covid-19 responses at community, regional and in some cases national levels.

All 26 projects have now concluded. The Foundation worked hard with partners to capture and analyse the results of these initiatives, not least to help inform our future work on health.

1. Increased community involvement in Covid-19 policy and practice leading to more inclusive, tailored and relevant Covid-19 responses

Grant partners identified gaps in national and district Covid-19 responses arising from the exclusion of marginalised and vulnerable groups in decision-making processes. They collected data on less well-represented groups, created platforms for their voices to be amplified and were ultimately able to influence governments to recognise their needs and concerns in Covid-19 policies.



Health activists discussing Covid-19 response measures and government support in Malaysia

In **Malaysia**, our partner [Development of Human Resources for Rural Areas \(DHRRA\)](#) convened community leaders, activists and organisations representing marginalised and rural groups for training on Covid-19 response measures and government support. These discussions identified that the government vaccination plan made no provision for stateless and undocumented individuals. DHRRA communicated this to the Ministry of Health, which opened up the vaccination rollout to these marginalised groups.

In **Bangladesh**, the work of [Turning Point Foundation](#) contributed to the inclusion of people with disabilities and their caregivers in national and local Covid-19 response plans. Turning Point Foundation collaborated with two Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) to advocate for people with disabilities to be recognised in the government's Covid-19 response. The collaboration between communities, DPOs and government contributed to

a commitment from the Health Service Division to include the needs of people with disabilities in the Bangladesh Preparedness and Response plan.

2. Strengthening gendered responses to Covid-19 and future health crises

A comprehensive review of data in [The Lancet](#) confirmed the highly gendered impact of the pandemic, with women and girls across the world experiencing a rise in gender-based violence and exclusion from education and social protection mechanisms. Our grant partners addressed some of these impacts by working to increase women and girls' participation in policy and decision-making, strengthen the capacity of women's groups to advocate for their rights and coordinate more effective multi-agency responses.

Higher-level results

Improved access to information, knowledge and practice relating to Covid-19 prevention	9
Enhanced collaboration between Government and civil society in healthcare provision	22
Improved access to social security and increased resilience to future shocks	5
Strengthening gendered responses to Covid-19 and future health crises	16
Increased community involvement in Covid-19 policy and practice leading to more inclusive, tailored and relevant Covid responses	14

The number of grants that have contributed to each of the five higher-level results identified, based on data harvested from project reports.

Behaviour changes

Change in policy or legislation	5
Commitment to change in policy or legislation	7
Change in community behaviour	10
Improved coordination between CSOs and governments	22
Improved government accountability	13

The number of grants that have contributed to each type of behaviour change, based on data harvested from project reports.



Assessing community access to Covid-19 relief packages in the Bono East region, Ghana

In **Maldives**, [Women and Democracy](#) facilitated a series of multi-stakeholder discussions with government bodies, civil society organisations and vulnerable groups to inform more inclusive and gender-responsive interventions in current and future crises. Subsequently, and at the request of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Social Services, Women and Democracy contributed to the development of the National Gender Equality Action Plan 2022–2026, to ensure the plan acknowledged and addressed the gendered impacts of Covid-19.

A project led by the [Dakshin Foundation](#) in **India** aimed to increase socio-economic resilience amongst fishing communities to disruption to their livelihoods caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions, with a particular focus on women. The project addressed the lower representation of women in leadership roles by creating a new community network—the Coastal Grassroots Fellowship—which was made up entirely of women and provided a platform to discuss issues affecting the fishing community from a gendered perspective.

3. Improved access to social security and increased resilience to future shocks

Grant partners contributed to increases in demand for—and, in some cases, supply of—social protection packages, supporting vulnerable groups to protect livelihoods and strengthening community resilience.

The [Centre for Civil Society \(CCS\)](#) in **India** contributed to a recognition from policy-makers of the challenges encountered by street vendors, especially women, which were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. CCS investigated whether the government response to the pandemic adversely affected livelihoods and presented its research—endorsed by two elected representatives of parliament—before a parliamentary committee examining the implementation of the Street Vendors Act 2014. The sustained interaction with government facilitated by our grant was a factor in influencing the relevant Ministry to launch a social security scheme providing street vendors with working capital loans of Rs 10,000.

In **Ghana**, electricity shortages prevented rural communities from receiving television and radio updates on Covid-19 social protection mechanisms.

The [Women Integrated Development Organisation \(WIDO\)](#) conducted research with 20 rural communities in Ghana on the challenges they faced accessing Covid-19 relief packages, which was disseminated to local authorities. With support from WIDO, the Ghana Enterprise Agency established 10 registration centres for people living in rural communities, especially women and persons with disabilities. Awareness raising activities held with local communities through the project supported 564 women and 213 people with disabilities in rural communities to submit applications for government support.

4. Enhanced collaboration between government and civil society in healthcare provision; strengthening community trust in Covid-19 responses

Our grant partners facilitated greater collaboration between government and civil society, fostering an increase in mutual trust which helped improve the effectiveness of government responses and, in some cases, enable civil society to meet gaps in state provision.

In **Cameroon**, [Partners for Relief and Development Organisation \(PARDO\)](#) identified that the implementation of the Covid-19 responses was hindered by a lack of trust between government agencies and CSOs. PARDO facilitated closer engagement between health authorities and CSOs, including by producing an operational guideline on engagement approaches for CSOs at national, regional and district levels. In the Northwest region of Cameroon, CSOs—including seven women-led organisations—were invited to support the rollout of the government Covid-19 response amongst hard-to-reach communities where health services had been disrupted. This enhanced delivery and resulted in a more rapid relay of information at the community level, sometimes beyond the capacities of the state.

In **Jamaica**, grant partner [Council of Voluntary Social Services \(CVSS\)](#) contributed to the creation of a multi-sectoral working group to develop responses to health crises with representation from the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), the private sector and the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MLSS). CVSS was

invited to represent civil society at meetings of the Humanitarian Assistance Committee and to provide feedback on the draft National Humanitarian Policy and Strategy, contributing to a more robust and comprehensive response to future crises.

5. Improved access to information, knowledge and practice relating to Covid-19 prevention

Our grants played a role in increasing access to information, raising awareness and, in some cases, changing behaviours in relation to Covid-19 within communities.

[Blossom Trust India](#) trained local community members to be Covid-19 champions, raising awareness within rural communities on symptoms, prevention and vaccination, as well as equipping them with advocacy skills to promote the interests of rural communities at state level.

[Dialogue Fiji](#) disseminated Covid-19 information that had not previously been shared with the wider public through radio and TV messages in the three national languages. The project developed two research reports into vaccine hesitancy which informed more appropriate and tailored strategies, leading to greater uptake. The reports were the only empirical studies of vaccine hesitancy in Fiji, serving as useful tools for epidemiologists and other public health policy-makers to formulate effective future mass immunisation programmes.

While the breadth and depth of changes linked to our Covid-19 grants varied from project to project, the Foundation is confident that all 26 projects enhanced the ability of civil society to influence governance and decision-making. By strengthening coordination and collaboration between government and civil society, these grants contributed to more effective and inclusive Covid-19 responses and helped to build the foundations for stronger and more accountable responses to future crises.

Civil society participation in Health Ministers Meeting 2023

Getting Universal Health Coverage in the Commonwealth on Track for 2030 was the theme of this year's Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting. Progress towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC), a core Sustainable Development Goal, has been set back by the Covid-19 pandemic and recent economic and political instability. Across all regions of the Commonwealth, gender inequality has been widely acknowledged as a major impediment to accessing adequate health care and support.

The Foundation convened two events—accompanied by an online survey, which received 300 responses—to bring civil society experience and expertise to bear on approaches to realign UHC as a policy priority within the Commonwealth. Both events focused on why inclusive health policy-making matters, especially in relation to gender, when it comes to moving towards UHC.

An online *Critical Conversations* roundtable: **Advancing Universal Health Coverage through gender equality** in February 2023, brought together over 200 health policy experts, practitioners and civil society leaders working in health from 39 countries. Beginning with an analysis and discussion on the status of UHC in the Commonwealth, the event culminated in a collaborative working session to develop 'key asks' that were presented to the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH) and later at a **dialogue with Senior Health Officials** attending the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting in May 2023.

Participants at the roundtable were selected based on their knowledge and expertise of the intersections between health and gender policy and practice. Wide interest resulted in more than 900 applications, from which 429 were invited to attend the online roundtable. From this group, six civil society health and gender experts were selected to participate in the Senior Officials Meeting.

'Thank you for giving me the chance to put forth the point and this is an important conversation for the health ministers and policies for universal healthcare and gender equity.'

Mariam Saeed Khan, Pakistan (participant)

Health: grant highlights

- With our **Open Call Grant**, the **Best Practices Foundation** is working with partners to improve health service delivery and enhance access to comprehensive healthcare for LGBTQI communities and sex workers in the State of Karnataka, **South India** by raising awareness of barriers faced by marginalised and vulnerable communities and strengthening capacities at grassroots level to advocate for enhanced inclusion in healthcare policies and processes.
- Our **Creative Grant** to the **Solomon Islands Creative Writers Association** developed the skills of writers to advocate around issues of health through a creative writing workshop in June 2022.
- With our **Open Call Grant**, **Disability Rights Watch** is working with partner **Youth Action for Disability Inclusion in Zambia** to improve access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for young people with disabilities in three districts by identifying gaps in public health policy and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to advocate for a more inclusive policy environment.

Training for young people with disabilities, Zambia



Remember to Rest: adda collection on healthy communities

The call for a special *adda* edition on healthy communities attracted 648 entries from 42 Commonwealth countries. A panel of three editors, including one practising doctor, Roopa Farooki, selected 25 pieces published in three issues under the title **Remember to Rest**, between February and April 2023. The collection represents Vanuatu for the first time on *adda*. Themes across the collection include mental health, reproductive health, indigenous medicine, medical neglect, and the connection between climate, the environment and healthy communities.

648

Entries

42

Countries represented

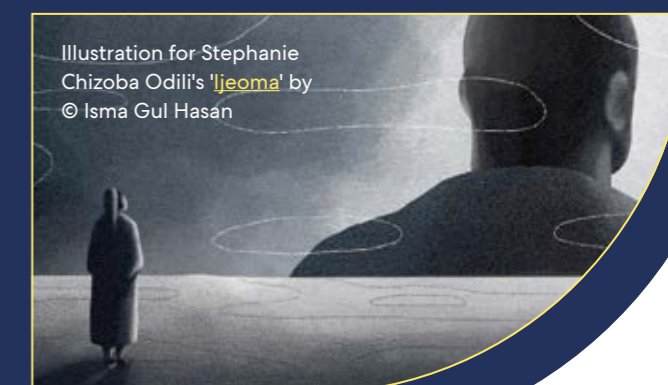
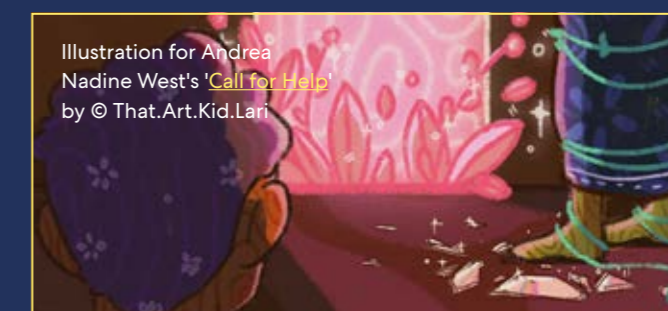
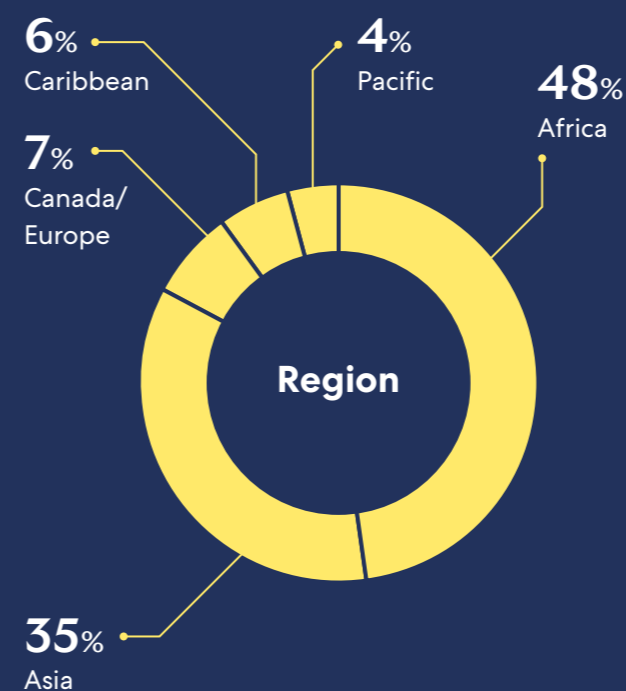
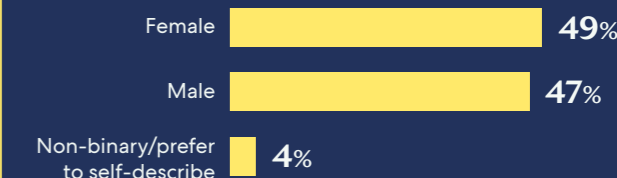
41

Entries translated into english

'This is the first time I am being paid for my creative work. I feel motivated to write more and consider working on larger projects. This is like a confirmation that I am on the right track and I deserve to be heard.'

Mammatli Molefi, Lesotho, contributor

Gender



Our work on freedom of expression

Threats, intimidation, and the imprisonment of journalists are on the rise across the world and the Commonwealth is no exception to this trend. The international community has responded by adopting several United Nations resolutions on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity for crimes committed against them. The Commonwealth Charter highlights freedom of expression as a critical value and Commonwealth civil society has long been active in defending this aspect of Commonwealth identity.

Commonwealth principles on media freedom

Over the past several years, a broad-based coalition involving government partners as well as media practitioners and other experts have come together to develop a new set of [Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of Media in Good Governance](#). These principles were widely seen as presenting the Commonwealth with an historic opportunity to reaffirm its unique position in the intergovernmental system as a champion and guardian of free expression.



© Commonwealth Secretariat
2022 Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting, Mauritius

In November 2022, the Foundation convened an online event to discuss the draft set of principles on media freedom that were due to be considered by Commonwealth Law Ministers later that month. This *Critical Conversation*, [The People's Voice: A Stronger Commonwealth Code for Media Freedom](#), brought together leading voices on the issue to discuss how media freedom is being threatened across the Commonwealth and how the principles might be used for positive change. Panellists included Nigerian Judge Chile Eboe-Osuji, former president of the International Criminal Court; Mr Kanbar Hossein-Bor, Senior British Diplomat and Deputy-Director of the UK Foreign Office's media freedom programme; Sneha Aurora, Executive-Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative's London Office; and leading Maltese

media freedom advocate Corinne Vella, the sister of murdered journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

The audience—147 participants from 38 countries—represented a wide range of media practitioners and media freedom advocates, including officials from the Council of Europe, UNESCO, and Commonwealth partner organisations including the Commonwealth Journalists Association.

At the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting held on 24 November—nine days after our event—Ministers agreed to recommend the principles to Heads of Government for adoption at CHOGM 2024 in Samoa.

'It's a big moment for the Commonwealth. We don't yet have consensus on these principles at the state level. Endorsing these principles [is] the beginning of an important journey.'

Mr Kanbar Hossein-Bor, Senior British Diplomat

UNESCO Taskforce

Since October 2020, The Foundation has been an active member of UNESCO's Intergovernmental 'Light Touch' Taskforce on the Safety of Journalists, a coalition of intergovernmental organisations working to deepen collaboration and coordination to advance the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity*. Our interaction with the Taskforce has helped shape aspects of the Foundation's work on freedom of expression, widening our audience for events and expanding our network of contacts.

In November 2022, the Foundation fielded a delegation to the Vienna Conference on the Safety of Journalists. This provided an opportunity to present the views of Commonwealth civil society to governments as well as to raise awareness of the Commonwealth's new *Principles on Freedom of Expression*. In doing so, the Foundation was able to draw in a much wider network of media freedom experts to contribute to the debate. Many of these contacts joined the Foundation's *Critical Conversation* event referred to earlier.

adda 'Speak Out!' collection

The final issue of the *adda* series on freedom of expression was published in July 2022. The Foundation was delighted with the quality of the selected pieces for this series, which affirmed, in very different ways, the critical importance that creative arts can play in advancing this fundamental Commonwealth value.

Four editors selected the 29 works that were published in four issues between April and July 2022 on topics including LGBTQIA+, discrimination, the right to protest, censorship of free speech, and issues of religion and democracy. As a measure of how deeply the theme resonated with writers, a survey conducted by the Foundation found that almost half of all works published in the series were completely new: written specifically in response to the call.

Freedom of expression: grant highlights

- With support from our **Open Call Grant**, the [Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum](#) is strengthening the capacity of artists and journalists to raise awareness of the constraints on freedom of expression and the consequent reduction in national-level civic activism.
- The [Sibikwa Arts Centre](#) is addressing a lack of citizen participation in local governance processes in **South Africa** by harnessing the power of cultural and creative approaches. With our **Open Call Grant**, the project is piloting the creation of 'Urban Labs' as spaces in which citizens can engage in dialogue around urban policies that directly affect their lives.
- In **Cyprus**, research by our grants partner [Urban Gorillas](#) highlights a lack of awareness among citizens of the importance of public spaces. With support from our **Open Call Grant**, this project will strengthen citizen participation in urban decision-making processes and transform underutilised urban sites into spaces for dialogue, creativity and participation.

'The biggest risks for a journalist are corruption, a culture of impunity, or rule of law failure in the state they work in. So, any legal reforms to protect journalists and media freedom have to be paired with effective action against those risks.'

Corinne Vella, Director of Media Relations, Daphne Caruana Galizia Foundation



Outreach and partnership

Online engagement

Each month, we receive an average of

1.1 million

content views on social media

80,000

webpage visits

1,400

new people joining our mailing lists

After a year of record growth, the Foundation passed the milestone of 100,000 followers across all social media channels in early 2023. This was achieved despite the stricter rules that now govern social media advertising, a tool we have used extensively to drive audience growth. Being adaptive and responsive in such a volatile environment proved to be vital: we experimented with a greater variety of advertising tools and found ways to engage with our existing community more effectively, carefully segmenting subscribers according to their interests and tailoring the content they receive to increase the quality of their engagement. This has led to our community members promoting our work organically through their own personal networks, offsetting the diminishing returns from social media advertising and expanding our overall reach.

Simplifying how we communicate our work

The Foundation has continued to upgrade its website to improve functionality and simplify the way we communicate our work. A complete rework of our most used and visible web pages—including those for our grants programme, our events series and the Commonwealth Short Story Prize—was implemented during the reporting period. We also launched a new community section: a hub for Commonwealth civil society to connect, share and learn with each other.

Over the course of the current strategy, the *Commonwealth Writers* online community has grown to include creatives working in many other disciplines: from filmmaking to performance poetry; from painting to photography. This global and close-knit network of creative practitioners from all disciplines and backgrounds needed to be recognised through a new name. During the reporting period the Foundation relaunched *Commonwealth Writers* under the new banner: *Commonwealth Foundation Creatives*. We also took this opportunity to consolidate our online presence: moving our cultural projects onto the Foundation website and retiring the site that previously housed them, thereby strengthening the Foundation's identity as the Commonwealth's agency for culture.

Media coverage

We have achieved over 60 pieces of coverage during the reporting period across the five regions of the Commonwealth. This coverage involved a variety of media, from story readings by our Short Story Prize winners on the radio to long-form writing on small island states' efforts to tackle climate change. Our liaison with the press has at once raised the Foundation's profile while also ensuring mainstream media coverage (including *Financial Times*, *Esquire*, *BBC*, *Straits Times*, *Jamaica Gleaner*) of issues that matter to our civil society and government partners.

Media fellows at CHOGM

The Foundation supported four media fellows from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific to increase media coverage of CHOGM and the People's Forum from the perspective of civil society. The media fellows proved to be active and engaged: asking difficult questions on free expression, climate change and health. They published articles in journals including Ghana's *Daily Graphic* and Tonga's *Nuku'alofa Times* as well as segments in broadcast media.



Our people

Our people are what enables the Foundation to deliver on its strategy, and we have continued to prioritise the development and strengthening of our team.

Recruitment

The new staffing structure has been fully implemented and refined to meet the demands of the strategic plan in a dynamic operating environment. The Foundation's commitment to valuing its people ensures it is recognised as an attractive place to work and vacancies arising during the year have been filled with high-calibre candidates, despite the difficult recruitment landscape.

Graduate internship programme

Our internship programme continues to offer exceptional experience to talented young people for whom such a life-changing and appropriately remunerated opportunity may not otherwise be accessible. We encourage our interns in their learning journey and support them to secure strong employment opportunities on completion of their term with the Foundation. Refinements to the programme during the reporting period have helped to make the recruitment process more efficient and bring benefits in line with industry good practice.

Working arrangements and staff wellbeing

The Foundation prides itself on maintaining a work environment that is highly conducive to a happy and productive team. We keep our staff policies under close review, revising when and where necessary. For example, during the reporting period we updated our paternal leave provisions to better reflect best practice and our own commitment to gender equality. Working arrangements are considered in light of staff wellbeing as well as productivity. On the

basis of lessons learned over the past several years we are currently operating a carefully calibrated policy that offers defined flexibility for staff while ensuring a strong and consistent in-office presence.

Learning and development

As a learning organisation, the Foundation supports employee performance and development through a twice-yearly appraisal process and ongoing individual learning and development plans. Staff are encouraged to take an active role in considering their own needs in relation to their role and career aspirations, and to recognise the importance of both formal and informal learning and development opportunities. The Foundation continues to work with the Secretariat in delivering the corporate induction programme for new starters to both organisations and is grateful to the Secretariat for extending its 'Future Leaders' programme to our managers, three of whom took up the opportunity during this reporting period.



Commonwealth Foundation staff at 'stop and reflect' retreat, April 2023

Our finances

As a values-based organisation and a custodian of public funds, provided through assessed contributions from Member States, the Foundation is committed to demonstrating that we are spending our income wisely and effectively. Each year our audited financial statements are published on the Foundation's website within six months of the year-end.

Summary of financial performance for financial year 2022–2023

This annual report is published before the end of the financial year in June 2023. Financial reports for the 2022–2023 year will be available by December 2023. Audited accounts for prior years are also available on the Foundation's website.

Annual assessed contributions

The main source of the Foundation's income is contributions from Member States based on an agreed formula adopted by the Board of Governors. The Foundation relies on Member States paying their assessed contributions in full and on time. We work closely with those having difficulties to support them in meeting their commitments.

In previous years the Foundation has generally received just over 90% of budgeted assessed contributions within the relevant financial year (see figure 1). At the time of writing (April 2023), we have already received 87% of the contributions due for the year.

Arrears recovery and reset initiative

The Foundation takes a proactive approach to current and accumulated arrears. The Directorate has engaged in targeted outreach to affected Member States and the preparation of tailored payment plans that seek to recognise the ongoing difficulties that many Commonwealth countries are experiencing. We look to our governors for support in encouraging Member States in arrears to participate in payment plans. The Foundation has been especially attentive to making sure that High Commissioners of countries in serious arrears are kept well informed of our work and encouraged to continue their engagement.

In June 2022, in a demonstration of Commonwealth solidarity and in recognition of the risk that Member States in serious arrears become less engaged in the Foundation's work, the Board of Governors agreed to an 'arrears recovery and reset initiative'. The initiative allows the discharge of longstanding debts for Member States in serious arrears who, by the end of the 2022–2023 financial year, clear three years of assessed contributions and commit to the full and timely payment of future contributions. The Director-General has been engaging personally with representatives of all countries concerned, and office holders of our governance bodies have been similarly engaged. The Foundation has requested governors to use their good offices to help ensure the success

of the initiative which will secure continued Member State engagement and contribute substantially to the longer-term financial stability of their organisation.

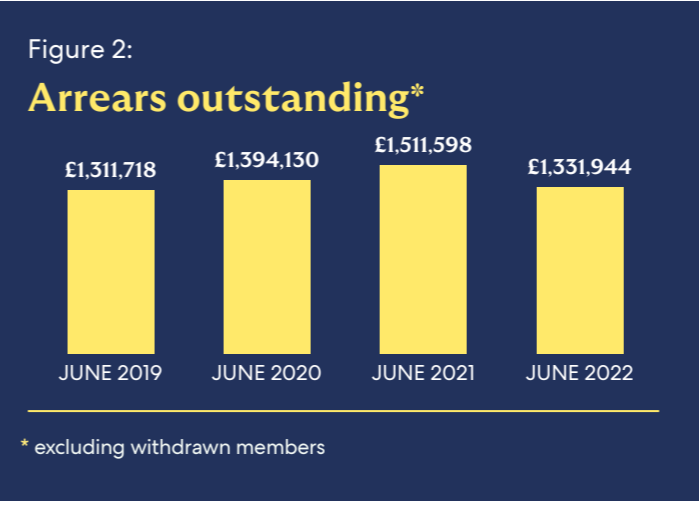
Expenditure

Of the total approved budgeted expenditure of £3,424,130 for the financial year 2022–2023 (2021–2022: £3,274,305), the Foundation allocated the highest share to its programmes (including staff costs for the programmes) amounting to £2,708,595 (79%) (2021–2022: 83%).

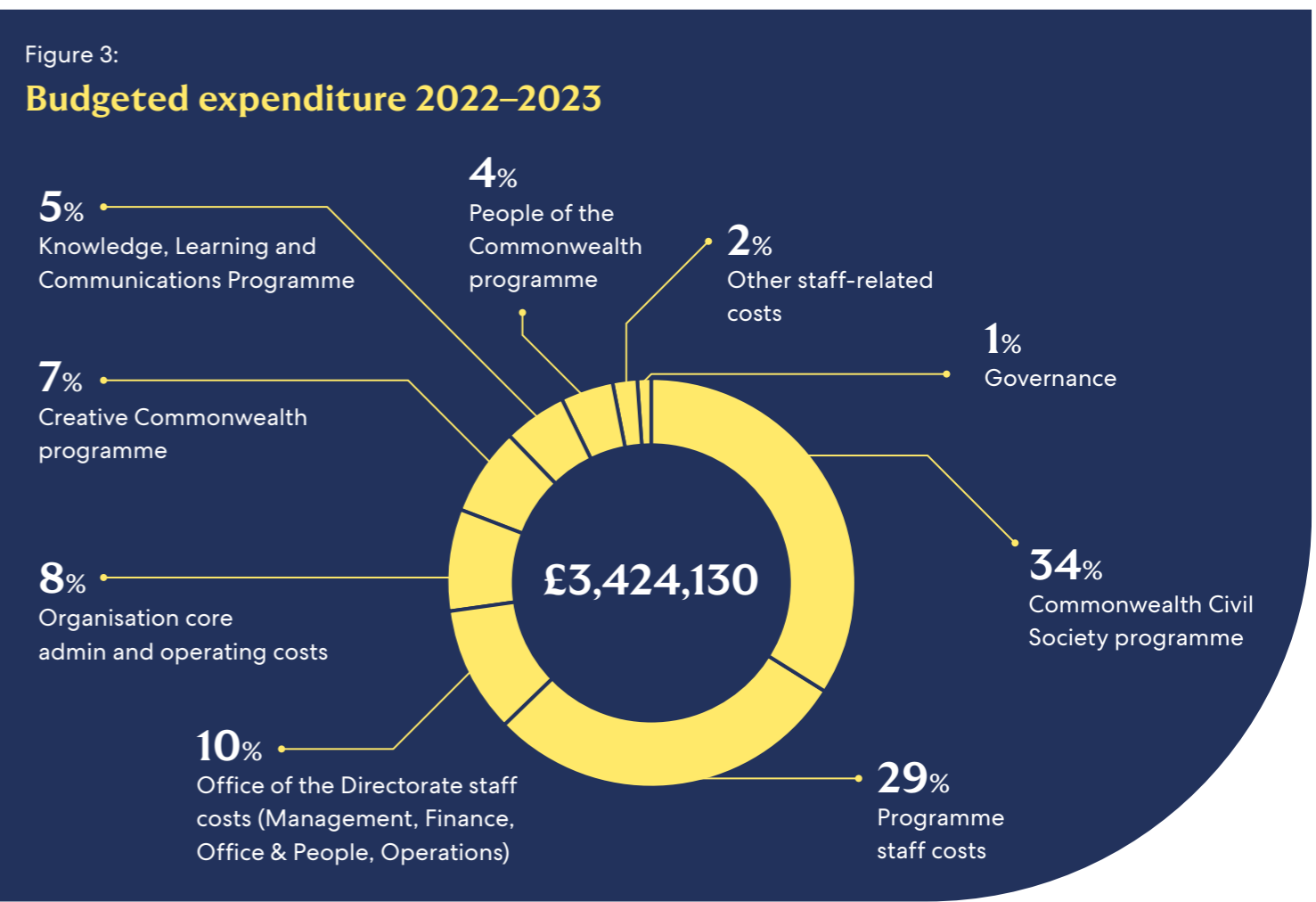
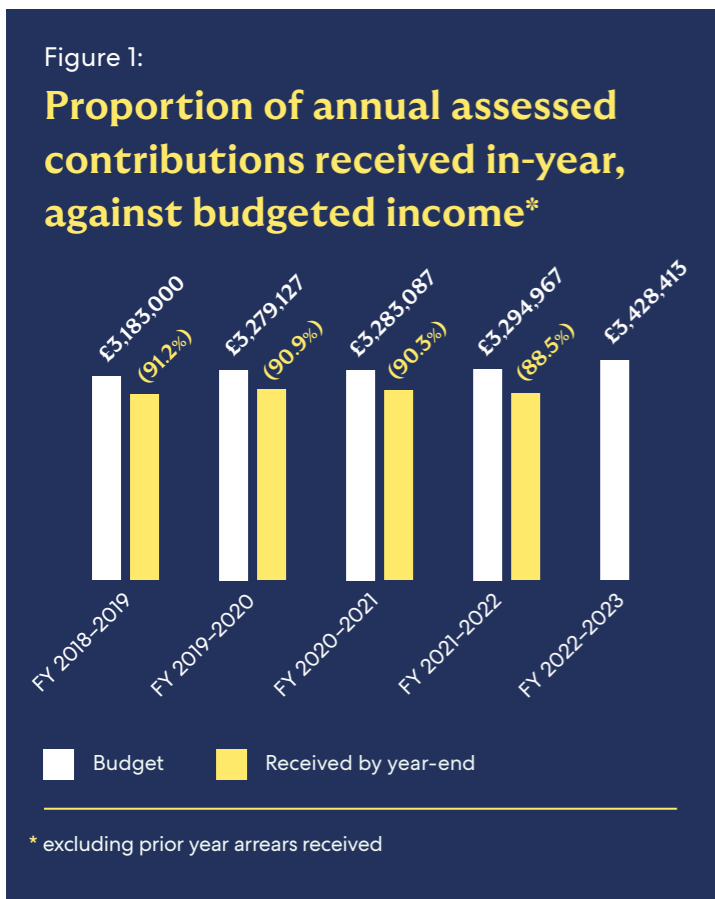
Figure 3 illustrates the allocation to different categories of the current strategy outcomes.

Extra-budgetary resources

In 2021 the Foundation secured extra-budgetary resources (EBR) of CAD 550,000 (equivalent to GBP 315,862) from the Government of Canada to enhance our Special Grants Call in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This welcome contribution enabled the Foundation to support an additional 10 projects, all of which were completed during the reporting period (see project outcomes on pages 40–43). The Foundation will continue to encourage extra-budgetary resources from sources that comply with guidelines approved by the Board of Governors for the sole and specific purpose of supplementing our grants allocation.



At the time of writing (April 2023), £55,443 had been recovered of the arrears that were outstanding at June 2022. 59% of this amount recovered related to assessed contributions for the previous (2021–2022) year. Figure 2 illustrates the trend of outstanding arrears over the last four financial years.





Annex: Funded projects 2022–2023

Open Call Grants 2021–2022*

Strengthening the capacity of young women survivors to influence policy on mental health
 Health security for persons living and working in the streets of Nairobi
 Health for all: sensory screening and early intervention for children with complex disabilities
 Enhancing access and participation in climate change policy development
 Enhancing fisher's capacity to advocate in policy and programme review
 Urban culture, democracy and governance labs
 Propagation of women empowerment and rights
 Cancer services for all
 Promoting improved access to health services for youth with disabilities
 Strengthening services in rural areas through picture advocacy
 Women fisher-folk rights
 Our wellbeing, our voice: marginalised communities organise for change
 Youth for civic action and reporting on climate change through citizen journalism
 Guaranteeing inclusive right to health of marginalised communities
 Citizen engagement and advocacy for open contracting in public health procurement
 Innovative spaces for promoting freedom of expression and information rights
 Mobile 'Agora' for participatory spaces: creating for new forms of expression in the cityscape

Kenya
 Kenya
 Kenya
 Malawi
 Mauritius
 South Africa
 Uganda
 Uganda
 Zambia
 Zambia
 Bangladesh
 India
 Pakistan
 Sri Lanka
 Sri Lanka
 Sri Lanka
 Cyprus

Capacity Strengthening Grants 2021–2022

awarded to the following organisations:

Building Innate Resilience Through Hearts
 Fusi Alofa Association
 Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN)
 Samoa Victim Support
 Te Toa Mato
 Tonga Leitis Association
 Vanuatu Disability Promotion and Advocacy Association
 Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities
 Bahamas UCTRANS
 Organisation for Responsible Governance (ORG) Foundation
 Hope Foundation
 Toledo Maya Women's Council
 Lake Health and Wellbeing
 CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago
 Women and Democracy
 Mauritius Eco-Sud
 Nurses Association of the Republic of Seychelles

Fiji
 Tuvalu
 Kiribati
 Samoa
 Kiribati
 Tonga
 Vanuatu
 Antigua and Barbuda
 The Bahamas
 The Bahamas
 Barbados
 Belize
 Saint Kitts and Nevis
 Trinidad and Tobago
 Maldives
 Mauritius
 Seychelles

Creative Grants 2021–2022

Enhancing skills and techniques of literary artists in Fiji
 Inspiring and developing non-fiction writers in Kiribati
 Building a national literature through discussion, competition and collaboration
 Developing the skills of writers to advocate around issues of health
 Developing skills and self-expression through mural design, and highlighting the importance of visual art
 Developing musical compositions to support climate change advocacy

Fiji
 Kiribati
 Papua New Guinea
 Solomon Islands
 Tonga
 Vanuatu

* One Open Call Grant approved in June 2022 was cancelled. Details have been shared with members of the Grants Committee



Creative Grants 2022–2023

AgaMotse, art creating worlds
 Mbabane art space
 Banjul art and cultural revival initiative
 Bahale young actors and directors incubation programme
 Art-i-San 23, contemporary San art in Namibia
 Mentorship for growth: skill sharing and professional development workshops for Rwandan artists
 Poda-Poda Stories fellowship
 Minodu (Let's reunite)
 Multiplying narratives: writing East African experiences
 Anthology for and by young adults and teenagers

Botswana
 Eswatini
 The Gambia
 Lesotho
 Namibia
 Rwanda
 Sierra Leone
 Togo
 Rwanda
 Tanzania

Covid-19 Grants

Supporting health at the grassroots
 Strengthening community responses to mitigate impacts of Covid-19 on vulnerable communities
 Fostering multi-stakeholder outreach to improve policy action in the context of Covid-19 and beyond
 Using government-developed transparency frameworks for accountability in Nigeria Covid-19 spending
 Developing and implementing inclusive policies in response to the Covid-19 pandemic
 Civil society engagement for effective Covid-19 response
 Monitoring and promoting equitable access to Covid-19 prevention and treatment technologies
 Supporting the development of gender-balanced public health policies during emergencies
 Disability response to Covid-19 pandemic
 Strengthening voices of micro and small-scale entrepreneurs in the post Covid-19 economic policy reforms
 Ensuring effective municipal responses to housing needs and homelessness during Covid-19
 Strengthening citizen engagement in Fiji's Covid-19 response
 Strengthening Covid-19 accountability mechanisms
 Voices from the street: people, policy and pandemic
 Building capacity of women and girls with disabilities in India to meet the challenges of Covid-19
 Raising awareness of the impact of Covid-19 on persons with deafblindness and multiple disabilities
 Raising voices: strengthening civil society participation and supporting health at the grassroots
 Enhancing citizens participation for effective Covid-19 responses
 Strengthening community access to Covid-19 information and involvement in pandemic responses
 Strengthening inter-cluster capacity to engage in policy and programme review
 Eliminating sexual and gender-based violence - collaboration, advocacy, awareness and protection
 Basic income support in the context of Covid-19 and beyond
 Strengthening community involvement in Covid-19 response plans
 Safeguarding India's itinerant maritime fisheries labour
 Strengthening disability inclusion in Covid-19 responses
 Strengthening multi-sectoral responses to the Covid-19 pandemic

Kenya
 Malaysia
 Maldives
 Nigeria
 Pakistan
 Pakistan
 South Africa
 Saint Kitts and Nevis
 Uganda
 Uganda
 Canada
 Fiji
 Ghana
 India
 India
 India
 Cameroon
 Ghana
 Malawi
 Malawi
 Nigeria
 South Africa
 India
 India
 Bangladesh
 Jamaica



Legacy grants (completed and evaluated this year)

- Advocating for the right to health for vulnerable people
- Realising the rights of young people with disabilities
- Shaping statutory regulation for civil society organisations
- Increasing access to sexual and reproductive health services for women and girls living with HIV
- Mobilising young women to participate in governance
- Fostering women's participation in governance
- Promoting inclusive practices in communities and schools
- Facilitating access to HIV health services for people who use drugs
- Strengthening legislation and policy development on natural resource management
- Monitoring implementation of the Tonga Strategic Development Framework

- Kenya
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Pakistan
- Pakistan
- Mauritius
- Papua New Guinea
- Tonga

Legacy grants (ongoing)

- Strengthening the capacity of young people to reduce gun violence in their communities
- Safeguarding the rights of older women and men
- Enabling young people to shape the future
- Strengthening the implementation of legislation to end violence against women and girls
- Protecting the rights of the transgender community through legislative development
- Strengthening implementation of the laws that address violence against women
- Promoting increased women's representation in government
- Strengthening the capacity of transgender and intersex persons to advocate for protection of their rights
- Promoting the rights of street children
- Strengthening the voices of communities to participate in the inland fisheries policy process
- Strengthening advocacy for better implementation of the Prevention of Atrocities Act
- Empowering community paralegals to address statelessness
- Helping rural women engage in land reform
- Strengthening the inclusion of i-Kiribati civic voices in climate change induced displacement policies
- Ensuring the inclusive education of children with disabilities in Guyana and Jamaica
- Family caregiving and public policy in India: creating new opportunities for recognition and support
- Amplifying the voices of women community leaders in city-planning processes in India
- Promoting rights of grassroots persons with disabilities through community-led initiatives

- South Africa
- Malawi
- Mozambique
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- India
- Vanuatu
- South Africa
- Bangladesh
- South Africa
- India
- Malaysia
- South Africa
- Kiribati
- Guyana and Jamaica
- India
- India
- Bangladesh



Participants at the 2022 Commonwealth People's Forum in Kigali, Rwanda



