

Annual Report

2023–2024



Commonwealth
Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation 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 their governance.

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Welcome from the Chair of the Board



As Chair of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Foundation, it is my pleasure to introduce this annual report, which showcases the Foundation's efforts to champion the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, and foster the development of dynamic, free civil societies across our Member States.

The report reflects another year of hard work and innovation in response to the formidable task of advocating for the rights and interests of the 2.5 billion citizens of the Commonwealth. With a close eye on its strategic goals, the Foundation continues to broaden and deepen its connections with civil society organisations across all regions of the Commonwealth. Of particular note is its steadily increasing engagement with small and vulnerable states, where civil society is too often fragile and in need of carefully targeted support.

In 2021, the Board ratified a strategic plan that focuses the Foundation's energies and resources on three pivotal areas: health, climate, and freedom of expression. Progress and results presented in this report powerfully affirm that decision, demonstrating tangible impact in each area. Coherent, interconnected programmes, created and executed as part of this highly targeted strategy, have increased the Foundation's visibility and leveraged strategic partnerships needed to drive meaningful change.

The Foundation is moving into the final two years of its 2021–2026 strategic plan and I am confident that we are well-placed to fulfil—perhaps even exceed—our ambitious goals. A strong culture of innovation and learning has helped the Foundation to deliver meaningful results with just a small team and modest budget. I encourage the Director-General and her staff to be unrelenting in their ambition.

Our Member States are the backbone of the Foundation, ensuring its sustained vitality through

‘Coherent, interconnected programmes, created and executed as part of this highly targeted strategy, have increased the Foundation's visibility and leveraged strategic partnerships needed to drive meaningful change.’

their regular and timely financial contributions and active participation. In this period, we were thrilled to celebrate Samoa's return to the Foundation, an important step forward in our collaborative efforts to deliver a strong People's Forum in October. Only a few Commonwealth countries remain outside the Foundation's membership. As we approach the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, it is my sincere hope that these countries will decide to join us. Our Member States play a crucial role in this expansion effort, particularly by heralding the manifold benefits membership brings to their nations and civil societies.

And of course, it is our governors who so ably take on the daily responsibility for ensuring the Foundation fulfils its important mandate. I am grateful to all who serve on the Foundation's Board, its Executive Committee and Grants Committee. Meeting many of you at the 2023 High Commissioners' Festive Poetry Evening, hosted in the elegant setting of the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission, was an honour and a pleasure. Now in its third year, it was a most memorable evening, filled with warmth, laughter, and moments of poignant reflection. It seems wholly fitting for the Foundation to act as the medium through which High Commissioners gather, celebrating the diverse tapestry of their cultures while contemplating the universal themes that bind our nations together, transcending geography and language.

I close by thanking my fellow office-holders for their dedicated service over the past year: Chair of the Executive Committee, H.E. Jeremiah Nyamane Mamabolo, High Commissioner of South Africa; and Chair of the Grants Committee, H.E. Dr Kevin Isaac, High Commissioner of Saint Christopher and Nevis. Special thanks are also due to our Civil Society Advisory Governors from Australia, Maldives, Malta, Nigeria, and Trinidad and Tobago, who are playing such an important role in preparing for the People's Forum. Finally, on behalf of all governors I extend our appreciation to Dr Gallagher and her team for a job well done.

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

Chair of the Executive Committee



H.E. Mr Jeremiah Nyamane Mamabolo
High Commissioner of South Africa

Chair of the Grants Committee



H.E. Dr Kevin M Isaac
High Commissioner of
Saint Christopher 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



Steady innovation and achievement are the hallmarks of the past year for the Commonwealth Foundation, and I am delighted to present our annual report for 2023–2024. After almost five years as its leader, I continue to be astonished at what our small organisation, with a staff of less than 25, and an equally modest budget, is able to deliver for Member States and the 2.5 billion citizens of the Commonwealth.

Our work at the Foundation, indeed within the broader Commonwealth, has never felt more important or more urgent. Throughout our family of nations and beyond, conflict and division feel more proximate than they did just 12 months ago. And, at the mid-point of 2024, we have cause to worry that our precious values—and the trusted institutions we have built to protect them—may not be sufficiently robust to prevail over new and emerging threats to human flourishing.

At such a time we reflect on the noble purpose of the Commonwealth: the idea that a group of very different countries can unite in support of each other with the shared goal of advancing the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter—of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The Commonwealth now totals 56 countries across five regions, bringing together 2.5 billion citizens: a worthy project that deserves our unequivocal support.

The Foundation embodies the Commonwealth identity as a union of people, not just of countries or governments. It is our task to bring that identity to life in ways that make a real difference. As we move into the final two years of our strategic plan, we are working hard to achieve the ambitious goals set by our governors back in 2021. To that end, we continue to embrace innovative and varied approaches to our work.

‘I continue to be astonished at what our small organisation is able to deliver for Member States and the 2.5 billion citizens of the Commonwealth.’

Highlights of this reporting period include our outreach and advocacy; most especially through the **Critical Conversations event series** which continues to unite thousands of Commonwealth citizens on issues of common concern and helps to ensure the voice of civil society is heard in forums where policy is crafted and decisions are taken. It embodies the idea of ‘participatory governance’ that lies at the heart of our work and has directly influenced our preparations for the **Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)** and the **Commonwealth People’s Forum 2024 in Samoa**. We have kickstarted a Commonwealth-wide dialogue on our areas of focus—health and climate justice, and freedom of expression—which aims to propel the commitments made at the 2022 CHOGM in Rwanda.

Our commitment to integrating creative expression into all facets of our work is yielding significant benefits, further amplified by a recent organisational shift that merges our advocacy and creative endeavours into a unified programme.

I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who has played a part in our achievements over the past year: our governors, for their guidance and support; our growing network of partners; and, importantly, our dedicated team, whose excellence and dedication exemplify the values of the Commonwealth Charter.

Dr Anne T. Gallagher AO
Director-General

‘The Foundation embodies the Commonwealth identity as a union of people, not just of countries or governments. It is our task to bring that identity to life in ways that make a real difference.’

Our flagship open grants call has continued apace. We now have more projects, in more countries, than ever before in our history. The largest portion of our budget, almost one third of our total expenditure, is dedicated to directly supporting Commonwealth civil society organisations through grant funding for dynamic projects across our focus areas. But our **grants programme** is more than funding: we are firmly committed to nurturing sustainable organisations capable of thriving in challenging environments. Further, these partnerships yield valuable learning opportunities which allow us to refine our advocacy and operational approaches.

Record-breaking submissions to the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, particularly from our smallest and most vulnerable states, illustrates blossoming **creativity** across our Commonwealth.

Our approach

The reporting period covers the third year of the Foundation's 2021–2026 strategic plan. Approved by the Board of Governors in June 2021, the strategy 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

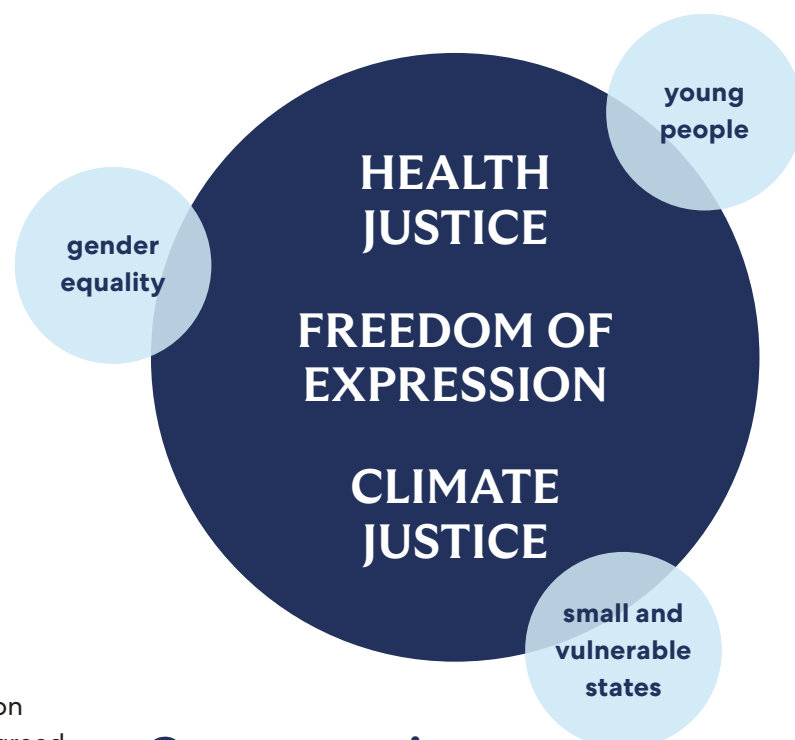
Nurturing the growth of vibrant and free civil societies in all Commonwealth countries

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 our 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.

Our focus areas

In June 2023, governors agreed to a further refinement of the original focus areas to better reflect the Foundation's work and strategic priorities on three issues: **health justice**, **climate justice**, and **freedom of expression**. This fine-tuning aligns us more closely with specific sub-goals of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), 13 (climate action), and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), as well as the spirit of the Commonwealth Charter. Three cross-cutting themes are prioritised throughout our work: **gender equality**, **small and vulnerable states**, and **young people**.



Our strategic results framework

The 2021–2026 strategic plan introduced a clear 'pathway to change', showing exactly what we are trying to achieve, and how. Our strategic results framework (SRF) takes that forward by attaching clear markers of change to each of our higher-level goals: what we expect to see because of our work; what we would like to see; and what we would love to see. During the reporting period, we further refined the SRF (see Annex 1) to ensure a robust evidence base for: (i) evaluation of the strategic plan; and (ii) development of the next phase of the Foundation's work.



'We reiterate our commitment to the values of the Commonwealth Charter, both as an expression of our ideals and aspirations, and as a framework for common action. Through our Commonwealth connection we see each other, hear each other, learn from one another, and co-operate with mutual respect and goodwill to deliver a resilient common future for all our communities and nations.'

Extract: Commonwealth Act of Affirmation

Our Commonwealth partners

Working with the Commonwealth Secretariat

The Foundation is convinced that stronger and more strategic collaboration between the Commonwealth's intergovernmental pillars, especially with the Secretariat, is critical to maximising the impact and effectiveness of the Commonwealth as a whole. To that end, we continue to seek deeper engagement with the Secretariat to advance our focus areas, working closely with colleagues organising ministerial meetings most relevant to our priority areas of health justice, climate justice, and freedom of expression, and our cross-cutting areas of gender equality, small and vulnerable states, and young people. This has led to new and ongoing opportunities to bring the voice of Commonwealth civil society into important policy spaces ([see page 12](#)).

We have also been working closely with our Secretariat colleagues in preparation for the People's Forum, including joining regular cross-forum meetings with our counterparts in the Secretariat and the Government of Samoa. Other areas of growing collaboration this year include administration, people management and staff training. As sister organisations, the Foundation and the Secretariat are well-positioned to learn from each other and to seek greater efficiencies through coordination of our systems and services. Looking ahead, we hope to forge similar ties with the Commonwealth of Learning to further strengthen the bonds between the three intergovernmental pillars of the Commonwealth.

Attendees at the High Commissioners' Festive Poetry Evening 2023



Leveraging the Commonwealth network

We appreciate that the Foundation has an important role to play as a guide, collaborator, and conduit of information for the broader family of organisations that comprises the Commonwealth. The Director-General continues to prioritise our relationship with the accredited organisations by providing timely briefings about the Foundation, its work, and opportunities for collaboration, including at regular meetings of the umbrella convening bodies that bring many of them together.

The Foundation actively nurtures relationships with those accredited organisations that are especially relevant to our areas of work. During the reporting period, this has included engagements with,

among others, the Association of Commonwealth Universities; Royal Commonwealth Society; CommonAge; Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; Commonwealth Association of Planners; Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work; Kaleidoscope International Trust; Institute of Commonwealth Studies; Commonwealth Health Partners Alliance; and Commonwealth Journalists Association. Within the United Kingdom, the Foundation has developed a strong connection with the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Commonwealth, supporting a series of events aimed at exploring the future of the Commonwealth from the perspectives of different Member States.

‘As Co-Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Commonwealth I have been delighted to collaborate closely with the Foundation’s Director-General to bring diverse voices into vital discussions about the future of the Commonwealth. Our series of events with High Commissioners has been especially rich and rewarding.’

Lord Syed Kamall, Co-Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Commonwealth

Bringing the voice of civil society into policy spaces

Our efforts to encourage and facilitate civil society engagement in multilateral processes have reaped real rewards over the past year. Our *Critical Conversations* event series, for example, has been used to great effect: creating Roundtables that bring together hundreds of informed Commonwealth citizens to craft policy recommendations that are conveyed directly to Commonwealth Ministers.

Our *Critical Conversations* Roundtable, [Gender, Climate Change, and Health: How Can We Do Better for Women and Girls?](#), gathered civil society experts to develop a set of practical recommendations that were presented to the **Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting** in The Bahamas, in August 2023, and earned a ground-breaking endorsement by Ministers in the official communiqué.

In September 2023, our Roundtable, [Global Finance for People and Planet](#), marked another pioneering moment for the *Critical Conversations* series. For the first time, civil society insights distilled from the Roundtable informed background papers for the **Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting** in Morocco, in November 2023.

With much-appreciated encouragement from the Secretary-General and her colleagues, the Foundation has been closely following other important ministerial and policy processes connected to our areas of work. In March 2024, the Director-General participated in the **Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting** in Tanzania and, the following month, in the first-ever meeting of **Commonwealth Oceans Ministers**. In May 2024, the Foundation attended the **Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting** in London.

Also in May 2024, the Foundation followed up on last year's successful civil society engagement with the **Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting** on the interconnections between health and gender. At this year's meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, civil society

experts provided an update on progress against the recommendations set out to Ministers in 2023, as well as on the challenges that Commonwealth countries, particularly small and vulnerable states, are facing.

We hosted a side-event at the [United Nations Small Island Developing States \(UNSIDS\) Conference](#) in Antigua and Barbuda, in May 2024, which provided valuable insights on the challenges of building resilient health systems in small island states to carry forward to the People's Forum in Samoa.

Living out our commitment to careful stewardship of scarce resources, the Foundation chose not to field a team to the **28th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28)**. Rather, we used modest funds to build civil society awareness of this important intergovernmental policy space by sponsoring the participation of several journalists and young climate negotiators from the Commonwealth's small and climate vulnerable states.

Looking ahead, the Foundation will continue its accelerated work to bring the voice of Commonwealth civil society to policy and decision-making forums relating to our areas of focus. Discussions with the Secretariat aimed at formalising the Foundation's role in Commonwealth ministerial spaces are ongoing. It is our hope that Member States will enthusiastically support this crucial development, recognising the role that the Foundation can play in making ministerial meetings more effective by introducing perspectives from Commonwealth civil society.

Our open grants call 2024

Each year, the Foundation offers financial support to civil society organisations in eligible Member States for projects that seek to advance Commonwealth principles and ideals within the broad framework of 'participatory governance'. Project proposals are required to address one or more of our focus areas: health justice, climate justice, and freedom of expression. Organisations can apply for up to £30,000 a year, for up to two years.

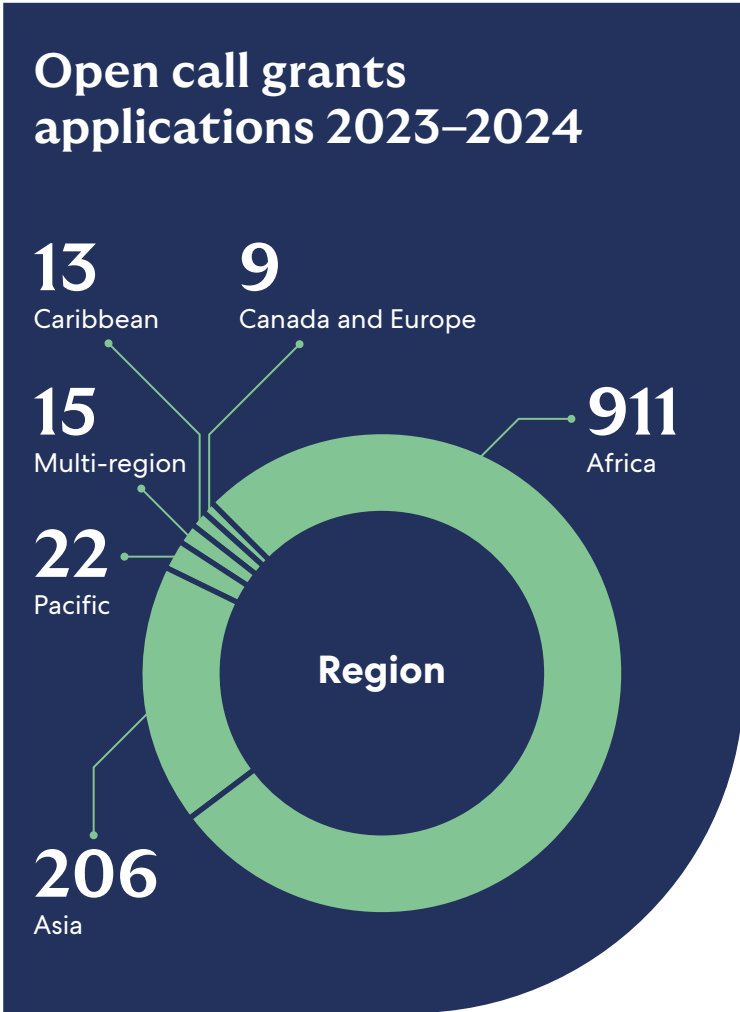
This year's open call attracted a record response with over 1,100 applications from all regions of the Commonwealth. Carefully tailored outreach and streamlined application procedures were used to encourage applications from organisations operating in small and vulnerable states, and those countries and regions that have not traditionally engaged as strongly with the open call.

The impact of these efforts was reflected in a marked increase in applications from the Caribbean region, including Belize, Guyana and Saint Lucia, and from Indian Ocean countries. We were delighted to receive first-time applications from Samoa, our newest Member State.

The Foundation's Internal Review Committee finalised a cohort of 22 strong projects that are scheduled to be reviewed by the Grants Committee in June 2024. These projects cover all three of our focus areas with several addressing both health justice and freedom of expression.



Speakers at an event promoting improved health outcomes for LGBT Jamaicans, organised by grant partners Equality for All Foundation Jamaica and TransWave Jamaica



Progress towards the Commonwealth People’s Forum 2024

In October 2024 the Commonwealth People’s Forum, the largest gathering of civil society in the Commonwealth system, will be convened alongside the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa. The Foundation organises the People’s Forum jointly with the host government and has additional responsibility for the Roundtable dialogue between civil society representatives and Foreign Ministers that is part of the official CHOGM programme.

Preparing for CHOGM and the People’s Forum

The Foundation’s experience at CHOGM 2022 provides valuable guidance in preparing for CHOGM and the People’s Forum in 2024. Critically, we have come to understand the importance of not treating the People’s Forum as a one-off event. Rather, it must be a point in the continuum of the Foundation’s work: an opportunity to take forward the connections, energy, content and direction that our work is generating. We also appreciate the need to bring the Forum to a wider audience: it must not only be for a small group of Commonwealth citizens fortunate to be able to travel to Samoa. This means investing heavily to ensure we optimise our reach during the preparatory phase.

In November 2023, our global launch event, [The People’s Voice: Accelerating Civil Society Action towards CHOGM 2024](#), attracted almost 300 members of Commonwealth civil society to assess progress against the CHOGM 2022 Communiqué and identify priorities for October 2024. With these insights in mind, we developed an ambitious schedule of preparatory activities, aimed at securing wide and deep engagement with Commonwealth civil society in the year leading up to the Forum. A series of online Regional Conversations is providing structured spaces for hundreds of Commonwealth civil society leaders to affirm their shared goals for CHOGM 2024 and to determine (from their regional or subject perspective) what needs to be done over the next year so that CHOGM and the People’s Forum make a positive contribution to advancing the values and principles of the Charter.



COMMONWEALTH
PEOPLE’S FORUM

To ensure maximum input from accredited organisations and wider Commonwealth civil society, we are disseminating a supplementary online consultation so participants can share recommendations for turning the aspirations of the Charter into reality. This will ensure that the voices of many thousands of Commonwealth citizens are heard in Samoa. We have also been working with our governors to secure extra-budgetary resources to support the in-person participation of journalists, civil society leaders and activists in Samoa, particularly from the Commonwealth’s Small Island Developing States.



View highlights from the
People’s Forum launch event

Developing the People’s Forum programme

The programme for the Forum is being developed by a Content Design Committee, which includes the Foundation’s five regional Civil Society Advisory Governors as well as partners from the host country. The Committee is also overseeing our preparatory activities, ensuring that the results from each scheduled event feed directly into programme development. It meets monthly, with a rotating Chair to ensure the interests and perspectives of all Commonwealth regions are reflected in the evolving programme. The involvement of the host country, including representatives of Samoan civil society, has helped enormously in shaping a programme that will support and advance the broader CHOGM agenda.



Rwandan artist Malaika Uwamahoro invites you to join the path to Samoa in her performance of ‘We the People’ for Commonwealth Day 2024



Dr Anne T. Gallagher AO at the 2023 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting with Hon. Valasi Luapitofanua Toogamaga Tafito Selesele, Samoan Minister of Health and Aiono Dr Alec Ekeroma, Director General of Health, Geneva, Switzerland

‘It has been a pleasure and a privilege to be part of the hardworking and well-focused Content Design Committee for this year’s People’s Forum. We have been able to oversee an ambitious schedule of preparatory activities and are confident that our work will result in a strong and inclusive event in October.’

Fuimaono Vaitolo Ofoia, CEO, Samoa Umbrella Organisation of Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO)

Commonwealth Short Story Prize

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize, one of the world’s leading literary prizes, has continued its strong record of unearthing stellar talent from across the Commonwealth. The 2023 prize was awarded to Kwame McPherson from Jamaica. His remarkable triumph, with his story ‘Ocoee’, marks the seventh time he has entered and the first time a writer from Jamaica has won the overall prize.

Kwame's award-winning story, which interweaves Caribbean folklore and stories from African American history, was published online by *Granta*. This publication, along with extensive media coverage, significantly raised his global profile. At home, he gained recognition as an emerging talent, leading to a meeting with the Jamaican Foreign Minister and a special invitation to the award ceremony of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition at Buckingham Palace in London. Kwame's journey is a shining example of how talent, dedication, and unwavering effort can lead to noteworthy success.

The reach of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize has extended considerably since the creation of our online award ceremony in 2020. Presented by Jamaican

journalist Dionne Jackson Miller, the 2023 event drew a live audience of over 700 people and garnered almost 5,000 viewers from across the Commonwealth. The ceremony also celebrated the regional winners by including videos which shared insights into their writing practice and how they crafted their winning stories.

Short Story Prize 2024

This year’s promotional campaign was shaped by our growing appreciation of the challenges faced by many aspiring writers. We used a range of platforms to instil confidence in their craft by sharing editing and writing tips from renowned creative writing teachers and previous winners. This new approach no doubt contributed to 2024 being a record year for entries: 7,359 from 53 Commonwealth countries.

The Foundation maintains its steadfast commitment to bringing the prize to the Commonwealth’s smallest and most vulnerable states. This year, we redoubled our efforts to reach the Caribbean region by investing greater resources in advertising that saw an increase in submissions from Barbados, Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Targeted outreach also helped us achieve a substantial increase in stories written in Chinese, Portuguese and Mauritian Creole. Maltese was added to our list of submission languages this year and we were pleased to receive 14 entries, thanks in large part to our partnership with the National Book Council of Malta. Submissions in English from Maltese writers more than tripled.



‘I never set out to win the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. For me, it was just about telling and sharing a story. Yet, winning confirmed the journey. It cemented the many years of honing my craft and finding a way to engage the reader.

Since winning, I’ve had a whirlwind of experiences from international collaborations to speaking opportunities.’

Kwame McPherson, Jamaica, 2023 overall winner

Regional winners were announced in May 2024 drawn from a diverse shortlist of **23 stories** from **13 countries**. Mauritius, Rwanda and Saint Christopher and Nevis featured on the shortlist for the first time. The overall winner will be announced in June 2024 in an online ceremony.

7,359
Total entries

53
Countries represented

131
Entries translated into English from 40 languages

414
Entries in languages other than English

54%
Entries from women

Regional winners



Reena Usha Rungoo ‘Dite’
Africa (Mauritius)



Sanjana Thakur ‘Aishwarya Rai’
Asia (India)



Julie Bouchard ‘What Burns’
(translated from French)
Canada and Europe (Canada)

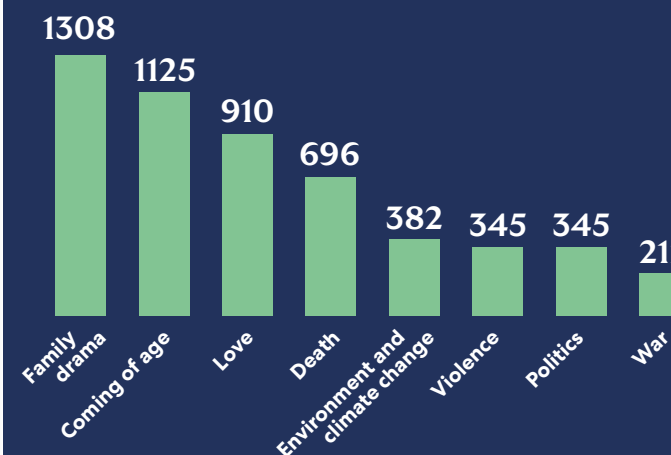


Portia Subran ‘The Devil's Son’
Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago)

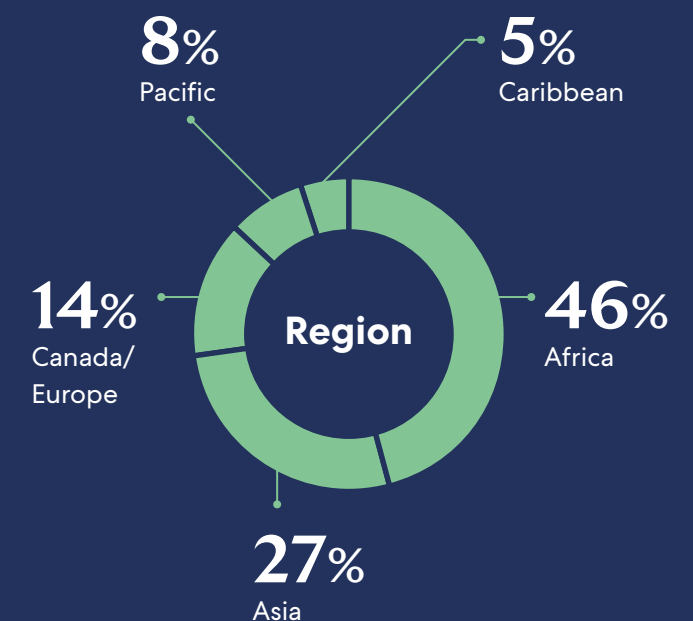


Pip Robertson ‘A River Then The Road’
Pacific (New Zealand)

Entries by theme*



* 2036 other (including mental health, friendship, identity, migration, survival, and redemption)



The 2024 judging panel is chaired by Ugandan writer Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, who won the prize herself a decade ago and has also previously been a judge. Her fellow judges are South African writer, Keletso Mopai; Singaporean short story writer,

screenwriter, and novelist O Thiam Chin; Canadian writer and editor Shashi Bhat; poet and author Richard Georges from the British Virgin Islands; and award-winning Australian Bundjalung writer Melissa Lucashenko.

Health justice

Our focus on health acknowledges the social determinants of health and the structural barriers that hinder equal access to quality healthcare. This area of our work resonates strongly with the direction of the **CHOGM 2022 Communiqué**, core principles of the Charter and key aspects of the **SDGs**. Health justice has been loudly affirmed by civil society as a major priority for the people of the Commonwealth.



Grant partner, Public Health Ambassadors Uganda, monitoring their project in Luwero, Uganda

Our approach seeks to advance the realisation of universal healthcare through the recognition and reduction of inequities in the provision of health services, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups including women and girls, people living with disabilities and young people. We recognise the very specific challenges faced by the Commonwealth's small and vulnerable states in developing and sustaining resilient healthcare systems, especially in the face of growing climate threats.

Over the reporting period, we have continued to prioritise health in our grant-making: supporting civil society organisations to influence more inclusive and equitable health policy and practice. We have forged links with the **Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting** and are using our platforms to amplify voices and place civil society at the centre of discussions addressing inequalities in healthcare. Across multiple areas of our work, we are recognising and responding to the links between health justice and climate justice.

Grant highlights

The Foundation has supported [Public Health Ambassadors Uganda](#) to bring adolescent girls and young women into decision-making processes around sexual and reproductive health rights in Luwero District, Central Uganda. This has led to the establishment of 'youth corners' at health facilities in two sub-counties, increasing access to vital services. Young women were supported to participate in District Health Committee meetings, trained and mentored as peer-educators, and given the opportunity to tell their stories more widely. Local public health facilities led monthly community outreach sessions, endorsed by county decision-makers, to sensitise young people on sexual and reproductive health services.

[Sense International Kenya](#) is working to address inequitable access to sensory screening and early intervention services for children with complex disabilities in Garissa and Kwale counties, with support from the Foundation. These services have now been included in County Integrated Development Plans (CIDP), formally adopted as legal frameworks in November 2023, thereby ensuring that sufficient funding is allocated to enable the integration of these important services for children with complex disabilities into health facilities across the two counties.

Bringing the voice of civil society into health policy spaces

In August 2023, our *Critical Conversations* Roundtable, [Gender, Climate Change, and Health: How Can We Do Better for Women and Girls?](#), convened 450 civil society experts and advocates to examine the intersection of climate change and health through a gender lens: delving into their specific impact on women and girls. A set of ten practical recommendations were developed and presented to the **Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting** in The Bahamas by Caribbean broadcast journalist Alison Kentish and our Director-General, and later endorsed by Ministers in the official communiqué.

'I had never been to a panel at this level that spoke on the intersection of gender, climate change and health. Far too often, we focus on these themes in silos.'

[Keithlin Caroo](#), Executive Director of Helen's Daughters, Saint Lucia (*Critical Conversations* panellist)

The Foundation consulted 25 civil society experts on health ahead of the **Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting** in May 2024, culminating in an update against the '12 Key Asks from Civil Society' first presented to Health Ministers in 2023. The resulting policy statement underscored remaining challenges and lessons learned, emphasising actionable solutions with a strong focus on small and vulnerable states.

Our side-event at the [United Nations Small Island Developing States \(UNSIDS\) Conference](#) in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024 examined the connection between the health and climate crises experienced by SIDS and is reported under 'climate justice' ([see page 21](#)).

The Foundation's focus on universal healthcare has been strengthened through our partnership with the **UHC2030 Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (CSEM)**. During the reporting period, we invited members of the CSEM Advisory Group to take part in our *Critical Conversations* panels and other dialogues to facilitate exchange of information and insights across countries and sectors.



Dr Anne T. Gallagher AO presenting key asks from civil society at the 2023 Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in The Bahamas

'What the Foundation does so well is boil down language into something that is useful for Ministers to take away. The recommendations really resonated with Ministers.'

[Jennifer Namgyal](#), Head of Gender Section, Commonwealth Secretariat

Climate justice

Our focus on climate recognises that the worst effects of climate change are disproportionately felt by many of the Commonwealth's small and vulnerable states that bear little or no historical responsibility for what is happening to them and the planet. The concept of climate justice carries with it an acknowledgement that appropriate and proportionate responses will accurately reflect existing vulnerabilities, resources and capabilities.

We acknowledge that women across the Commonwealth face unequal access to resources, land ownership and decision-making power, leaving them especially vulnerable to external shocks including the impacts of climate change. Our cross-cutting theme of gender equality is accordingly woven strongly throughout our work on climate justice.

Throughout the reporting period, we have continued to prioritise climate change in our grant-making: supporting innovative projects that are working to influence policy formation and decision-making, including through creative means. We have facilitated civil society engagement in key multilateral processes, recognising the vital role that civil society plays in holding governments to account and driving real and lasting change on this critical issue.

Grant partner, Civil Society Network on Climate Change, leading a workshop on climate advocacy in Malawi



Grant partner, Environmental Protection and Conservation Organisation, interviewing a fisherwoman as part of their project in Mauritius

Grant highlights

With support from the Foundation, [Badabon Sangho](#) in **Bangladesh** is seeking to improve conditions for women fishers by ensuring their inclusion in decision-making on climate policy. Seven consultation workshops were held during the reporting period, attended by 156 fishers and 27 local government officials. Fishers learned about their rights and entitlements and reported enhanced awareness of gender-based discrimination and the impacts of climate change on women's health. Government officials reported that they better appreciated women's participation in the fisheries sector and were in favour of facilitating their registration and the issuing of identification cards: measures that will increase their security and access to support.

The [Environmental Protection and Conservation Organisation](#) in **Mauritius** is strengthening fishing communities in coastal areas adversely affected by climate change and recent environmental disasters with support from the Foundation. Over the reporting period, 438 artisanal fishers in nine coastal villages were trained on their rights and relevant policies using creative approaches including animated videos. The training highlighted the importance of equality and raised awareness of the often-overlooked role of women in the fisheries sector.

Bringing the voice of civil society into climate policy spaces

Our first Roundtable of the reporting period, [Gender, Climate Change and Health: How Can We Do Better for Women and Girls?](#), examined the intersection of climate change and health through a gender lens and is reported under 'health justice' ([see page 19](#)).

Our September 2023 Roundtable, [Global Finance for People and Planet](#), brought together almost 200 advocates for debt and climate justice, financial experts, and civil society leaders to consider how the impacts of the climate crisis on the Commonwealth's frontline countries can be addressed through reform of the global financial system. A set of specific and practical recommendations informed background papers shared with officials at the **Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting** in Morocco in October 2023. This was the first time that the Foundation was able to bring the perspectives of civil society to Finance Ministers and we intend to work closely with Secretariat colleagues in exploring how engagement in future meetings can be secured.

The Foundation supported young climate negotiators from the Commonwealth's small and climate vulnerable states—part of the Loss and Damage Youth Coalition—to engage in the **Africa Climate Summit** in Kenya in September 2023. Two of these negotiators also attended the **28th United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP28)** in November 2023 with Foundation support; making significant contributions towards the adoption of the Loss

and Damage Fund, and the inclusion of loss and damage under the Global Stocktake and the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance.

As reported in more detail under 'freedom of expression' ([see page 23](#)), the Foundation supported the participation of several journalists from small and vulnerable states at COP to build civil society awareness of this important intergovernmental policy space.

We hosted a side-event at the [United Nations Small Island Developing States \(UNSIDS\) Conference](#) in Antigua and Barbuda in May 2024. This intergenerational dialogue—delivered in partnership with the Government of Samoa—shone a light on the fundamental connection between the health and climate crises experienced by SIDS with a focus on young people. This event has been a crucial stepping stone in the lead-up to CHOGM 2024 in Samoa, revealing the specific challenges of building resilient health systems in small island states and potential common solutions.



Highlights from 'Global Finance for People and Planet'

'One of the project's greatest achievements was facilitating the participation of Hyacinthe Niyitegeka as a Loss and Damage negotiator [and] Honorine Isingizwe as an agriculture negotiator at COP28 [...] Having two of them in the room negotiating on behalf of their country is the best way to increase the voices of young women from developing countries, who are identified as one of the groups most affected by the impacts of climate change.'

The Loss and Damage Collaboration

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression, including media freedom, is a core priority for the Commonwealth. It is recognised in the Charter as a prerequisite for democracy: the means by which Commonwealth citizens can engage constructively in governance and hold their governments to account. The Foundation's mandate—to support vibrant and free civil society throughout the Commonwealth—places a special obligation on us to help advance freedom of expression.

Our work to increase civil society engagement in policy and decision-making forums explicitly aims to give voice to those whose perspectives and interests may otherwise go unheard. Over the reporting period, we have supported a wide range of projects that encourage media freedom, civic participation in governance and the use of creative expression to push for real and lasting change. We have provided additional spaces for civil society to engage in free and open discussion and debate; integrated creative voices into advocacy; explored ways to strengthen quality journalism, particularly in small and vulnerable states; and supported storytellers and artists to realise their right to creative expression.

Grant highlights

In **South Africa**, the Foundation is supporting **Sibikwa Arts Centre** to use creative approaches to foster youth empowerment and address the lack of citizen participation in local governance. During the reporting period, ten youth performers received intensive training in policy advocacy, theatre and peer education which enabled them to identify local policy challenges and explore community-driven, creative policy solutions. As a result of the project, more than 100 community stakeholders and local government officials met to discuss improvements to urban policy in Ekurhuleni district, Gauteng.



Community in Nicosia enjoying performance and creative expression in mobile hubs developed by grant partner Urban Gorillas

With support from the Foundation, **Urban Gorillas** developed underutilised urban areas in **Cyprus** into vibrant, inclusive hubs for free expression and meaningful exchange. Mobile and adaptable structures were installed in four sites to attract marginalised groups, youth and the broader public to participate creatively in shaping their urban environment. Over 20,000 people engaged in 17 events including communal dinners in public squares, storytelling, documentaries, performances, festivals, and an interactive installation called 'letters to the city' that collected people's visions about the future shape of their cities.

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

Commonwealth Charter, Article V

Bolstering media freedom in the Commonwealth

We have maintained a presence at meetings of the civil society Working Group on Media and Good Governance, providing a bridge with the **UNESCO Intergovernmental 'Light-Touch' Taskforce on the Safety of Journalists** and feeding ideas generated from the Working Group into our plans for the Commonwealth People's Forum.

Heads of Government are expected to consider the draft *Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of Media in Good Governance* at CHOGM 2024. If adopted, these principles will elevate the issue of media freedom across the Commonwealth, affirming the commitment of Member States to a principled and rights-based approach to this critical aspect of freedom of expression. The Foundation has been involved in the development of the principles for several years and will actively support their effective implementation once adopted.

Over the past year we expanded our pilot efforts to bolster climate journalism in small island and climate vulnerable states, where the effects of climate change are felt most acutely and where media in all its forms is severely under-resourced. In November 2023, we supported media organisations from this group of countries in dispatching journalists to attend the **28th United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP28)**, hosted by the United Arab Emirates. The initiative was designed to encourage the production of long-form, detailed reporting about the unique experiences of small island and climate vulnerable states, as well as the challenges and opportunities presented by international processes such as COP28.

The Foundation will take forward the experiences and lessons of our pilot initiatives to ensure that journalists from all corners of the Commonwealth can participate effectively in CHOGM 2024 and the People's Forum in Samoa.

Grant partner, Sri Lanka Development Journalist Forum, delivering photojournalism training



Creativity for change

The Foundation's profile and reputation as a champion of Commonwealth culture and creativity has strengthened over the reporting period. Beyond our flagship Short Story Prize, we seek to nurture those using creative expression for social change through our online literary magazine, *adda*, our creative events, and our creative grants, which have a strategic focus on those countries and regions most in need of support.

New Advocacy and Creative programme

The Foundation recently brought together its Advocacy and Creative workstreams: a reflection of our commitment to advancing creative expression as a tool of transformative change. This newly merged programme will further integrate creative expression into our advocacy while at the same time providing space for Commonwealth artists and storytellers to speak and be heard on issues that matter most to them and their communities.

adda: sharing stories to connect people

Our online literary 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 format enables us to deliver tailored and timely responses to contemporary issues and to address the Foundation's areas of focus.

We continue our tradition of using *adda* to showcase the work of strong emerging writers unearthed through the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. During the reporting period, we published 21 shortlisted stories from the 2023 prize, with a story from Cyprus published in both the original Greek and the English translation. Another submission, which featured in the 'Remember to Rest' collection in the original English, was subsequently translated into Urdu and republished on *adda*.



adda illustration by Ed Dingli for 'Catching Up' by Janeen Samuel



adda illustration by Amitola Soriano for 'When This Island Disappears' by Dennis Kikira. Amitola Soriano is the winner of an artwork competition organised at the Hutjena Secondary School in Papua New Guinea, in response to Dennis Kikira's short story.

During the reporting period, we published a printed magazine comprising the three thematic collections (previously published online and as booklets), including: (i) the health collection, 'Remember to Rest', (ii) the freedom of expression collection, 'Speak Out', and (iii) the climate collection, 'Earth Screams'.

In September 2023, the call for a special *adda* collection focusing on poetry and spoken word attracted over 1,500 entries from 45 Commonwealth countries. Entries spanned a multitude of themes from

societal issues to everyday matters—from the very personal to those that affect the wider community—including the power of language, the richness of one's culture and the importance of speaking your mother tongue. Selected pieces were published on *adda* throughout the second half of the reporting period.

Creative elements in our open call grants stream

The Foundation is delighted with the great variety of approaches adopted by open call grant partners that have incorporated a creative component in their projects. Organisations have used film, visual arts, radio drama, forum theatre and spoken word poetry as creative methods for advocacy and to reach project beneficiaries.

'Caribbean Voices' film project

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 completed. This project has resulted in the production of seven short films from Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago, which have been shown locally and internationally.

We are proud of the high quality of the creative work that has been made possible through this initiative and will continue to support the filmmakers in submitting their work to regional and international film festivals. In May 2024, we organised a screening of the seven shorts in Antigua and Barbuda, as part of our engagement around the UNSIDS conference.

Creative voices in our Critical Conversations

Our *Critical Conversations* and preparatory Regional Conversations for the 2024 People's Forum have meaningfully integrated creativity and storytelling; showcasing poetry and spoken word pieces from *adda*, and featuring speakers who are both artists and advocates or activists in the panel discussions.



'*Plastic Everywhere*', Slim Shaka's spoken word poem, was played at the Regional Conversation for Africa and Europe, after being published on *adda*

Creative events and partnerships

During the reporting period, the Foundation partnered with the UK-based organisation Guyana Speaks to convene a panel discussion to commemorate the 1823 Demerara Rebellion in Guyana and its enduring legacy. We also continued our partnership with the Singapore Book Council, providing support for the Singapore Translation Symposium in September 2023 and an online workshop on translating poetry the following month.

In February 2024, we established a partnership with Women of the World (WOW) Festival to commission Namibian artist and climate activist Ina Maria Shikongo to produce bespoke pieces of artwork and take part in WOW Manchester at the end of May. The pieces link the stories of women and girls in the global fight for climate justice. The partnership aligns with both parties' commitment to champion discussions on gender equality and the climate crisis.

Our three grant streams

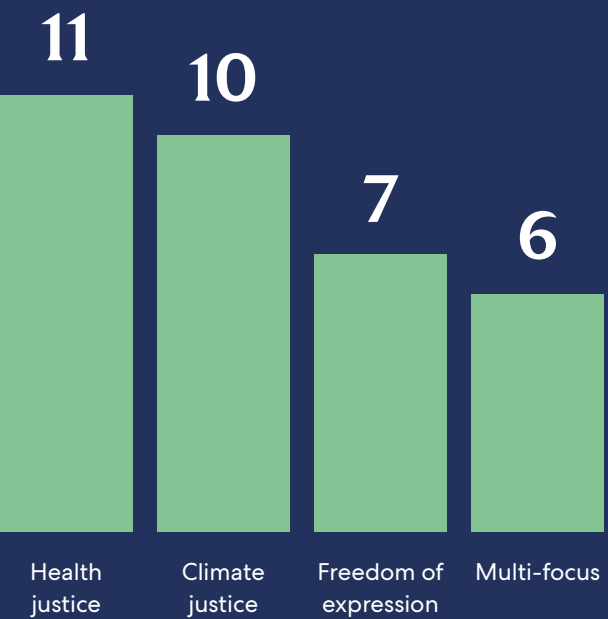
Our new approach to grants blends versatile grant-making with capacity strengthening approaches, applying both rigour and flexibility to widen access, especially for civil society organisations in small and vulnerable states.

Open call grants

The annual open call is our largest grants stream: a competitive process offering financial support (up to £30,000 a year, for up to two years) to civil society organisations in eligible Member States for projects that address one or more of our focus areas.

In June 2023, the Grants Committee approved 18 open call grants which, added to those approved in June 2022, resulted in 34 active open call grants during the reporting period (see Annex 3 for full list). Grant partners have benefitted 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.

Focus areas addressed by active open call grants during the reporting period



2023–2024 applications

1,176 applications received (of which 843 were eligible)

22 Projects selected for approval by the Grants Committee

As noted in the highlight on [page 13](#), this year’s open call attracted a record response with over 1,100 applications including a strong representation from organisations in small and vulnerable states.



Capacity strengthening grant partners, Building Innate Resilience Through Hearts (BIRTH), in Lautoka, Fiji

Capacity strengthening grants

The capacity strengthening grants stream supports less well-established organisations in the Commonwealth’s small and vulnerable states: enhancing their capacity to influence policy processes through a combination of grant-making and tailored assistance that is sensitive to context and emphasises local ownership.

Now in its third year, this initiative continues to expand our reach and increase our impact with just a modest investment of funds. We are currently administering 23 capacity strengthening grants, with the majority supporting organisations in the Caribbean, Pacific, and Indian Ocean regions (see Annex 3 for full list). A recent survey of grant partners was encouraging: 91% said the facility had substantially improved their organisational capacity.

In June 2023, the Grants Committee approved a shift in our approach that will maintain the number of capacity strengthening grants at a manageable level: a reflection of the fact that our partners are almost all operating in challenging environments, requiring a high degree of attention and flexibility on our part to ensure the successful completion of projects.

Within this grants stream the Foundation seeks to go beyond the provision of funds by being a conduit to other sources of support that can help these often small and fragile organisations to flourish. We support our capacity strengthening grant partners to set strategic objectives and enhance their long-term operating effectiveness, adaptability, and sustainability. During the reporting period, we convened 15 partners to help them identify and address common challenges and build their capacity around financial administration, reporting and substantive matters relating to the focus of their work.

‘The support provided through the capacity strengthening grant was pivotal in fortifying our organisational framework. By formulating and updating internal policies such as procurement, HR, and communications, we’ve established a resilient structure ready to navigate any scenario.’

Women and Democracy, Maldives (grant partner)

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 related to our focus areas.

Now in its third year, this stream has continued a strong regional focus, turning to small and vulnerable countries of the Caribbean region during this reporting period. Insights gathered from monitoring progress and results among previous cohorts in the Pacific and Africa regions guided a highly consultative approach whereby organisations in our target Caribbean countries were identified and invited to apply. In May 2024 the Foundation awarded grants to a strong cohort of creative projects that will be implemented in the Caribbean region over the coming year. The selected projects will support a wide range of exciting initiatives, from the building of a multi-functional space for artists in Dominica to a three-month programme of learning that will strengthen the skills of young women artists in Saint Christopher and Nevis.

During the reporting period, eight of the ten creative grants awarded in April 2023 to civil society organisations in Africa were completed. The Foundation is thrilled by initial results: an exciting new arts space, Yini Loku (siSwati phrase meaning 'what's this') has been established in Mbabane, Eswatini; an initiative working with San artists in Namibia has inspired creativity and generated income opportunities; a new anthology of seventy years of Togolese poetry has been published; the skills of theatre practitioners have been strengthened in Lesotho; literary fellows in Sierra Leone have increased their knowledge and skills of international publishing; and a building in Gaborone, Botswana, has been repurposed as a thriving arts centre and library.

As reported on [page 25](#), the Foundation has supported creative elements in several projects funded under our open call grants stream which are currently in their second year of implementation.

The Foundation continues to champion and embrace opportunities for learning. In November 2023 we convened an online learning exchange for partners exploring creative approaches to driving social change. A summary of outcomes is provided on [page 29](#).



Performance at Yini Loku in Mbabane, Eswatini, organised by creative grant partner, Yebo ArtReach

'It is EXTREMELY welcome and refreshing to receive a grant that may be freely used on organisational building and a long-desired project. The flexibility of the grant and the process are highly appreciated.'

Dane Armstrong, Director, Yebo Artreach, Eswatini (grant partner)

Support to legacy grant partners

During the reporting period, seven 'legacy grants' (multi-year projects approved under the previous strategic plan) were completed and are undergoing final assessment and closure. We continue to support an additional 11 legacy grants that remain under implementation. A list of assessed and completed grants will be shared with the Grants Committee in June 2024.



Profiles of completed 'legacy grants'

Engaging our grant partners

The Foundation's expanded and diversified grants programme has provided greater opportunities to engage with Commonwealth civil society organisations working on the frontline of our areas of focus. Over the past year we have actively sought new ways to connect and work with those organisations who are receiving funding under our three grants streams.

Our engagement with grant partners is designed to maximise learning. First: we seek to **learn from partners**, to improve our own outreach, advocacy and ways of working. Second: partners gain the opportunity to **learn from us**, including around financial management and reporting that is crucial for the longer-term flourishing of the small organisations we seek to nurture. And finally: we help partners working on similar issues in different parts of the world to **learn from each other**.

We use a variety of techniques to facilitate learning between ourselves and our network of partners. For example, during the reporting period, we convened a series of events that brought together participants

from 33 small and less well-established organisations currently receiving support from the Foundation. Special attention was given to: (i) fostering a culture of accountability and transparency in project delivery; (ii) supporting partners in risk identification and risk management; and (iii) building their capacity to meaningfully include gender in their work. Participant feedback was positive across all areas and, for the Foundation, reinforced the importance of engaging closely with our partners to appreciate their operating environments and the specific challenges they face.

As explored elsewhere in this report, the Foundation is working hard to strengthen the connections between our creative and advocacy work. We see our grant partners as important drivers—and guides—in these efforts. During the reporting period, we convened a learning exchange on **creative approaches to driving social and policy change**. Over 40 participants, including a substantial portion from small and vulnerable states, were able to showcase their work; using these real-life examples to discuss the relationship between art and activism, and the benefits and challenges of integrating creative methods into advocacy and civic engagement programmes. This will lead to deeper engagement with the Foundation's online discussion forum, which has the potential to play an important role in facilitating learning and connections between civil society organisations, creatives and activists across the Commonwealth.

'Thank you very much for including us into the conversation. We don't often get to share the work that we do, so it's always a blessing when the opportunity arises. It is also [good] for us to gain insight into what other organisations are doing, especially on the African continent.'

Kelly Storom, Sibikwa Arts Centre, South Africa (grant partner)

Global grants portfolio

Over the reporting period, our support to Commonwealth civil society through our three grants streams reached 45 Member States.

101
projects

45
countries

77
active

24
completed
this year

- Open call grants
- Capacity strengthening grants
- Creative grants

1
project

Canada and Europe

Antigua and Barbuda
Saint Christopher and Nevis
The Bahamas
Jamaica
Belize
Guyana
Barbados
Grenada
Saint Lucia
Trinidad and Tobago
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

18
projects

Caribbean

48
projects

Africa

The Gambia
Sierra Leone
Togo
Nigeria
Cameroon
Namibia

Uganda
Kenya
Rwanda
Tanzania
Malawi
Zambia
Mozambique
Botswana
Eswatini
Lesotho
South Africa

18
projects

Asia

Cyprus
Pakistan
India
Bangladesh
Sri Lanka
Malaysia
Maldives
Seychelles
Mauritius

16
projects

Pacific

Kiribati
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Papua New Guinea
Vanuatu
Tuvalu
Tonga
Fiji

A full list of funded projects is provided in **Annex 3**.

Strengthening our civil society network

We have been able to report record audience growth and reach year-on-year since the launch of the strategic plan in 2021, and this year is no exception. More people have seen our content on social media this year than in any other, and our mailing lists continue to add an average of 1,300 new subscribers every month.

We see these changes as a reflection of the Foundation's growing public profile within Commonwealth civil society and the broader intergovernmental and non-governmental communities that share our areas of focus. Growth of our online community has been accelerated through careful use of advanced marketing techniques that have enabled us to be highly specific in our outreach and targeting. This has been especially helpful in ensuring we reach countries and communities that have lower historical engagement with our work.

The real measure of our success, however, is the extent to which we can mobilise civil society in support of Commonwealth principles and priorities—turning new observers and followers of our work into active contributors and organisers. Our focus has been on crafting communications that take our audiences on a journey to identify areas of our work that align with their interests and experience. This deeper engagement is evident in our marked success in connecting new audiences in less-engaged countries with our open call grants and Short Story Prize, including first-time applications for grants and submissions from some of our smallest Member States such as Saint Lucia and Guyana.

Mobilising our community

We have been exploring new ways to deepen the connections with and within our online community, even after they've entered a grant application or a short story. This has involved overhauling our approach to online events and subscriber emails to include more community-building exercises, inviting the most active members of the civil society network to speak and engage in conversation on priority issues in small-group video calls. These activities have produced substantive recommendations for Commonwealth ministerial meetings and the People's Forum. They have also built cross-national links between Commonwealth civil society organisations and, as detailed on the following page, led to a surge in membership of our online discussion forum.



Photos: participants at the 2023 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting



Online discussion forum

Our online discussion forum is a hub for generating meaningful connections and sharing ideas, expertise, challenges and opportunities. It has shown consistent growth, with hundreds of members comprising advocates, policy-makers, academics, researchers, development organisations, creative practitioners and grassroots activists from almost every Commonwealth country. Members are among the most engaged of our wider network of over 100,000 Commonwealth citizens and those who apply to join the group are subject to a verification and approval process to ensure maximum trust and safety within the platform.

During the reporting period, we undertook a review of the forum, to identify both facilitators of, and barriers to, engagement. Following a user survey and two focus groups, we have introduced: (i) bi-monthly online 'meet and greet' sessions, which provide an informal space for members to deepen their connections with one another via video calls; (ii) a video tutorial to support members in navigating our hosting platform; (iii) a civil society directory, comprising links to networks, news bulletins, training, events and other opportunities, accompanied by a weekly 'creative opportunities' post; and (iv) an internal community management model to ensure that insights and opportunities from all areas of the Foundation's work are reliably fed into exchanges on the forum.

Enhanced online systems

Over the past year we have overhauled significant parts of the Foundation's online infrastructure and methods to widen accessibility and improve useability. This has included the introduction of new features to assist potential grant applicants with interactive eligibility information; the provision of step-by-step guides for applicants; and a new judging portal for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize. Feedback on this latter upgrade confirmed that it has enhanced the user experience and improved efficiency for the many readers and judges who help us decide on the winning stories.

Our ongoing celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter guided the redesign of our webpage to offer an engaging platform for individuals to better understand the Charter and pledge their support for Commonwealth values.



Read more about the
Commonwealth Charter

Our people

The Foundation's people are core to delivering its strategic plan, and we prioritise the development and strengthening of our team.

Recruitment

Like many organisations, the Foundation has recently faced the challenge of an increase in staff turnover. We have continued to review our staffing requirements as vacancies have arisen, taking each opportunity to revise and optimise our structure. We are excited about bringing together two complementary aspects of our work under the umbrella of the new Advocacy and Creative programme and are already seeing the benefits of the close synergies in outputs. We have again been successful in making high-calibre appointments, both from external and internal candidates. In the next six months we will complete the restructuring of the Office of the Directorate team, as envisaged for the current strategic plan, as well as considering the extent to which we are able to benefit from a strong permanent core staff team complemented by the agile use of consultant contract personnel.

Graduate internship programme

Our internship programme continues to offer graduates the opportunity to participate fully in the Foundation's work programme in ways that will enable them to build knowledge, skills and experience to advance their career journey. This year we have accelerated our commitment to ensuring this exceptional experience is as accessible as possible to all by changing the status of our interns to become employees, paid at the London Living Wage. It has been a great pleasure to welcome and work with the 2023-2024 cohort of bright, committed, and creative young people who have brought energy and new perspectives to the team. The Foundation continues to track the journey of our past interns, many of whom have embarked on thriving careers in government and civil society.

Working arrangements and staff wellbeing

The Foundation endeavours to maintain a work environment conducive to a happy and productive team. During the reporting period, we conducted an extensive staff wellbeing survey and were encouraged by the strong sense of belonging and commitment to the Foundation's values and strategic direction. We listened carefully to staff views and have sought to modify systems and processes accordingly, including by giving managers increased discretion to respond to the needs of their teams. The survey results reinforced information received from departing staff about the need to consider the current system of staff rewards and benefits. To that end we commissioned an external compensation review, with a view to making recommendations to the Board at its June 2024 meeting.

The Directorate met its commitment to review the work arrangements policy which, among other matters, specifies requirements for in-office attendance. Governors and external experts were consulted as well as staff members. Taking these views into account, alongside an assessment of the operational needs of the Foundation, the Directorate concluded that the current policy is appropriate, fair, and workable; offering defined flexibility while ensuring a strong and consistent in-office presence.

Learning and development

The Foundation has continued to support staff performance and development through its twice-yearly appraisal process. Staff are encouraged to take an active role in considering their own needs in relation to their role and career aspirations, and the importance of both formal and informal learning and development opportunities is recognised. The Foundation has continued to coordinate with the Secretariat around the 'Corporate Induction' programme for new starters and is grateful for the alignment of mandatory training opportunities and other soft-skills training, including participation of selected staff members in the 'Future Leaders' programme.



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 income is utilised wisely and effectively. Our audited financial statements are published on the Foundation's website each year, within six months of the year-end.

Summary of financial performance for 2023–2024

This annual report is published before the end of the financial year in June 2024. Audited accounts for the 2023–2024 year will be available on our website in December 2024, along with those from prior years.

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 around 90% of budgeted assessed contributions within the relevant financial year (see figure 1). At the time of writing (15 April 2024), we have already received 89.6% 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 regularly engages 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 experience. The Foundation is especially attentive in making sure that High Commissioners of countries in arrears are kept well-informed of our work and encouraged to continue their engagement.

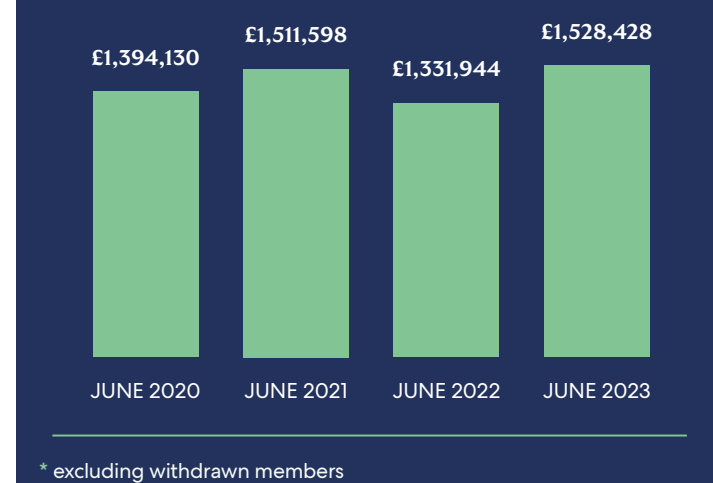
Figure 1

Proportion of annual assessed contributions received in-year, against budgeted income*



Figure 2

Arrears outstanding*



In June 2022, the Board of Governors agreed exceptionally to an 'arrears recovery and reset initiative' that would allow the discharge of longstanding debts for Member States in serious arrears. Eligible Member States were requested to clear three years of assessed contributions and to commit to the full and timely payment of future contributions. The initiative reaped some limited successes. The Foundation is grateful to governors who used their good offices to promote the initiative and agreed to extend the deadline. The debt of Member States in serious arrears who did not participate in the initiative will remain. We look forward to continued Member State engagement, and prompt payment of assessed contributions, to ensure the longer-term financial stability of their organisation.

At the time of writing (15 April 2024), £219,992 (14.4%) has been recovered of the arrears that were outstanding at June 2023, and a further £181,793 (11.9%) had been written off under the 'arrears recovery and reset initiative'. Figure 2 illustrates the trend of outstanding arrears over the last four financial years.

Expenditure

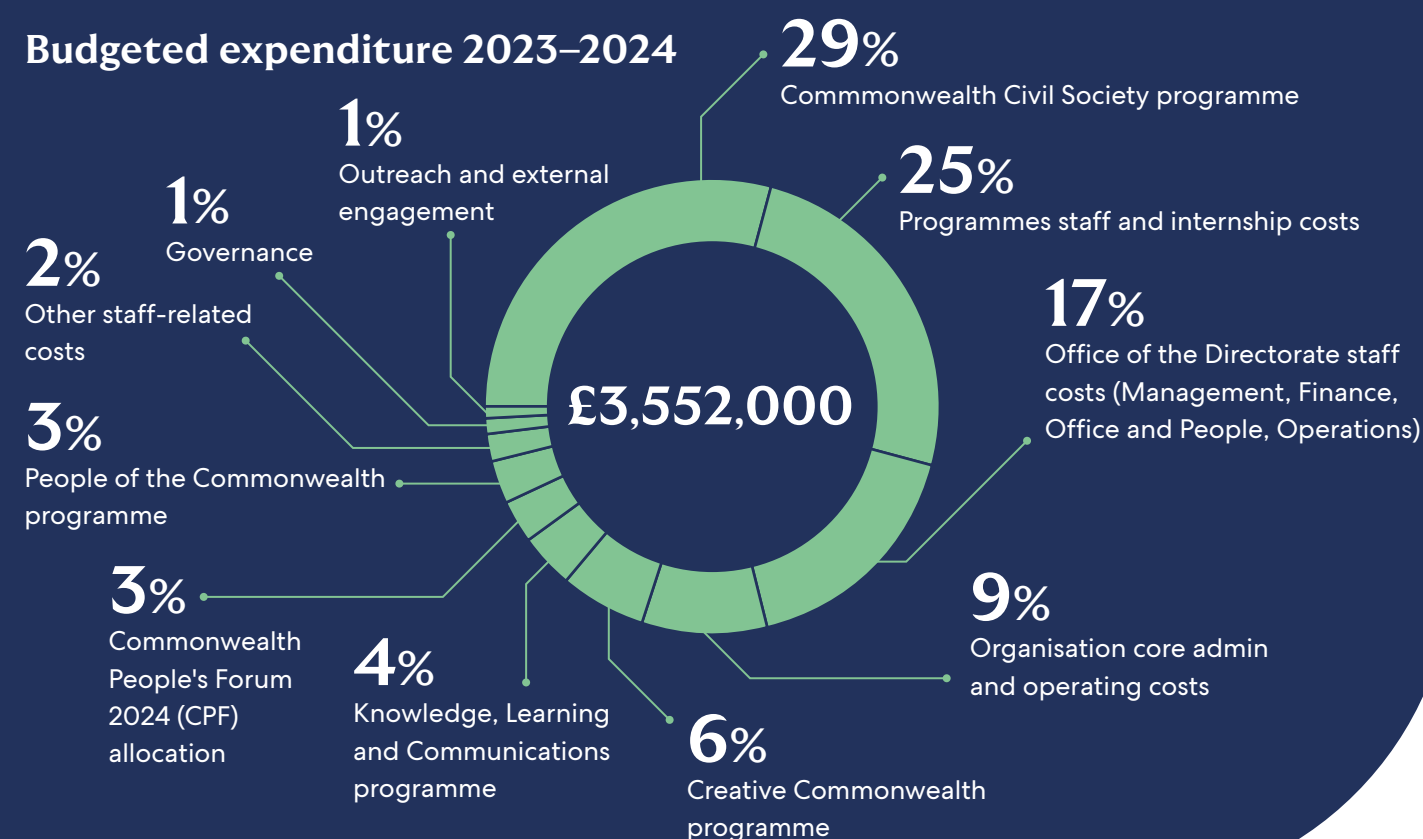
Of the total approved budget of £3,552,000 for the financial year 2023–2024 (2022–2023: £3,424,000), the Foundation allocated the highest share of the budget expenditure to its programmes (including staff costs for the programmes) amounting to £2,515,000 (71%) (2022–2023: 72%). Figure 3 illustrates the allocation of annual budget to current programmes and activities.

Extra-budgetary resources

The Foundation is committed to doing everything possible to ensure that the 2024 People's Forum in Samoa includes diverse representation from across the Commonwealth, including from small and vulnerable states. To that end we are working to secure extra-budgetary resources to support the participation and attendance of civil society leaders from this group of countries.

Figure 3

Budgeted expenditure 2023–2024



Strategic results framework

Vision	A Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies	
Goal	Civil society across the Commonwealth is vibrant and free: Commonwealth citizens are constructively engaged in core aspects of their governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles	
Expect to see	Higher-level result (HLR) 1: Commonwealth civil society is strengthened to constructively engage in governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles	Higher-level result (HLR) 2: The Commonwealth and its Member States act on civil society recommendations and demands in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles
	<div>1.1 Civil society demands in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles are amplified through Commonwealth platforms and beyond</div> <div>1.2 Commonwealth civil society has greater access to decision-making spaces around Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div> <div>1.3 Creative voices are strengthened and amplified through Commonwealth platforms in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles</div>	<div>2.1 The Commonwealth and its Member States open access to civil society to constructively engage in governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles</div> <div>2.2 The Commonwealth and its Member States welcome contributions from civil society on focus areas</div>
Like to see	<div>1.4 Commonwealth civil society has greater confidence operating in decision-making spaces – including multilateral policy spaces – in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles</div> <div>1.5 Commonwealth civil society demonstrates positive contributions to governance and decision-making in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas, particularly in small and vulnerable states</div> <div>1.6 Less well-established civil society organisations in small and vulnerable states have strengthened organisational capacity to engage in governance</div>	<div>2.3 Governments and other institutions demonstrate changes in practice in support of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div> <div>2.4 The Commonwealth and its Member States institutionalise access for civil society to constructively engage in governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles</div> <div>2.5 The Commonwealth and its Member States explicitly acknowledge civil society as partners in governance</div>
Love to see	<div>1.7 Civil society organisations network and partner with each other to demand changes in policy and practice in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div> <div>1.8 Culture and creativity are integrated into advocacy networks and efforts around Commonwealth values and principles</div>	<div>2.6 The demands of Commonwealth civil society are taken up by decision-makers in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles</div> <div>2.7 Governments and other institutions take meaningful action through changes to laws and policies in support of Commonwealth values and principles</div>
Cross-cutting progress markers (CC)		
Expect to see	3.1 Gender equality	5.1 Young people
	<div>3.2 Evidence that integration of gender into the Foundation's work provides inspiration and guidance for partners</div> <div>3.3 Civil society partners demonstrate a clear understanding of why a gender perspective matters and a capacity to integrate gender into their work</div>	<div>5.2 Evidence that integration of young people and youth-led organisations into the Foundation's work increases its connection with and relevance to young Commonwealth citizens</div> <div>5.3 Civil society partners, Member States and others take steps to meaningfully include young people in governance in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div>
Like to see		
	<div>4.1 Small and vulnerable states</div> <div>4.2 Evidence of strategic Foundation support for civil society advancement in small and vulnerable states in support of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div> <div>4.3 Civil society in small and vulnerable states is better able to contribute actively and constructively in governance and decision-making spaces in support of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div>	<div>5.4 Young people's engagement, influences change in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles and within focus areas</div>
Love to see		
	<div>3.4 Governments, civil society and other institutions publicly recognise and promote the integration of a gender perspective into laws, policies and practices in support of Commonwealth values and principles and within the focus areas</div>	

Snapshot of strategic results 2021–2024

The strategic results framework ([see page 38](#)) is a key reference document for monitoring and evaluating our contribution to achieving a Commonwealth of equal, just and inclusive societies. It sets out our direction towards the higher-level and cross-cutting results in our pathway to change.

We are drawing together a wide range of data against the progress markers found in the framework to evaluate our progress towards our higher-level results and inform our planning in the two remaining years of the strategic plan (2021–2026). A snapshot of the summary data is provided below. A full evaluation of the strategic plan will commence next year.

Advocacy and Creative

3.5 million

people have seen our videos on social media discussing and promoting Commonwealth values and principles (HLR 1.1)

500,000

unique visitors have read *adda*, our online magazine of new writing and spoken word poetry (HLR 1.1)

8,000+

civil society representatives—between them representing 54 Commonwealth Member States—have directly endorsed policy recommendations and principles later presented to governments (HLR 1.2)

20,000+

entries to the Commonwealth Short Story Prize (HLR 1.3)

54

of the 117 speakers and moderators at our events have been from the Commonwealth's small and vulnerable states (CC 4.2)

31/33

of the Commonwealth's small and vulnerable states have been represented by participants at our pre-ministerial Roundtables to contribute to policy recommendations (CC 4.3)

56

Citizens from all Commonwealth countries have participated in our *Critical Conversations* event series, including all Commonwealth small and vulnerable states (CC 4.2)

Grants

The number of grants projects that have contributed to the progress markers of higher-level result 1

1.1 & 1.2 Commonwealth civil society has greater access to decision-making spaces / to make demands in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles

11

1.4 Commonwealth civil society has greater confidence operating in decision-making spaces – including multilateral policy spaces – in pursuit of Commonwealth values and principles

11

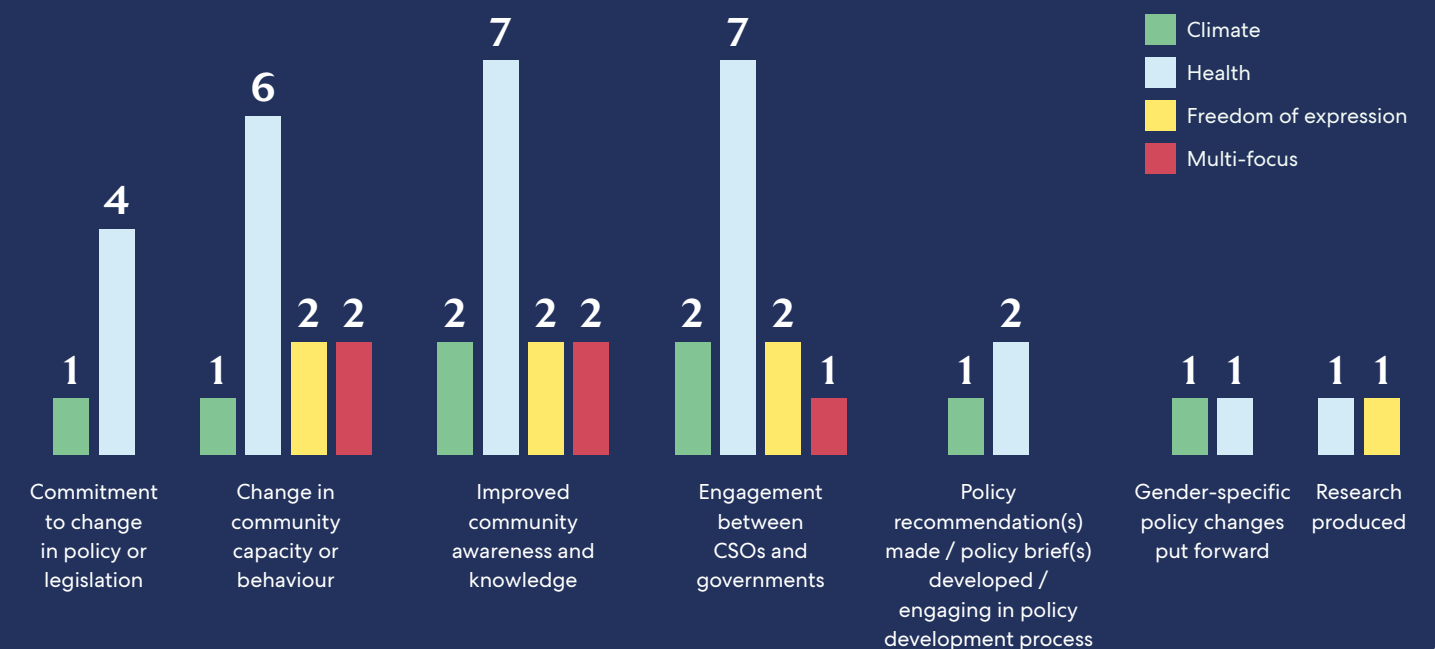
1.6 Less well-established civil society organisations in small and vulnerable states have strengthened organisational capacity to engage in governance

11

1.8 Culture and creativity are integrated into advocacy networks and efforts around Commonwealth values and principles

6

The number of grants projects, grouped by focus area, that have contributed to our higher-level results



Grants data is drawn from 17 open call grants that have submitted first-year reporting under the strategic plan 2021–2026; the majority of projects are still 'active' and are yet to report results.

Funded projects 2023–2024

Open call grants

2022–2023 (active)

Advocacy for restoration of mining sites in the east region of Cameroon	Cameroon
Improving access to information in Cameroon	Cameroon
Supporting young women living with disabilities to influence policy on comprehensive healthcare	Kenya
Combating gag complaints to enhance freedom of expression	Kenya
Strengthening the youth voice for climate action	Lesotho
Inclusive access to non-judgemental comprehensive health care for women sex workers	Malawi
Promoting and advancing sexual reproductive health and rights	Mauritius
Community engagement in monitoring local climate change adaptation plans	Mozambique
Agroecology and food sovereignty combating the industrialised food system	South Africa
Building the resilience of women in the coffee sector	Uganda
Civil society in Uganda participation program	Uganda
Building resilience against climate change on water resources	Tanzania
Amplify freedom of expression	Tanzania
Enhancing community participation in Constituency Development Fund administration	Zambia
Mainstreaming indigenous knowledge and practices for flood resilience	India
Participatory evolution of climate action strategies of Indian metropolises	India
Holistic queer health	Jamaica
Gwala customary marine management	Papua New Guinea

2021–2022 (active)

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

2021–2022 (completed)

Propagation of women empowerment and rights	Uganda
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Capacity strengthening grants

2022–2023* (active)

Community Agriculture and Environmental Protection Association	Cameroon
Women Unlimited	Eswatini
Namibia Media Trust	Namibia
The Women's Leadership Centre	Namibia
Citizens Engagement Platform Seychelles (CEPS)	Seychelles
My Fem Health	Maldives
The Barbados Association of Endometriosis and P.C.O.S	Barbados
Grencoda	Grenada
Merundoi Incorporated	Guyana
Policy Forum Guyana	Guyana
Youth Challenge Guyana	Guyana
Garden of Rebirth	Saint Christopher and Nevis
Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia	Saint Lucia
RedRoot SVG Inc.	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

2021–2022 (active)

Antigua and Barbuda Association of Persons with Disabilities	Antigua and Barbuda
Bahamas UCTRANS	The Bahamas
Lake Health and Wellbeing	Saint Christopher and Nevis
Building Innate Resilience Through Hearts	Fiji
Te Toa Mato	Kiribati
Kiribati Climate Action Network (KiriCAN)	Kiribati
Samoa Victim Support	Samoa
Tonga Leitis Association	Tonga
Fusi Alofa Association	Tuvalu

2021–2022 (completed)

Mauritius Eco-Sud	Mauritius
Nurses Association of the Republic of Seychelles	Seychelles
Women and Democracy	Maldives
Organisation for Responsible Governance (ORG) Foundation	The Bahamas
Hope Foundation	Barbados
Toledo Maya Women's Council	Belize
CEDAW Committee of Trinidad and Tobago	Trinidad and Tobago
Vanuatu Disability and Advocacy Association	Vanuatu

'Active' refers to both projects that have been delivering results for months or years to those in the earliest stages of implementation. 'Completed' refers to either projects that are awaiting evaluation or those that have been formally closed during the reporting period because the obligations of the Foundation and the grant partners are considered fully discharged.

*One capacity strengthening grant 2022–2023 was withdrawn. Details have been shared with members of the Grants Committee.

Creative grants

2022–2023 (active)

AgaMotse, art creating worlds
[Banjul art and cultural revival initiative](#)
[Mentorship for growth: skill sharing and professional development workshops for Rwandan artists](#)
Multiplying narratives: writing East African experiences
[Poda-Poda Stories fellowship](#)
[Anthology for and by young adults and teenagers](#)
Minodu (Let’s reunite)
[Bahale young actors and directors incubation programme](#)

2022–2023 (completed)

[Mbabane art space](#)
[Art-i-San 23, contemporary San art in Namibia](#)

2021–2022 (completed)

[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](#)

Botswana
The Gambia
Rwanda
Rwanda
Sierra Leone
Tanzania
Togo
Lesotho

Eswatini
Namibia

Fiji
Kiribati
Papua New Guinea
Solomon Islands

Tonga
Vanuatu

Legacy grants

(active)

[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](#)
[Strengthening the capacity of transgender and intersex persons to advocate for protection of their rights](#)
[Strengthening the voices of communities to participate in the inland fisheries policy process](#)
[Helping rural women engage in land reform](#)
[Strengthening implementation of the laws that address violence against women](#)
[Strengthening advocacy for better implementation of the Prevention of Atrocities Act](#)
[Empowering community paralegals to address statelessness](#)
[Promoting increased women's representation in government](#)
[Strengthening the inclusion of i-Kiribati civic voices in climate change induced displacement policies](#)

Malawi
Mozambique
Nigeria
South Africa
South Africa
South Africa
India
India
Malaysia
Vanuatu
Kiribati

(completed)

[Strengthening the capacity of young people to reduce gun violence in their communities](#)
[Promoting rights of grassroots persons with disabilities through community-led initiatives](#)
[Promoting the rights of street children](#)
[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](#)
[Protecting the rights of the transgender community through legislative development](#)
[Ensuring the inclusive education of children with disabilities in Guyana and Jamaica](#)

South Africa
Bangladesh
Bangladesh
India
India
Pakistan
Guyana and Jamaica



