



Partnership and Action

A message to Heads of Government
from Commonwealth Civil Society

The Commonwealth's strength is not only its size. It is the knowledge, courage, and creativity of the people who make up its communities.

This booklet reflects a multi-year consultation involving more than 3,000 civil society activists and experts across the Commonwealth. Hundreds more contributed through regional dialogues in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific, including a dedicated conversation on the creative economy.

The message is clear: people want partnership, not token inclusion, and action, not promises.

Cover Images:

1. A woman boards a minibus taxi in Bridgetown, Barbados.
2. Women attend the Emancipation Day observance procession in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago.
3. Luis Williams sits on the verandah of a wooden house in Blackwater Landing, Guyana.
4. Children dancing in the playground at St Luke's Primary School in Pointe Michel, Dominica.
5. A woman selling fruit and vegetables outside the market in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda.



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We were able to obtain an advisory opinion on climate change from the International Court of Justice because people in every walk of life—lawyers, activists, younger and older generations—chose to carry the issue together. That's the key to overcoming the climate crisis.

— VISHAL PRASAD, CLIMATE ACTIVIST

Photo credit: ZUMA Press

At a glance: The most frequent recommendations made by civil society

To the Commonwealth

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Genuine Commonwealth-wide commitment to protect human rights, civic space and freedom of expression

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Consistent, credible civil society involvement and influence in Commonwealth decision-making

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Real, measurable action on climate change, environmental protection and climate justice, including delivery of climate finance to Small Island and Climate-Vulnerable States

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Commonwealth-wide action and partnerships to build and sustain resilient, accessible and equitable health systems

To governments

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New and better laws and stronger institutions to protect civic space and free expression online and offline

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Greater public scrutiny of legislation and meaningful public participation in decision-making

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Long-term, capital investment in people, communities and resilient public services

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Accelerate a just and accountable transition to net zero, while protecting communities, livelihoods and ecosystems

[Read on for more](#)



Countries that contributed to the consultation



✧ Africa

Botswana
Cameroon
Gabon
The Gambia
Ghana
Kenya
Kingdom of Eswatini
Lesotho
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Rwanda
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Togo
Uganda
United Republic of Tanzania
Zambia

✧ Asia

Bangladesh
Brunei Darussalam
India
Malaysia
Maldives
Pakistan
Singapore
Sri Lanka

✧ Caribbean & Americas

Antigua & Barbuda
The Bahamas
Barbados
Belize
Canada
Dominica
Grenada
Guyana
Jamaica
Saint Lucia
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Vincent and The Grenadines
Trinidad & Tobago

✧ Europe

Cyprus
Malta
United Kingdom

✧ Pacific

Australia
Fiji
Kiribati
Republic of Naoero
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

What does civil society need from the Commonwealth?

Highlights from the consultation

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The Commonwealth is a strong enough body to be a serious lobbying force to ensure Governments are held accountable for the pledges they make at international forums.

— MARGARET LAWRENCE, HEALTH ACTIVIST



Photo credit: Joshua Yospy



**Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Articles I, II
and V: Democracy,
Human Rights and
Free Expression**

Genuine Commonwealth -wide commitment to protect human rights, civic space and freedom of expression *

- **Establish** a scorecard system to track member countries' adherence to the rights and freedoms in the Commonwealth Charter, including the conditions for meaningful civic participation.
- **Empower** the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to consistently address violations of Charter values.
- Establish a Commonwealth Commissioner of Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights to advise the Secretary-General and CMAG.
- **Protect** journalists, human rights defenders, activists and civil society organisations from intimidation, surveillance, arbitrary detention and violence.
- **Support** member countries and civil society to respond to emerging threats to civic space, including misinformation, digital surveillance, online harms and the misuse of artificial intelligence, while promoting digital safety, literacy and rights-based technology governance.



**Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Article XVI:
The Role of Civil
Society**

Consistent, credible civil society involvement and influence in Commonwealth decision-making *

- **Develop and implement** a code of practice that formalises civil society involvement in Ministerial Meetings and other relevant Commonwealth processes.
- **Develop** mechanisms and procedures to maintain open and continuous dialogue between Commonwealth institutions, member countries and civil society.
- **Establish** clearer pathways for civil society recommendations to reach Ministers and Heads of Government.
- **Ensure** public responses showing which recommendations were accepted, rejected or deferred and why.
- **Remove** barriers to participation for young and indigenous people, women, people with disabilities and other marginalised communities.

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Highlights from the consultation



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We need arts and culture; it can give us what is desperately missing in the world today: an imagination of what kind of future we can build.

— KUMI NAIDOO, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Photo credit: Micha Patault / Greenpeace

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**Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Article
X: Protecting
the Environment**

Real, measurable action on climate change, environmental protection and climate justice, including delivery of climate finance to Small Island and Climate-Vulnerable States*

- **Fully utilise** the Commonwealth's collective voice at international climate negotiations to protect the interests of frontline member countries and strengthen their influence in international climate decision-making.
- **Increase investment** in the Commonwealth Climate Finance and Disaster Resilience initiatives, with greater support for locally led adaptation and community access to climate finance.
- **Put frontline communities at the centre** of climate and environmental decision-making, recognising the leadership and knowledge of Indigenous peoples, women, young people and grassroots organisations.
- **Protect** livelihoods, oceans and ecosystems as part of a just transition, recognising the links between climate change, health, food security, displacement and economic inequality.
- **Support** stronger legal and public accountability for environmental harm.

4



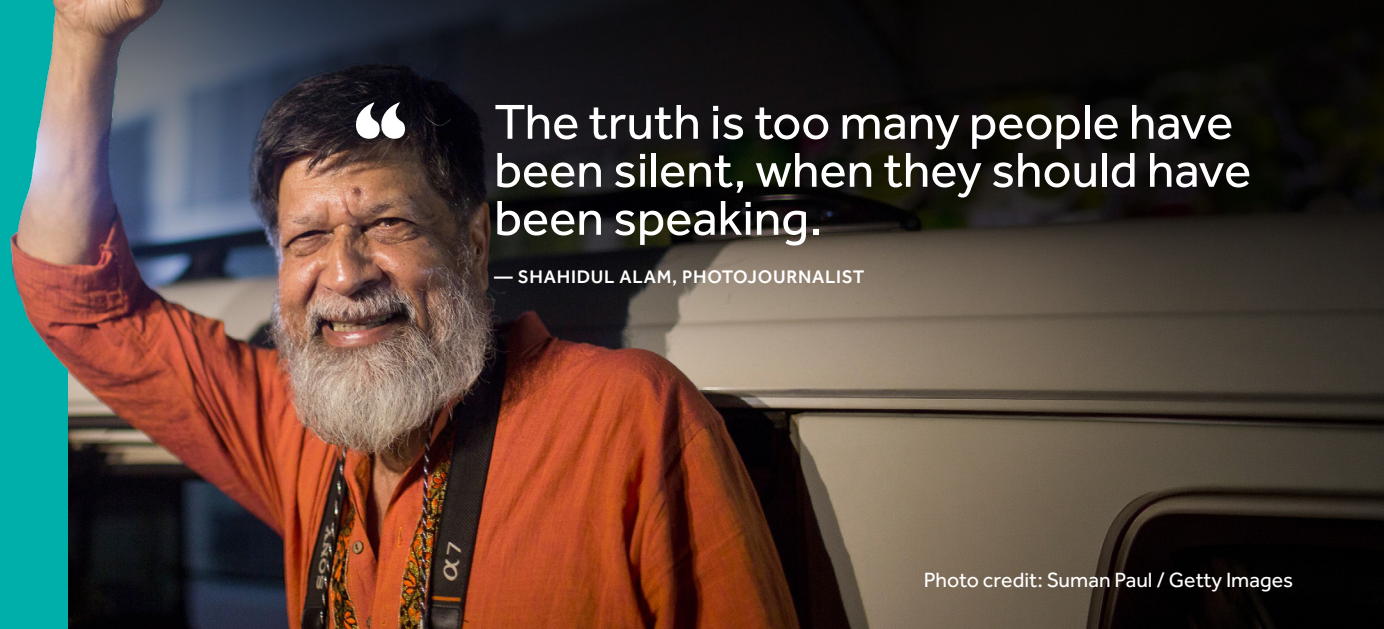
**Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Article XI:
Access to Health,
Education, Food
and Shelter**

Commonwealth-wide action and partnerships to build and sustain resilient, accessible and equitable health systems*

- **Make** climate-resilient health systems a declared key priority of the Commonwealth.
- **Direct** resources and expertise to helping member countries adopt and implement the World Health Organisation's framework for Universal Health Coverage.
- **Treat** health resilience as a whole-of-society issue, recognising its links with economic security, education, transport, social protection and emergency preparedness.
- **Strengthen** community participation and cross-sector partnerships in the design and delivery of health services.
- **Give greater attention** to health inequalities, including mental health, reproductive health and the particular barriers faced by women and marginalised communities.

What does civil society need from governments?

Highlights from the consultation



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The truth is too many people have been silent, when they should have been speaking.

— SHAHIDUL ALAM, PHOTOJOURNALIST

Photo credit: Suman Paul / Getty Images



Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Articles I, II,
and V: Democracy,
Human Rights and
Free Expression

New and better laws and stronger institutions to protect civic space and free expression online and offline*

- **Take decisive steps** to implement the United Nations' Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.
- **Do a better job** of implementing comprehensive freedom of information laws.
- **Break up and prevent** media monopolies, recognising their role in undermining free expression.
- **Prevent** the misuse of defamation and blasphemy laws in ways that stifle free expression.
- **Protect** citizens and civil society from unlawful surveillance and other restrictions on democratic participation.
- **Develop** rights-based approaches to AI, misinformation and digital platforms that protect freedom of expression, privacy and public participation.
- **Invest in** digital literacy, safety and access so that technological change does not deepen existing inequalities.



Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Articles I
and XVI: Democracy
and the Role
of Civil Society

Greater public scrutiny of legislation and meaningful public participation in decision-making*

- **Establish mechanisms** that enable the people to have a say in laws and policies that affect their lives, with particular attention to communities directly affected by those decisions.
- **Introduce** structured and periodic dialogue with civil society at all stages of policy development, implementation and review, and provide clear feedback on how civil society input has influenced decisions.
- **Move beyond** ad-hoc consultation towards sustained and institutionalised partnerships between government, civil society and communities.
- **Ensure** participation is accessible and addresses structural barriers faced by women, young people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised communities.
- **Strengthen** transparency and accountability so that people can scrutinise not only legislation but its implementation and impact.

What does civil society need from governments?

Highlights from the consultation



We used to have a fairly effective system of access to information but it hasn't been funded properly.

— KARYN PUGLIESE, JOURNALIST



Photo credit: Jin Sun



Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Article
IX: Sustainable
Development

Long-term, capital investment in people, communities and resilient public services *

- **Widen and improve** internet connectivity and digital literacy, ensuring that digital-first services do not exclude marginalised communities.
- **Improve access** to reproductive and other essential health services.
- **Invest** in resilient health systems that can withstand crises.
- **Invest** in education, skills, youth employment, entrepreneurship and financial literacy to strengthen economic inclusion and community resilience.
- **Invest in and support** the creative economy and the arts, recognising the huge added cultural and economic value it can provide to Commonwealth countries.
- **Provide more sustainable and flexible support** for civil society and community organisations, recognising that short-term project funding can undermine long-term change.
- **Support locally led solutions** and invest in the capacity of communities to shape and sustain their own development.



Rooted in
Commonwealth
Charter Article
X: Protecting the
Environment

Accelerate a just and accountable transition to net zero, while protecting communities, livelihoods and ecosystems *

- **Set credible pathways** to net zero by 2050, with transparent interim targets.
- **Mandate environmental impact assessments** across the public and private sectors, ensuring full transparency and meaningful participation by affected communities.
- **Take practical measures** to reduce carbon emissions using a full range of tools including taxes, alongside investment in adaptation and resilience.
- **Develop and implement laws** that effectively criminalise and penalise the destruction of the environment and strengthen accountability for environmental harm.
- **Ensure** climate and environmental policies protect livelihoods and do not place disproportionate costs on communities least responsible for climate change.
- **Recognise** oceans, coastal ecosystems and biodiversity as central to climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods.
- **Draw on** Indigenous, local and community knowledge when designing climate and environmental responses.

1



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The

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3



Commonwealth

'The Commonwealth Quilt imagines fifty-six nations stitched into one fabric. The question isn't what will save us — it's how we find what we already have. And what we have is each other. That's the quilt. A line is what we inherit — bloodline, songline, borderline. A thread is what a line becomes when it joins another. We don't abandon our lines. We offer them. The Commonwealth Quilt is not mine alone to make. The question at the end is yours now. What will you thread?'

- Selina Tusitala Marsh, Commonwealth Poet Laureate



1. WRAPPED IN HERITAGE
John Ali, Nigeria



2. HOPE
Pedro Langa, Mozambique



3. CULTURE DECAY
Baweme Masamba, Zambia



4. BACK TO FRONT
Amanda Dakin, Barbados



5. REGROWTH
Elena Aquilina, Malta



6. FA'ASAMOA (SAMOA LIFE)
Shona Woods, Samoa



7. CHALICE
Cosmata Lindie, Guyana



8. DESERT GARDEN
Karen Reid on behalf of:
Desert Painters Swakopmund
Collective, Namibia



**9. ISLAND WINGS,
SHARED EARTH**
Sarani Heiyantuduwa, Sri Lanka



**10. THE ELEPHANTS AT SAJJI
MAKINO-RAGHUNATH HILL**
Maneet Kaur, India



11. UNDER ONE SKY
Glenna Turnbull, Canada



12. ANANSI
Abraham Tumwine, Uganda

EXPLORE THE QUILT HERE:



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8



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10



7

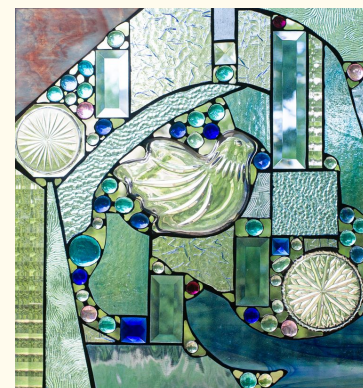


Quilt

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About the Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation mandated by its member countries 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.

Co-sign this message
to Heads of Government.



Scan the QR code to stand with
civil society from across the
Commonwealth and help build
a Commonwealth for all.

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   @commonwealthorg

THE ROAD TO CHOGM

Selina Tusitala Marsh,
Commonwealth Poet Laureate
(2025 — Present)

The road is potholed from pressure
fractured by fraying trust
flooded by rising seas.

The road runs steep, deep
in debt and inequality,
narrowing under strain.

The road is turbulent.

Yet the road is ours—
one-third of humanity
fifty-six nations
one family.

Let the road be connection.

Let the road be conscience.

Let the road be cooperation.

Let the road be democracy—
the beating heart.

Let the road be trade—the lifeblood.

Let the road be climate—the frontline.

Let the road be opportunity—for all.

Let the road bridge the wide divides.

Let the road make equals
of large and small,
equals of all.

Let the road be unity
in diversity,

service not status,
the power of small states
to shape great outcomes.

Let the road rise renewed in purpose,
confident in identity,
ambitious in vision.

May the road rise to meet us.

