

# Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Consensus Building Programme

Final Report

December 2021



The Commonwealth

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December 2021



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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Tables, Figures &amp; Annexes</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Purpose of the evaluation	2
<b>2. Methodology and Reporting</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 Report outline	4
<b>3. Limitations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Commonwealth Secretariat's Approach to Consensus Building</b>	<b>6</b>
4.1 Consensus building mechanisms of the Commonwealth Secretariat	6
<b>5. Evaluation Findings</b>	<b>9</b>
5.1 Relevance to stakeholders	9
5.2 Coherence/alignment with programmatic outcomes	11
5.4 Consensus building during COVID-19	19
5.5 Management and support	20
<b>6. Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Annexes</b>	<b>27</b>



# Tables, Figures & Annexes

## Tables

Table 2.1 Sampling approach	4
Table 5.1 Average attendance at consensus building events 2013/14 to 2020/21	10

## Figures

Figure 1.1 Objectives of the evaluation	2
Figure 4.1 Consensus building mechanisms across the Secretariat's programmatic areas	7
Figure 4.2 Programme Logic of the CB Programme	8
Figure 5.1 Scheduling of meetings around CHOGM 2018	15
Figure 5.2 Budget allocations across SP-1 and SP-2	22

## Annexes

Annex 1. Programmatic scope of the evaluation	27
Annex 2. List of documents reviewed	28
Annex 3. Details of KIIs and IDIs	43
Annex 4. Evaluation Design Matrix	45
Annex 5. List of consensus building projects	50
Annex 6. List of consensus building events	51
Annex 7. Sample monitoring form	54





# Abbreviations and Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
BTOR	Back to Office Report
CACH	Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health
CADME	Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CB	Consensus Building
CCA	Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda
CCEM	Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
CEMM	Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting
CFAMM	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting
CFMM	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting
CFTC	Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation
CHMM	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CLMM	Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting
CMAG	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group
CMMSS	Commonwealth Ministers Meeting on Small States
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
COW	Committee of the Whole
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women (of the UN)
CTMM	Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting
CWF	Commonwealth Women's Forum
CYMM	Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
EMAG	Education Ministers Action Group
EPSS	Economic Policy and Small States

EYSD	Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development (Directorate)
GBCSS	Global Biennial Conference on Small States
GBP	Great Britain pound
GBV	gender-based violence
G20	Group of 20
IDI	in-depth interview
IGO	Inter-governmental organisation
IPF	Integrated Partners' Forum
KII	key informant interview
LMSCJ	Law Ministers of Small Commonwealth Jurisdictions
MM	ministerial meeting
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NCD	non-communicable disease
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NTD	neglected tropical diseases
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
POL	Political Division
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOM	senior officials meeting
SP	Strategic Plan
SPC	Communaute du Pacifique / The Pacific Community
SPD	Social and Policy Development (Section)
SPPDD	Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships and Digital Division
TWG	Technical Working Group
UHC	universal health coverage
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
WAMM	Women Affairs Ministerial Meeting
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
YDI	Youth Development Index



# Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Secretariat is an intergovernmental organisation established in 1965, comprising 54 diverse member countries, located in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific. In addition to its five Strategic Pillars (Democracy; Public Institutions; Youth and Social Development; Economic Policy; and Small and Vulnerable States), the 2017/18–2020/21 Strategic Plan (SP) also identified Consensus Building (CB) as a cross-cutting outcome.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's power to convene member states through various Consensus Building mechanisms has been identified as a core strength of the organisation in delivering value to its member states. In line with the recommendations of the Mid-term Evaluation of the Secretariat's 2017/18–2020/21 SP, this independent evaluation was commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat to assess the Secretariat's performance in utilising its convening power, global presence, visibility and influence through its various CB mechanisms and processes to deliver benefits to and promote the interests and voices of its member states. The evaluation was guided in its assessment of the CB Programme by the 28 evaluation questions that comprised the programmatic scope of the evaluation. The evaluation focused on CB encompassing the two previous Strategic Plans of the Secretariat – that is, SP 2013/14–2016/17 (SP -1) and 2017/18–2020/21 (SP-2) – and examined nine CB projects, which comprised its CB Programme over this duration. In addition, the evaluation also used a qualitative case study methodology and selected four CB projects (Rule of Law, Health, Education and the Connectivity Agenda) across three Strategic Pillars to serve as deep dives into the assessment of approaches to CB across different thematic areas.

The main CB mechanisms supported by the Secretariat include senior officials meetings (SOMs), ministerial meetings (MMs) and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs). In addition, various knowledge sharing and learning events are held with member states, on the margins of other conventions and with topical focuses. The evaluation found that additional CB mechanisms, in the form of technical advisory and monitoring bodies, are sometimes

in place, but their presence and structure vary across programmatic areas. The Secretariat utilises its expertise, financial support from member states, knowledge, access to members, networks and partners, and the convening power of the Secretariat to engage in global discussions, use internal learning mechanisms and after-action reviews, facilitate intra-Commonwealth events and generate research and knowledge. Through these, the Secretariat aims to share knowledge and build understanding, achieve consensus and commitments to national action, achieve policy change at the national or global levels, increase political space and influence, and strengthen alliances.

Using its CB mechanisms to influence the global agenda was identified as the strategic direction the Commonwealth would move towards in SP 2013/14. The Commonwealth's positions have been influential in shaping the global agenda, particularly with regards to the inclusion of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and universal health coverage (UHC) into the global agenda post-the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Commonwealth Secretariat has also received recognition at other international consensus building for a, such as the UN General Assembly (UNGA), World Health Assembly (WHA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and is considered a trusted partner admired in the international arena for its access to and ability to convene ministers from various government machineries. The Secretariat is also visible at other global conventions, as it holds meetings on the margins of these. Conversely, the programming and CB work of the Secretariat is also influenced by the global agenda, primarily in its alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as on issues that require concerted global responses. Major factors that have given the Secretariat an edge over other organisations include previous regional presence and engagement in niche areas of work, such as in the case of youth, and uniqueness and high relevance of a forum, as in the case of the Rule of Law.

Although the 2013/14 SP outlined a strategic direction in which the MMs would shift from just discussing contemporary issues towards building

consensus on global issues and using the agreed common policy positions for advocacy at relevant international fora, this has not been practically accompanied by supporting measures, such as enhanced resources, strategy or guidelines on how to implement the CB process, and integration of CB into the respective programmes' theory of change (ToC).

An assessment of the CB projects' fit with the overarching programmes revealed that Consensus Building was well integrated into the Secretariat's Strategic Plans, but lacked a common and agreed framework. In practice, the process was found to be driven by a feedback loop between ministerial meetings, senior officials meetings and CHOGMs. However, only selected recommendations emerging from ministerial meetings are considered at CHOGM, often due to emerging and competing priorities, limited available financial resources, the broad agendas of ministerial meetings and lack of unified positions from individual member states. Against the backdrop of ever-declining resources, a focus on diverse topics also generally discourages the tabling of contentious issues for CB and weakens the impact of Secretariat-led advocacy efforts. Moreover, CB mechanisms are generally not adequately elastic to react to rapidly evolving situations, such as COVID-19 and the fast-developing global trade agenda, resulting in missed opportunities. Additionally, regarding Gender, women were found to be underrepresented in most CB meetings. Despite the weak linkages between programmatic outcomes and CB outcomes at the design level, some linkages of CB outcomes with programme outcomes were found in practice, particularly in the areas of health and education – where the outcomes of the respective MMs lay the groundwork for their subsequent translation into practical action items for the Secretariat and member states. The level of integration of CB into the ToC of respective programmes, meeting frequency, types of CB and advocacy events and programme budgets are major factors that determine the extent to which programmatic outcomes are linked with CB outcomes.

In terms of relevance to stakeholders, the Commonwealth's CB mechanisms continue to be relevant to its member states, particularly the small states, as it provides its members with a platform for open and frank discussion, knowledge and experience sharing, and the opportunity to shape

the global agenda. For its small states members, the Commonwealth functions as a crucial avenue enabling their voices to be heard, which often get drowned out in other global inter-governmental organisations (IGOs). Conversely, the larger and more developed member states view the Commonwealth as an entity that can support democracy, the rule of law and human rights, along with niche areas of global significance such as youth and the Connectivity Agenda, rather than some of the areas of social development (such as education and health) which may be better addressed by larger competing entities.

The evaluation revealed that achieving consensus through the various CB mechanisms at the Commonwealth is marred by a range of challenges due to the diversity of its membership, which comprises nations at different stages of social and economic development, size, and positions in the global economic and political order. As a result, the CB mechanisms mostly function as mechanisms for deliberation on policy positions on issues of mutual interest for its membership, with consensus being achieved on the adoption of a general development direction based on policy research through engagement, consultation and experience sharing.

The success of Consensus Building also depends on management and resources available at the Secretariat. Over the two SP periods examined in this evaluation, the Secretariat has faced increasingly limited resources; this has led to a reduction in staff and budgets that has negatively impacted its capacity to implement and monitor scheduled activities, guide programming in new directions, and develop or maintain new partnerships. Limited budgets also affect the Secretariat's ability to have a sustainable impact, as it is unable to respond to provide support to the outcomes of CB events. Human resource and financial challenges aside, the Secretariat also faces challenges in terms of monitoring, evaluation and learning, with weak, unstructured and limited monitoring processes across the different programme units of the Secretariat. This deprives them of opportunities to learn, monitor progress on implementation of ministerial outcomes, better adapt to the needs of their member states, and assess the impact and effectiveness of their units.

Based on these findings, the following list of recommendation is provided to the Secretariat:

i. **Consensus building outcomes:**

- a. It is critical that the Secretariat addresses the issue of broad agenda items, by focusing only on one-to-three areas where it has the potential of developing a niche.
- b. The Secretariat must obtain buy-in for the selected areas and ensure that there is continuity of dialogue and advocacy on these items during all CB events related to the programmatic area.
- c. It is critical to develop a result-oriented implementation plan for the mandates arising from each MM, which should be developed by the Secretariat and agreed upon by ministers. The approach to implementation, resources required and time-bound actions to undertake must also be elaborated.

ii. **Monitoring:**

- a. It is recommended that the Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships and Digital Division (SPPDD) develops and implements a monitoring framework for the CB Programme, keeping in view that building consensus is an incremental and slow process.
- b. Key elements of the monitoring framework should include tracking progress against indicators, regular and systematic evaluations of CB projects, and monitoring of outcomes and impacts.
- c. To efficiently assess the implementation of mandates from CB events, partnerships must be developed with regional organisations or those with in-country presence, such as UN agencies.

iii. **Links with programming:**

- a. Establishment of a common approach to CB, through a CB Framework with clear linkages to other outcomes, should be developed.
- b. CB must also be integrated into all other relevant project design documents (PDDs) and linkages between CB and

programming must be clearly identified in the latter.

- c. If or when resources permit in the future, the Secretariat may want to consider the establishment of a unit dedicated to the implementation and monitoring of the CB Framework. In that case, it is also recommended that staff proposed for the CB unit be highly experienced in relevant skills such as advocacy and communication, to effectively implement the CB Framework.

iv. **Resource management:**

- a. It is recommended that engagements with existing and new partnerships should be critically reviewed and prioritised in accordance with the potential for financial leverage, outreach to member states, and influence on regional and global agendas.
- b. In the interest of effectiveness, partnerships must be formalised beyond memoranda of understanding (MOUs), such as in the form of partnership agreements and joint projects.
- c. For effective delivery and responsiveness, Secretariat staffing levels must match the extensive management responsibility associated with planning, implementing, co-ordinating and monitoring CB events.
- d. In view of limited financial resources, multiple strategies can be utilised, such as hiring new Secretariat staff, requesting secondments from member states and relying on partnerships.
- e. The Secretariat's hiring processes must be reviewed and updated to facilitate shorter hiring processes and more stable contract durations.
- f. In the interest of economy, there is some potential for organising hybrid events. However, it is critical that lessons learned from the experience of online meetings held during COVID-19 are carefully considered.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

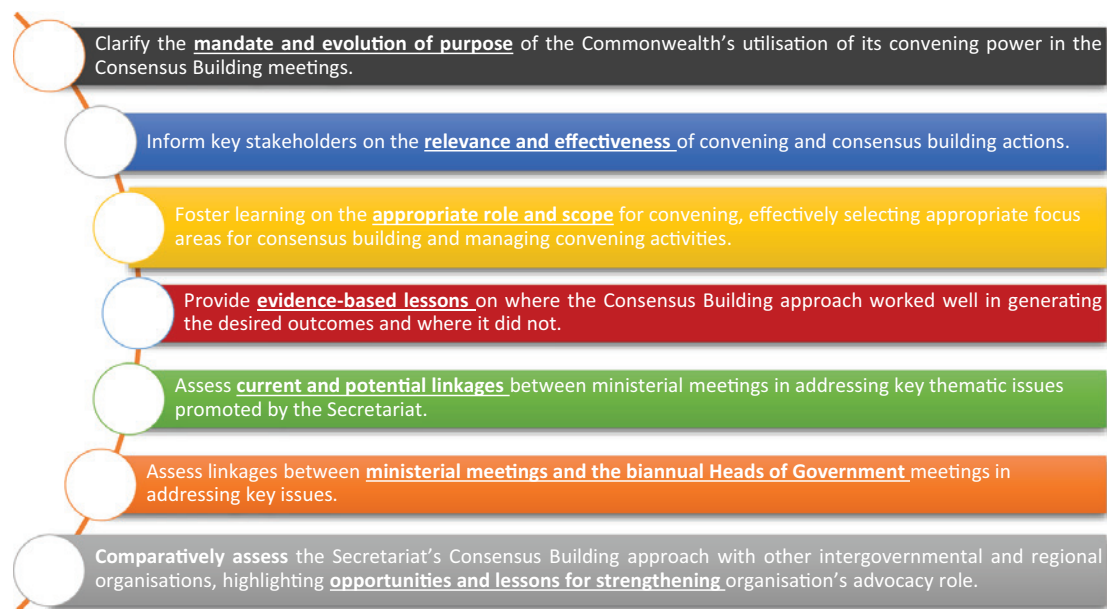
The Commonwealth Secretariat is an intergovernmental organisation established in 1965, comprising 54 diverse member countries, located in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific. Guided by the Commonwealth Charter and its current Strategic Plan for 2017/18–2020/21, the Secretariat is the main intergovernmental organisation<sup>1</sup> that supports the member states to achieve the Commonwealth's aims of development, democracy and peace.

The Secretariat's work is guided by five impact pathways, namely: 1. Consensus Building, Thought Leadership and Advocacy; 2. Policy and Legislative Development; 3. Institutional and Capacity Development; 4. Networking, Knowledge Generation and Sharing; and 5. Performance Management.<sup>2</sup> Having said that, there is a

significant overlap between Consensus Building and Thought Leadership and Advocacy, as Advocacy is required to convene and build consensus, whereas the latter results in mandates which are implemented in the form of technical work.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's power to convene member states in various high-level meetings, involving Heads of Governments, ministers, senior officials and other entities, has been identified as a core strength of the organisation in delivering value to its member states. In particular, the programming and Consensus Building work of the Secretariat is influenced by the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and also focuses on issues that require a concerted global response, such as climate change, sustainable development, trade and investment, migration, and countering violent extremism and radicalisation, etc.

### Figure 1.1 Objectives of the evaluation



1 The two other intergovernmental organisations of the Commonwealth are: 1) the Commonwealth of Learning (COL); and the Commonwealth Foundation.

2 Commonwealth Secretariat (2021), 'Leveraging Convening Power to Influence and Advocate for Change: Lessons Paper', Commonwealth Learning Week 2021, 27–29 April, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

## 1.2 Purpose of the evaluation

This independent evaluation was commissioned<sup>3</sup> by the Commonwealth Secretariat to assess the Secretariat's performance in utilising its convening power, global presence, visibility and influence through its various Consensus Building mechanisms and processes, such as ministerial and high-level meetings, to deliver benefits to and promote the interests and voices of its member states. The evaluation focused on the Consensus Building encompassing the two previous Strategic Plans of the Secretariat, that is SP 2013/14 – 2016/17 (SP-1) and 2017/18 – 2020/21 (SP-2). It is expected to inform the development of a Global Advocacy Strategy for the Secretariat and feed into the new Strategic Plan 2021/22–2024/25. The specific objectives of this evaluation are summarised in Figure 1.1.

The evaluation purpose and objectives, and assessment of the Secretariat's performance, were framed in line with the 2019 updated Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria of Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability. Annex 1 provides a summarised overview of the programmatic scope of the evaluation.

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<sup>3</sup> Cynosure Consultants Pvt. Ltd. was contracted to conduct an independent evaluation

## 2. Methodology and Reporting

The evaluation adopted a consultative and participatory approach and employed a primarily qualitative methodology, while also utilising quantitative data where available, to capture information relating to the evaluation objectives. This intelligent mix of methodological approaches provided more quality and depth to ensure greater understanding of the extent of the Consensus Building (CB) Programme's relevance, coherence/ applicability, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and lessons learned.

In consideration of the travel restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic globally, all data collection was designed and undertaken remotely and virtually, and interviews with various stakeholders were conducted through VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) software. The evaluation framework and evaluation methodology submitted to the Commonwealth Secretariat in May 2021 as part of the inception report served as the foundation for the evaluation and established parameters of the data collection and identified key focal areas. The data collection methods used included desk review and document analysis, key informant interviews (KIIs), and in-depth interviews (IDIs). Annex 6 provides a list of Consensus Building events organised by the various sections/units of the Secretariat that were reviewed as a part of this evaluation.

The desk review and document analysis were based on the cache of relevant documents shared by the Evaluation and Learning Team with the Cynosure Evaluation Team pertaining to the nine Consensus Building projects, evaluations of various programmatic activities, monitoring and evaluation reports, the various meeting communiques and outcome statements, and proceedings of the various ministerial and high-level meetings. The in-depth desk review facilitated a clear understanding of the impact pathways and projects and supported an effective evaluation design. This review also informed the programmatic and geographic scope of the evaluation activities, as well as samples for interviews. A complete list of documents reviewed is provided in Annex 2.

The Evaluation Team also utilised a case study methodology for a deeper dive into select

components of the Secretariat's programme areas that involve consensus building. Four case studies were selected for inclusion in the current evaluation, which represent 50 per cent of the thematic areas in which the Secretariat has a consensus building component: i) Education; ii) Health; iii) Rule of Law; and iv) Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (CCA). These case studies were chosen to reflect three of the five pillars of the 2017/18–2020/21 Strategic Plan: Public Institutions (Rule of Law), Youth and Social Development (Education and Health); and Economic Development (Trade and Connectivity). These areas were selected as case studies because of their varied approaches to consensus building, including the use (or lack thereof) of supporting mechanisms, varied levels of alignment with CHOGM, unique histories and trajectories, and to reflect the Secretariat's foray into new and exciting avenues.

Primary data collection involved conducting key informant interviews and in-depth interviews. Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with Secretariat staff who were involved in the formulation and/or implementation of the various Consensus Building projects. The Evaluation Team also conducted in-depth interviews (IDIs) with various stakeholders to gather detailed information, particularly regarding how the Commonwealth Secretariat's CB is perceived and appraised by representatives from member states and partners or peer organisations.

For the representatives of member states variously involved in CB, the Evaluation Team used purposive sampling, relying on the guidance of the Evaluation Reference Group, to select representatives of member states from four regions: a) Asia; b) Africa; c) the Caribbean; and d) the Pacific. In addition to regional representation, the selection process for potential respondents was guided by the extent to which member states were active within different CB mechanisms pertaining to the four case study thematic areas: i) Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda; ii) Health; iii) Education; and iv) Rule of Law. The size of the member states was also considered as a criterion to ensure adequate representation of small states in the sample of respondents. The Evaluation Team also targeted representatives

**Table 2.1 Sampling approach**

Data collection method	Stakeholders	Number of interviews requested	Number of interviews granted	Total
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	Evaluation and Learning Team	01	01	<b>15</b>
	Senior Management Committee	03	01	
	Section heads and staff	17	13	
<b>In-depth interviews (IDIs)</b>	Regional hosts and participants of events/ meetings & chairs of meetings	18	01	<b>09</b>
	Commonwealth partners	08	07	
	High Commissioners of member states	06	01	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>53</b>		<b>24</b>

from the High Commissions as stakeholders in this evaluation. In addition to regional representation, the respondents targeted comprised larger member states to ensure a wider representation. Across the six different stakeholder categories, the Evaluation Team requested a total of 53 interviews, of which 24 were granted (a 45% response rate). Of these 24 interviews, a total of 15 KIIs with internal Secretariat stakeholders and 9 IDIs with external stakeholders, including partners and country representatives, were conducted, as detailed in Annex 3 and reported in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 outlines our sampling approach, outlining the activity/tool administered to the respondent group based on their roles and functions and with reference to the Consensus Building outcome of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The review team chose to record all interviews and transcribe the recordings to provide an accurate information record. Respondents were asked for permission in advance to record the meeting. Where permission was not granted, the team recorded feedback through handwritten notes that were then written up into a meeting record. All data collected from KIIs included in the report were anonymised.

The data obtained from the above sources were coded primarily using a coding structure based on the seven primary OECD/DAC evaluation criteria. The coded data were further aggregated and organised by evaluation questions and

sub-questions. This aggregated data formed the basis of the qualitative data analysis.

The first step in the analysis involved a thematic review of the aggregated dataset and tagging of data according to the emerging themes. The depth of evidence in similar themes and responses was analysed by identifying the number of times a specific theme occurred and triangulating whether a certain theme was identified through multiple sources. Meanwhile, quantitative data, such as attendance data and budget information, were analysed using averages, percentages and trend lines.

## 2.1 Report outline

This evaluation report is composed of two parts: a) the Main Evaluation Report, which encompasses the learnings of the Evaluation Team through an in-depth participatory review of the Consensus Building Programme of the Secretariat; and b) the Case Studies, which serve as meticulous explorations of four select areas of the Secretariat's work to showcase particular instances of strengths and challenges faced by the Secretariat in its approach to consensus building, which is multifaceted and unique across the different sections and teams. In both these sections of the report, the Evaluation Team based its analysis and findings on the Evaluation Design Matrix attached in Annex 4, to ensure that the evaluation questions pertained to the OECD/DAC criteria.

## 3. Limitations

This section provides an overview of the challenges encountered during the evaluation, along with rectification measures that the Evaluation Team employed in consultation with the Secretariat.

The evaluation was designed to target a broad range of stakeholders, both internal and external to the Commonwealth Secretariat. In addition to the staff at the Commonwealth, the Evaluation Team also targeted representatives from various government ministries and departments of member states, the high commissioners of select member states and representatives of partner organisations. The biggest challenge faced during the evaluation was the lack of response from the offices of government representatives and high commissions, which precluded their effective participation in the evaluation.

To mitigate this challenge, several measures were utilised by the Evaluation Team, including consistent and repeated follow-up requests and the involvement of the Secretariat staff from relevant sections to reach out to the potential respondents. However, despite significant efforts to achieve the participation of member states, the Evaluation Team was successful in interviewing only a handful of the respondents it reached out to. As a result, a

major limitation of the current evaluation emerged in the form of the limited voice and participation of member states into the assessment of the various consensus building mechanisms, which affected the depth and breadth of the analysis presented. Nevertheless, to ensure that some voice of member states was reflected, the Evaluation Team relied on analyses obtained through a review of previously conducted surveys or monitoring missions by relevant sections of the Secretariat.

Another challenge was encountered by the Evaluation Team in the form of limited monitoring and finance data. Monitoring data pertaining to attendance and participant feedback were mostly scattered and not classified to allow for prompt analysis. Moreover, only two consensus building events had been evaluated during the period under review. With regards to the finance data, the approach to budgeting for the Consensus Building Programme changed over the two Strategic Plan periods, thereby making analysis and comparison difficult. This challenge is elaborated in the financial management section in section 5.5. Accordingly, before analysing, the Evaluation Team had to make the additional effort of collecting and sorting monitoring and finance data available from multiple sources.

## 4. Commonwealth Secretariat's Approach to Consensus Building

The Secretariat supports its 54 member states in organising and facilitating various consensus building platforms and mechanisms on behalf of its member states. The consensus building approach of the Commonwealth is unique in that compared to other intergovernmental organisations, the Commonwealth does not institute voting for mandates at various levels of the CB, instead often relying on 'endorsement by silence, rather than the provision of true mandates'.<sup>4</sup> Programmatic mandates to the Secretariat emerge from these meetings in the form of advocacy, knowledge generation and sharing, analysis, technical assistance, capacity building, and advice on policy development.

The changing global context and situations have transformed the Secretariat's approach to and mandate for Consensus Building. In addition, while significant CB processes are uniform across the Secretariat, the programme perspective on CB also varies to some extent across the different reviewed programmatic areas.

The approach to the Consensus Building Programme at the Secretariat has evolved over time. Prior to the Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17 (SP-1), the convening of ministerial meetings (MMs) generally focused on discussing contemporary global issues and providing mandates to the Secretariat. However, as SP-1 aimed to build future Secretariat work on consensus and reform, it stated that:

*The focus on ministerial meetings will gradually shift and these meetings will be used as an opportunity to build consensus on global issues and otherwise utilise the Commonwealth power of convocation represented by these meetings.*

SP-1 laid out a strategic direction for the function of CB mechanisms in that, 'the agreed outcomes of these meetings will provide common policy positions for advocacy at relevant international

fora', and support to national-level policy development and implementation, promoting co-operation between member states.<sup>5</sup> Building on the work of SP-1, the Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21 (SP-2) designated Consensus Building as one of the three cross-cutting outcomes, the other two being Partnerships and Innovation, and Gender Mainstreaming. Under SP-2, the Consensus Building Programme at the Commonwealth Secretariat comprises nine projects, as listed in Annex 5.

Moreover, the mandate for Consensus Building at the Commonwealth Secretariat has been shaped over time by various factors, such as major global developments, Secretariat reform, the changing priorities of member states, etc. For instance, the CCA, which is based on the consensus building mechanisms of Senior Trade Officials Meetings (STOMs), Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meetings (CTMMs) and five Connectivity Clusters, was an initiative resulting from the recognised potential for increasing intra-Commonwealth trade. Meanwhile, the first-ever virtual Commonwealth Leaders Meeting was held in June 2020 and resulted in a COVID-19 statement discussed by Heads of Government.

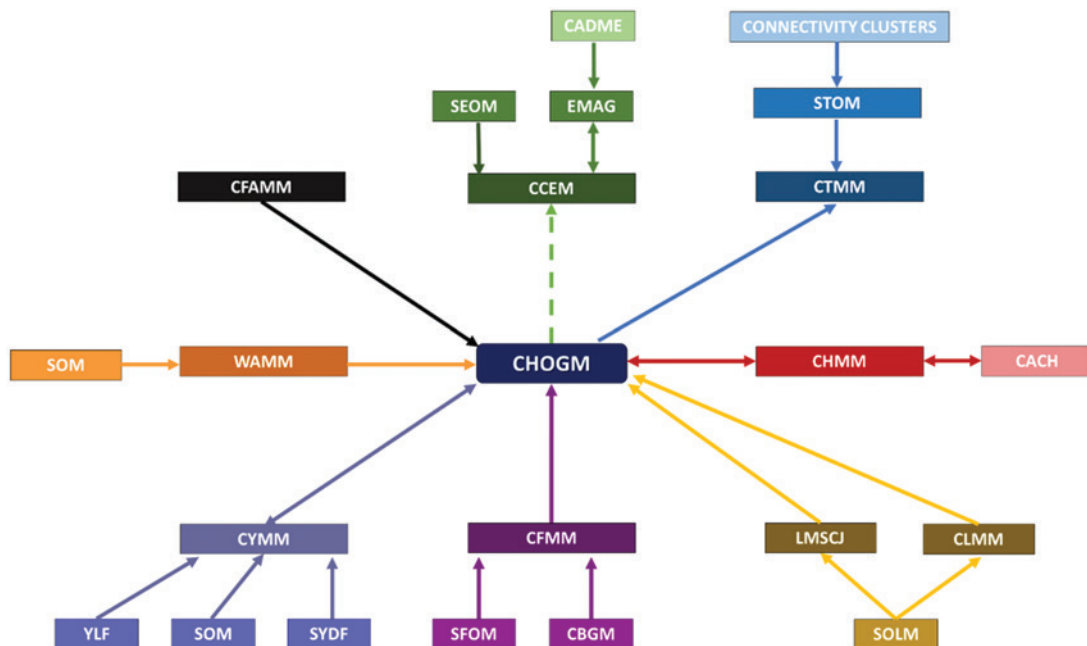
### 4.1 Consensus building mechanisms of the Commonwealth Secretariat

At present, the main consensus building mechanisms supported by the Secretariat include senior officials meetings (SOMs), ministerial meetings (MMs) and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs). While most of these events are meant to represent pan-Commonwealth membership, some events particularly focus on small states, such as the Meeting of Law Ministers of Small Commonwealth Jurisdictions (LMSCJ), Commonwealth Ministers Meeting on Small States (CMMSS), the Global Biennial Conference on Small States (GBCSS), the

4 Commonwealth Secretariat (2021), 'Leveraging Convening Power to Influence and Advocate for Change: Lessons Paper', Commonwealth Learning Week 2021, 27–29 April, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, p 5.

5 Commonwealth Secretariat (2015), Commonwealth Secretariat Revised Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17, p 23.

**Figure 4.1 Consensus building mechanisms across the Secretariat's programmatic areas<sup>6</sup>**



Small States Forum on Education, etc. Furthermore, while meeting frequency is decided by member states, the frequency of holding these consensus building events varies, with meetings being held annually, biennially or triennially. At the CHOGM or ministerial meeting, a key consensus building document is a communique or outcome statement that often sets out decisions taken by the Heads of Government or ministers and/or sets a new vision and priorities for the next few years.

In addition, there are technical advisory and monitoring bodies in place, but their presence and structure vary across programmatic areas. For example, along with the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), the education team also organises the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG), the Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education – Technical Working Group (CADME-TWG) and the Integrated Partners' Forum (IPF). In comparison, the Economic Policy and Small States (EPSS) Unit organises the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM), the GBCSS, the CMMSS and G-20 outreach. Moreover, to support the CB meetings, advocacy

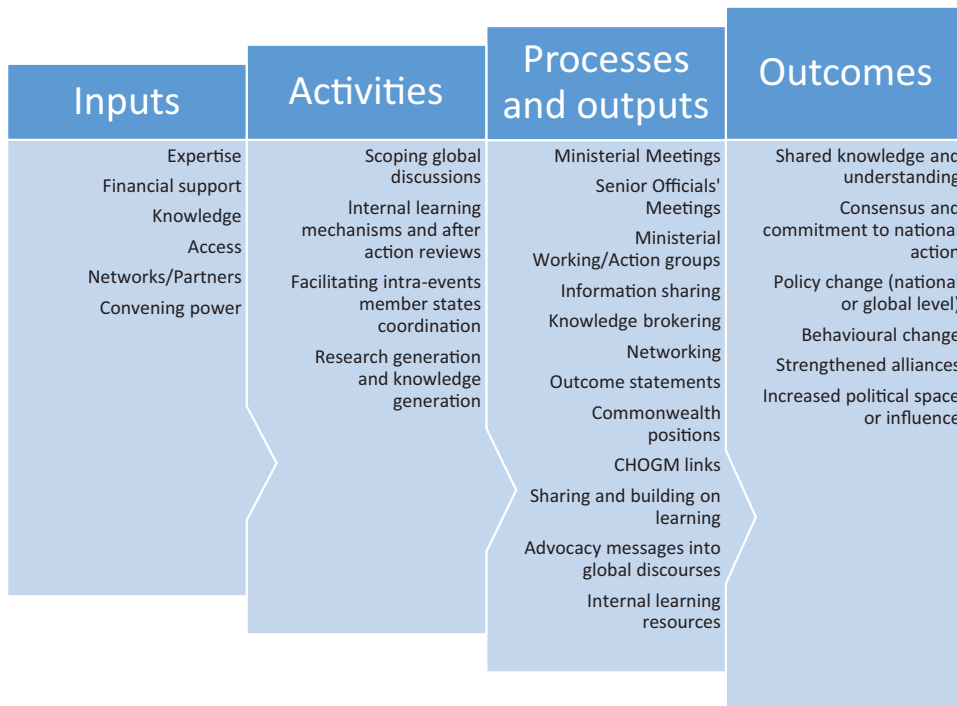
events, such as webinars and working groups, are also held by various teams at the Secretariat.

The technical advisory bodies and SOMs perform different functions across different ministerial meetings. Broadly, the SOMs are held prior to the ministerial meetings in which the senior officials deliberate on and approve the agenda for the ministerial meeting, are briefed on the work undertaken by the Secretariat in the period between the meetings being held, and also provide recommendations to their respective ministers. The technical advisory bodies such as EMAG and CADME-TWG (for CCEM), the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH) (for the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting [CHMM]), and the Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Task Force (CYMTF) function as monitoring bodies within the respective ministerial meetings to track progress on action items from one MM to another, ensure momentum between meetings, and to facilitate the implementation or uptake of action items in select member states. For most MMs, political consensus is established at the MM level, wherein, input from SOMs and technical advisory bodies is sought and may be incorporated. The outcomes of the ministerial meetings then inform the Consensus Building among Heads of Government at CHOGM, held biennially.

6 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018), *Evaluation of the Commonwealth Consensus Building – Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM)*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.



Figure 4.2 Programme Logic of the CB Programme<sup>7</sup>



The Programme Logic of the Consensus Building Programme involves it utilising its expertise, financial support from member states, knowledge, access to members, networks and partners, and the convening power of the Secretariat (Inputs) to engage in global discussions, use internal learning mechanisms and after-action reviews, facilitate intra-Commonwealth events and generate research and knowledge (Activities) at the MMs, SOMs, Working Groups/Action Groups, CHOGM and knowledge and learning events (Processes and Outputs), in order to share knowledge and build understanding, achieve consensus and commitments to national action, achieve policy change at the national or global levels, increase political space and influence, and strengthen alliances (Outcomes). The Evaluation Team found that the Programme Logic was composed of various interlinked aspects, with involvement of

multiple stakeholders such as the Secretariat itself, the member states, partner organisations and external expertise at all levels of the programme logic. Overall, the Secretariat's Consensus Building Programme generally follows the Programme Logic to different levels of effectiveness within the sections that lead the CB programmatic area. The subsequent sections provide further detail into the overall assessment of the Consensus Building Programme.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 4.2 outlines a generic Programme Logic for the Secretariat's Consensus Building Programme, providing an overview of how the projects and actions are expected to realise the outcomes of the organisation's Consensus Building Programme.

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth of Nations (2013), *Charter of the Commonwealth*. Commonwealth Secretariat, London.



# 5. Evaluation Findings

## 5.1 Relevance to stakeholders

Despite the presence of global bodies such as the UN and the World Bank, and the targeted support provided by regional bodies like the African Union (AU), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the evaluation found that participation in Commonwealth consensus building events continues to be relevant to its member states due to their shared heritage, similarities in legal systems and member states finding a voice in discussions despite their place in the global order.

In particular, small states, which represent 60 per cent of the Commonwealth's membership, are highly appreciative of the voice given to them by the Secretariat during consensus building meetings, as this is a unique area of support not available to these states at other international fora. Similarly, these states see the Secretariat as a conduit for having their collective voices heard at global fora, such as the WTO, UN, etc. During the CB meetings organised and facilitated by the Secretariat, member states also benefit from cross-exchange of information and improved approaches to policy-making and development initiatives across a broad range of countries, as revealed by post-meeting feedback surveys. An example is the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) 2019, where 39 per cent of surveyed participants reported networking and 30 per cent said idea sharing with member states were the most attractive aspects of that meeting. Conversely, only 18 per cent said that 'outcome setting, agenda items, and specific policies' were of interest to them, while the remaining 12 per cent were interested in the opportunity to engage with Secretariat staff.

However, the recent proliferation of regional intergovernmental organisations has resulted in diversion of member states' interest towards these bodies, as they are focused on issues common to a smaller and more homogenous group of states. This has resulted in waning engagement with the Commonwealth in areas such as finance, which has especially faced challenges due to reduced capacity at the Secretariat and has led to stalling or

cancellation of the Secretariat's work on taxation, diaspora finance and fintech.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the Secretariat's consensus building events continue to hold special importance of varying degrees to all member states, due to its ability to influence the global agenda, as well as being an avenue for networking, knowledge sharing and dialogue.

Member states with developed socioeconomic systems, who also happen to have the capacity to make financial contributions, want to support the unique role of Commonwealth as a neutral entity supporting democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In addition, there is some support for existing or niche opportunities of global significance, including youth and the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (CCA). Conversely, areas of social development (education and health) are seen by these member states to be better addressed by much larger competing entities, such as the World Bank and the UN, and even bilateral support through member states like the UK and Australia, etc.

Consensus building at the Commonwealth Secretariat was also found to deliver significant value to its partners, such as other international and regional intergovernmental bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), accredited organisations of the Commonwealth, and other development organisations. These partners primarily appreciate the Secretariat's direct and collective access to the ministers and senior officials of 54 member states, as well as the potential for amplifying the partners' voice and policy position to a wide and diverse audience across these countries.

In fact, an in-depth assessment of the Consensus Building Programme revealed that achieving consensus was not just difficult, but almost impossible to achieve in most of these fora. This is due to the diverse viewpoints of the 54 member states, which find themselves at different stages of economic and social development, while also holding significantly diverse positions in the global

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank (2020), *The World's Bank: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Global Convening*, Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank, Washington, DC.

**Table 5.1 Average attendance at consensus building events 2013/14 to 2020/21**

Sector	CHOGM	CCA	CFAMM	Health	Finance	Education	Youth	Rule of Law	Small States	Gender
<b>Average Total</b>	52	47	45	39	36	36	31	29	24	23
<b>Average Percentage</b>	98%	89%	85%	74%	69%	68%	58%	54%	45%	42%

economic and political order. Instead, the CB events organised by the Secretariat were mostly held with the view to deliberate on policy positions on various issues of potential mutual interest. Moreover, issues on which consensus was reported often pertained to adoption of a general development direction based on policy research. Therefore, instead of aiming to build consensus, the meetings at the programme level are more reflective of seeking consensus through engagement, consultation and experience sharing embodied in the Commonwealth Charter.

*Affirming that the Commonwealth way is to seek consensus through consultation and the sharing of experience, especially through practical co-operation, ... (Charter of the Commonwealth, p. 1)<sup>9</sup>*

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the challenges associated with Consensus Building faced by the Commonwealth are also prevalent among other multilateral institutions with significant convening power. An evaluation of the World Bank Group's Global Convening also highlighted similar challenges to effective convening because of engagement across myriad thematic areas, multiple agendas that strained internal capacity, and limited and/or weak monitoring mechanisms.<sup>10</sup>

Further, a review of the attendance at high-level consensus building events revealed that average attendance (as a percentage of total membership) during SP-1 and SP-2 had been highest at CHOGM (98%). Among ministerial meetings, the CCA (89%), Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting (CFAMM) (85%) and Health (74%) enjoyed the highest levels of participation from member states, followed by Finance (69%) and Education (68%). Conversely, Gender (42%), Small States (45%), Rule of Law (54%) and Youth (58%), had the lowest attendance, as shown in Table 5.1.

However, while attendance may be a good indicator of interest and importance accorded by member states to ministerial meetings, it does not always represent an accurate picture. In particular, meetings such as the CFAMM and CHMM, which are held in the margins of major global meetings, are easier to access and therefore well attended. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that, with the exception of CCA, most of the meetings reporting low attendance were not held in collaboration with a major event, and therefore required additional effort and resources by member countries to attend.

## Conclusions

The Commonwealth's CB mechanisms continue to be relevant to its member states, particularly the small states, as it provides its members with a platform for open and frank discussion, knowledge and experience sharing, and the opportunity to shape the global agenda. For its small states members, the Commonwealth functions as a crucial avenue, enabling their voices to be heard and which often get drowned out in other global IGOs. Conversely, the larger and more developed member states view the Commonwealth as an entity that can support democracy, the rule of law and human rights, along with niche areas of global significance such as youth and the Connectivity Agenda, rather than some of the areas of social development (such as education and health), which may be better addressed by larger competing entities.

The evaluation reveals that achieving consensus through the various CB mechanisms at the Commonwealth is marred by a range of challenges due to the diversity of its membership, which comprises nations at different stages of social and economic development, size, and positions in the global economic and political order. As a

9 Commonwealth Secretariat (2015). Commonwealth Secretariat Revised Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17, p 23.  
10 Ibid, p 23.

result, the CB mechanisms mostly function as mechanisms for deliberation on policy positions on issues of mutual interest for its membership, with consensus being achieved on the adoption of a general development direction based on policy research through engagement, consultation and experience sharing.

## 5.2 Coherence/alignment with programmatic outcomes

An assessment of the CB projects' fit with the Commonwealth's overarching programmes revealed that Consensus Building was well integrated into the Secretariat's Strategic Plans, but lacked a common and agreed framework. In practice, the process was found to be driven by a feedback loop between ministerial meetings, senior officials meetings and CHOGMs. However, only selected recommendations emerging from ministerial meetings are considered at CHOGM, often due to emerging and competing priorities, limited available financial resources, the broad agendas of ministerial meetings and lack of unified positions from individual member states. Against the backdrop of ever-declining resources, a focus on diverse topics also generally discourages the tabling of contentious issues for CB and weakens the impact of Secretariat-led advocacy efforts. Moreover, CB mechanisms are generally not adequately elastic to react to rapidly evolving situations, such as COVID-19 and the fast-developing global trade agenda, resulting in missed opportunities. Additionally, regarding Gender, women were found to be underrepresented in most CB meetings.

This section presents an assessment of the CB Framework, linkages between CB and programme outcomes, alignment of CB mechanisms with CHOGM, advocacy, and gender mainstreaming within CB mechanisms.

### 5.2.1 Consensus Building Framework

In accordance with the prioritisation accorded to Consensus Building in the recent two Strategic Plans, CB corresponded to all six strategic outcome areas of the 2013/14–2016/17 Strategic Plan and all five strategic outcomes of the 2017/19–2020/21 Strategic Plan, respectively.

However, the changes in strategic direction since 2013/14, primarily in the use of ministerial meetings 'as an opportunity to build consensus on global issues'<sup>11</sup> and using the agreed outcomes of the ministerial meetings to 'provide common policy positions for advocacy at relevant international fora'<sup>12</sup>, have not been practically accompanied by supporting measures, such as enhanced resources, strategy or guidelines on how to implement the consensus building (CB) process nor integration of CB into the respective programmes' theories of change (ToCs).

Consequently, while there were assumed linkages between Consensus Building and programme activities, since initiatives on which consensus is built guide the Secretariat programming, these linkages were not demonstrated in project strategy. The nine stand-alone project documents for CB across various units/sections show limited linkages with other programming aspects, such as research or technical support being offered by the respective department. In contrast, the other two cross-cutting outcomes of the 2017/19–2020/21 Strategic Plan, that is, Gender Mainstreaming and Partnerships and Innovation, are integrated into each project of the Secretariat in the form of project-specific targets and indicators.

The bespoke approach to CB allows the individual programme teams some flexibility in determining the course that CB mechanisms will take. However, such an approach also prevents the Secretariat from standardising certain mechanisms in all the programmatic areas with CB mechanisms. For instance, the Education Unit of the Secretariat, responsible for convening the triennial CCEMs, has in place two advisory and monitoring bodies (EMAG and CADME-TWG) to ensure momentum from one meeting to the next and to facilitate the implementation of the action items emerging from the MMs. In contrast, Rule of Law, responsible for convening the CLMM, has no such mechanisms in place.

Similarly, the outcomes of the MMs themselves vary across the Secretariat's programme areas. For instance, realising the challenges associated

11 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018). *Proceedings of the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, p 23.

12 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018). *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Communiqué, 'Towards a Common Future'*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, para. 34, p 8.

with building consensus, the Economic Policy and Small States (EPSS) Unit generally issues a Chair's Summary at the end of a Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM). In contrast, the Education Unit issues a declaration at the conclusion of each CCEM.

Moreover, unlike Gender Mainstreaming and Partnerships and Innovation, each of which has been assigned a separate unit to support capacity building and co-ordination, Consensus Building remains the mandate of various departments.

### 5.2.2 Linkages with programme outcomes

Nevertheless, while linkages between programmes and CB are weak at the design level, in practice, some linkages between programmatic outcomes and outcomes of CB mechanisms were found. For instance, the CHOGM 2018 outcomes included the CCA, the Cyber Declaration and the Blue Charter, which have received significant programmatic attention at the Secretariat since then. Similarly, consensus building under the Rule of Law Programme addresses challenges in member countries and facilitates the development of legal policy, advancement of SDG 16 and provision of legal information to Commonwealth jurisdictions, all of these being aligned with the goal of the 2017/18–2020/21 Strategic Plan, as well as the priority areas for the Secretariat's programme under human rights, the rule of law and good governance.

Major outputs emerging from previous CCEMs have also been the focus of subsequent Secretariat programming. For example, the Nassau Declaration of the 19<sup>th</sup> CCEM provided direction to the Education Unit through its Action Plan by resulting in the development of the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework (CEPF), the Curriculum Framework for the SDGs, through development of the TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) Self-Assessment Toolkit, the Faith in the Commonwealth project,<sup>13</sup> and via the establishment of the Commonwealth Education Hub. Later, the Nadi Declaration of the 20<sup>th</sup> CCEM resulted in the development of the Learning 4 Life Programme at the Secretariat.

Having said that, the degree of integrating consensus building into day-to-day programmatic direction varies across units. While the differences among programmes regarding their reliance on CB could not be measured objectively, to some extent this was reflected in the integration of CB into the theory of change of the respective programme, meeting frequency, number and types of advocacy events supporting ministerial meetings, and programme budgets. Of the programmes reviewed, the CCA – with frequent meetings of its unique five Connectivity Clusters – was seen to have the highest degree of integrating consensus building into programme decision-making through more recurrent contact and advocacy. However, the use of CB among the remaining units/sections was found to be relatively moderate. As a consequence, Youth and Education being two of the programme areas with the widest gap in ministerial meetings have established interim ministerial bodies in the recent years.

Furthermore, instead of being a linear process, the evaluation found that CB at the Secretariat works as a feedback loop between MMs, SOMs and CHOGMs, etc. Hence, while CHOGMs reflect the outcomes of SOMs and MMs, the priorities identified in CHOGMs are also highlighted in subsequent senior officials, ministerial and technical meetings held for the purpose of consensus building.

### 5.2.3 Alignment with CHOGM

In particular, a review of the ministerial outcomes for health, youth, gender, trade and the rule of law yielded that these had been reflected to some extent in the CHOGM communiqués held under the two strategic plans under review, that is, CHOGM 2015 and 2018. For instance, Heads in the 2015 CHOGM, held in November, recognised the importance of tackling communicable and non-communicable diseases and reaffirmed their commitment towards making the complete eradication of polio a global priority, as recommended by the 2015 CHMM, held in May. Similarly, Gender Mainstreaming was also reflected in CHOGM 2015 and CHOGM 2018, more specifically in terms of gender empowerment and gender-based violence (GBV). Meanwhile, a large number of the recommendations by the 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM) held in 2017 were also incorporated in the CHOGM 2018 communiqué, including agreement

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<sup>13</sup> All member states are represented at the Board of Governors through their respective High Commissions in London, UK.

by the Heads to mainstream youth priorities into national development policies and plans, the importance of creating meaningful employment opportunities for youth, and the need to invest in a systems approach to support young people, including through skills building, entrepreneurship, apprenticeships and the need for better data to target interventions effectively.

Also, in response to the emphasis on cybercrime and cyber security by the CLMM 2014 and 2017, CHOGM 2018 announced the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration. The Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (CCA) for Trade and Investment is another example, as the CCA was a result of technical meetings and consensus building events, including the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting (CTMM) 2017, the Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI) 2017, CFAMM 2018 and the Committee of the Whole (COW) 2018. Furthermore, in view of the emphasis on the digital divide/technology by various ministerial meetings, such as CFMM, CYMM, CLMM and CHMM, etc., the Heads at CHOGM 2018 highlighted the seminal role of information and communication technology (ICT) in supporting good governance, promoting inclusion and sustainable development, and reducing the digital divide.

Further, it was determined that a number of priorities identified at CHOGMs were also highlighted during subsequent SOMs, MMs and other CB events. For example, following the 2015 CHOGM, the subsequent 2016 CHMM saw an alignment with and reaffirmation of the CHOGM outcomes. This was especially on the issues of health security and public health threats such as antimicrobial resistance, on which the CHMM mandated further actions, such as welcoming an independent review on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and commitment to making AMR a global priority at the 2016 UN General Assembly (UNGA).

Having said that, not all key recommendations made in ministerial meeting outcomes were considered by CHOGMs. An example was the identification of Education as a 'cross-cutting issue, key to delivering on all SDGs' by the ministers at the 20 CCEM held in February 2018. In the CHOGM 2018 communique, held in April, Heads encouraged action towards some CCEM recommendations, including the opportunity for at least 12 years of quality education, and investment in educators,

education facilities and out-of-school children; however, instead of promoting cross-cutting linkages with other programmes, Education was given consideration only as a stand-alone programme area.<sup>14</sup>

Major reasons for limited reflection of ministerial outcomes in CHOGMs were determined to be the lack of unified positions at the individual member states level, as well as emerging and competing priorities – either within the same programme area or across other programme areas. While the mandate is established by Heads of Governments and the Secretariat's strategic plans and budgets are approved by the Commonwealth Board of Governors,<sup>15</sup> the recommendations of ministers are not always aligned with the priorities set by the former two as indicative in the abovementioned example.

Further, at the CHOGM 2018, the Heads provided impetus to new programme areas, such as the Connectivity Agenda, Blue Charter, Cyber Declaration, etc. While under SP-2, the budget for Rule of Law increased by 48 per cent, that for the entire Social Policy and Development Section (SPD, which comprises health, education, youth and sport) only saw an increase of 8 per cent.

Moreover, ministerial outcomes identified a wide range of recommendations without taking into consideration the Secretariat's limited resources. Similarly, in several cases, the MM outcomes did not provide specific roadmaps or guidelines for implementation of recommendations, thereby leading to a more limited commitment/neutral approach in the CHOGM communique. In fact, in a number of cases, the ministerial outcome statements read like simplified accounts of meetings proceedings, without providing any concise information on next steps.

Recognition of issues at the CHOGM level through its communiqués confers certain advantages, both to the Secretariat as well as the member states. In addition to the abovementioned impetus to new areas of programming, such as the Connectivity

14 Ibid, para. 33, p 7.

15 The 2015 CHMM outcome states: 'Ministers therefore recommend that the Heads of Government collectively: c. Recognise the primary role of governments in encouraging a society wide response to the global challenge of ageing and non-communicable diseases, including mental health.' Commonwealth Secretariat (2015), *Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting 2015 Ministerial Statement*, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, p 2.



Agenda, Blue Charter and Cyber Declaration, recognition of issues at the CHOGM-level also garners country-level support among stakeholders, as the mandate arises from their respective Heads of Government. Similarly, raising an issue at the level of CHOGM also provides a collective position for member states to advocate on at other global fora. In some instances, new mandates are provided for existing areas of the Secretariat's programming, which articulate a clear direction for both the Secretariat as well as its member states. In that regard, the 2018 CHOGM set the actual Commonwealth-wide targets and commitments to halve malaria across the Commonwealth by 2023 and eliminate blinding trachoma by 2020.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Heads of Government agreed that progress on these commitments should be considered every two years at the CHMM and should also be reported at subsequent CHOGMs, thereby instituting a mechanism to monitor and keep up momentum towards achieving the targets set out.

However, trade-offs at CHOGM have sometimes resulted in missed opportunities, as they overlook early identification of issues by the ministers that the Secretariat could potentially have taken a global lead on. An example is the issue of mental health identified by CHMM since 2015,<sup>17</sup> which was not reflected in CHOGM 2015 but recognised in CHOGM 2018.<sup>18</sup> By this time, it had already taken on global significance and found likely champions elsewhere among international bodies, particularly the World Health Organization (WHO), which

released its Mental Health Action Plan in 2013,<sup>19</sup> and also the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), with a number of Commonwealth nations among its members, which established its Plan of Action on Mental Health in 2014.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, while ministerial meetings are intended to feed into the CHOGM agenda, in some cases, the meeting schedule is not always aligned to readily attain this objective. This issue has been addressed in some instances; for example, since 2017, the frequency of CLMM has been changed from triennial to biennial. However, this remains a challenge for the Education Unit, where CEMM is held every three years, and the Youth Division, which holds the CYMM every four years. Having said that, the relatively recent introduction of Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG) and Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Task Force (CYMTF) are expected to resolve the issue of continuity in these meetings to some extent, as their outcomes are likely to feed into CHOGMs. Figure 5.1 maps out the schedule of the various meetings around CHOGM 2018.

### 5.2.4 Advocacy

Furthermore, some degree of continuity was also observed from one ministerial meeting to the next, albeit in a broad context. For instance, the implementation of the Nassau Declaration 2015 continued to be discussed at Education Ministerial Action Group (EMAG) in 2021. Similarly, at CHMM, universal health coverage (UHC) has been a topic of discussion since 2011, while the agenda items at CLMMs have highlighted countering violent extremism (CVE), international humanitarian law (IHL) and combating corruption, etc.

A systematic review of the CB meetings' agendas revealed a wide array of topics being discussed at most meetings, as the Secretariat aims to respond to the multitude of requests from member states. However, it is a recognised fact that in order to achieve consensus, continued

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16 Mental health was referenced in the CHOGM 2018 communique in two contexts: health and inclusion. For inclusion: 'Heads agreed to address the stigma around disability in all its forms and manifestations, as well as around mental health, ensuring that no one is left behind, and to encourage all member countries to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.' Commonwealth Secretariat (2018), op. cit. note 9, para. 6, p 2. For health: 'They noted that these public health challenges include communicable and non-communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, diabetes, as well as obesity, malnutrition, and mental health conditions.' Commonwealth Secretariat (2018), op. cit. note 9, para. 32, p 7.

17 World Health Organization (2013), *Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020*. published by WHO, Geneva

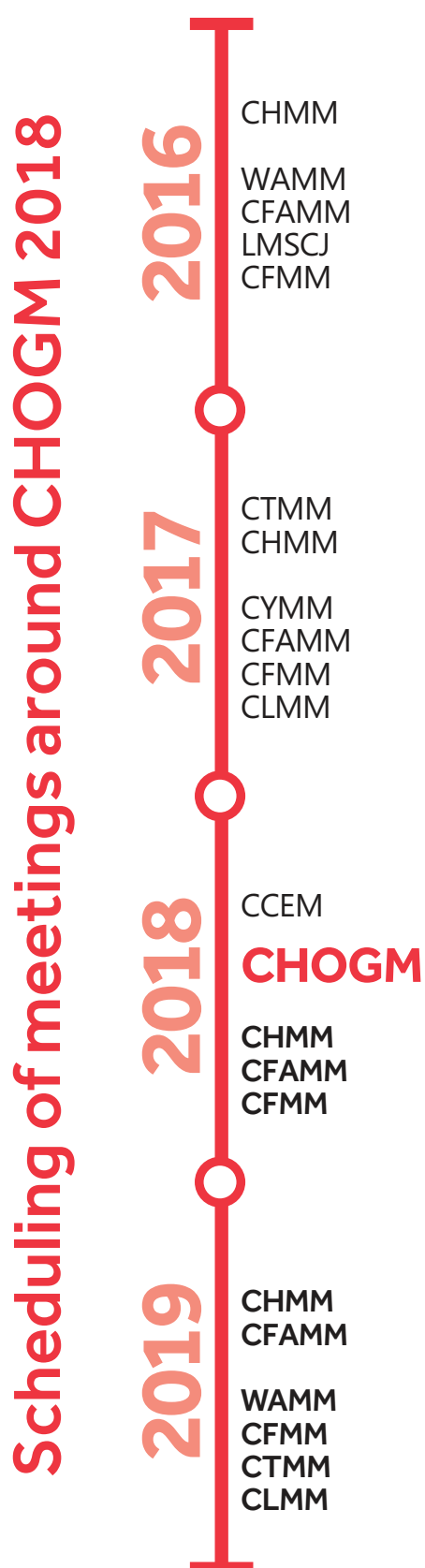
18 PAHO/WHO. 2014. *Plan of Action on Mental Health 2015–2020*. published by PAHO

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19 Commonwealth Secretariat (2021), 'Leveraging Convening Power to Influence and Advocate for Change: Lessons Paper', Discussion Paper, Commonwealth Learning Week 2021, 27–29 April, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

20 Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM), Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM), Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM), Education Ministers Meeting (CEM) and Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM).

Figure 5.1 Scheduling of meetings around CHOGM 2018



advocacy and dialogue focused on select issues are required over a long period of time. This is even more pertinent in the case of the Secretariat, as it seeks to build consensus over sensitive issues such as trade and gender, etc., among 54 member states. Hence, a lack of focus is detrimental to the Secretariat's opportunity to identify niche areas on which to demonstrate global thought leadership. However, since the themes are dictated through discussions between the outgoing and incoming chairs of CHOGMs, the Secretariat has limited control of the process. Having said that, the Chair of CHOGM 2018 and incoming Chair of CHOGM 2022 have recognised this gap and decided to largely continue the theme of CHOGM 2018 into the next CHOGM. However, the issue of broad agenda items continues to be reflected in most ministerial meetings, as has also been identified in their feedback by delegates participating in several meetings.

With the availability of limited resources, as explained in the section on financial management (section 5.5.2), this broad focus has also made the CB process overwhelming, with the result that only non-contentious issues are tabled for discussion, often resulting in polite agreement between the ministers in attendance. For instance, an internal evaluation of CFMM 2018 reported that decisions appeared to be 'based on endorsement by silence, rather than by provision of true mandates'.<sup>21</sup>

### 5.2.5 Gender considerations

Furthermore, Gender is a prominent theme in the Commonwealth Charter, where women's rights and empowerment are referenced under Human Rights (opposing all kinds of discrimination, including gender) and then in more detail under Gender Equality, which recognises women's rights and girls' education as critical for sustainable development.

These aspects on Gender Mainstreaming were also reflected by Heads of States in CHOGM 2015 and CHOGM 2018, more specifically in terms of gender empowerment and gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, the Secretariat maintains three main fora for dialogue and advocacy particularly aimed

21 Commonwealth Secretariat (2019), 'Accelerating Gender Equality by Gender Mainstreaming', Meeting Paper, 12<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting.

at Gender: a) annual consultation with the national women machineries (NWMs) and senior officials from the ministries responsible for gender and development; b) Commonwealth Women Affairs Ministerial Meetings (WAMMs) held every three years; and c) the Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF) held during CHOGM week (once every two years).

A gender analysis of a sample of five Commonwealth ministers' meetings<sup>22</sup> held in 2017 and 2018<sup>23</sup> revealed a mixed picture, with varying levels of Gender Mainstreaming – depending on the sector and theme of the meeting. The results showed that the ministers and senior officials of most of the meetings were predominantly men, apart from CLMM, where 46 per cent of the officials and observers were women. There was also good representation of women among invited speakers to these meetings for CFMM (67%), CHMM (56%) and CCEM (42%). In general, Gender was found to be a natural lens for certain thematic areas, such as education and health, which had gender items on their respective agendas, as well as discussion of gender issues throughout meeting proceedings. Conversely, the summary of proceedings report for CFMM contained no references to gender and no specific gender items were included on the agenda. For CLMM, while there was discussion of a specific gender item – preventing and eliminating child, early and forced marriages – this did not translate into agreed actions. For CYMM, while there were no specific gender items included on the agenda, the final communique included several references to gender, including the need to target 'no one left behind' initiatives with gender as one of the eight categories.

At the implementation level, while most member states have ratified international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the SDGs, reporting on the four priority areas of gender equality and women's empowerment shows limited progress. Moreover, even when consensus is built within the Commonwealth, there is limited progress on some of the more contentious and polarising areas – such as sexual and reproductive health and gender affirmative action.

22 Since the adoption of the 'Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda' by CHOGM in 2018, only one CTMM (2019) has been scheduled.

23 These regional meetings are separate from the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings (CYMMs) held once every four years.

## Conclusions

Although the 2013/14 SP outlined a strategic direction in which the MMs would shift from just discussing contemporary issues towards building consensus on global issues and using the agreed common policy positions for advocacy at relevant international fora, this has not been practically accompanied by supporting measures, such as enhanced resources, strategies or guidelines on how to implement the Consensus Building (CB) process, and integration of CB into the respective programmes' theories of change (ToCs).

At the CHOGM level, not all priorities identified at the MM level were reflected and vice versa, primarily due to the lack of unified positions at the individual member state level, meeting schedules not being aligned to feed into CHOGMs, emerging and competing priorities, either within the same programme area or across other programme areas, and because of lack of alignment of priorities identified at the ministerial level with those of Heads of Government and the Secretariat Board of Governors. Also, the lack of focused discussions on select issues over longer durations was found to be detrimental to the effective achievement of consensus, as well as for the Secretariat to identify niche areas of work to demonstrate global thought leadership.

Gender was found to be mainstreamed to varying degrees, with MMs pertaining to social development (youth, health and education) reflecting better integration of gender considerations in their agendas and outcomes compared to those MMs related to legal and/or economic aspects (rule of law and finance).

### 5.3 Linkages with global and regional agenda

The intensity of linkages between the regional and global agenda varies across programme areas and depends on the thought leadership demonstrated and partnerships established by the Secretariat. In general, there were found to be limited partnership linkages between the Secretariat and regional and global bodies, thereby restricting the opportunity for resource leveraging and extending outreach.



The aim to influence the global agenda was integrated into the consensus building work of the Secretariat to some extent, such as the 2015 CHOGM being held under the theme, 'The Commonwealth: Adding Global Value'. The outcomes of ministerial meetings and CHOGMs have also been influenced by the global agenda, and vice versa. In particular, the programming and CB work of the Secretariat are influenced by the UN SDGs and also focus on issues that require a concerted global response, such as climate change, sustainable development, trade and investment, migration, and countering violent extremism and radicalisation, etc.

### Impact evidence

The Secretariat has long been a strong voice shaping the global development agenda on health, with the inclusion of the NCDs and UHC integrated into the UN Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG-3) in 2015.

Interviews with partner organisations and stakeholders confirmed the importance accorded to the Commonwealth as a global representative body of diverse member states, second only to the UN in diversity. Therefore, positions agreed by Commonwealth member states are given due recognition at international consensus building fora, such as the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), WHO World Health Assembly (WHA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), etc. This aspect alone gives special significance to the consensus building processes of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Secretariat has also attempted to feed consensus building outcomes into the global agenda in several instances. In addition, programme units have developed linkages with regional partners, such as the AU, PIF, Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and CARICOM. In the context of CB, these linkages mostly comprise attendance by representatives of these bodies at the Secretariat's CB events, and vice versa. Some examples of the Secretariat's contribution to the global agenda include the organisation of the first Commonwealth WTO Caucus in Geneva in 2018. Following on the Geneva

Caucus of 2018, the CTMM 2019<sup>24</sup> issued the Commonwealth Statement on the Multilateral Trading System. Similarly, since 2010, under its Group of 20 (G20) outreach, the Secretariat has provided a platform to facilitate information sharing by hosting a technical annual outreach and dialogue with Commonwealth and La Francophonie member states, as well as a political high-level meeting between the G20 President and the two respective Secretary-Generals. In addition, since ministerial consensus at CHMM 2015, the Chair of the CHMM has presented the meeting statement to the WHA.

Moreover, in several cases, the Secretariat holds meetings on the margins of global consensus building events. For instance, the CFMM and Central Bank Governors Meeting (CCBG) are held in the wings of the annual World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings in Washington, DC. The CHMM is held alongside the WHO's World Health Assembly, the CFAMM takes place on the margins of the UN General Assembly, and consultation with national women machineries (NWMs) is held annually for one-to-two days during the annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN CSW) in New York. This strategy supports the Secretariat's CB activities in multiple ways, including via linkages to global dialogue, access to a wider audience, and saving time and money on holding standalone events.

Of the seven programme areas reviewed, Youth and Health were seen to have the highest number of linkages with regional organisations and global CB mechanisms. Also, the CLMM was said to be a unique platform as it addresses 54 countries with a similar history and legal frameworks, while the Economic Policy and Small States (EPSS) Unit specifically addresses the issues of small states, a cause championed in the Commonwealth Charter. On the other hand, the Secretariat's Education and Gender demonstrated comparatively limited CB linkages at both the regional and international levels. Meanwhile, despite its significant potential, the role of CCA could not be determined due to

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24 This includes measures such as removal of user fees for testing and treatment for vulnerable people and support to the establishment of a voluntary mechanism to support the equitable sharing or distribution of excess supplies of essential supplies, such as test kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment, during the global emergency.

its recent establishment and because this would depend upon effective consensus building within the Commonwealth and strong partnerships with regional and global bodies.

### Implications for sustainability

In the context of financial constraints, effective partnerships can provide opportunities for the Commonwealth to improve the sustainability of its Consensus Building programme and enhance the effectiveness of its implementation.

A major potential factor facilitating the strong linkages of the Youth Programme includes its previous regional presence through a centre in each of the four Commonwealth regions. The Youth Division continues to hold biennial meetings of regional ministers<sup>25</sup> in collaboration with the relevant regional bodies, mainly including the AU, PIF, CARICOM and the Pacific Community (SPC). These collaborations allow the Secretariat to reach out to both Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth member countries in these regions. Accordingly, outcomes of these meetings are commitments on youth development from all countries in the region. The Secretariat has also partnered with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), CARICOM, AU, SPC and ASEAN to hold regional workshops to strengthen the capacity of senior officials, youth leaders, national statisticians and civil society organisations, as well as the development of the global and regional-level Youth Development Index (YDI). In addition, the YDI is reflected in

### Impact evidence

The Secretariat is seen a leader in the arena of youth development, as reflected in the adoption of its Youth Development Index (YDI) in the global and country-level strategies and programming of major organisations such as the UNDP Youth Strategy (2014–2017).

the global and country-level strategies and programming of major organisations, such as the UNDP Youth Strategy 2014–2017.

Similarly, Commonwealth health ministers first discussed the issue of NCDs at the CHMM 2007, which was then taken up by CHOGM in 2009 and brought to the global community together with CARICOM Heads of State, leading to the UN Resolution on NCDs in 2011. The Commonwealth Secretariat also majorly contributed to the shaping of global consensus on the inclusion of UHC and NCDs in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its consensus building processes. The Health Unit at the Secretariat also enjoys partnerships with multiple organisations, including the WHO, Commonwealth Foundation, various NGOs, research bodies and Commonwealth-accredited organisations, on a range of areas including UHC, NCDs, COVID-19, a Price and Information Sharing Database, GBV, Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTD) and avoidable blindness, cancer control and malaria. For instance, the Secretariat has been invited by the WHO to participate on the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator technical working group. Going forward, the Health Unit has also initiated discussions with 13 potential partners to leverage in the support of its programmatic work.

Moreover, Commonwealth involvement in Rule of Law was seen to be unique and highly relevant. Some 64 per cent of member states attending the CLMM 2019 responded that the CLMM was unique and had no global comparative forum, while the remaining 36 per cent cited The World Justice Forum, The Singapore Convention, and meetings of regional bodies, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), CARICOM and the Organisation of Eastern and Caribbean States (OECS). However, while Rule of Law enjoys some programme partnerships, such as implementation of the 2018 Cyber Declaration, with organisations such as UN Women, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Association of Women Judges, CARICOM and OECS, etc., it was found not to have strong linkages either with global-level CB bodies on the rule of law, such as The World Justice Forum, or the relevant regional bodies.

By comparison, facilitated by the Education Unit, Commonwealth recommendations were adopted and included in the UNESCO Statement for the Post-2015 Development Framework for Education made in May 2014 in Oman. However, since then,

25 Commonwealth Secretariat (2018), *Six Monthly Progress on Results Report Enabling Outcome – Consensus Building*, July to December, Trade Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

the Secretariat's contribution to the global agenda or regional linkages on education has been limited, despite the development of flagship knowledge and policy tools, such as the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework (CEPF) and the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (CTRP). Moreover, only a few active partnerships have been developed by the Education Unit. Major partners include UNESCO, the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) and CARICOM, but with collaboration often being limited to inputs into CCEM planning and attendance at CB events. Meanwhile, linkages with leading consensus building bodies, such as the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and regional organisations are weak or missing.

Nevertheless, it was determined that some CB mechanisms were not sufficiently flexible to respond to quickly evolving situations. While health and education have been among the social sectors worst affected by COVID-19, a comparison revealed different approaches. For instance, the annual CHMM was held virtually in May 2020 and resulted in agreement between member states to co-ordinate their COVID response;<sup>26</sup> this was highlighted in the COVID-19 Statement issued by Heads of Government in June 2020. On the contrary, while the focus of the next CCEM was due to be on the COVID-19 response, as the next education ministers meeting was scheduled for 2021, there had been no significant discussion among the Commonwealth member states, at any level, on the critical issues of the response to the impacts of COVID-19 on education. Meanwhile, although the 6th EMAG focused on COVID, the meeting resulted in limited outcomes due to this being an open-ended discussion.

Similarly, an internal evaluation of the CFMM in 2018 noted that from the date of a request by CFMM for work in a new area, such as disaster finance or fintech, to the Secretariat being able to define the scope of work, allocate time and resources to invest in this, and then initiating work, the duration was around two-to-three years. Yet a major lesson learned under the CCA is that the Secretariat's CB mechanisms will need to be responsive to the rapidly evolving context of global trade and digital connectivity.

Furthermore, there was found to be little active collaboration between the Secretariat and the other two intergovernmental organisations of

the Commonwealth, i.e., the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Commonwealth Foundation. While these counterparts are engaged by the Secretariat in discussions on aspects such as agenda setting for ministerial meetings, instead of involvement in joint planning, delivery and follow-up on CB, their engagement is often limited to the same level as that of external partners.

## Conclusions

In addition to alignment with and influence on the global agenda in fora such as the UNGA, WHA, WTO and the UN SDGs, the Secretariat's programme units have developed linkages with regional partners such as the AU, PIF, SADC, ASEAN and CARICOM, representatives of which have also attended the Secretariat's CB events and vice versa. However, partnerships with regional organisations were found to be very limited and underdeveloped, particularly in the domain of programme delivery and technical support, which the Secretariat, due to constrained resources, relies on. Major factors that have given some programme areas at the Secretariat an edge over other organisations include previous regional presence and engagement in niche areas of work, such as in the case of Youth, and uniqueness and high relevance of a forum, as in the case of the Rule of Law.

With the advent of COVID-19, it was found that some CB mechanisms were not sufficiently flexible to respond to the rapidly evolving situation. Given the fixed schedule of the MMs, only the CHMM was able to hold its annual meeting, albeit virtually. Instead, for both the Health and Education Sections, their technical and advisory bodies were convened to discuss responses to COVID-19 and for the purposes of knowledge and experience sharing. Given the open-ended discussion format, coupled with participation limited to a subset of total membership, these meetings yielded only limited outcomes.

## 5.4 Consensus building during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a global health crisis that has impacted virtually all facets of life at the social, economic and political levels. For an organisation such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, the COVID-19 pandemic has

<sup>26</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat (2021), op. cit. note 15.

presented unique challenges and disruptions to its work, primarily in the form of preventing in-person gatherings and events – which lay at the heart of what it does. This section charts some of the ways in which the Secretariat has had to innovate and change the way it works in an attempt to meet the challenges posed by the global pandemic. It also presents some of the work it has done in this respect to support its diverse membership, comprising nations at different levels of socioeconomic development, particularly the small states that form the majority of its membership.

The unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the Secretariat having to pivot away from in-person gatherings and events to a virtual modality. Some CB meetings and information exchange events have also been organised by the Secretariat to identify the pan-Commonwealth effects of COVID and ways to overcome these challenges. Due to travel restrictions, several ministerial meetings have been held virtually, including CHMM, CFAMM and an ad hoc meeting of law ministers on the legal aspects of COVID-19.

At the strategic level, the first-ever virtual Commonwealth Leaders Meeting was also held in June 2020, and resulted in a COVID-19 statement issued by Heads of Government, committing to solidarity and mutual support in the area of health, as well as supporting the WHO. It also fulfilled the commitments contained in Resolution WHA73.1 'COVID-19 Response', adopted at the 73rd World Health Assembly, and the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement and Public Health. Other areas for which support was agreed upon included: debt, youth, gender, trade, food security and climate change.

The Heads' commitments on a COVID response with respect to health stemmed from the CHMM held in May 2020. The meeting resulted in consensus on removal of user fees for testing and treatment for vulnerable people; collaboration on vaccine development, diagnostics and therapeutics; and the establishment of a voluntary mechanism to support the equitable sharing or distribution of excess supplies of essential supplies, such as test kits, ventilators and personal protective equipment during the global emergency.

Moreover, to support small states, the Secretariat launched a series of virtual webinars on 'The

Economics of COVID-19', to assess the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and discuss policy responses, focusing on tourism and sovereign debt. The findings of these webinars fed into the CFMM 2020 and the extraordinary meeting for small states in 2020. In addition, the Secretariat has expanded the scope of development of the Voluntary Information and Price Sharing Database (VIPSD), in collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), to focus on tools and diagnostics for COVID-19.

However, since the onset of COVID-19 travel restrictions in 2020, CHOGM and most ministerial meetings have been cancelled. In particular, the cancellation of CHOGM, which was to be held in 2020, has affected consensus building at the strategic level. For instance, CHOGM had special importance for the CCA, as an endorsement from Heads of States was expected to have resulted in stronger country-level commitment for this new initiative of the Secretariat.

Holding virtual meetings has revealed that while this modality puts less pressure on budgets and ensures the participation of many stakeholders who would not otherwise have been able to attend physical events, it was also observed to have significant drawbacks. In particular, digital connectivity and literacy in most member states, especially small states, can hamper meeting attendance and participation. Moreover, building consensus at the ministerial level requires extensive dialogue and face-to-face diplomacy, both of which are absent in online modality, where events otherwise scheduled for an entire day have to be squeezed into one to two hours.

## 5.5 Management and support

The success of Consensus Building also depends on management and resources available at the Secretariat. Over the two SP periods examined in this evaluation, the Secretariat has faced increasingly limited resources. This has led to a reduction in staff and budgets that has negatively impacted its capacity to implement and monitor scheduled activities, guide programming in new directions, and develop or maintain new partnerships. Limited budgets also affect the Secretariat's ability to have a sustainable impact, as it is unable to respond to provide support to the outcomes of CB events. Human resource and financial challenges aside, the Secretariat also

faces challenges in terms of monitoring, evaluation and learning, with weak, unstructured and limited monitoring processes across the different programme units of the Secretariat. This deprives the Secretariat of opportunities to learn, monitor progress on the implementation of ministerial outcomes, better adapt to the needs of member states, and assess the impact and effectiveness of its units. This section assesses and elaborates on issues pertaining to the efficiency of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Consensus Building Programme in relation to project management and staffing, financial management, and monitoring mechanisms and their impact on CB.

### 5.5.1 Project management and staffing

CB events are managed by the respective unit, which is responsible for undertaking or contracting fact-based research; conducting advocacy through webinars and bilateral meetings; co-ordinating with the offices of the Secretary-General, other programme/corporate units as applicable, the host country and partners; and promoting the meeting outcomes at relevant global and regional platforms. When planning and organising CB events, collaboration is sought from other units within the Secretariat and external partners, as and when needed. For instance, Rule of Law works in close collaboration with the Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform, the Human Rights Unit and other departments. Similarly, the EPSS Unit draws on the linkages and expertise of the trade team. Meanwhile, those departments providing support and cross-cutting functions, such as the Events and Protocols, Communications, and Gender, are engaged most regularly. Furthermore, recognising the influence of political issues on implementation, some programme activities also seek participation of the Political Division (POL) through participation on planning committees, etc. Similarly, the responsible unit incorporates partner and/or senior officials' feedback when finalising the agenda for ministerial meetings.

However, a major issue faced by the Secretariat during the implementation period under review has been its severely reduced staffing capacity, resulting from funding constraints. In addition, some areas have experienced delays during the recruitment process, which has impacted the teams' ability to respond to evolving contexts. For instance, the Connectivity Agenda Section, which was a new initiative as an outcome of the 2018 CHOGM,

reported that a standard recruitment process could take up to 12 months before a new employee was in post, largely due to delays at the interview stage, while an expedited recruitment process could take eight-to-nine months from advertisement to deployment for a 24-month role.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the project did not have dedicated staff assigned to it until Q1 2019/20. In the absence of dedicated support staff, the team had to rely on the already-scarce divisional staff and young professionals, as and when these resources became available. Similarly, the Youth Division reported significant staff gaps in the first two years of implementing the 2017/18–2020/21 Strategic Plan.

Similar challenges were faced by many other of the interviewed units, with many positions vacant at all levels or being filled by acting staff. In addition, many temporary staff were working on contracts of three-to-six months duration, thereby resulting in uncertainty, low morale and comprised institutional memory. A prominent example was the Health Unit, staffed by only three individuals, two of these being on short-term contracts of three-to-six months duration.

Limited staffing in particular affects the Secretariat's capacity to implement and monitor scheduled activities, guide programming in new directions, and develop or maintain new partnerships. In the case of CB, the staffing levels were found to be not sufficient to undertake the advocacy required for effective consensus building among the 54 member states. Although staff were technical subject-matter experts, it was not clear whether the majority of the staff possessed the key skills required for effective consensus building. At the very least, participants at various levels of CB meetings, including SOMs, MMs and the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), reported late provision of research documents, giving them little or no time to undertake advance preparation. The limited incidence of partnerships and programme areas in an evolving context, such as digital connectivity or COVID-19, made the burden on the limited Secretariat staff even more pronounced.

### 5.5.2 Financial management

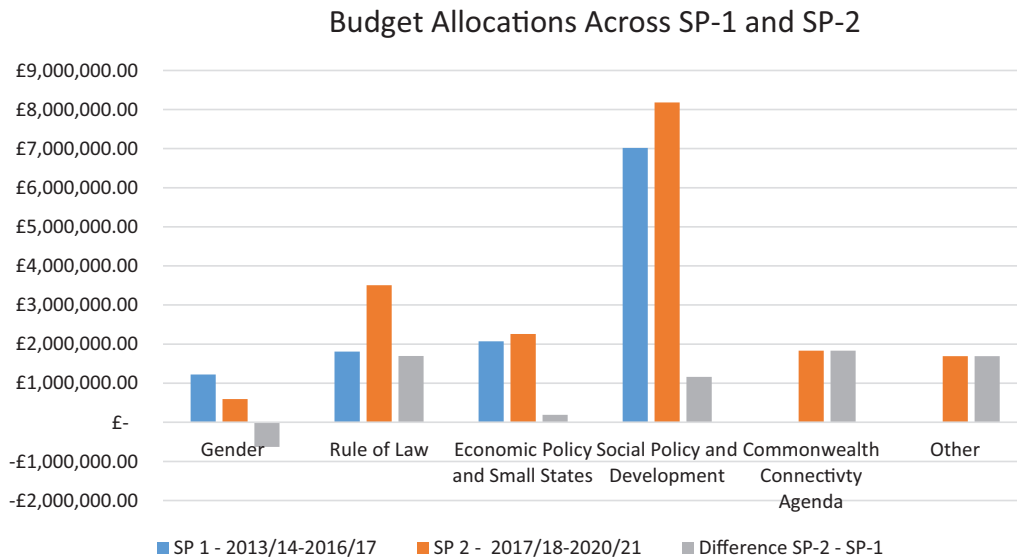
The reviewed programme areas were allocated a budget of 11.54 million GB pounds (GBP) in Strategic Plan 2013/14–2017/18 (SP-1). In the subsequent

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<sup>27</sup> CFMM 2018 and CLMM 2019.



**Figure 5.2 Budget allocations across SP-1 and SP-2**



Note: 'Other' includes YACWG1048: Support for Consensus Building and YACWG1032: Consensus Building Political CHOGM etc.

Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21 (SP-2), this allocation grew by 36 per cent to GBP 18.06 million. A comparison of the two SP budgets showed that allocation for Rule of Law saw the highest increase (48%), due to the receipt of extra-budgetary resources (EBR) funding for its Cyber Project, followed by the Social Policy and Development Section (comprising the Youth, Health, Education and Sports teams) at 14 per cent and Economic Policy and Small States at 8 per cent. Conversely, the budget for the Gender Unit decreased by -51 per cent from GBP 1.22 million in SP-1 to GBP 0.59 million in SP-2, as shown in Figure 5.2. In addition, the CCA, initiated as a new programme area, was allocated GBP 1.83 million in SP-2.

Major reasons for programme-wise budget reductions were the decline in Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) funds, as well as the addition of new programme areas, such as the CCA. Overall, CFTC fell from being 47 per cent of the funding source in SP-1 for the programmes under review, to only 19 per cent in SP-2.

### Implications for sustainability

The CFTC Fund, a mutual and voluntary fund, has seen its share of total funding dwindle from 47 per cent in SP-1 to only 19 per cent in SP-2. This has had grave implications for the Secretariat's ability to provide technical support and services to its member states and implement action items from MMs.

Prior to SP-2, finance data were aggregate at the programme level and lacked a clear distinction between the programming and consensus building budgeting. The downward budgetary trends in most programme areas, accompanied by the fact that there are now stand-alone project documents for ministerial meetings, means that a large proportion of the budget is spent on consensus building. During SP-2, Rule of Law contributed the largest share of its budget (66%) to CB, followed by Gender (43%), Health (33%), EPSS (29%) and Education (29%). On the other hand, CCA has spent 100 per cent of its budget towards CB, as it aimed to implement Phase I of its Action Plan. Also, the significant proportional allotment to consensus building meetings necessitates that only a limited portion can be spared for implementation of the extensive mandates resulting from these meetings.

Budgetary constraints have also forced programme teams to economise on CB measures, at the risk of lower effectiveness. In particular, the Global Biennial Conference on Small States (GBCSS) 2020/21 and CCA CHOGM side events were dropped from the Secretariat schedule due to limited funding availability. Therefore, despite having the highest allocation as compared to the other CB mechanisms reviewed, finance has also remained a challenge to delivering activities under CCA. Moreover, to avoid printing costs, EPSS is planning to distribute background papers online, while Rule of Law did not print hard copies of policy papers

for CLMM 2019. However, as these units serve small member states that often have the largest digital divide, it is likely that these papers will not be easily accessible to all stakeholders. In fact, in many instances, delegates from small states have already reported difficulty accessing online resources/platforms, such as the 'Huddle' platform. Similarly, the Health Unit, for the same reason, also sometimes relies on its partners to assist with policy research on a pro bono basis.

More importantly, across the board, limited budgets also affect the Secretariat's ability to have a sustainable impact, as it is unable to respond to provide support to the outcomes of CB events. For instance, progress on two key workstreams originating at CFMM, namely G20 engagement as well as tax and regulation, has gradually waned, with the former being directly linked to the inability of the Secretariat to fund and recruit required technical expertise.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the CCA team requires a significant budget to respond to the connectivity gaps identified during Phase I of the CCA Action Plan.

### 5.5.3 Monitoring

Progress against each consensus building project is reported against established outcome and output indicators outlined in the project documents. However, most indicators were found to be quantitative, aimed at recording physical progress and not impact. Moreover, these indicators only ostensibly reflect effectiveness, for example, number of participants but not the quality of discussion.

Further, monitoring processes were found to be either absent or unstructured and weak, at best. In general, monitoring of consensus building events depends on post-event participant surveys conducted by some departments, sometimes in collaboration with the SPPDD. However, in the absence of an overarching CB monitoring framework, feedback is not collected consistently for every meeting, as monitoring is subject to the decisions of the respective department.

In addition, the survey response rate is very weak across the board, with only a handful of participants responding to the surveys. Moreover, the feedback forms are not always directly aligned with the established outcome and output indicators. A sample monitoring form is provided in Annex 7. The limited monitoring data obtained is neither stored in a uniform monitoring database nor analysed.

The opportunity for in-depth evaluation had also remained limited, as only two ministerial meetings had been evaluated at the time of this report,<sup>29</sup> both internally, under the current strategic plan 2017/18–2020/21. In fact, there were no established guidelines for undertaking such evaluations. Hence, there is limited opportunity for collating and applying lessons learned from one event to the next. Further, programme evaluations conducted by the Secretariat, for example, country-level evaluations or thematic evaluations, only briefly touch on Consensus Building – despite it being a cross-cutting outcome in the 2013/14–2020/21 Strategic Plan.

While some commitments resulting from CB events are integrated into Secretariat programming, the large majority are to be voluntarily adopted by member states using their own resources. Some ministerial meetings, for example, CHMM since 2015, are followed by the development of an Action Plan or accompanied by timelines and achievement targets, such as halving malaria across the Commonwealth by 2030 and eliminating blinding trachoma by 2020 under Health.

However, in the absence of outcome monitoring, it is unclear the extent to which mandates/commitments made at CB events by member states are delivered; and it is also unclear which mandates do not eventually form a part of the Secretariat's direct programming interventions.

Some political-level monitoring and support mechanisms are in place to review progress on CB outcomes, such as the country-level adoption of commitments made at CB events, such as the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG), the Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Task Force (CYMTF), and the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH), etc. Although, the monitoring conducted by these bodies informs

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28 SEOM: Senior Education Officials' Meeting  
CFAMM: Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers' Meeting  
WAMM: Women's Affairs Ministers' Meeting  
CYMM: Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting  
SFOM: Senior Finance Officials' Meeting  
SYDF: Stakeholders In Youth Development Forum  
YLF: Young Leaders Forum

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29 The Programme Logic was first introduced in the Terms of References for this evaluation. It was also presented in the lessons paper on consensus building: Commonwealth Secretariat (2021), op. cit. footnote 1.

Secretariat programming and is also reported at CB events such as ministerial meetings, it does not feed into the Secretariat's results-based management (RBM) processes. Moreover, the monitoring function performed by these bodies varies according to programme needs, and results are not reported against any established indicators. In addition, while some of the policy research undertaken by the Secretariat, such as the 'Status Update Report on Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth', may include monitoring on development goals agreed at global fora and serve as a baseline tool for policy-making, these results cannot be traced back directly to the outcomes of the Consensus Building Programme.

### Implications for impact

Current monitoring mechanisms can be further strengthened to improve the Secretariat's ability to trace back results directly to outcomes from Consensus Building

Finally, considering the limited staffing and financial capacity of the Secretariat, a major challenge with monitoring outcomes of CB events is also the broad agenda and inclusion of new agenda items, as well as the open-ended commitments reported in the outcome statements, without specifying targets or action plans. In addition, the voluntary nature of commitments means that implementation of outcomes is not binding on member states.

## Conclusions

The efficiency of the Secretariat's CB Programme is impacted by factors such as project management and staffing, financial resources, and monitoring mechanisms. During the two SP periods under review, the staffing capacity of the Secretariat was severely reduced as a result of funding constraints, which impacted teams' ability to respond effectively to evolving contexts, guide programming in new directions and develop new partnerships. In addition, slow recruitment processes resulted in vacant positions or positions filled by acting staff and a reliance on already-scarce divisional staff to carry out sectional functions. Funding constraints are prominent in the programme-related CFTC fund, which declined from being 47 per cent of the funding source in SP-1 to only 19 per cent in SP-2, thereby increasing the pressure on the COMSEC Fund. In addition, a significant proportion of the overall section budget is allocated to CB activities, which reduces the proportion of funds for implementation of action items generated from ministerial meetings.

Monitoring mechanisms are inconsistently present in only some of the sections and largely take the form of post-MM surveys and feedback forms, which broadly have low response rates. Mechanisms for monitoring of MM outcomes are present, most notably in Health, Education and Youth; however, these still do not feed into the Secretariat's RBM processes and are not reported against any established indicators, which makes tracing results back to outcomes challenging.



# 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the Consensus Building Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat remains relevant to the needs of member states, especially small states. In addition, programming priorities of the Secretariat are often informed by consensus building. However, the broad agenda, unstructured approach, limited resources, weak monitoring, and inadequate definition and management of partnerships are all major challenges to effective consensus building and sustainable establishment of thought leadership to influence the regional and global agendas.

The following recommendations are presented based on this in-depth evaluation of the Consensus Building Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat:

## I. Consensus Building outcomes

In order to improve the CB outcomes, it is critical that, as a first step, the Secretariat addresses the frequently cited issue of broad agenda items by focusing on only one-to-three areas where it has the potential for developing a niche while also serving its member states. The Youth Development Index (YDI) is an example of an existing programme area, while support to harmonisation of digital connectivity policies can be another potential area to focus on.

Buy-in for these selected areas must be obtained from member states. Moreover, in the interest of impact and sustainability, it is critical that there is continuity of dialogue and advocacy on the select areas. Therefore, there must be a clear understanding and strategy for continued tabling of the selected items during all consensus building events pertaining to the relative programmatic area.

Furthermore, it is critical to develop a result-oriented implementation plan for the mandates arising from each ministerial meeting. This plan should be developed by the Secretariat and agreed upon by ministers; it should also elaborate the approach to implementation, along with resources required and time-bound actions.

## II. Monitoring

To resolve the issue of inadequate and ad hoc monitoring, it is recommended that the SPPDD develops and implements a monitoring framework for the Consensus Building Programme, while also keeping in view the nuances of CB, such as the understanding that building consensus is an incremental and slow process. Key elements of the monitoring framework should be tracking progress against indicators, regular and systematic evaluations of consensus building projects, as well as monitoring of outcomes and impact. Results from monitoring activities should be analysed and lessons integrated into future activities.

Furthermore, to efficiently assess the implementation status of mandates arising from consensus building meetings, partnerships must be developed with regional organisations or those with in-country presence, such as agencies of the United Nations.

## III. Links with programming

To establish a common approach to consensus building, it is imperative that a Secretariat-wide Consensus Building Framework is developed, with clear linkages to other outcomes. Moreover, while there is some value in having separate project design documents (PDDs) for consensus building, as it ensures the availability of dedicated resources, CB must also be integrated into all other relevant PDDs, with linkages between CB and programming clearly identified in the latter.

In addition, similar to Gender and Partnerships, if or when resources permit in the future, the Secretariat may want to consider the establishment of a unit dedicated to the implementation and monitoring of the CB Framework. In that case, it is also recommended that the staff of the proposed CB unit be highly experienced in relevant skills, such as advocacy and communication, to effectively implement the CB Framework.

#### IV. Resource and management

For effective utilisation of existing partnerships, it is imperative that these engagements are critically reviewed and prioritised in accordance with the potential for financial leverage, outreach to member states, and influence on regional and global agendas. In addition, it is highly recommended that new partnerships are actively sought in line with these criteria. In this regard, the Secretariat must align itself with leading organisations in the respective programme areas, e.g. Global Partnership for Education (GPE), regional intergovernmental organisations such as the AU and CARICOM, and UN agencies with a country presence. In addition, there is a need to explore a more active and unified role with the other two Commonwealth IGOs, the COL and Commonwealth Foundation. However, in the interest of effectiveness, partnerships must be formalised beyond MOUs, such as in the form of partnership agreements and joint projects.

Moreover, for effective delivery and responsiveness, Secretariat staffing levels must match the extensive management responsibility associated with planning, implementing, co-ordinating and monitoring consensus building events. In view of limited financial resources, this gap may be filled with multiple strategies, such as hiring new Secretariat staff, requesting secondments from member states and relying on partnerships. In addition, the Secretariat's hiring processes must be reviewed and updated to facilitate shorter hiring processes and more stable contract durations.

Furthermore, in the interest of economy, there is some potential for organising hybrid CB events. However, before instituting such measures, it is critical that lessons learned from the experience of online meetings held during COVID-19 are considered.

# Annexes

## Annex 1. Programmatic scope of the evaluation

#	OECD/DAC criteria	Key area of focus
1.	<b>Effectiveness</b>	How effectively has the Commonwealth Secretariat utilised its convening power to the benefit of Commonwealth member states?
2.	<b>Efficiency</b>	How well is the Secretariat utilising and managing its resources?
3.	<b>Relevance</b>	How well do the consensus building projects' objectives and design respond to member states' needs, policies and priorities, and would continue to do so as the global context changes?
4.	<b>Coherence/alignment</b>	How well do consensus building projects fit within the overarching programmes and with the actions of other institutions functioning within the same context?
5.	<b>Impact</b>	To what extent has the Consensus Building Programme delivered to longer-term/high-level social, environmental, governance and economic changes (positive or negative, intended or unintended)?
6.	<b>Sustainability</b>	How likely are the identified benefits to persist over time and what are the key enablers and risks to sustained benefits?
7.	<b>Lessons</b>	What are the factors, drivers, opportunities, capacities and processes that foster effective implementation of consensus building activities?

## Annex 2. List of documents reviewed

### Annual results reports

1. Annual Results Report (2013–14, 2014–15, 2015–16, 2016–17, 2018–19)

### Six monthly reports

2. Six Monthly Results Report (Jul–Dec 2013, Jan–Jun 2014, Jul–Dec 2014, Jan–Jun 2015, Jul–Dec 2015, Jan–Jun 2016, Jul–Dec 2016, Jul–Dec 2017, Jul–Dec 2018)
3. Notes for Six Monthly Report 2019, 2020

### Biennial report

4. Biennial Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 2013/2015
5. Biennial Report of the Commonwealth Secretary-General 2018

### Charter of the Commonwealth

6. Charter of the Commonwealth

### Evaluations

7. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management Programme 2003/04–2008/09
8. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Programme of Technical Assistance on Maritime Boundary Delimitation 2003/04–2008/09
9. Evaluation of Phase 2 of the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative
10. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Public Private Partnership Programme
11. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat's Support to Member Countries on Criminal Law
12. Impact Assessment of Malta-Commonwealth Secretariat Third-Country Training Programmes 2004–12
13. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Support to Belize 2007–12
14. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Support to Sri Lanka 2007–12
15. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Support to Kenya 2008–12
16. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Support to Solomon Islands 2007/08–2012/13
17. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat support to Member Countries on Legislative Drafting
18. Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Small States in Geneva on Multilateral Trade Issues
19. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007–2015
20. Evaluation of Singapore – Commonwealth Third-Country Training Programme
21. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Connects Programme
22. Review and Renewal of Commonwealth Media Development Fund (CMDf)
23. End of Term Review of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005–2015
24. Meta-Evaluation Report – 2016
25. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Strategic Plan 2013/14 – 2016/17
26. Review of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)
27. Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Programme Evaluation
28. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Support to Namibia, 2013/14–2016/17 (A)
29. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Support to Namibia, 2013/14–2016/17 (B)
30. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Support to Papua New Guinea, 2013/14–2016/17
31. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Democracy Programme 2013/14–2016/17
32. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Support to Guyana 2013/14–2016/17

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  34. Mid-Term Review of the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21
  35. Final Evaluation of the Hub and Spokes Programme
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  38. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Countering Violent Extremism Programme
  39. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) – Volume I – Final Report
  40. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) – Volume II – Case Studies & Desk Reviews
  41. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) – Volume III – Appendices
  42. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) – Volume I – Final Report
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  44. Impact Assessment Report – The Bahamas
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  46. Monitoring and Evaluation – Belize August 2019 Mission – Final
  47. Study on the Commonwealth Secretariat's Follow-Up and Utilisation of Evaluation Findings – Final Report
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  50. Evaluation and Learning Lessons Log
  51. Evidence Mapping Notes
  52. Impact from Evaluation Studies (April 2016–2020)
  53. Monitoring Mission – Learning Outcomes
  54. Lessons from Country Evaluations 2019–2020
  55. Top 5 Lessons from Country Evaluations
  56. Lesson Learnt from MEL
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  58. CFMM Monitoring Mission Report – DRAFT
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60. Allied Economic Forum
  61. Evaluating Coalitions and Networks: Frameworks, Needs, and Opportunities
  62. The World's Bank: An Evaluation of the World Bank Group's Global Convening
  63. Forthcoming Ministerial, Heads of Government and High-Level Meetings
  64. Economic Policy Division Memorandum
- PSGU – cabinet secretaries meeting**
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  68. Civil service chiefs to meet on emerging challenges, opportunities
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70. Commonwealth Secretariat Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) presentation Cabinet Secretaries Meeting 27 March
71. Pan-Commonwealth Heads of Public Service/ Cabinet Secretaries Meeting – Building Public Service Resilience to Support Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction
72. The Role of the Public Service in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieving SDGs: Adapting the values and principles of the Agenda to national level Service delivery
73. Strengthening the Political-Administrative Interface to Enhance Synergy & Efficiency in Service Delivery
74. The Importance of the Rule of Law and Good Governance in strengthening public institutions for sustainable development
75. The Commonwealth Principles (Latimer House) on the Relationship between the Three Branches of Government: Twenty Years on
76. The impact of global dynamics on financing for development
77. The Role of Cabinet Secretaries /Heads of Public Service in National Development
78. The impact of global dynamics on financing of Africa's development

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79. Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan
80. Commonwealth Secretariat Revised Strategic Plan – 2013/14–2016/17

**ToRs**

81. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Consensus Building Programme – ToR

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82. CHOGM 2018 – Impact Story
83. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report Enabling January to June 2018
84. Project Design Document – Support for Consensus Building

85. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report – Support for Consensus Building

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86. Commonwealth Finance Minister's Meeting (CFMM) and G20 Outreach

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87. The Commonwealth-La Francophonie G20 Annual Dialogue
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  89. Economics Youth and Social Division Memorandum
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  91. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting – Summary 2019
  92. CFMM Chairs Summary 2018 Signed
  93. Copy of draft MEL PLAN TOOL for C3
  94. Evaluation of the Commonwealth Consensus Building – Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM)
  95. FINAL DRAFT – Commonwealth Finance Ministers Statement on COVID-19 – October 2020
  96. History of CFMM
  97. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting – Minister of Finance of Cyprus, Mr Harris Georgiades' Opening Remarks
  98. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting 2020 – Securing Fiscal Sustainability: Options for navigating COVID-19 crisis
  99. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting 2020 – COVID-19 effects on Tourism and a future with Blue Green Tourism
  100. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting 2020 – Reviving Economic Growth through Smart Agriculture
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  102. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting – Summary 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020

103. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting – Directory of Delegates and Secretariat 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020
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112. Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting – Proceedings Report
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115. G20 Outcome Statement 2014, 2015, 2016
116. Participation List 2014, 2015, 2016
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118. Hangzhou CAR \_G20 Development Commitments
119. Commonwealth and La Francophonie Perspectives on the Accountability of the G20 and its Development Agenda 2016
120. Update on G20 Engagement – 2016
121. The Commonwealth-La Francophonie G20 Annual Dialogue – Summary 2017
122. The G20 Agenda: Recent Outcomes, Opportunities and Challenges 2017
123. The Commonwealth-La Francophonie G20 Annual Dialogue 2018: Meeting Summary
124. Commonwealth/La Francophonie – G20 Engagement 2018 BTOR

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126. GBCSS Delegate List 2014, 2019
127. BTOR GBCSS and OEMWG 2014, 2019

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128. Achieving Consensus to Tackle the Impact of COVID-19 – 2021
129. Successful Delivery of 2019 CFMM
130. Small States Weather the Storm Together at Commonwealth Conference on Disaster Finance – 2019
131. Reinventing CFMM – 2018

#### **Ministerial meetings on small states**

132. CMSS Chair's Summary 2013
133. Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Small States: Co-chairs Summary Final 2018
134. CMMSS Outcomes Update 2018
135. CMMSS List of Participants 2018, 2020
136. CMMSS Summary of Evaluation 2018
137. Summary Of Discussion: Extraordinary Meeting of Commonwealth Small States and IFIs 2020
138. Extraordinary Meeting of Commonwealth Small States Finance Ministers & IFI on COVID-19: Summary 2020

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139. Quarterly Reports (July to Sep 2018, July to Sep 2019, Jan to Mar 2020, July to Sep 2020)

#### **Six monthly reports**

140. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (July to Dec 2017, Jan to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June 2019, July to Dec 2019, Jan to June 2020, July to Dec 2020)

#### **Small states – research conference**

141. Commonwealth Small States Centre of Excellence (CSSCoE) Research Conference
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143. Research Conference SS Summary and Outcomes

#### **Small states – UNGA**

144. COVID-19, Vulnerability and the Urgent Need for Access to Finance in Small States

145. Commonwealth Secretariat and AOSIS High-Level Meeting Co-Chairs' Summary

#### **Gender**

146. Gender Policy Dialogue and Advocacy with Member States

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147. 12WAMM – Agenda

148. 12WAMM – Letter of Invitation from Government of Kenya

149. 12WAMM Senior Officials Meeting Provisional Agenda

150. 12WAMM SOM Report

151. Commonwealth Women's Forum – Zero Draft – 2018

152. 2018 Commonwealth Women's Forum Report V2

153. Annual Consultation of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries – 2018

154. Aide – Memoire – Rwanda

155. Annex 2 – Aide Memoire

156. Back to Office Report (BTOR) – 12WAMM – Kenya – 2018

157. BTOR – 12WAMM Mission to Kenya – May 2019

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159. BTOR – Inclusive Trade Launch

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162. CSW62 (2018) Information Brief

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165. Final Report – Launch of JBB ON VAWG, July 2016

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167. MOU with ITC and Commonwealth Secretariat – 11 Sep 2018

168. MEL Plan tool

169. Report on UN CSW 2020 – 9 Mar 2020

170. Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers for Women's Affairs and Gender and Development on COVID-19 – Proposed Practical Action

171. CSW 2018 Commonwealth Statement – First Draft – 25 Oct 17

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172. Guide for gender mainstreaming for ministerial meetings

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176. Eleventh Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting – 'Gender Equality through Sustainable Development in An Inclusive Commonwealth' – 2016

177. WAMM Delegates Directory 2016

178. 12th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (12WAMM) – Accelerating Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Sustainable Development – 2019

179. Final 12WAMM\_Proceedings Rpt, Jan 2020



180. WAMM – Accelerating Gender Equality by Gender Mainstreaming

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181. Convening of Commonwealth Health Ministers and Senior Officials

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182. 67 HMC Draft Programme – Provisional
183. BTOR CHMM 2018
184. CHMM Outcomes – Internal Advocacy Events
185. MEL Plan Tool
186. Final 2018 WHA statement
187. EYSD-BTOR Uganda-Tanzania March 2018
188. ECSA-HC – the Commonwealth Secretariat at the Technical Committee meeting
189. Final Health Ministerial Statement 2018
190. London Global Cancer Week-Cancer in the Commonwealth-Programme
191. Resolutions of the 67th Ministers Conference
192. Universal Health Coverage: Experience and lessons from SADC countries
193. SPD All Mission Form Part 2 of 2 BTOR – PMNCH 2018
194. SPD ALL Mission Form Part 2 of 2 BTOR – SADC ECSA CACH

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195. CHMM Delegations Directory 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
196. CHMM Ministerial Statement 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
197. Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting Final Outcome Statement 2020

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198. Stakeholders commend 2018 Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting and disseminate outcomes
199. SADC Health Ministers Meeting 2019
200. CACH held in Pacific for the first time
201. CACH Kenya
202. Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting commended – 2019

203. Commonwealth Action on Cervical Cancer

204. Commonwealth Impact on HRH issues and regional priorities

205. Ministerial Round Table on Tackling Cervical Cancer

206. ECSA and University of York to explore partnerships and opportunities for Research

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207. Quarterly Reports (July to Sep 2019, July to Sep 2020)

### Six monthly reports

208. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (July to Dec 2017, Jan to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June 2019, July to Dec 2019, July to Dec 2020)

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209. Convening of Commonwealth Education Ministers and Senior Officials

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210. Education Programme Report 2015–17
211. Bangladesh Today
212. CCEM Programme discussion – Attendance List
213. News Today
214. Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG)
215. Naya Digonta
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217. 20 CCEM Evaluation Report
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220. 20CCEM Thematic Issues Paper TOR for USP
221. Sustainable Development Goal 4 in the Commonwealth
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- 226. Proceedings of the Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education Technical Working Group Meeting – 2019
- 227. CEP\_Agreement
- 228. EMAG 2019
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- 230. EMAG Minutes 01 May 2019
- 231. EMAG Report 2020
- 232. Fiji 20 CCEM Planning Mission programme 2017 – Draft
- 233. Integrated Partners' Forum Evaluation Report
- 234. Delegates at the Integrated Partners' Forum (20CCEM)
- 235. IPF Joint Statement \_ Final
- 236. Programme – HC Briefing
- 237. Revised Issues Paper

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- 238. 19<sup>th</sup> CCEM Report Final – 2015
- 239. CCEM Delegates Directory 2015
- 240. Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers: The Nassau Declaration
- 241. CCEM Proceedings Report – 2018
- 242. Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers: Nadi Declaration Education Can Deliver – 2018

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- 243. 20 CCEM promotional story on Commonwealth website
- 244. Action by member countries on 20 CCEM mandates
- 245. Commonwealth Education Good Practice Awards 2018

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- 246. Quarterly Reports (July to Sep 2019, Jan to Mar 2020)

#### **Six monthly reports**

- 247. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (July to Dec 2017, Jan to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June 2019, July to Dec 2019, July to Dec 2020)

#### **Rule of law**

- 248. Access to Justice Initiatives Reporting in PMIS
- 249. CLMM 2019 Monitoring Mission Report – FINAL
- 250. CLMM Outcome Statement FINAL
- 251. Completed feedback forms CLMM 2017
- 252. Final LMSCJ 2018 Outcome statement
- 253. Final Outcome Statement SOLM 2018
- 254. LMSCJ 2018 – Completed feedback forms
- 255. SOLM 2018 – Completed feedback forms
- 256. MEL Plan Tool
- 257. LMSCJ 2018 Feedback Analysis
- 258. SOLM 2018 Feedback Analysis

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- 259. 'Fantastic' Commonwealth initiatives commended for promoting rule of law
- 260. Law Ministers Meeting unique and essential forum
- 261. Online legal resource unveiled at Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting
- 262. Law Ministers Meeting ends with pledge to reform key legislation
- 263. The rule of law work of the Secretariat widely disseminated
- 264. Small Commonwealth jurisdictions promote the rule of law

#### **Quarterly reports**

- 265. Quarterly Reports (July to Sep 2018, Oct to Dec 2018, July to Sep 2019, Jan to Mar 2020, July to Sep 2020)

#### **Six monthly reports**

- 266. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (July to Dec 2017, Jan to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June 2019, July to Dec 2019, Jan to June 2020, July to Dec 2020)

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- 267. SOLM Delegates Directory 2013, 2016
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- 269. SOLM 2013 Record of Proceedings

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284. Project Design Document – Consensus Building
- Attachment**
285. MEL Plan Consensus Building 2020–2021
- CEN – Commonwealth Electoral Network**
286. CEN Biennial Conference Report 2014
287. Steering Committee Report 2014
288. Extraordinary Steering Committee Meeting – 2015
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292. Election Management: A Compendium of Commonwealth Good Practice
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294. Independence of Election Management Bodies
295. New Media and the Conduct of Elections
296. Voter Registration
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299. POL Memo – CFAMM Summary Record
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307. CHOGM 2018 Leaders Statement
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- CHOGM Liaison Committee Jan 2020**
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314. CWF – CHOGM Liaison Committee

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316. LCM – Presentations – Circular Note
317. CHOGM 2020 – Liaison Committee & Media Liaison Committee Meetings: Agenda & Programme
318. Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Liaison Committee Meeting 2020
319. Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Liaison Committee Meeting – Provisional Agenda
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321. Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Rwanda
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- COW**
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324. COW Delegates Directory – 2013
325. COW 2013: Administrative Arrangements
326. COW 2013: Provisional Agenda and Documentation
327. COW 2013: Provisional Timetable
- PRE-CHOGM CFAMM 2013**
328. Directory of Liaison Officers and Personal Security Officers
329. Foreign Ministers' Dialogue with Associated Organisations (AOs)
330. PRE-CHOGM 2013: Administrative Arrangements
331. Proposed Draft Hambantota Youth Declaration
332. Proposed Draft Statement on International Trade CHOGM 2013
- CMAG**
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335. Press Release on Maldives 2013
336. Statement on Maldives by CMAG 2013
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347. CMAG 53<sup>rd</sup> Meeting concluding statement
348. CMAG 54<sup>th</sup> Meeting concluding statement
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350. CMAG 56<sup>th</sup> Meeting concluding statement
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353. Paper to the Management Committee: The Withdrawal of The Gambia from Membership of Commonwealth
354. CMAG Delegation list (Feb 2016, Apr 2016)
355. CMAG Report to CHOGM 2015
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359. 2013 Rwanda Legislative Elections (Chamber of Deputies)
360. 2013 Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council Elections
361. 2013 Swaziland National Elections
362. 2014 Antigua and Barbuda General Election
363. 2014 Botswana general elections

364. 2014 Dominica General Election
  365. 2014 Malawi tripartite elections
  366. 2014 Maldives people's Majlis elections
  367. 2014 Mozambique Presidential, National and Provincial Assembly Elections
  368. 2014 Namibia Presidential and National Assembly Elections
  369. 2014 Solomon Islands general election
  370. 2014 Solomon Islands General Elections
  371. 2014 South African national and provincial elections
  372. 2015 Autonomous Region of Bougainville General Elections
  373. 2015 Guyana National and Regional Elections
  374. 2015 Lesotho National Assembly Elections
  375. 2015 Nigeria Presidential and National Assembly Elections
  376. 2015 Seychelles Presidential Elections
  377. 2015 Sri Lanka Parliamentary Elections
  378. 2015 Sri Lanka Presidential Election
  379. 2015 St Kitts and Nevis Parliamentary Elections
  380. 2015 St Vincent and the Grenadines general elections
  381. 2015 Tanzania General Elections
  382. 2015 Trinidad and Tobago Parliamentary Elections
  383. 2016 Ghana General Elections
  384. 2016 Nauru General Election
  385. 2016 Uganda general elections
  386. 2016 Vanuatu General Elections
  387. 2016 Zambia general elections and referendum
  388. 2017 Bahamas General Elections
  389. 2017 Lesotho National Assembly elections – Feb
  390. 2017 Lesotho National Assembly elections – June
  391. 2017 PNG National Elections
  392. 2018 Pakistan General Elections
  393. 2019 Maldives Parliamentary Elections
  394. 2019 Mozambique Presidential and National and Provincial Assembly Elections
  395. 2019 Namibia Presidential and National Assembly Elections
  396. 2019 Nigeria General Elections
  397. 2019 Solomon Islands National General Elections
  398. 2019 Sri Lanka Presidential Elections
  399. Bougainville Election Report 2010
  400. Solomon Islands – ESS impact story
- Quarterly reports**
401. Quarterly Reports (July to Sep 2018, Oct to Dec 2018)
- Six monthly reports**
402. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (July to Dec 2017, Jan to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June 2019, July to Dec 2019)
- Trade Connectivity**
403. Project Design Document – Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting)
- Attachment**
404. BTOR – 1st Meeting of the Digital & Physical Connectivity Clusters
  405. Action Plan
  406. Annex 1 Private Sector Engagement Nairobi
  407. Delegates List (Sep 2017, March 2019, May 2019, Apr 2019)
  408. Annex 8 – Final 2019 CTMM Communique
  409. Annex II – Agenda and Programme
  410. Annex III – CTMR Overview
  411. Annex IV – Secretariat Presentations
  412. Annex V Scoping Issues
  413. Annex VI – Connectivity Case Studies
  414. Annex VI Submission from Mauritius
  415. Annex VII Physical Connectivity

- 416. Annex VIII Digital Connectivity
- 417. Annex X Business to Business Connectivity
- 418. Annex XII Green Economy
- 419. Annex XIII Women Youth and Indigenous People
- 420. Annex XV Commonwealth Games Trade Event
- 421. Annex XVI Work Plan
- 422. Annex XVII UK Presentation on CHOGM 2018
- 423. Background Note on Regulatory Cluster
- 424. Background notes for circulation SSC PDF
- 425. Barbados Minister Quote
- 426. BTOR CCA – SSC\_NB
- 427. BTOR CCA at the ICSA Summit – May 2019
- 428. BTOR CLFG Conference – June 2019
- 429. BTOR – NZ-Caribbean Workshop
- 430. BTOR – UNCTAD South-South Co-operation
- 431. BTOR –Trade 2018 Programme ICSA Gold Coast
- 432. CCA CW2 – Secretariat presentation to B2B Cluster
- 433. CCA\_RCC1\_SOD\_FINAL
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- 435. Cluster Week Survey
- 436. Commonwealth 1st Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI) – Final Report
- 437. MEL Plan
- 438. Final Participants List
- 439. Letter to the Commonwealth Secretariat 2019
- 440. Neil Balchin CS 2019
- 441. PRE-CHOGM Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting – Agenda Item 2 (ii) Towards a Common Future: A More Prosperous Future
- 442. Senior Trade Officials Meeting (STOM) (18) SOD\_COB FINAL
- 443. Survey Monkey Snapshot – Cluster Launch

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- 444. Commonwealth Trade Ministers' Roundtable – Chair's Summary Statement 2017
- 445. Delegates Directory CTMM 2017, 2019
- 446. Commonwealth Statement on Multilateral Trading System 2019
- 447. Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda Action Plan
- 448. 2019 Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting Communiqué 'Advancing Our Shared Prosperity'

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- 449. Commonwealth Agenda: The First Year
- 450. Commonwealth countries back rules-based global trade
- 451. Connectivity Agenda to Priorities Gender
- 452. Connectivity Agenda to Benefit Pacific Economies
- 453. Malaysia Praises CCA
- 454. Progress since CHOGM

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- 455. Quarterly Reports (Jan to Mar 2018, July to Sep 2018, Oct to Dec 2018, July to Sep 2019, Oct to Dec 2019, Jan to Mar 2020, July to Sep 2020)

## **Six month reports**

- 456. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (July to Dec 2017, Jan to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June 2019, July to Dec 2019, Jan to June 2020, July to Dec 2020)

## **Youth**

- 457. Project Design Document – Commonwealth Youth Programme

## **Attachment**

- 458. Letter of understanding – University of Mauritius 2019
- 459. 9 CYMM (17) Final Communiqué
- 460. 9 CYMM (17) STK Stakeholder Forum Final Communiqué

461. 2020 YDI Expert Panel Report Update Agenda PPTs
462. Commonwealth Higher Education Youth Work Consortium – Action Plan
463. Commonwealth Higher Education Youth Work Consortium – Action Plan 2018 to 2019
464. Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work 2018: Workshop Report
465. Letter PS Grenada request
466. A Young Commonwealth – Scoping Study – 2018
467. Youth development links to sustainable development
468. Africa SOM Oct 2019 – Evaluation Form Results
469. AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth
470. Ayman, Zaiba to receive queen’s award 26 Jun
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473. Brunei SOM Aug 2019 – Completed Evaluation Forms
474. Brunei SOM Aug 2019 – Evaluation Form Results
475. Caribbean Youth Leaders promote youth development – Loop News
476. CAS – Taking Charge of Our Future – Illustrations
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488. Commonwealth – Summary of Training, Consultation Sessions
489. Commonwealth Action Series – Session 1 Draft Report
490. Commonwealth Quarterly Report
491. Commonwealth training for youths
492. Commonwealth youths meet Harry, Meghan
493. Conclusions and recommendations 13th Session of CoDGs\_FV2
494. Conference Report-RGNIYD
495. Consolidated Report from Rapporteurs v2
496. MEL Plan Tool
497. State of African Youth Report 2019
498. CRYC Policy and Advocacy Training Project Report
499. CYP Letter of Understanding – India
500. Draft CAYWA Briefing Minister Peters
501. Evaluation Forms
502. Evaluation Report\_KenyaMay2018
503. Exchange of Notes-Signed Makeree-Uganda
504. Exchange of Notes-Signed-Botswana
505. FBC News – Commonwealth Forum provides platform for Youth
506. Final YourCommonwealth.org Report Mar–May YCI 2019
507. FINAL REPORT – Mentorship-2
508. Final 9<sup>th</sup> CYMM 2017 Resolutions Matrix
509. Final MOU signed – Jan2019
510. Final\_YourCommonwealth.org Report Nov 2019 – Jan 2020
511. Grenada Youth Workers Training – Article



512. Isaac Damian Ezirim receives the Queen's Young Leaders award
513. Kenya YM Framework Final Draft
514. Letter of Understanding between Commonwealth of Learning and Open University of Mauritius
515. MOU – Signed LOU – Bangladesh Open University
516. Nat Symp YTH Peace CAMEROON Oct 2019 a, b, c, d, e
517. National-Trade-Policy-2019–2030
518. Nigeria Youth Workers Association – Minute 1 & 2
519. Nigeria Youth Workers Association – Press 1 & 2
520. Participant feedback sheet – Bangladesh\_v2
521. Press release –Min. Youth, Training Youth Workers, Grenada
522. Public Debt and Youth
523. Raise your voice to make a mark say Queen's Young Leaders
524. Report – CYC Technology Pilot
525. Signed LOU [letter of understanding] – Sierra Leone
526. Signed LOU – Universiti Putri Malaysia
527. Signed LOU BY UNIMALAWI
528. Signed LOU LUANAR
529. Signed LOU-University of Ghana
530. Signed LOU-University of Guyana
531. Signed LOU-University of Seychelles
532. Signed LOU-University of the South Pacific
533. Signed LOU-University of Venda
534. Signed Letter of Understanding – NAMCOL
535. State of Pacific Youth Report 2017
536. Statement Archive – 2018
537. Survey Management Leadership Skills for Youth Development Work
538. UNFPA State of Pacific Youth 2017 Report v5
539. Updates for Ministerial Meeting
540. Verdentum Monthly Report – December 2018
541. Verdentum Monthly Report – November 2018
542. Verdentum Monthly Report – October 2018
543. Virtual Knowledge Café-Youth Work – Nov 2030
544. WP1609 Report
545. WP1658 – Report
546. Your Commonwealth Report January and February 2019
547. YourCommonwealth.org Report June 2019
548. Youth Correspondents Survey 2019 Results
- BTOR**
549. BTOR SPD YTH CYLS2020
550. BTOR SDP for 9CSMM Australia 2018
551. BTOR SPD EDU 20CCEM Fiji 2018
552. BTOR SPD EDU AO MALTA 9–16 Nov 2018 Part 1 of 2
553. BTOR SPD EDU AO MALTA 9–16 Nov 2018 Part 2 of 2
554. BTOR SPD YTH IPF Joint Statement \_ Final Fiji 2018
555. BTOR SPD EDU Faith in the Commonwealth, Young ToT [training of trainers] Workshop 2018
556. BTOR SPD EDU Faith in the Commonwealth Youth Training of Trainers Workshop CAMEROON 25 Nov –2 Dec 2018
557. BTOR SPD EDU Faith in the Commonwealth Youth Training of Trainers Workshop UGANDA 9 –15 Dec 2018
558. BTOR SPD EDU IPF at 20CCEM FIJI Feb 2018
559. BTOR SPD EDU NK BELGIUM 2018
560. BTOR SPD SDP LA PARIS 2018
561. BTOR SPD SDP Mission to BANGKOK 2019
562. BTOR SPD SDP OD FRANCE and SWITZERLAND 2018
563. BTOR SPD SDP OD JAMAICA\_TT\_USA 18–31 Oct 2018
564. BTOR SPD SDP OD\_SM GENEVA 5–6 Dec 2018



- 565. BTOR SPD YTH IPF CSA Fiji 2018
- 566. BTOR SPD YTH Africa Youth Connect Summit RWANDA Oct 2018
- 567. BTOR SPD YTH AI CHMM 2019 GENEVA May 2019
- 568. BTOR SPD YTH AO Mauritius and Namibia April–May 2019
- 569. BTOR SPD YTH CLGF Malta 2017
- 570. BTOR SPD YTH Commonwealth Youth Summit KL 2017
- 571. BTOR SPD YTH LM NETHERLANDS 2018
- 572. BTOR SPD YTH LM RWANDA 2018
- 573. BTOR SPD YTH LM\_SR\_TG FIJI 2018
- 574. BTOR SPD YTH Singapore CAYE Summit 2018
- 575. BTOR SPD YTH Singapore 2019
- 576. BTOR SPD YTH SR GENEVA 2018
- 577. BTOR SPD YTH SS LR BELIZE 2019
- 578. CAS Session 2 Report
- 579. SPD BTOR SDP\_TA Mission to Botswana\_2018
- 580. SPD BTOR\_2017 CABOS Meeting – O Dudfield

#### **CSMM**

- 581. Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting Communique 2014, 2016, 2018
- 582. CSMM Delegate List 2014, 2016, 2018
- 583. Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting: Provisional Agenda (2016, 2018)

#### **CYMM**

- 584. CYMM Delegate List 2013,

#### **Africa 2015**

- 585. AR CYMM (14) 3A-1 P-2015
- 586. AR CYMM (14) 3B-1 CAP
- 587. AR CYMM (14) 4A-1 YENT-CW-GF
- 588. AR CYMM (14) 4B-1 YENT-CAAYE
- 589. AR CYMM (14) 5A-1 YPAR-GP-YPB
- 590. AR CYMM (14) 5D-1 YPAR-CIVEDU

- 591. AR CYMM (14) 6B-1 NYPF-WPAY
- 592. AR CYMM (14) 6C-1 NYPF-AFYC
- 593. AR CYMM (14) 7A-1 YW
- 594. AR CYMM (14) 7B-1 YW
- 595. Africa Region Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting – Delegate Directory 2015

#### **Asia 2015**

- 596. AsR-CYMM (15) 4-1 YENT
- 597. AsR-CYMM (15) 4-2 CAYE-ASR
- 598. AsR-CYMM (15) 3-1 P-2015
- 599. AsR-CYMM (15) 3-2 FRMWRK-UNDP
- 600. AsR-CYMM(15) 3-3 INFO-RDEV
- 601. AsR-CYMM(15) 5-1 YPAR
- 602. AsR-CYMM(15) 5B-1 INFO-CYC
- 603. AsR-CYMM(15) 5B-2 INFO-CSA
- 604. AsR-CYMM(15) 6-1 CWYPF
- 605. AsR-CYMM(15) 7 INFO-YTHSTRAT
- 606. AsR-CYMM(15) 7-1 YWET
- 607. AsR-CYMM(15) 7-3B YWET-PBLD
- 608. Commonwealth Asia Youth Ministries 2015

#### **Caribbean 2015**

- 609. CR-CYMM Communique
- 610. CARIBBEAN 2015-CYMM – Attendance by Meeting

#### **Pacific 2015**

- 611. PR-CYMM Communique final
- 612. PACIFIC Region-Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting

#### **2017**

- 613. 9 CYMM Communique
- 614. Uganda 9 CYMM 2017 – Delegate Master List

#### **Impact stories**

- 615. Commonwealth Action series – Press release
- 616. CSA and AASU Sign a MOU
- 617. Integrating Youth Worker Training
- 618. Post CHEC4YW Workshop

619. The power of the Pen

620. Utility of Youth Work

621. youth leaders use new mobile technology  
to connect

**Quarterly reports**

622. Quarterly Reports (Oct to Dec 2018, July to  
Sep 2019, Jan to Mar 2020)

**Six monthly reports**

623. Six Monthly Progress on Results Report (Jan  
to June 2018, July to Dec 2018, Jan to June  
2019, July to Dec 2019, Jan to June 2020, July  
to Dec 2020)

### Annex 3. Details of KIIs and IDIs

#	Name	Designation/department	Section	Date conducted
<b>Internal</b>				
1	Ms Claire Wolstenholme	Head, Events and Protocol Section	Events and Protocol	17 June
2	Ms Jennifer Namgyal	Adviser, Gender Mainstreaming and Acting Head, Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development (EYSD) Directorate	Gender	
3	Dr Janneth Mghamba	Adviser Health, Social Policy and Development, Health Sector	Health	18 June
4	Mr Layne Robinson	Head of Social Policy and Development	Health/Youth/ Education	21 June
5	Mr Paulo Kautoke	Senior Director, TONR	Trade, Oceans and Natural Resources	
6	Mr Kirk Haywood	Adviser and Head, Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda	Trade, Oceans and Natural Resources	22 June
7	Mr Linford Andrews	Political Adviser, Africa and Deputy Secretary CHOGM, Governance and Peace Directorate	CHOGM	
8	Mr Nasir Kazmi	Adviser Education, EYSD Directorate	Education	23 June
9	Mr Abubakar Abdullahi	Peace and Development Officer, Governance and Peace Directorate	Good Offices/ Governance and Peace	
10	Dr Tawanda Hondora	Adviser and Head, Rule of Law Section	Rule of Law	24 June
	Ms Helene Massaka	Programme Assistant	Rule of Law	
	Ms Elizabeth Bakibinga	Adviser, Rule of Law	Rule of Law	
11	Mr Matthew Patterson	Director of Communications	Communications	15 July
12	Mr Abhik Sen	Head of Innovation & Partnerships	Innovation & Partnerships	20 July
13	Ms Heather Cover-Kus	Economic Officer, EYSD Directorate	EPSS	20 July
	Ms Motselisi Matsela	Economic Adviser, EYSD Directorate		
14	Mr Sushil Ram	Programme Manager	Youth Team	02 August

#	Name	Designation/department	Section	Date conducted
15	Ms Evelyn Pedersen	Adviser and Head, Evaluation Section	SPPDD Team	24 August
	Ms Katherine Marshall Kisson	Adviser, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning		
	Ms Purvi Kanzaria	Programme Officer		
<b>High Commissions</b>				
16	Mr Duncan Howitt	Political Officer	Australian High Commission	27 July
17	Ms Paulini Cakacaka	First Secretary, Fiji High Commission	Fiji High Commission	09 August
	Hon Jitoko Tikolevu	High Commissioner, Fiji High Commission		
<b>Partner Organisations</b>				
18	Dr Venkataraman Balaji	VP	Commonwealth of Learning	20 July
	Ms Alexis Carr	M&E Manager		
19	Mr Adam Bell	Commonwealth Lead, Department of International Trade	Digital Connectivity Cluster	26 July
20	Mr Ross Bailey	Senior Advocacy Manager	Malaria No More	27 July
21	Ms Reineira Sanjua	Programme Manager	Commonwealth Foundation	04 August
22	Mr Chris Southworth	Secretary General	ICC UK	06 August
23	Mame-Yaa Bosomtwi	Stakeholder Management Officer, Cervical Cancer Elimination Initiative	WHO	10 August
24	Mr Torbjorn Fredriksson	Chief ICT Policy Section	UNCTAD	11 August

## Annex 4. Evaluation Design Matrix

OECD/DAC criteria	Evaluation objectives	Sub-questions	Data sources	Evaluation methods			
<b>Relevance</b>	Inform key stakeholders on the relevance and effectiveness of convening and consensus building actions Foster learning on the appropriate role and scope for convening, effectively selecting appropriate focus areas for consensus building and managing convening activities	Who sets the mandates for these meetings and how have these mandates evolved? Are these mandates still relevant?	Section heads of the Secretariat	KIIs			
			Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas	IDIs			
			Commonwealth partners				
			Chairs of meetings				
			High Commission representatives				
			Case study				
		To what extent does the Secretariat's convening power respond to the needs of member states?	Senior Management Committee	KIIs			
			Section heads of the Secretariat				
			Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas	IDIs			
			Commonwealth partners				
			Chairs of meetings				
			High Commission representatives				
Is the Commonwealth involved where it should be, and to the level it should be to be effective from a strategic perspective?		Case study	Senior Management Committee	KIIs			
			Section heads of the Secretariat				
			Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas	IDIs			
			Commonwealth partners				
			High Commission representatives				
			Project documents and results reports	Literature review			
			How relevant are the CB Programme's events and other mechanisms with regards to global agenda and evolving contexts?		Case Study	Senior Management Committee	KIIs
						Section heads of the Secretariat	
						Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas	IDIs
						Commonwealth partners	
						High Commission representatives	
						Case Study	
Are there opportunities, gaps where the Commonwealth should be more deeply involved?			Senior Management Committee	KIIs			
			Section heads of the Secretariat				
			Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas	IDIs			
			Commonwealth partners				
			High Commission representatives				



OECD/DAC criteria	Evaluation objectives	Sub-questions	Data sources	Evaluation methods
<b>Efficiency</b>		How efficiently are resources (financial, non-financial, tangible and intangible) used/ managed?	Evaluation and Learning Team Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners	KII  IDIs
		What measures were in place to enhance programme efficiency in the use of resources and implementation of activities?	Project documents and results reports Section heads of the Secretariat Commonwealth partners Case study	Literature review KIs IDIs
		How well have the delivery and operational management mechanisms/processes worked?	Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners Chairs of meetings Project documents and results reports Case study	KIs IDIs  Literature review
		How are outcome statements and actions monitored and reported? How is MEL information shared from one meeting to another?	Evaluation and Learning Team Section heads of the Secretariat/ Programme staff Commonwealth partners	KIs  IDIs
		How does the Secretariat facilitate learning and knowledge products from consensus building actions? How are these documented and actioned?	Evaluation and Learning Team Section heads of the Secretariat	KIs

OECD/DAC criteria	Evaluation objectives	Sub-questions	Data sources	Evaluation methods
<p><b>Coherence/alignment</b></p>	<p>Clarify the mandate and evolution of purpose of the Commonwealth's utilisation of its convening power in the consensus building meetings. Assess current and potential linkages between ministerial meetings in addressing key thematic issues promoted by the Secretariat. Assess linkages between ministerial meetings and the bi-annual Heads of Government meetings in addressing key issues.</p>	<p>To what extent should these meetings be aligned to the CHOGM agenda? Are there efficient and relevant mechanisms in place for this to happen? How well do MIMs and other CB mechanisms, such as CMAG, feed the CHOGM agenda or vice versa? What lessons can be drawn from practices?</p> <p>How well are the convening actions aligned with other projects delivering to the same programmatic outcomes within the Secretariat's portfolio?</p> <p>How aligned are the Commonwealth's CB-related mechanisms and meetings with global meetings? How aligned are the Commonwealth's advocacy issues to the global agenda? What entry points exist in global discussions for addressing issues relevant to the Commonwealth and to raise the voice and visibility, in particular of small states? How effective have these entry points been recognised and utilised?</p> <p>How consistent is the Commonwealth in addressing and following up on key issues related to the CB Programme's agreed outcomes and action points? What follow-up mechanisms exist for key issues that the Secretariat is advocating for? How are conversations around these issues developed and sustained from one meeting to another?</p> <p>What long-term benefits has the Secretariat's use of its convening powers reaped for member states, the Secretariat and Commonwealth organisations?</p> <p>How have hosting countries benefitted/ been impacted by their experience?</p>	<p>Senior Management Committee Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Chairs of meetings High Commission Representatives Case study</p> <p>Evaluation and Learning Team Senior Management Committee Section heads of the Secretariat</p> <p>Senior Management Committee Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Chairs of meetings Commonwealth partners Case study</p> <p>Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners</p> <p>Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners High Commissions representatives Case study</p> <p>Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners High Commissions representatives</p>	<p>KIIs IDIs</p> <p>KII</p> <p>KIIs IDIs</p> <p>KIIs IDIs</p> <p>KIIs IDIs</p>
<p><b>Impact</b></p>				



OECD/DAC criteria	Evaluation objectives	Sub-questions	Data sources	Evaluation methods
<b>Sustainability</b>		How likely are the identified benefits to persist over time?	Senior Management Committee Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners	KIs IDIs
		What are the key enablers and risks to sustained benefits?	Senior Management Committee Section heads of the Secretariat Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas Commonwealth partners Case study	KIs IDIs
<b>Lessons</b>	Comparatively assess the Secretariat's consensus building approach with other intergovernmental and regional organisations, highlighting opportunities and lessons for strengthening the organisation's advocacy roleProvide evidence-based lessons on where the consensus building approach worked well in generating the desired outcomes and where it did not	What are the factors, drivers, opportunities, capacities and processes that foster effective convening and collective action?	Senior Management Committee	KIs
			Section heads of the Secretariat	
			Representatives from member states who host and participate in CB agendas	IDIs
			Chairs of meetings	
			Commonwealth partners	
			High Commission representatives	
			Case study	
			Evaluation and Learning Team	KIs
			Section heads of the Secretariat	
			Commonwealth partners	IDIs
Evaluation and Learning Team	KIs			
Section heads of the Secretariat				
Project documents and results reports	Literature review			

## Annex 5. List of consensus building projects

Consensus building projects 2017/18–2020/21

Project code	Project name	Delivery team
YACWG1048	Support for Consensus Building	Events and Protocol
YBCWG1014	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM) and G20 Outreach	Economic Policy for Small States
YGCOM1025	Gender Policy Dialogue and Advocacy with Member States	Gender Section
YHCWG1020	Convening of Commonwealth Health Ministers and Senior Officials	SPD-Health
YHCWG1040	Convening of Commonwealth Education Ministers and Senior Officials	SPD-Education
YLCWG1046	Consensus Building on Rule of Law	Rule of Law
YPCWG1032	Consensus Building	Political Division
YXCWG1012	Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting)	(Trade) Connectivity Section
YPAF1024	Commonwealth Youth Programme	SPD (Youth, Sports)

## Annex 6. List of consensus building events

Financial Year	Name of Meeting	Date of Meeting	Location
<b>2013/2014</b>	Senior Officials of Law Ministries	Sep-13	Marlborough House, UK
	Meeting of Law Ministers of the Small Commonwealth Jurisdictions	Sep-13	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-13	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Sep-13	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting	Oct-13	Washington, USA
	The Committee of the Whole Meeting	Oct-13	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Small States	Nov-13	Colombo, Sri Lanka
	Pre-CHOGM Foreign Ministers Meeting	Nov-13	Colombo, Sri Lanka
	Pre-CHOGM Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Nov-13	Colombo, Sri Lanka
	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting	Nov-13	Colombo, Sri Lanka
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Nov-13	Colombo, Sri Lanka
	3rd Global Biennial Conference on Small States	Mar-14	St Lucia
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Mar-14	Marlborough House, UK
	Annual Commonwealth and Francophonie Dialogue with the G20	Apr-14	Washington, USA
	Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting	May-14	Gaborone, Botswana
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-14	Geneva, Switzerland
<b>2014/2015</b>	Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting	Jul-14	Glasgow, UK
	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-14	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Sep-14	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting	Oct-14	Washington DC, USA
	Regional Youth Ministers Meeting (Africa)	Feb-15	Cameroon, Africa
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Mar-15	Marlborough House, UK
	Regional Youth Ministers Meeting (Caribbean)	Apr-15	Antigua & Barbuda, Caribbean
	Annual Commonwealth and Francophonie Dialogue with the G20	Apr-15	Washington, DC, USA
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-15	Geneva, Switzerland
	Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting	Jun-15	Bahamas
<b>2015/2016</b>	Regional Youth Ministers Meeting (Asia)	Jul-15	New Delhi, India
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Jul-15	Marlborough House, UK
	Regional Youth Ministers Meeting (Pacific)	Sep-15	Apia, Samoa
	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-15	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting	Oct-15	Lima, Peru

Financial Year	Name of Meeting	Date of Meeting	Location
	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting	Nov-15	Malta
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Feb-16	Marlborough House, UK
	Annual Commonwealth and Francophonie Dialogue with the G20	Apr-16	Washington, DC, USA
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Apr-16	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-16	Geneva, Switzerland
	Global Biennial Conference on Small States	May-16	Seychelles
<b>2016/2017</b>	Commonwealth Electoral Network	Jun-16	Trinidad & Tobago
	Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting	Aug-16	Rio, Brazil
	Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-16	Apia, Samoa
	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-16	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Sep-16	New York, USA
	Senior Officials of Law Ministers (SOLM) / Law Ministers of Small Commonwealth Jurisdictions (LMSCJ)	Oct-16	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting	Oct-16	Washington DC, USA
	Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting	Mar-17	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Mar-17	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-17	Geneva, Switzerland
<b>2017/2018</b>	Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting	Jul-17	Uganda
	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-17	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Sep-17	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting	Oct-17	Washington DC, USA
	Annual Commonwealth and Francophonie Dialogue with the G20	Oct-17	Washington DC, USA
	Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting	Oct-17	The Bahamas
	Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers	Feb-18	Fiji
	Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting	Apr-18	Gold Coast, Australia
	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting	Apr-18	London, UK
	Annual Commonwealth and Francophonie Dialogue with the G20	Apr-18	USA
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-18	Geneva, Switzerland
<b>2018/2019</b>	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-18	New York, USA
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM)	Oct-18	Bali, Indonesia
	Cabinet Secretaries' Meeting	Mar-19	Marlborough House, UK

Financial Year	Name of Meeting	Date of Meeting	Location
	Global Biennial Conference on Small States	Mar-19	Samoa
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-19	Geneva, Switzerland
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Sept-18 & Jun -19	New York & London
<b>2019/2020</b>	Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting	Jul-19 & Sep-19	UK & USA
	Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting	Sep-19	Kenya
	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting	Oct-19	USA
	Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting	Oct-19	Marlborough House, UK
	Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting	Nov-19	Sri Lanka
	CHOGM Liaison Committee	Dec-19	UK
	Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group	Mar-20	Virtual
	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting	May-20	Virtual

## Annex 7. Sample monitoring form

**Please follow the Google Drive Link below for the SOLM – 2018 Feedback Form**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qWWczQG3AnO4EN8\\_qsxiPKECI6hfWDP2/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qWWczQG3AnO4EN8_qsxiPKECI6hfWDP2/view?usp=sharing)

# Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Consensus Building Programme

Part II  
Case Studies

December 2021



The Commonwealth

# Contents

<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1. Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (CAA)</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background and introduction	1
1.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda	1
1.3 Consensus building process	2
1.4 Management and support	4
1.5 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations	5
<b>2 Education</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Background and introduction	7
2.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda	7
2.3 Management and support	11
2.4 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations	12
<b>3 Rule of Law</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Background and introduction	13
3.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda	13
3.3 Consensus building process	15
3.4 Management and support	16
3.5 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations	17
<b>4 Health</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1 Background and introduction	19
4.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda	20
4.3 Management and support	23
4.4 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations	25





# Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
AMR	antimicrobial resistance
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
B2B	business-to-business
CACH	Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health
CADME-TWG	Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education Technical Working Group
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CB	Consensus Building (Programme) / consensus building
CCA	Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda
CCEM	Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers
CDs	communicable diseases
CEFM	child, early and forced marriage
CHMM	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting
CEPF	Commonwealth Education Policy Framework
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CLMM	Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
COW	Committee of the Whole
CTMM	Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting
EBR	Extra-budgetary Resources
ECCE	early childhood care and education
EYSD	Economic, Youth and Sustainable Development (Directorate)
EMAG	Education Ministers Action Group
E&P	Events and Protocol (Section)
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GBV	gender-based violence

ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ITC	International Trade Center
LMSCJ	Law Ministers and Attorneys General of Small Commonwealth Jurisdictions (forum)
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NCDs	non-communicable diseases
OCCJR	Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform
PDD	project design document
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
ROL	Rule of Law
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SOLM	Senior Officials of Law Ministries Meeting
SPD	Social and Policy Development Section
SPPDD	Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships and Digital Division
STOM	Senior Trade Officials Meeting
TONR	Trade, Oceans and Natural Resources (Directorate)
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UHC	universal health coverage
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WGTI	Working Group on Trade and Investment
WHA	World Health Assembly
WTO	World Trade Organization

# 1. Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (CAA)

## 1.1 Background and introduction

The world economy has significantly slowed down since the 2008 global financial crisis. In 2016, world trade expanded by only 1.9 per cent, which was significantly below the average growth of about 6.5 per cent over the almost three decades (1980 to 2007) prior to the crisis. The Commonwealth Secretariat's 2015 Commonwealth Trade Review showed that Commonwealth members – because of similarities in their regulatory systems, largely common language and business practices – on average, tend to trade 20 per cent more between each other and generate 10 per cent more foreign direct investment (FDI) flows as compared to other partners.<sup>1</sup> Within this context, strengthened intra-Commonwealth trade and investment co-operation has the potential to revive global trade and growth, and contribute towards advancing the trade-related aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recent decades have seen regionalisation of trade, with trade issues being the focus of regional organisations such as the European Union (EU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), etc. However, the Commonwealth being a network of diverse geographies and economies, it is a microcosm of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and hence well positioned to promote trade issues at the international level. In particular, the common legal framework and administrative systems among its member states put the Secretariat in a unique position to provide support to the development/strengthening of digital connectivity.

To capitalise on this Commonwealth advantage, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2018, Heads adopted the Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda (CCA). The CCA represents a new member-led initiative to boost intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 trillion by 2030 and expand investment, by providing a

platform for structured knowledge and experience sharing on hard and soft capacity, and undertaking capacity building around connectivity.

The Connectivity Agenda Section was established in 2018 to support this goal by convening Senior Trade Officials Meetings (STOMs) and Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meetings (CTMMs), to forge consensus on the parameters and content of these initiatives, and convene sector regulators, implementers, knowledge partners and the private sector under five clusters to operationalise these initiatives. The clusters focus on a broad range of activities, namely: 1) Physical Connectivity; 2) Regulatory Connectivity; 3) Digital Connectivity; 4) B2B [business-to-business] Connectivity; and 5) Supply-Side Connectivity.

## 1.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda

The Connectivity Agenda aims to build the capacity of member states and also support global fora such as the WTO by bridging divides by increasing shared understanding of opportunities and challenges. In this regard, one of the major outcomes of the Consensus Building Programme under CCA was the organisation of the first Commonwealth WTO Caucus in Geneva in 2018. Following on the Geneva Caucus of 2018, the CTMM 2019<sup>2</sup> issued the Commonwealth Statement on the Multilateral Trading System.

Further, while digital trade is a driving factor of the fourth industrial revolution, the digital divide that exists in many member states, especially the 32 small states that comprise 59 per cent of the Commonwealth's membership, is monumental and will prove to be a significant hurdle in their future development. In the aftermath of COVID-19, the importance of digital and physical connectivity will become even more pronounced for the delivery of public and private social services, such as health and education.

1 Policy Background Document, Pre-CHOGM Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting, Agenda Item 2: Towards A Common Future: A More Prosperous Future.

2 Since the adoption of the 'Declaration on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda' by CHOGM in 2018, only one CTMM (2019) has been scheduled.

Interviews with selected representatives of member states revealed that small member states particularly found the work of the Connectivity Clusters to be useful thus far, as they provided a unique platform for inter-country dialogue and information exchange. A major lesson learnt from discussions during Cluster Weeks has been that in order to bridge the digital divide and reap sustainable benefits, small states will need deep, sustained and in-country support to be able to translate principles into practical action. The support identified thus far has included the need for customised trainings, and tools and skills for policy-making and collaborative knowledge sharing through engagement with both the public and private sectors.

However, discussions with representatives of some larger Commonwealth economies revealed that the meeting agenda had little to offer them. This resulted in a lack of active representation from these member states at the meetings, thereby limiting the opportunity for diversity of exchange and denying any such participating countries a chance to exchange information with their own peers.

Furthermore, while the CCA team generally reported co-ordinating its activities with the Secretariat's trade team, the extent of collaboration between the two on common themes was not clearly reflected in monitoring documents. For instance, the Trade, Oceans and Natural Resources Directorate (TONR) has been supporting Cameroon and Sri Lanka to boost their participation in global digital trade. Similarly, the trade adviser project at the Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) in Geneva, in collaboration with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission, organised a regional consultation on the state of play of e-commerce discussions at the WTO in 2019. But, as these initiatives were not reported in the CCA's progress reports or other documentation, it is likely that there was little co-ordination between the respective teams.

Also, despite some efforts by the Secretariat, Gender Mainstreaming in the CCA has faced a lack of interest by member states. For instance, Gender was not considered a standing agenda item for the CTMM 2019. Similarly, during their domestic consultations, only two member states provided some feedback on the gender dimension of connectivity and no member state stepped forward to be a lead on Gender. To fill this gap to some

extent, the Secretariat organised a Special Session on Women in the Digital Economy in 2019, with the results reportedly fed into the work of the various clusters, such as the policy documents submitted to the clusters.

### 1.3 Consensus building process

The CCA was initially developed based on instruction from the 2017 Trade Ministers Roundtable. These instructions were eventually taken forward in various technical meetings and consensus building (CB) events, including the CTMM (2017), the Working Group on Trade and Investment (WGTI 2017) and the Committee of the Whole (COW), before being adopted by Heads of Government at CHOGM 2018. These discussions engaged many member state representatives. For instance, the WGTI 2017 was attended by trade officials from 45 out of the 54 member states,<sup>3</sup> while all 54 Heads of Government were in attendance at the CHOGM 2018. Mandated by the CHOGM 2018, CTMM in 2019 endorsed an Action Plan to implement the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda. In addition, the CTMM mandated the continuation of activities and initiation of new tasks, for instance, the development of voluntary Commonwealth Good Regulatory Practice Principles.

Hence, the CCA mandate came into being because of the consensus building processes. Its implementation is expected to be guided by a regular feedback loop between CHOGM and other consensus building mechanisms under the CCA Section, including the ministerial and senior officials meetings, as well as the five Connectivity Clusters. While CTMM and STOM comprise the policy organs of consensus building for CCA, the Connectivity Clusters facilitate technical exchange and knowledge transfer among the member states.

At the Secretariat-level, programmatic areas working towards similar outcomes also collaborate with the CCA Section. In particular, other sections of TONR & EYSD Directorates contribute to the work of the clusters upon request, for instance regarding discussion on financial services, while for social issues, the Social Policy and Development Section is enlisted.

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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat (2017), *Report of the Meeting: First Meeting of the Working Group on Trade and Investment*, 26–28 September, Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

Three cluster weeks have taken place so far (as at the time of this evaluation), with the participation of 35 member states, including 15 small states.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on a linear 'landscaping – technical deepening and focus – action planning' model, the approach was adopted from multistakeholder consensus building initiatives of international institutions, such as the World Health Organization (WHO). With an intention to facilitate member state-led decision-making, the member states were given a six-month domestic consultation process to select the Connectivity Cluster of their choice for further participation. The cluster activities were initiated only after the finalisation of selection by member states.

The cluster weeks generally start with cross-cutting presentations, with discussions then continuing in parallel teams with the cluster-specific talks. They finally end in a plenary sharing and consolidation of agreed action points for each the clusters. In addition, the clusters aim to mainstream inclusive and sustainable trade, addressing women's economic empowerment, youth unemployment, and sustainable development of the blue and green economies. The clusters also generate action points for the Secretariat, such as research or partnership development. As most clusters are overwhelmingly focused on digital-related issues, this gives a focus to the meetings.

The agenda at cluster meetings is informed by research undertaken by the Secretariat. For instance, for the B2B Cluster, a survey was undertaken on 'Priority Issues for Commonwealth Trade and Investment'. Similarly, in 2020 the CCA team undertook infrastructure scoping needs assessment discussions with six countries, as well as developed a matrix of capacity needs and project proposals based on bilateral meetings with members.

However, while the clusters are attended by technical experts and business representatives, etc., the existence of effective linkages between cluster participants and officials have been less clear, as senior officials often come from different ministries and may not have the 'clout' to affect the trade policies of their countries. These contacts with relevant officials are essential not only for the cluster priorities to be reflected in the CTMM as the major venue for political consensus building, but also for advocacy on the CCA among the

member states to garner stronger buy-in at the national level. Such diplomacy becomes even more important against the backdrop of participation from member states, such as South Africa and the UK, and India and Australia, which are on opposite sides of the WTO agenda.

It was also observed that although cluster discussions are fed into the CTMM to some extent, the timing of these two fora is not aligned with each other, as there is a two year wait for technical discussions in clusters to be endorsed at the political level at the CTMM.

Furthermore, with a wide range of topics tabled during these meetings, it was found that although converging on the topic of digital connectivity, the cluster meeting agenda for some clusters, such as the Digital Connectivity Cluster, lacked focus and had little continuity from one meeting to the next. This was due mostly to the different agenda-setting approaches utilised by the two co-leads from one meeting to the next. Further, while the clusters aim to facilitate open discussion, there was a need for the cluster proceedings to be more structured, with a set meeting schedule. For instance, according to one interviewed respondent, the cluster meetings were scheduled at relatively short notice. Similarly, it was stated that, due to the informal style of proceedings, in contrast to the policy level meetings, such as, CHOGM, STOM, CTMM, it was not always clear whether cluster meeting participants were stating their personal views or the official position of their country.

The CHOGM planned to be held in 2020 was expected to adopt the Action Plan and CB mechanism established during the pilot phase to facilitate this anticipated scale-up. The adoption by CHOGM would have ensured national-level commitment from member states, thereby facilitating the participation from a large number of economic sectors beyond just the trade ministers. As CHOGM was postponed to 2022, the CCA Section has continued holding cluster meetings, as well as virtual training and capacity building events. Therefore, while clusters have provided a free flow of information between member states, there have also been more recent efforts to improve the focus and structure of cluster meetings – to ensure that they better contribute to the CCA's intended outcomes.

To serve the dual-pronged purpose of aligning activities with the global agenda, as well as leveraging the capacity of similar organisations to

<sup>4</sup> As of September 2021, participation in clusters was up to 45 member states.

inform the Commonwealth's consensus building work, the CCA Section has partnered with multiple organisations to deliver consensus building events. Thus far, partnerships have been in the form of data and knowledge sharing, partner attendance at cluster meetings, representatives of partner organisations working as Cluster Chairs, and requests by partners for the Secretariat to share its policy position. In addition to multilaterals, partners also include the private sector and civil society. Key partners include: the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Trade Centre (ITC), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Pathways for Prosperity Commission on Technology and Inclusive Development, the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the United Nations Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, the World Bank/Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance Secretariat (GICA), COMESA Business Council, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and Commonwealth accredited organisations.

On their part, the CCA team has provided input to other relevant international fora for consensus building. For instance, in 2018, UNCTAD invited the CCA team to share the Connectivity Model at the preparatory meeting for the Second High Level Un Conference on South–South Co-operation (BAPA 40+) as a model for South–South and trilateral co-operation, and also to provide recommendations on the digital trade component of the draft negotiating document.

All the partners for CCA are highly relevant organisations, particularly to share on similar issues; for instance, the Digital Connectivity Cluster can benefit from the eTrade4All initiative of the UNCTAD and there is value for the B2B Cluster in actively collaborating with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). However, while memoranda of understanding (MOUs) have been signed with some of these partners for information sharing, no joint projects were being implemented at the time of this evaluation with any of the partners to leverage the limited available resources. A major reported challenge with partnerships could be evolving priorities. For instance, the Secretariat's work on the digital divide with the World Bank has suffered due to reprioritisation on part of the latter in its COVID-19 response.

## 1.4 Management and support

The limited resources available to the Secretariat make it difficult to follow up on the frequent requests for technical assistance made during the cluster meetings, as detailed below:

**Management:** The main responsibility for the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda rests with the Connectivity Agenda Section. However, management and co-ordination processes are affected by bureaucratic procedures at the Secretariat, as well as the multiple responsibilities of the limited staff assigned to the Section. As acknowledged in the CCA project design document (PDD), the Secretariat's 'infrastructure is better developed for workshops/seminars, but not quick-moving trade meetings'.

Also, despite being a prioritised area of programming by the CHOGM in 2018, the CCA did not have access to dedicated staff resources until Q1 2019/20. The previously slow recruitment processes at the Secretariat, which reportedly take nine months to a year to recruit for a 24-month contract, affected hiring staff at the CCA Section. While the current staffing structure is an improvement, the CCA management team believes that this level of staffing is still insufficient to deliver the Action Plan, take on the responsibility for organising STOM, CTMM and cluster meetings, co-ordinate with stakeholders and partners, and to oversee research and technical assistance provided under the CCA.

In addition, when utilised, the process of consensus building can be time intensive. However, any decision to give additional time for activities in response to demand from member states is made at the risk of Secretariat-level planning and commitment to stakeholders, such as the Board of Governors (BOG). For instance, while the domestic consultations to determine cluster priorities were allotted three months in the CCA Action Plan, the process actually took six months, thereby leading to delay in operationalisation of the clusters.

**Monitoring:** Oversight of the Connectivity Agenda and Action Plan rests with Commonwealth trade ministers and their senior trade officials, while the clusters perform according to established terms of reference (TORs) and are convened to operationalise these directives. Meanwhile, the CCA Section, in collaboration with the Strategy, Portfolio, Partnerships and Digital Division (SPPDD) monitors implementation of agreed decisions, using the



Action Matrix Tracker and Connectivity Dashboard. This progress is then reported in the quarterly and six-monthly progress reports produced by the CCA Section.

In accordance with its monitoring role, the CTMM in 2019 endorsed the progress on the CCA and also mandated future activities. Meanwhile, the CCA Section has used online surveys after each cluster event to collect participant feedback. The feedback received thus far has been positive. For instance, the survey from the cluster week in 2019 showed satisfaction in excess of 80 per cent.<sup>5</sup> However, while the survey can be an effective tool to track progress, the Evaluation Team found the range of questions asked to be limited. For instance, while the questions sought a satisfaction ranking, they did not delve into the causes for the given ranking. Hence, it was not clear how the results of the survey could be used to improve subsequent clusters or feed into the CTMM/STOM.

Similarly, in the absence of monitoring data collected by the Secretariat, it was not possible to assess the impact of the clusters on policy development or institutional changes.

**Financial management:** The total financial allocation for the CCA, including the convening of CTMM, under the 2017/18–2020/21 budget was 1.83 million GB pounds (GBP), comprising approximately 64 per cent from COMSEC funds and the remaining 36 per cent from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC). The entire budget for the Connectivity Agenda under SP-2 was spent on consensus building activities.

Despite being the highest allocation as compared to the consensus building mechanisms for the other sectors<sup>6</sup> reviewed, finance has remained a challenge to delivering activities. For instance, in 2019/20, the budget was insufficient to hold all the scheduled activities for the year, including a CHOGM side event, CTMM, STOMM and two cluster weeks. Although CHOGM did not take place in that year due to COVID-19, these budget limitations would have resulted in a plan to not hold the planned CHOGM side event. In addition, limited budgets have also affected the Secretariat's ability to have a sustainable impact, as it is unable

to respond to requests from member states for technical assistance, advisory services, capacity building and knowledge products.

**COVID-19:** COVID-19 has impacted the time and mode of consensus building delivery, including the cancellation of CHOGM, which had special importance for the CCA, as an endorsement from Heads of Government was expected to result in stronger country-level commitment.

In addition, the third cluster week had to be held virtually, which was reported to be less effective than those held in-person, due to gaps in connectivity infrastructure in small member states and the lack of interpersonal communication. While there is some discussion regarding holding some consensus building events online, the CCA Section also reported that in other multilateral fora, there was resistance to virtual ministerial meetings by emerging countries and small island developing states (SIDS).

## 1.5 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations

A review of the CCA has revealed that the Connectivity Agenda arose as a result of consensus building processes and is guided by the Connectivity Agenda Action Plan. Moreover, if delivered effectively, the focus on digital-related trade could position the Commonwealth Secretariat as a global agenda setter, while also delivering on the development needs of its diverse member states.

Whereas STOM and CTMM are fora for political consensus building, the five Connectivity Clusters present an opportunity for open discussion and information exchange between member states, while also facilitating continuity between the STOM and CTMM, etc. While it is anticipated that the member-led nature of the CCA will ensure the sustainability of this initiative, major threats to the programme's impact and sustainability include limited funding, CHOGM delays, limited partnerships and the reprioritisation of national priorities following COVID-19.

In view of the above, the following recommendations are provided to improve consensus building processes to support an effective delivery of the CCA Action Plan:

**Identification of niche areas:** The cluster proceedings must focus on a few areas that have the highest potential for impact and are also easy to build consensus upon, for instance,

5 Six Monthly Progress on Results Report – CCA (CTMM); July–Dec 2019.

6 Other sectors reviewed under this evaluation were: Youth, Education, Health, Rule of Law, Economic Policy and Small States (EPSS), and Gender.



the establishment/ improvement of Digital Connectivity policy framework and coherence of policies across the Commonwealth countries, in line with international standards. As both of these are non-contentious issues and also high in demand across the member states, they can be a ready focus of consensus building processes.

**Approach to cluster meetings:** To improve the quality of cluster meetings, timely dissemination of policy research by the Secretariat, encouraging regular attendance by major economies, active participation by decision-makers from member states, as well as a more formal format for discussion that results in more actionable outcomes are all necessary. In addition, to ensure continued interest by member states in the CCA, it is essential for cluster leads to have an ongoing advocacy dialogue with member states.

**Leveraging partnerships:** To improve Secretariat responsiveness to member states' requests for technical support, it is highly recommended

that the CCA devises a partnership strategy that encompasses multiple dimensions of partnerships, including collaboration with technical support organisations such as the UNCTAD and ITC, as well as those with an in-country presence, such as the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the World Bank, etc.; and the private sector. When seeking partnership, the role of partners with existing experience or geographical outreach must be leveraged. For instance, to augment the limited human and financial resource in the CCA team, a co-ordination unit could be established at ICC, based in London, with support from the UK government's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS). While the former enjoys strong linkages with in-country business organisations, the latter has the advantage of working on leading programmes on digital trade, such as the Group of 7's (G7) commitment on digital trade. Similarly, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) must be engaged to support CCA.

## 2. Education

### 2.1 Background and introduction

The Commonwealth has a long history of working in the area of education. The Secretariat's work on education broadly falls into three main categories: a) convening power; b) advocacy; and c) technical work, including research, policy advice, toolkits and frameworks. The bulwark of the Secretariat's convening power and advocacy is the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEMs), a high-level meeting of education ministers held on a triennial basis. It is the largest ministerial meeting and second largest after CHOGM hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat. CCEMs also consist of a small states meeting, a regional ministerial caucus, a senior officials' meeting and a stakeholders' forum.

To maintain momentum in between the CCEMs, the Education Ministers Action Group (EMAG) and the Commonwealth Accelerated Development Mechanism for Education (CADME) Technical Working Group are convened to provide an opportunity for member countries to engage in open discussions, share good practices and learn from one another, deepen collaboration with various stakeholders, and achieve consensus on policy positions and collaborative actions. EMAG and CADME-TWG were established at 19CCEM (The Bahamas, 2015); they also provide oversight, strategic direction and function as monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the mandates emerging from ministerial meetings are carried forth from one CCEM to the next.

The CCEM is also composed of three-to-four partner forums that run parallel to the main ministerial meeting: a) a post-secondary and higher education leaders' forum; b) a stakeholders' forum comprising civil society and private sector representative; c) a students' forum; and d) a teachers' forum. These provide opportunities for the wider Commonwealth education community to meet, network, exchange ideas and engage in dialogue with one another and communicate their priorities to the ministers as well. These forums include representatives from national and international agencies, academics, teachers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), youth/student groups and the private sector engaged in education at all levels of the Commonwealth.

### 2.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda

Overall, the Commonwealth is committed to actively pursuing the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030. With regards to education, SDG 4 – 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' – is especially pertinent to the priorities and needs of member states. On a strategic level, pursuing the outcomes and targets of SDG 4 is aligned with the values and principles of the Commonwealth as enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter, which recognises the necessity of access to education for all while laying a particular emphasis on the advancement of women's rights and education of girls for effective sustainable development.

Over the last two Strategic Plan periods, the focus and scale of the Secretariat's work in education has changed in response to the mandates received, organisational changes, changes in the international environment and pressure on resources. Since the 2013/14–2016/17 Strategic Plan, the Commonwealth is cognisant of the fact that education is a key sector with significant national and international budgets and major global players. Hence, it explicitly recognises the need to focus the Secretariat's expertise and comparative advantage on where it is most effective – towards policy advocacy and technical support for the development and implementation of strengthened education policies that better undergird the SDGs and position its member states to realise targets in line with their national agendas.

Accordingly, in the last Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17, education was reflected as a separate intermediate outcome under the Social Development strategic outcome as 'Strengthened national policies and frameworks improve education outcomes'. Moreover, the Strategic Plan recognised that health, along with education, were key to ensuring delivery of broader development outcomes. However, with the advent of the new Strategic Plan for 2017/18–2020/21, both health and education were enjoined into one intermediate outcome under the Youth and Social Development

strategic outcome, as 'Strengthened sustainable policies reduce disparities and improve health and education outcomes'.

This change in strategic direction is also reflected in implementation. In the past, the Secretariat has conducted research, advocacy and provided technical assistance to the member countries, including on components of policy development and advocacy, in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, with the change in priorities, the Secretariat's education work is now focused on providing pan-Commonwealth policy frameworks and toolkits to help member countries in addressing issues and challenges they face in policy implementation and delivery.

The CCEMs provide member states with a platform to engage in policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and collaboration. As mentioned previously, several events run parallel to the CCEMs, which allows for sharing of best practices and learning from one another. Since the CCEMs are held triennially, there have been two CCEMs in the last two Strategic Plan periods: the 19CCEM held in The Bahamas in 2015 under the theme of 'Quality Education for Equitable Development: Performance, Paths and Productivity' and the 20CCEM held in Fiji in 2018 under the theme of 'Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?'.

Broadly, the CCEMs were seen to facilitate a vibrant and rich discussion among member states on issues such as primary and secondary education, early childhood education, technical and vocational education and training, gender and equal access, numeracy and literacy, sustainable development, global citizenship, resilience, and lifelong learning. The outcomes of the CCEMs are declarations that highlight consensus on issues of importance for the Commonwealth's members, as well as policy positions and recommendations collectively agreed on.

Through the CCEMs, member states have developed pan-Commonwealth recommendations to improve education outcomes and influence the global agenda on education. At the 18CCEM in Mauritius, the advocacy strategy, co-ordination and convening power of the Secretariat saw Commonwealth consensus and recommendations articulated into UN high-level processes responsible for developing the post-MDGs and post-Education for All (EFA) goals into the 2030

Sustainable Development Agenda. In addition, the Secretariat's work as a result of CCEM outcomes has also attracted interest from outside the Commonwealth. For instance, the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (CTRP) produced in 2004 was recognised as an example of best practice by regional and international partners such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Southern African Community (SADC), ASEAN, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Education International.

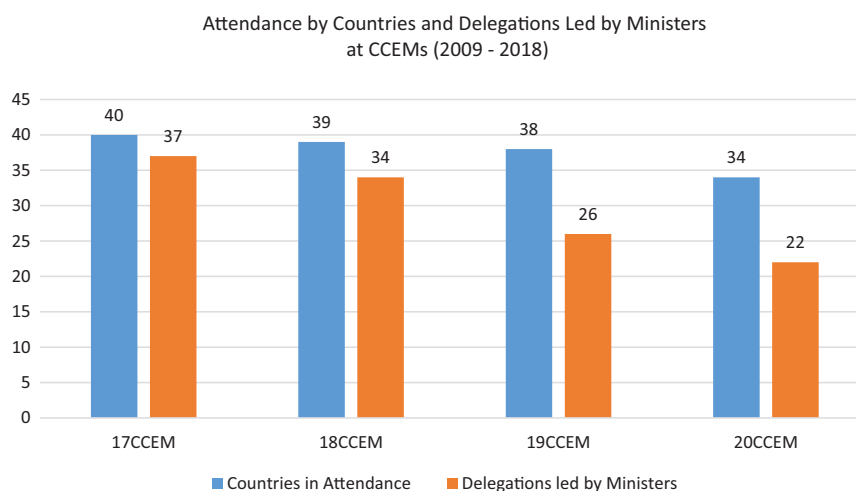
The 19CCEM led to ministers agreeing to establish both the EMAG and CADME-TWG, which have since their inception met regularly annually. The function of the EMAG is to ensure momentum and continued action between the CCEMs, whereas the CADME-TWG, which reports to EMAG, was established to translate CCEM outcomes into practical actionable steps and support member countries in their efforts to strengthen, develop and implement national frameworks to meet their relevant national goals and targets in line with SDG 4.

Analysis of attendance data showed that while the CCEMs were still among the most attended ministerial meetings, there had been a clear downward trend in attendance over the previous four CCEMs. More starkly, the data showed that the share of delegations led by education ministers who attended the CCEMs had decreased, most starkly at 19CCEM, with more member states sending delegations that did not include education ministers themselves. Figure 2.1 demonstrated this downward trend over the four most recent CCEMs.

The more recent shift in attendance, since the 19CCEM, could also be an unintended outcome of the establishment of EMAG and CADME-TWG, which are made up of senior officials from select member states. They are tasked with the actual translation of the CCEM outcomes into practical actions and to ensure that progress is monitored in between the CCEMs and momentum is maintained. There may be a need for the Education Unit to grapple with the implications of reduced representation of education ministers at the CCEMs, to better understand the source of this disengagement.

Also, given the way that the CCEMs operate and the outcomes that are generated, much of the legwork before and after CCEMs is undertaken by the senior officials themselves. If senior officials

**Figure 2.1 CCEM attendance**



can effectively articulate a country's position on discussions generated at the CCEMs, then they may effectively make attendance of education ministers redundant. Therefore, there is a need to closely examine the consequences of such an outcome for the Secretariat and its implications on its convening power and comparative advantage.

Overall, the outcomes of the CCEMs are highly aligned with the strategic direction of the Commonwealth, as reflected in the previous two Strategic Plans, in that the focus has been primarily on developing and supporting the implementation of national policies and frameworks that better undergird achievement of SDG 4. As an outcome of the 19CCEM, the Secretariat developed its Commonwealth Education Policy Framework (CEPF), through a process of pan-Commonwealth consultation involving 13 countries across all Commonwealth regions, which was published in 2017. In the same year, the Secretariat also finalised the Commonwealth Curriculum Framework and a Commonwealth TVET [technical and vocational education and training] Self-Assessment Toolkit.

Work on these frameworks and toolkits has continued from the 19CCEM into and beyond the 20CCEM. For instance, the CEPF has since been rolled out to 13 member states and the TVET Self-Assessment Toolkit, after being piloted in Fiji and Jamaica, was delivered to Botswana in 2019 and Sri Lanka in 2020. In addition to the abovementioned frameworks and toolkits developed because of 19CCEM, the 20CCEM mandated the Secretariat to develop an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Toolkit, which was piloted in Ghana and

Kenya in 2020, and the Effective Management of Education and Systems (EMES) Toolkit, which was finalised in 2020 and was being tested in Malta in 2021.

With regards to the link between CCEM and CHOGM, the evaluation found a weak level of alignment. Overall, the CCEM and its supporting mechanisms – EMAG and CADME-TWG – had functioned largely separately. This was particularly the case with the 19CCEM, which was held prior to the 2015 CHOGM and contained no reference nor recommendations or statements for Heads of Government to consider. Consequently, the communique from the 2015 CHOGM also made scant reference to education, which was limited to the context of women and girls' rights and the work of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

This was rectified to an extent in the 20CCEM, held prior to the 2018 CHOGM, in which ministers recognised that given the centrality of education in the development agenda of member states, high-level leadership and demonstrated commitment to education at CHOGM was of critical importance. Hence it proposed for education to be on the formal agenda at CHOGM through a session with Heads to discuss how to empower the Secretariat to deliver demand-driven education programmes for member states. Subsequently, the 2018 CHOGM communique encouraged the implementation of specific actions to provide the opportunity for at least 12 years of quality education and learning for girls and boys by 2030, by investing in skilled, motivated and supportive teachers, educational facilities and focusing on education reforms.

As a result of this reaffirmation of commitment to ensuring equitable access to quality education, the Secretariat launched Learning for Life (L4L), an education programme for 2018/19–2021/22 focusing on five areas of development: a) planning, management and creation of strong and effective policies; b) competent and well-qualified education providing high-quality content to all learners through learner-centred pedagogies; c) curriculum designs and learning resources that make use of latest ICT; d) learners benefitting from social skills; and e) collaboration with government and other stakeholders to boost impact, resilience and sustainability.

While the Secretariat continues to develop and support the implementation of policy frameworks and toolkits, many the mandates that emerge out of the CCEMs are not followed up on due to the weak monitoring mechanisms and reduced financial and human resource capacities at the Secretariat. One of the lessons learnt after the 19CCEM, was that the Secretariat assumed responsibility for too many of the action items in an environment of financial constraint. As a result, there has been a greater recognition of the need to develop subsequent action plans with more shared responsibilities between member states and partners to deliver against the actions. Therefore, there is a recognition among both member states, as well as the Secretariat, for the need to build sustained partnerships with regional as well as international organisations, to leverage support for the implementation of actions that emerge from CCEMs.

While the Secretariat engages organisations such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), COL, CARICOM, Education International and UNESCO, which attend CCEMs as observers and are also invited on to EMAG and CADME-TWG, giving them some space for agenda-setting, the Education Unit has limited formal partnerships and collaboration with these organisations on implementation of outcomes that emerge from the CCEMs.

Recognising the importance of partnerships, the Commonwealth Education Partnership (CEP) was launched in 2018 as a collaboration between the Secretariat, the ACU and COL, to support a cohesive and co-ordinated response to education challenges. Moreover, there is also some evidence of recent collaboration with various regional and multilateral organisations on developing toolkits and

frameworks. The CARICOM Secretariat requested technical support from the Commonwealth Secretariat to revise the Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders, which would help support countries in the Caribbean region develop their own national standards. Furthermore, for the development of its ECCE toolkit, the Secretariat established an ECCE working group consisting of member countries and partner organisations including the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNESCO, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), ILO, the African Early Childhood Network (AfECN) and University College London's Institute of Education.

Having said that, the evaluation found that the Secretariat had broad-based MOUs with COL and UNESCO and had in the past worked on toolkit development with UNICEF. Yet the extent of partnerships on implementation of the education outcomes remained limited and small scale. An additional area of exploration may be partnerships with regional organisations, such as CARICOM, the AU and PIF, which can also leverage their respective platforms for greater advocacy efforts and involvement of member states in taking the lead on actions that emerge from CCEM outcomes and for better roll-out of frameworks and toolkits to increase the Secretariat's impact.

The convening power of the Secretariat vis-à-vis education is especially important and relevant to small states, which have demonstrated sustained engagement at CCEMs and the associated EMAG and CADME-TWG. Reflecting the importance of catering to the needs of small states, whose voices and concerns are often drowned out in larger international meetings, the 19CCEM instituted a Small States Forum dedicated to ministers from small states. This was to enable them to make their concerns, challenges and voices be heard and to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing, both at the main ministerial meeting as well as the recently instated Small States Forum.

With regards to gender mainstreaming, the CCEMs, EMAG and CADME-TWG all pay particular attention to the gendered educational challenges of both boys and girls. For instance, in the 19CCEM declaration, ministers agreed to continue building on good practices in promoting "sensitive gender mainstreaming for gender equity", including reducing barriers to girls' education and addressing concerns over the underachievement of boys

and girls.<sup>7</sup> In the 20CCEM, ministers appreciated the Jamaican Boys Engagement Programme as a model with valuable lessons for other member states to improve educational outcomes for both boys and girls through a focus on boys' education. At EMAG and CADME-TWG, specific sessions are conducted on gender in education covering Commonwealth dynamics for both genders: boys' underperformance and girls' enrolment and safety. At the level of the Secretariat, input into the CCEM agenda is usually sought from relevant sections across the Secretariat such as Youth, Small States and Gender, along with Commonwealth civil society partners and Commonwealth accredited organisations.

Going forward, the 21CCEM, which was originally scheduled to be hosted by Kenya in 2021, was postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 21CCEM will be convened in the trail of a global health crisis and in the context of severe challenges for education throughout the Commonwealth. The 21CCEM will necessarily focus on the impact of the pandemic, as well as the need to rethink the education system in terms of preparedness and resilience, with a greater emphasis on the use of ICT solutions and advancements. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was one EMAG held in 2021, which presented an opportunity for member states to discuss emergent challenges, and to share knowledge and learning with one another. However, the EMAG comprises only ten member states, with some participation from partner organisations. This means that a holistic engagement with member states across the Commonwealth will not take place until the convening of the next CCEM.

## 2.3 Management and support

**Management and staffing:** The Education Unit comes under the Social Policy and Development (SPD) Section, which is under the Economic, Youth and Social Development (EYSD) Directorate. The SPD Section covers four programmatic areas of Education, Youth, Health and Sport, which are major entities of the Secretariat, with consensus building a critical component for each. In terms of staffing, the Education Unit faces a number of challenges. Currently, the unit is staffed by only two professional staff. Staffed with just two

professionals, the Education Unit is responsible for the delivery of CCEMs, EMAG and CADME-TWG, in addition to technical work involving frameworks and toolkits for the member countries. With regards to the CCEMs, a core team from the Secretariat – comprising the conference secretary, deputy conference secretary and staff from Events and Protocol, Communications and the Host Country Conference Taskforce – regularly meet to discuss and agree on overall planning of the CCEM, its structure and content, attendance and participation from member countries, resource mobilisation, and partnerships for CCEMs.

The Education Unit also relies on the support of staff members from the other sections/units. The project design, performance, monitoring and evaluation are supported by: a) the SPPDD, which offers guidance, advice and support throughout project cycle; b) the Events and Protocol (E&P) Section, which is responsible for the logistical arrangements and hosting of the meetings; c) the Communications Division, which supports publicity leading up to the meeting, during and after the meeting, and helps with communication and media aspects beyond the meeting itself; and d) various other programmatic sections of the Secretariat, which support and contribute to the development of background studies, papers and operationalisation tools.

In terms of operations, the procurement processes pose challenges to the Education Unit, such as delayed delivery of research papers, slow progress due to delayed recruitment of the officer responsible for assisting the CADME-TWG and EMAG groups, and significant burdens due to lack of timely approvals and planning. With regards to the convening of the CCEMs, a post-meeting survey conducted after the 20CCEM revealed some issues pertaining to management and efficiency. The survey found that some delegations were not provided with conference documents and papers in advance, which hindered their effective participation in the discussions. Overall, while the majority of the delegates (60%) considered the relevance of the conference theme and agenda to their national priorities to be highly satisfactory, only 28 per cent of the delegates surveyed were highly satisfied with the quality of the documentation sent by the Secretariat in preparation of the conference, indicating the need for provision of more high-quality content from the Secretariat.

<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth Secretariat (2015), 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers – The Nassau Declaration, p. 2



**Monitoring:** The monitoring of consensus building on education lies with the Education Unit, with support from the SPPDD as well as the EMAG and CADME-TWG. As previously mentioned, the function of the EMAG and CADME-TWG is to act as guidance and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that momentum between CCEMs is maintained, that the CCEM outcomes are translated into follow-up actions and that they are monitored. Both these mechanisms are recent, emerging from the 19CCEM in 2015. However, they have functioned to ensure that the Education Unit at the Secretariat continues to work in line with the strategic direction taken in the Strategic Plans, to provide effective policies and frameworks for member states to help achieve SDG 4.

On the Secretariat's side, monitoring involves producing quarterly and six-monthly progress reports against the outcome and output indicators established under the PDD. In addition, these reports document key achievements, impact stories, partnerships and collaborations, issues and challenges, risks, lessons learnt, and assess the financial performance and sustainability as well. The Secretariat also supports the monitoring and reporting of progress made on specific action items from each subsequent CADME-TWG, which are reported to the EMAG.

In the period between the two Strategic Plans, the Education Unit had undertaken no evaluation of the CCEM. Instead, a feedback form was sent out to the participants of the CCEM held in 2018. This survey suffered from low response rates from attendees, with a total of only 25 responses, hindering the Secretariat's ability to draw accurate insights. Despite this challenge, the evaluation did collect data on participant satisfaction with their engagement with the CCEM in terms of the meeting theme, agenda and documentation provided by the Secretariat, in addition to their views on the event structure and the extent to which they intended to follow up on actions agreed to during the meeting.

**Finances:** For the 2017/18 to 2020/21 period, the total amount allocated for the convening of CCEMs, CADME-TWG and EMAG was GBP 401,176, comprising of GBP 199,457 (50%) from the COMSEC Fund, GBP 177,719 (44%) from the CFTC Fund, and the remaining GBP 24,000 (6%) through Extra-budgetary Resources / Designated Funding sources.

Under the Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21, the Education Unit was allotted a total of GBP 1.5 million, of which 29 per cent was allocated to the consensus building component. Of the remaining 71 per cent, GBP 331,281 was allocated for the education programme implementing CCEM mandates and EBR promoting global citizenship education and intercultural and religious literacy, funding for which ceased in the year 2017/18. The remaining GBP 735,260 was allocated for the Learning for Life (L4L) Programme, set to run from 2018/19 to 2020/21 as a demand-driven programme with its own set programme components. This meant that any CCEM mandates not readily falling under the L4L Programme had no separate source of funding.

## 2.4 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations

At present, the Secretariat convenes many stakeholders in the area of education, and the CCEM attracts nearly 70 per cent of member states, reflecting prioritised support to this sector. However, consensus building in education suffers from a broad focus, and few partnerships and financial resources.

Although the Secretariat translates CCEM mandates into workplans, the Education Unit simply does not have enough resources to implement and monitor the policy frameworks and tools that it develops. Therefore, effective partnerships with regional and global organisations are necessary to make dissemination and implementation possible. It is therefore recommended that the Secretariat should develop a partnership framework and implementation strategy, specifically focusing on education. The strategy should explore advocacy and joint project delivery with leading organisations that have significant resources and a country or regional presence, along with technical competence, for example, the GPE, PIF, UNICEF and COL, etc.

Moreover, in the presence of multiple counterpart international agencies focusing on education, it is critical for the CCEM agenda to be selective and focus on a shorter list of items by identifying areas where the Commonwealth already has a comparative advantage, for example, early childhood education (ECE) or TVET. In addition, the global education emergency resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is another area that will require 'all hands on deck' for an effective recovery, especially with respect to distance learning.

## 3. Rule of Law

### 3.1 Background and introduction

Consensus building on Rule of Law brings together law ministers from 54 member countries of the Commonwealth to develop co-operation on legal matters such as access to justice, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), countering terrorism and violent extremism, tackling cybercrime, combating corruption, money laundering and the financing of terrorism, and international peace and security, etc.

Commonwealth law ministers have convened on a regular basis since 1965. Meetings of law ministers have been among the most established of all Commonwealth ministerial meetings and, unlike other meetings managed by the Secretariat, Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting (CLMM) is a standalone event. These meetings provide an opportunity for law ministers and attorney generals to share their experiences, debate on agenda items and ultimately develop consensus on issues pertaining to Rule of Law.

As part of the Rule of Law (ROL) project, law ministers are encouraged to foster a common approach towards upholding the rule of law in the Commonwealth, as well as advocating at the international fora. Outcome statements of the meetings include pledges by law ministers to assess their domestic legislation and policies, and requests for assistance from the Secretariat. Moreover, the member states benefit from these meetings, as the Secretariat provides a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learned and can contribute towards minimising the inequalities between large and small jurisdictions.

Co-operation among Commonwealth countries in legal matters is facilitated by a common legal system and common language, and the Secretariat therefore has the advantage of advocating for and developing measures and mechanisms which delegates can apply in their respective development agendas.

Until 2017, the CLMM was held once every three years. However, to align their meetings with CHOGM, law ministers and attorneys general at their meeting in Nassau on 16–19 October 2017

agreed to change the meeting cycle to biennially. Moreover, the Senior Officials of Law Ministries Meeting (SOLM) is held biennially, a year before CLMM, where issues are reviewed and the agenda for the law ministers meeting is determined. In addition, the Law Ministers and Attorneys General of Small Commonwealth Jurisdictions (LMSCJ) benefit from the LMSCJ forum to achieve consensus on issues that are of particular relevance to them and agree on outcomes that can feed into the CHOGM agenda, ensuring that the voice of small Commonwealth states is heard.

This case study focuses on an assessment of consensus building undertaken through the Rule of Law Section under the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17 (SP-1) and 2017/18–2020/21 (SP-2).

### 3.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda

Rule of Law is a cross-cutting thematic area of the Commonwealth Secretariat and is closely aligned with other sections of the Secretariat. The section works particularly in close partnership with the Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform (OCCJR). In addition, some collaboration also takes place with the Human Rights Unit, Gender Section, and teams under the TONR Directorate. This co-operation is mostly in the form of preparation of background papers, delivery of the meetings and providing support towards mandate setting in CHOMG, etc., where required.

Agenda setting at the various consensus building forums for Rule of Law has been influenced by and aligned with international events. At the establishment of the Secretariat, much of the discussions were on common law. Since then, other global events have influenced the agenda setting. Most prominently, post-11 September 2001 (9/11), legal issues related to counterterrorism took centre stage. However, in recent years, agenda items have been influenced by the SDGs, especially SDG 16: 'Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.'



An in-depth analysis of consensus building mechanisms under ROL showed interlinkages between the various meetings. For instance, key themes discussed in CLMM 2017 were closely reflected in CHOGM 2018 and, in some instances, they were also integrated in the latest Strategic Plan for 2017/18–2020/21. Both CLMM 2017 and CHOGM 2018 welcomed the creation of the Governance and Peace Directorate, which includes the Rule of Law Section and the Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform (OCCJR). Also, both forums reiterated their commitment towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 16. Similarly, law ministers and Heads of Government supported the Secretariat's newly established Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Unit, and reaffirmed support towards addressing climate change from a legal perspective in their affirmation of the 2015 Sendai Framework.

Moreover, consensus building under ROL has been a source for common positions advocated by the Secretariat at some global fora. Most prominently, law ministers have contributed to the Commonwealth position on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and endorsed the Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles, which now form part of the fundamental values and principles of the Commonwealth.

Another example of the influence of ROL at an international forum was that the representatives of Ghana and Jamaica shared their position on countering illicit arms trade in their countries at a side-event held in preparatory committee of the Arms Trade Treaty in April 2019, echoing the position adopted at the LMSCJ 2018. Furthermore, most delegates of the CLMM 2019 reported that their ministries were aligned with the Commonwealth and CLMM values when attending or contributing to international discussions.<sup>8</sup>

The Secretariat's work also has an impact by providing legitimacy to member states' domestic policies, as revealed by the monitoring report of the CLMM 2019. For example, a delegate at the meeting reported that recommendations stemming from Commonwealth Secretariat-led ministerial meetings gave more credibility towards

implementing national-level reforms. Similarly, another delegate reported that current reforms being undertaken in their country were derived from thematic parts of CLMM. Overall, 64 per cent of the law ministers who attended the meeting reported the forum to be unique and having no comparative global forum. However, others stated that the World Justice Forum, the Singapore Convention, and meetings of the Organization of American States OAS, CARICOM and the Organisation of Eastern and Caribbean States (OECS) Caribbean meetings were comparable to CLMM.

Participation in consensus building events had also reportedly led to in-country initiatives. For instance, several respondents from LMSCJ 2018 mentioned that their government was either currently considering or implementing reform action based on a previous Secretariat engagement. These included activities in anti-money laundering/ countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) (Turks and Caicos), case management (criminal) (The Bahamas), legislative drafting (Namibia), climate change-related laws (Fiji), and constitutional law reform (Eswatini). Meanwhile, more than 50 per cent of respondents of the SOLM 2018 survey reported having gained knowledge that they were keen to discuss with their respective ministries. Similarly, 35 per cent of respondents from the CLMM 2019 stated their intention to follow up with their respective ministry on a topic(s) discussed during the meeting.

However, an analysis of attendance data for the past three CLMMs revealed that on average, only 55 per cent of member states had attended the meetings, demonstrating limited pan-Commonwealth interest in these events. Moreover, as CLMMs are not held in the wings of another major global event, member states may not want to spend time and resources in attending the stand-alone event or may lack the resources to do so, especially in regions remote to them. Region-wise attendance data for CLMMs 2014, 2017 and 2019 showed that Asian member states were highly represented, with 87 per cent of Asian member states having attended the CLMMs on average across the three years, followed by African member states (66%) and North America/Europe (58%). Pacific member states and, in particular, Caribbean member states had comparatively lower levels of participation, with 42 per cent for the Pacific and 28 per cent of Caribbean member states having attended these CLMMs. Stronger attendance from the Asia and

8 Commonwealth Secretariat (2019). *Commonwealth Secretariat Monitoring Report – Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting & Senior Officials of Law Ministries Meeting*. London.

Africa regions could also be attributed to the fact that two of the past three meetings have been hosted in Botswana and Sri Lanka.

When it comes to gender mainstreaming, the issue had received some attention during consensus building initiatives of ROL. In this regard, gender balance in meetings has been a top priority. A gender analysis carried out by the Secretariat determined that 46 per cent of the officials and observers attending CLMM 2017 were women. Moreover, gender balance was found to be factored for a panel discussion on discriminatory laws at SOLM 2018, while the Chair of LMSCJ, the Attorney General of Turks and Caicos, was a woman. Gender has also been a recurring theme in papers developed by the Secretariat and shared with member states ahead of meetings. For example, papers on vulnerable persons in the justice system and diversity in the judiciary included specific references to gender considerations. Similarly, a study on international commercial arbitration also brought a gender perspective, noting, among other considerations, the importance of diversity on arbitration panels.

Furthermore, in the overall workings of the Rule of Law project and at the CLMM, gender has been specifically addressed in select agenda items, including the over-representation of vulnerable people in the justice system, child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), and discussions on discriminatory laws. However, discussions on CEFM had not yet translated into agreed actions at the time of this evaluation.

### 3.3 Consensus building process

In general, the delegates attending the SOLMs, CLMMs and LMSCJ (forums) reported satisfaction with the organisation of these events by the Secretariat, as well as the utility of these meetings to their work. However, some issues were consistently reported, such as the late receipt of background papers and broad agenda items, which were found to limit the effectiveness of these meetings.

The agendas at consensus building meetings were found to comprise mandates set by the CHOGM and informed by policy research developed by the Secretariat and shared with delegates in reference to upcoming meetings. Accordingly, these papers focused on areas such as the rule of law and technology, climate change, countering violent

extremism, the SDGs, terrorism, international humanitarian law, virtual currencies, commercial law and sustainable development, etc. However, while there was a general satisfaction with the quality of papers received at CLMM 2019, the majority of member states (68%) reported that papers and other literature prepared by the Secretariat were not received far enough in advance. The late receipt of papers was also a concern voiced in the feedback forms provided by participants of SOLM 2018. In the 2018 SOLM outcome statement, senior officials agreed that all meeting papers had to be shared at least two weeks before the meeting. However, this is seen as a minimum and law ministers expressed a preference for receipt further in advance.

Furthermore, with a wide range of topics tabled during these meetings, member states attending the CLMM 2019 reported limited focus and lack of continuity in meetings. Also, due to lack of time or interest, a few agenda items were either not discussed or did not attract dialogue. Meanwhile, some of the agenda items tabled in CLMM 2017 were reported to being beyond the mandate of law ministers' portfolio. As a result, Law Ministers have expressed the need to focus on areas that are within their portfolio and can thus have an impact and are more likely to achieve consensus.

Based on feedback received, it was reported that some effort had been put by the ROL Section into improving future meeting processes. However, these efforts have not been fully effective. For instance, respondents who attended the LMSCJ 2018 continued to note that there were too many topics on the agenda and therefore requested to either scale down the variety of topics or increase the meeting duration.

Moreover, an in-depth review of the ministerial meeting outcomes revealed that the agenda items were generally non-contentious, and while topics could be informative and generate dialogue, they did not require consensus building. In addition, commitments made by participants were generally stated vaguely and further mandates often lacked direction on implementation; they were also established without practical considerations of resource availability.

As part of the Rule of Law project, external partners are also included in ministerial meetings and contribute to the set agenda through attendance, reading papers and participation in discussions, as

well as organising side events or panel discussions. Some major organisational partners for the consensus building at ROL include the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the British Red Cross and several Commonwealth-accredited organisations, such as the Commonwealth Lawyers Association and the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association. The Rule of Law project also maintains informal partnerships with organisations such as the International Association of Women Judges, for conducting research on judicial diversity across the Commonwealth. Furthermore, an MOU has been signed between the Secretariat and UN Women.

However, nearly all collaboration with partners on consensus building is 'in-kind' and does not include financial contributions from the partners. In addition, currently there are no formal partnerships in the Rule of Law Section to directly influence or inform regional and international events. Partnering with the World Justice Forum and the Singapore Convention, which are comparable initiatives identified by participants of the CLMM 2019, presents an opportunity for the Secretariat in bringing together professionals from Rule of Law.

### 3.4 Management and support

**Management and staffing:** In the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Rule of Law delivery team is primarily responsible for the project, Consensus Building on Rule of Law, in collaboration with the Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform (OCCJR). As part of its role, the ROL team facilitates the development of policy papers for review and debate by law ministers, co-ordination with stakeholders, and the convening of relevant meetings. The project team comprises qualified lawyers, who contribute to research, development and the drafting of policy papers for senior officials and law ministers' meetings. Resultantly, in holding these meetings, the Secretariat's main resources are staff time and costs. The Events and Protocol team provides logistical support.

However, limited staffing has been reported to be one of the foremost management challenges faced by the ROL team. Staffing capacity is further stretched occasionally by the timings and structure of meetings. For example, the timing of the SOLM and LMSCJ 2018 meetings immediately following the UN General Assembly (UNGA) and Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers (CFAMM), placed an

additional burden on the Conference Secretary, who was also Conference Secretary for the CFAMM. In addition, since 2017, the frequency of CLMM has been increased from triennial to biennial, thereby increasing the workload of the ROL team.

Scheduling challenges have been particularly exacerbated by the already-reduced size of the Rule of Law Section. The two heads of section, the Acting Head of Rule of Law and Head of OCCJR, who were responsible for managing the CLMM, both left the Secretariat in August 2019, and these positions remained vacant until 31 December 2019. Resultantly, the staffing challenges adversely affected the team's capacity to deliver the next scheduled CLMM 2019.

Similarly, an increase in the workload of the Rule of Law Section has resulted in delayed publication of the *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, which is also being reformulated by the Section to enable it to become a tool in consensus building. To address these staffing challenges, an external legal editor was hired to clear the backlog and produce pending issues of the *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*. As a result, the publication returned to its original schedule in 2020.

**Monitoring:** Monitoring ROL consensus building meetings is subject to the outcome and output indicators outlined in the 'Consensus Building on Rule of Law' project design document (PDD) and reported by the ROL team in quarterly and six-monthly monitoring reports. However, while these indicators provide an assessment of the progress on activities, they are not reflective of the effectiveness or impact of consensus building events.

Feedback forms provided to event participants of the SOLMs, CLMMs and LMSCJ are a major method of monitoring. However, the response rate was found to be low, while the data collected were not available in an analysable format and often remained unanalysed. Similarly, attendance data from each meeting were kept in an Excel sheet, but not analysed. Having said that, with assistance from the SPPDD, the ROL Section conducted a review of the CLMM and SOLM 2019, resulting in an internally produced *Monitoring Mission Report*. The results of this assessment were informative. However, despite an attempt to use these learnings for organising future events, the major problems of agenda diversity and late dissemination of policy papers continued to persist.

Moreover, monitoring of consensus building outcomes was also found to be inadequate and inconsistent. Monitoring was generally limited to questions asked in participation feedback forms regarding delegates' plans for in-country follow-up on meeting discussions and the impact on the respective governments' position or policies. However, there was no detailed monitoring follow-up or verification mechanism in place.

**Financial management:** Under Strategic Plan 2, Rule of Law was allocated a total of GBP 3,505,805.00, of which 12 per cent (GBP 425,471.00) was spent on consensus building activities. Comparing the SP-1 and SP-2 budgets, Rule of Law received an additional GBP 1,698,061.00 in SP-2. Although an increase of 48 per cent, this was mostly the result of extra-budgetary resources (EBR) provided by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to work exclusively on the Cyber Programme.

However, despite the budgetary improvement, the ROL Section has found it necessary to economise its consensus building-related expenditure, as CLMM is now planned to be held once every two years. Major related expenditure items are policy research, travel and organising meetings. Having said that, the financial management of the meetings varies, based on their location and host country. Participating member states are responsible to bear their own costs of participating in all meetings. Conversely, for CLMM, the host country provides the venue and hospitality, whereas the Secretariat takes on the costs of the Secretary-General's lunch and reception, administrative costs for telecommunication, printing and shipping of materials, airfares, accommodation, and daily subsistence allowance for the Secretary-General and staff.

**COVID-19:** Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, SOLM 2021 was held virtually in February 2021. In addition, an ad hoc meeting of law ministers, 'the Virtual Meeting of Commonwealth Law Ministers on the legal aspects of COVID-19', was held on 18 February 2021. The discussion focused on the legal aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Commonwealth, and addressed three sub-themes: a) ensuring equal access to justice for all; b) upholding the rule of law in the fight against COVID-19; and c) legal barriers to equitable access to essential medicines, including vaccines, and

equipment. In addition, the ROL Section has held other virtual advocacy events, such as meetings and webinars to promote dialogue, discussions and lead towards consensus building.

However, while virtual events were found to be a cost-efficient alternative to in-person meetings, challenges of different time zones, weak internet connectivity and less constructive dialogues were major concerns highlighted by member states. With virtual meetings requiring greater internet bandwidth, these problems are more pronounced for member states with limited digital connectivity. Furthermore, as Consensus Building requires rapport building, dialogue, and discretion, these aspects are not afforded by virtual meetings.

### 3.5 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations

Although, CLMM is considered to be unique in terms of its value, due to its relevance to the common legal heritage of member states, only about half of member states attend the CLMM. Delegates of previous CLMMs have also identified extensive and irrelevant agenda items as a critical issue for effectiveness. Moreover, limited staffing, partnerships and monitoring also have adverse implications for the impact and sustainability of outcomes.

The following recommendations are provided to improve consensus building processes to support the effective delivery of the Rule of Law Section:

**Focused agenda:** Broad and numerous agenda items necessitate that the agenda of CLMM is strictly narrowed down to make it possible to build consensus and carve out opportunities for thought leadership. In addition, the agenda must also be reviewed to reflect pan-Commonwealth interests, through consultation with senior officials and law ministers on agenda items.

**Staffing capacity:** Limited staffing has been reported to be one of the prominent management challenges, especially with the already-reduced size of the Rule of Law Section and the increased frequency of CLMM since 2017. To improve overall management of the Rule of Law project, it is recommended that the staffing capacity of the project team is improved to meet the needs and challenges of preparing for and organising the various meetings. Increasing the number of staff

will be essential in the efficient allocation of the Secretariat's resources that go towards holding these meetings, including staff time and costs.

**Monitoring:** In view of current monitoring challenges, it is recommended that the Secretariat adopt a monitoring method to better assess the effectiveness and impact of ROL consensus

building meetings. This can be achieved by improved data collection techniques and in-depth analysis of feedback forms and attendance data. Furthermore, in addition to participation feedback surveys, regular and standardised evaluations of the ministerial and senior officials meetings are critical in implementing lessons learned.

# 4. Health

## 4.1 Background and introduction

Consensus building in the area of health is enabled by two main mechanisms: a) the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings (CHMMs); and b) the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH).

The Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) is convened annually in Geneva, Switzerland, for a full day, on the eve of the World Health Assembly (WHA). Each meeting builds consensus around pertinent matters and issues a Ministerial Statement, highlighting the Commonwealth position on those matters, as well as a statement to the WHA to reflect the Commonwealth perspective and to inform the global deliberations. In the year when the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is held, ministers also highlight priorities for Heads of Government to consider.

Appointed by the health ministers, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health (CACH), comprising government representatives, regional bodies, civil society and the Commonwealth Foundation, meets face-to-face twice a year, in autumn and in spring. In addition, virtual discussions and consultations of CACH, facilitated by the Secretariat, take place throughout the year. The role of CACH is to not only oversee the work of the Secretariat around health on behalf of ministers and provide technical quality assurance and review, but also to plan for the CHMM by developing the agenda, programme and sub-themes of the meeting. The role of CACH is critical in ensuring that items tabled for ministerial discussion are in line with government priorities and concerns, and are of an appropriate standard. In this way, the CACH functions as a technical advisory, while also providing a link to the regional bodies through its membership body and observers.

With regards to health, SDG 3,<sup>9</sup> and in particular Target 8 of SDG 3,<sup>10</sup> pertaining to the achievement of universal health care (UHC), is especially relevant

to the priorities and needs of Commonwealth member states. The principles of UHC, as reflected in SDG 3, of universality, access for all, equity and financial risk protection reflect the Commonwealth Charter values of promoting access to affordable health and removing wide disparities and unequal living standards. Hence, there is an alignment of the Commonwealth Charter with the internationally agreed global development agenda, as reflected by the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030. In addition to UHC, the Commonwealth Charter also explicitly recognises the importance of promoting health and well-being in combating both communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), in line with Target 4<sup>11</sup> of SDG 3.

As a result, progress towards accelerating UHC in the Commonwealth and combatting NCDs have been the main focal areas of the Commonwealth Secretariat and its member states. This consensus on focusing on the principles of UHC and combating NCDs is reflected at all levels of the consensus building mechanisms at the Commonwealth from CACH to CHMM, and to CHOGM. A review of the CHMMs revealed that the focus on UHC and NCDs as broad areas has allowed the ministers to focus on various aspects of UHC, such as healthy ageing, good health, health security, sustainable financing and global health security, as well as a health facility-based co-ordinated response to gender-based violence (GBV). Similarly, under the broad umbrella of NCDs, malaria, blinding trachoma, polio, mental health and cervical cancer have been the focus of ministerial meetings over the years.

In addition to taking direction from and aligning its work with those of leading intergovernmental bodies (such as the World Health Organization [WHO] and UN), the Commonwealth Secretariat has also majorly contributed to the shaping of global consensus on the inclusion of UHC and NCDs in the post-2015 development goals through its consensus building processes.

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quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

9 SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

10 Target 8 of SDG 3: Achieve universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to

11 Target 4 of SDG 3: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.



In its approach towards health, the Commonwealth is cognisant of the fact that health is a key sector, with significant national and international budgets and major global players. Hence, there is an explicit recognition at the strategic level of the need to focus the Secretariat's expertise and comparative advantage to where it is most effective – towards policy advocacy and technical support for the development and implementation of strengthened health policies that better undergird the SDGs and position member states to realise targets in line with their national agendas.

The Secretariat's appraisal of its global position vis-à-vis health has led to a restructuring of its approach to health, as reflected in its Strategic Plans. In the last Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17, health was reflected as a separate intermediate outcome under the Social Development strategic outcome, as 'Strengthened national frameworks and policies improve health outcomes'. Moreover, the Strategic Plan recognised that health, along with education, were key to ensuring delivery of broader development outcomes. However, with the advent of the new Strategic Plan for 2017/18–2020/21, both health and education were enjoined into one intermediate outcome under the Youth and Social Development strategic outcome, as 'Strengthened sustainable policies reduce disparities and improve health and education outcomes'.

## 4.2 Contributions to outcomes and development agenda

The CHMM is an annual gathering of health ministers that is convened on the eve of the World Health Assembly in Geneva. These ministerial meetings provide a unique opportunity for member states to share and learn from each other, forge common goals, and work together to achieve consensus on policy positions and collaborative actions.

The common goals and priorities that emerge from the ministerial meetings are then advocated for at the level of CHOGM, which provides an opportunity for shaping the global agenda. The case of the NCDs and UHC is a prime example of how consensus forged at the level of the ministerial meeting has led to and continues influencing the global agenda. The issue of NCDs was first discussed by health ministers in 2007, which was then taken up by CHOGM in 2009. It was then brought to the global community, together with

CARICOM Heads of State, leading to the UN Resolution on NCDs in 2011 and the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control on Non-communicable Diseases. The Secretariat and its member states continued to advocate for the inclusion of both the NCDs and UHC in the post-2015 development agenda at the 2014 and 2015 CHMMs and the 2015 CHOGM. As a result, both UHC and NCDs highlighted by the Commonwealth in 2014/15 are now global health priorities central to achieving SDG 3.

The commitment of Commonwealth health ministers to UHC and addressing NCDs as central themes of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda was emphasised in CHMM 2014. It was observed that since then, each CHMM has been centred on various thematic areas of UHC, as follows: ageing and good health (CHMM 2015); health security (CHMM 2016); sustainable financing, global security and violence prevention (CHMM 2017); resource mobilisation and ensuring accessibility to UHC in relation to the global fight against NCDs (CHMM 2018); and reaching the unreached and ensuring no one is left behind (CHMM 2019). Concurrently, in each CHMM, ministers have referenced the global fight against NCDs, with particular reference to a number of NCDs such as blinding trachoma, malaria, polio, cervical cancer, mental health, obesity, cancer, respiratory diseases and diabetes, among others.

In terms of further global advocacy, the Secretariat has shared ministerial meeting outcomes and policy recommendations with various global fora, such as the 71st World Health Assembly, WHO Global Conference on NCDs, G20 meeting and G20 partnership; and with regional fora, such as the East, Central and Southern Africa Health Community (ECSA-HC) Ministerial Conference, Southern African Development Community (SADC) Health Ministers Meeting, the Pacific Health Ministers Meeting, and at the Uganda-UK Alliance Conference. These efforts resulted in the Secretariat's invitation to the SADC Technical Committee on UHC, an invitation to contribute directly to the next steps in the realisation of the Pacific Healthy Island Vision, and to a central role in establishing the ECSA-HC and partnering with it on the health workforce.

A review of the CHOGM outcome statements has also shown that the agreed outcomes of the CHMMs are generally reflected in the subsequent

CHOGMs. Following the prioritisation of UHC and NCDs at the 2014 CHMM, the 2015 CHOGM outcome recognised the importance of tackling communicable diseases (CDs) and NCDs and routine immunisation programmes, called for the strengthening of policies for UHC to build strong health systems, and for the continued promotion of collaborative research into CDs and NCDs and collective action to tackle global health security and public health threats, including antimicrobial resistance. The 2015 CHMM, held prior to the 2015 CHOGM, also put forth the suggestion for polio eradication as a topic for consideration at CHOGM, which the 2015 CHOGM took up as well.

Similarly, actions mandated by CHOGM were also seen reflected in subsequent CHMM discussions. Following the 2015 CHOGM, the 2016 CHMM saw an alignment with and reaffirmation of the CHOGM outcome, especially on the issues of health security and public health threats, such as antimicrobial resistance. The CHMM mandated further actions on this, such as welcoming the Independent Review on AMR and commitment to making AMR a global priority at the 2016 UNGA.

The review of CHMM Outcome Statements also revealed that, in recent years, there has been increased discussion and dialogue on translating the commitment to accelerating UHC and combatting NCDs into practical action, with a view towards solutions and best practices to mitigate challenges around implementing UHC, particularly sustainable financing. For instance, in the 2017 CHMM, ministers: a) highlighted innovative examples of financing strategies and interventions which were working in low- and middle-income settings to accelerate the achievement of UHC in the Commonwealth; b) identified the challenges of financing UHC; and c) recognised the urgent need for practical actions and committed themselves to specific actions in relation to UHC financing, global security and violence prevention. In addition to more focus on practical actions to achieve common goals, the 2017 CHMM also resulted in a commitment by ministers to show progress on agreed actions in subsequent CHMMs. As a result, ministers noted the achievements, experiences shared and progress towards accelerating UHC, particularly sustainable financing, and the development and introduction of legislation in the 2018 CHMM.

Perhaps because of this focused discussion and dialogue at the level of CHMMs, the Evaluation Team noted that relative to the 2015 CHOGM, the 2018 CHOGM also had more agenda items on health in its communique. Most crucially, the 2018 CHOGM set the actual Commonwealth-wide targets and commitments to halve malaria across the Commonwealth by 2023 and to eliminate blinding trachoma by 2020. In addition, the Heads of Government agreed that progress on these commitments should be considered every two years at the CHMM and progress should also be reported at subsequent CHOGMs. Consequently, the Health Unit revised its PDD to also include the mandates resulting from the 2018 CHOGM to support the reporting of progress towards halving malaria and eliminating blinding trachoma in the next CHOGM.

The 2018 CHMM, which was convened after the 2018 CHOGM, reiterated and reaffirmed the CHOGM outcome and abovementioned targets and explicitly brought forward the link between accelerating UHC in an effort to combat the NCDs with its theme: 'Enhancing the global fight against NCDs; raising awareness, mobilising resources and ensuring accessibility to UHC'. Furthermore, the 2018 CHMM also saw the ministers acknowledging the need for collaboration and innovation to leverage the convening power of the Commonwealth in relation to pooled procurement, collective action on cervical cancer, addressing NCDs and in accelerating UHC, particularly sustainable financing. To this end, they considered and agreed on a total of 21 policy options and recommendations, including a sugar tax, tobacco tax, 100 per cent smoke-free public spaces, measures to promote sustainable financing of UHC, as well as policy options in relation to women's health, particularly cervical cancer and the health sector response to addressing gender-based violence.

The Secretariat has played an important role in undertaking background work to inform the ministerial deliberations on the prevalence and impact of NCDs, UHC funding mechanisms, and a co-ordinated response to gender-based violence and violence against women and girls. The Secretariat also assists member countries in the implementation of the shared learning from the ministerial meeting, by building and strengthening cross-sectoral partnerships, raising



extra-budgetary funds, and developing relevant implementing tools and toolkits. At the 2019 CHMM, the Secretariat's work on developing practical tools and toolkits, such as the UHC Financing Toolkit, a price-sharing database, and a planned scorecard to track and monitor GBV, was acknowledged and commended.

Against the backdrop of COVID-19, the 2020 CHMM was convened virtually, with the theme adapted from its planned focus on accelerating UHC coverage through sustainable health financing, to focus instead on the immediate impact of the pandemic on health systems and the anticipated long-term social and economic ramifications across the Commonwealth. The forum presented an opportunity for health ministers to share progress against the disease at the regional and national levels, share and exchange good practice strategies, solutions and models, and identify priorities for co-ordinated action. To that end, the 2020 CHMM resulted in ministers agreeing on certain policies, such as removal of user fees in relation to COVID-19 testing and treatment for vulnerable people, accelerating strategies across the Commonwealth for protecting, retaining and deploying frontline responders, and establishing a voluntary mechanism to support the equitable sharing/distribution of excess supplies of test kits, ventilators, personal protective equipment, medical technology and medical products. In addition, ministers also mandated the formation of a COVID-19 open-ended informal technical working group of country contact points and experts, to facilitate the exchange of information and promote innovative solutions between member states and to respond to urgent needs or policy challenges. Alignment with existing global efforts, such as the UN Global Supply Task Force, in regard to supply chain management, was emphasised to avoid duplication of efforts.

An analysis of the attendance of CHMMs held between 2014 and 2017 revealed high rates of attendance from ministers and other senior government officials from member states, with 73 per cent to 75 per cent of member countries represented. The 2018 and 2019 CHMMs saw an increase in attendance from member countries, with representation from 83 per cent of the Commonwealth's members at each meeting. It is anticipated that since the CHMMs are convened on the eve of the WHA, these in-person meetings are

well attended as ministers and other senior officials convene for the larger WHO assembly in Geneva.

However, with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitating the switch to conducting the meeting virtually, participation dropped to 57 per cent. The virtual mode posed additional challenges for the convening power of the Secretariat, due to issues such as disparities in the level of internet connectivity across regions and challenges with different time zones. Analysis of data on attendance showed that the virtual meeting saw significantly lower participation from countries based in the Caribbean and Pacific areas located on either extremities of the time zones that are also small island development states (SIDS) with relatively poorer digital connectivity.

Furthermore, a feedback survey of the CHMM 2017 revealed that only 45 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the quality of the documentation sent by the Secretariat in preparation for the meeting; at the same time, 69 per cent of respondents were satisfied that the meeting theme and agenda was relevant to the priorities of their government in the health sector. On the other hand, 67 per cent of ministers indicated that their government policies and strategies may be impacted through the meeting. These policies included financing UHC, global health security, drug control, mental health, AMR and natural disaster preparedness.

With regards to gender mainstreaming, in the 2016 CHMM, ministers recognised that domestic violence was the greatest cause of morbidity in women and girls, and encouraged efforts by the Commonwealth Secretariat, government health agencies, and other private sector and civil society stakeholders to combat its effects. Hence, explicit reference to gender issues and agenda items pertaining to gender were observed to have emerged progressively since the 2016 CHMM.

Moreover, one of the key areas of focus vis-à-vis the NCDs was the Commonwealth-wide effort in addressing cervical cancer, which was highlighted in the 2017 CHMM. In addition, in the context of UHC financing, global health security and addressing health sector response to GBV, ministers committed to strategies to empower victims of abuse (male, female, young and old) to enable adequate intervention at the 2017 CHMM. Further, the 2018 CHMM saw the acceleration of discussion and consensus among health ministers

on several gender-related agenda items, such as: integrating the needs of vulnerable groups into UHC agenda, including women and young people; HPV vaccination for all girls aged between 9-13 years by 2025; and a health facility-based co-ordinated response to GBV.

On the Secretariat's side, the Health Unit undertook a situation analysis of the health facility-based co-ordinated response to GBV in the Commonwealth and the sharing of best practices and lessons; this was presented in the 2018 CHMM. The unit also collaborated with the Gender Section in delivering a technical paper on UHC and Cervical Cancer Control at the 12th Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting (WAMM).

**Partnerships:** As of this evaluation, there were 12 partnerships in progress between the Health Unit of the Secretariat and various Commonwealth-accredited organisations, as well as other organisations. Some of these partners include Evidence Based Solutions, the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), London Global Cancer Week, Malaria no More, the Union for International Cancer Control and WHO. Collaboration takes place on a range of areas, including COVID-19, the price and information sharing database, NCDs, GBV, avoidable blindness, cancer control and malaria. In addition, the Health Unit has also initiated discussions with 13 potential partners to leverage the support of its programmatic work on areas such as UHC, NCDs, cancer control and malaria, among others. However, most partnerships are informal and are based on open-ended MOUs, at best. Recognising this problem, the Health Unit was at the time of this evaluation, mapping its partnership portfolio and reviewing partners' potential, assessing their capacities and impacts, as well as developing joint plans in an attempt to better strategise and streamline these partnerships.

Despite the multitude of partners, in-depth engagement with regional bodies was found to be limited and was observed mainly during the CACH meetings. A key challenge to greater engagement with regional bodies and partners was the lack of framework to engage beyond CACH through Focal Points, which could act as a link between the Secretariat and member countries in other fora. Another challenge faced by Secretariat with managing partners was streamlining and aligning its work plans with those of the technical working

groups present. Recently, the Health Unit had been trying to get partners to join its technical working groups to assure that there was no duplication of effort.

### 4.3 Management and support

**Management and staffing:** The Health Unit comes under the Social Policy and Development (SPD) Section, which is under the Economic, Youth and Social Development (EYSD) Directorate. The SPD Section covers the three programmatic areas of education, youth and health, which are major entities of the Secretariat, with consensus building a critical component for each.

The Health Unit also relies on the support of staff members of other sections/units. The project design, performance, monitoring and evaluation are supported by: a) the Strategic, Portfolio, Partnerships and Digital Division (SPPDD), which offers guidance, advice and support throughout the project cycle; b) the Events and Protocol (E&P) Section, which is responsible for the logistical arrangements and hosting of the meetings; c) the Communications Division, which supports the publicity leading up to the meeting, during and after the meeting, and supports the communication and media aspects beyond the meeting itself; and d) various other programmatic sections/units of the Secretariat, which support and contribute to the development of background studies, papers and operationalisation tools.

As with other departments in the Secretariat, staffing is a major management challenge faced by the Health Unit. At the time of writing, the unit was staffed by only three people, with only one of these (an adviser) holding a full-time position. The other two staff members, an administrator and a research officer, were hired on a contractual basis for three-to-six months, which was subject to renewal. In view of the extensive mandate given by health ministers to follow up on agreed CHMM outcomes, and support the development of various frameworks, tools and toolkits and their implementation, understaffing of the Health Unit presents a great challenge in the Secretariat's ability to be agile and responsive. Recruitment processes have also posed several challenges, which cascade into delays in the delivery of outputs. For instance, delays in recruiting staff resulted in delays in initiating various aspects of the project and in commissioning essential background papers and studies that

were to inform the 2018 CHMM. Furthermore, the Secretariat was also challenged by slow internal management processes, such as late approval of project design documents (PDDs) and subsequent delays in approvals of consultancies, which negatively impacted progress in 2018.

Regarding the convening of CHMMs, a post-meeting survey conducted after CHMM 2017 revealed some issues pertaining to management and efficiency. The survey found that better communications from the Secretariat were needed for future events and that some delegates found that there was poor explanation of the agenda and objectives and how the policy briefs would inform the meeting. Overall, while most of the delegates considered the general structure and organisation of the meeting to be 'outstanding' or 'good', a few delegates suggested the need for better time management, due to there being too many agenda items, and also advised on reports being shared beforehand, so that participants could have more involvement on the floor.

**Monitoring:** The responsibility for monitoring consensus building on health lies with the Health Unit, with support from the SPPDD team as well as the CACH. On the Secretariat's side, monitoring involves producing quarterly and six-monthly progress reports against the outcome and output indicators established under the PDD.

In response to the time-bound commitments made at CHMM and CHOGM, the Secretariat also supports the monitoring and reporting of progress made on specific goals and targets established under the 2017 CHMM and the 2018 CHOGM. In particular, the 2017 CHMM instructed the Secretariat to annually report on the progress made on action points on which consensus was built; while CHOGM instructed the Secretariat to monitor and report on progress made towards the goals of halving malaria across the Commonwealth by 2030 and eliminating blinding trachoma by 2020.

While no formal evaluation of the Health Unit has been undertaken under the two Strategic Plans, since 2017, the Health Unit has monitored CHMM using a participant feedback form. However, in both instances a non-standardised approach was used for survey structure and data analysis. The survey of the 2017 CHMM suffered from low response rates, with only 22 per cent of the 121 attendees returning the form.

Nevertheless, the questionnaire did include data on satisfaction with engagement with the CHMM in terms of meeting theme, agenda, relevance and documentation provided by the Secretariat, as well as follow-up plans of participants, etc. While feedback was reportedly incorporated through increased engagement with member states, the impact of these actions was not captured, as the assessment of the 2019 CHMM only reported attendance rates and overall satisfaction with the meeting; it also provided three quotes from respondents.

Moreover, the CACH oversees the work of the Secretariat on health, plans for ministerial meetings, and provides technical quality assurance and review in relation to programme outputs. The CACH, which is made up of member states and other stakeholders, also faces the challenge of being overstretched, as senior officials from member states must take on additional responsibilities at the CACH on the side, while working to deliver on their complex national issues.

Hence, monitoring at the Secretariat was found to suffer from inadequate concrete methods and limited resources, including time, budget and human resource.

**Finances:** For the 2017/18 to 2020/21 period, the total amount allocated for the convening of Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings and senior officials meetings was GBP 233,265, most of which (GBP 208,265 [89%]) was funded through the COMSEC Fund. Meanwhile the remaining consensus building funds came from the CFTC Fund (GBP 5,000 [2%]) and GBP 20,000 (9%) through EBR/DF sources. Under the Commonwealth Secretariat's Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21, the Health Unit was allocated a total GBP 1.1 million, of which a significant 33 per cent was given to consensus building activities. Hence, only 67 per cent was left over for implementing over a four-year period the mandates arising from the consensus building events, such as support to policy, development and dissemination of toolkits, and monitoring. Major expenditure items for organising consensus building events included staff resources, policy research and travel logistics.

Since the CHMM is convened in Geneva on the eve of the WHA, the associated costs for both the Secretariat and ministers are minimised, as the ministers and their delegations are already bearing

the cost of attending the WHA. Also, considering the overall meagre resources allocated to Health, the Health Unit sometimes relies on its partners to assist on a pro bono basis. Similarly, activities in relation to halving malaria by 2030 and eliminating trachoma by 2020 are mostly externally funded through partner organisations, but with the Secretariat funding some supportive aspects.

#### 4.4 Conclusions, lessons learned and recommendations

Although there is a recognition at the strategic level that the Secretariat's role in the area of health should be oriented to where it is most effective, that is, towards policy advocacy and technical support for the development and implementation of strengthened health policies, in recent years the role of the Secretariat vis-à-vis health has seen an expansion, both at the level of the ministerial meeting and CHOGM. Considering this expanded role and with the advent of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to affect the world, there may be a need for the Secretariat to re-examine what role it should accord itself with regards to health in the upcoming Strategic Plan period. In view of this, the following recommendations are presented:

**Leverage partnerships:** Because of the small size of the Health Unit and its limited financial resources, leveraging partnerships is crucial for the Secretariat to be responsive to its member states' needs, both in terms of programmatic work in the area of health, as well as the convening of the consensus building mechanisms. In relation to programmatic work, the Secretariat can leverage the resources of partners to implement the tools and frameworks it has developed pertaining to UHC and to disseminate them. With regards to consensus building, the Secretariat must leverage the resources of regional organisations, to both broaden its outreach – especially with the small states in the Caribbean and Pacific regions – as well as to facilitate the uptake of its tools and frameworks to achieve greater impact.

**Improve monitoring frequency and methods:**

The Health Unit has only conducted two post-

CHMM surveys, which have faced the challenges of low response rates and have utilised non-standardised approaches to questionnaire design. The lack of a standardised approach to survey design, data collection and reporting poses a hindrance to the health team in garnering insights, drawing comparisons from one survey to another, and reporting trends and lessons learned. There is a need to strengthen monitoring mechanisms, to ensure that CHMMs continue to deliver value to Commonwealth members. The Secretariat may also benefit from the use of multi-method monitoring mechanisms that do not rely solely on surveys and incorporate other methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus group discussions, for better data triangulation. Beyond CHMMs, the Secretariat should also request dedicated staff from member states to work at the level of CACH, to ensure that the monitoring and technical review functions of the CACH are strengthened.

**Agenda-setting at the CHMM level:** CHMMs are convened around a large number of agenda items, which some member states consider too loaded. There is a need for the Secretariat to prioritise and orient towards a core set of agenda items, which would facilitate the Secretariat in not overstressing itself as a result of excessive mandates emerging from each successive CHMM. In addition, this would also assist the Secretariat in ensuring that the existing tools and frameworks developed by the Secretariat are disseminated to and taken up by more member states.

**Better resourcing the Health Unit:** The Health Unit is staffed by just three personnel, two of whom are temporary hires on short-term contracts. There is a need to better resource the Secretariat in light of the increased mandates, goals and targets set by the ministers and Heads of Government, to ensure that the Secretariat can continue to function effectively for its member states. Better resourcing of the unit will also help in overcoming some of the operational challenges faced in previous CHMMs, which have included delays, slower progress, and challenges in supporting member states around communication of CHMM agendas and objectives.

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