

# Annual Results Report Part A

July 2019 - June 2020



The Commonwealth



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT  
ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT  
2019/20



The Commonwealth

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## Acronyms

ACA	Anti-Corruption Agency
ACU	Association of Commonwealth Universities
AIMS	African Institute for Mathematical Sciences
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUC	African Union Commission
B2B	Business-to-Business
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CCA	Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment
CCEAM	Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management
CCEM	Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting
CCFAH	Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub
CEDAW	Commission on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEMM	Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting
CFTC	Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation
CHMM	Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting
CFMM	Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting
CHOGM	Commonwealth Head of Governments Meeting
CLMM	Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
CSSO	Commonwealth Small States Office
CYP	Commonwealth Youth Programme
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECHRP	eSwatini Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
EMB	Election Management Body
ERM	Enterprise Risk Management
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GECOM	Guyana Elections Commission
GICA	Global Infrastructure Connectivity Alliance
GITA	Global Innovation & Technology Alliance
GRPs	Good Regulatory Practices
HRC	Human Rights Council
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOF	International Organization of la Francophonie
IPP	International Partnership Programme
ISA	International Seabed Authority
IT	Information Technology
ITC	International Trade Centre
JDGD	Joint Domestic Gender Delegation (Malawi)
KNCHR	Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
LDC	Least Developed Country
MCVS	Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NCD	Non-Communicable Disease
NICE	National Initiative on Civic Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
PAC	Public Affairs Committee (Malawi)

P/CVE	Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
PIF(S)	Pacific Island Forum (Secretariat)
RBM	Results-Based Management
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SWF	Sovereign Wealth Fund
TC	Tropical Cyclone
UK	United Kingdom
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNMGCY	United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNOSAT	United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme
UNOSSC	United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
UNSSC	United Nations System Staff College
UPR	Universal Period Review
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WTO	World Trade Organization





## Foreword

None of us could have foreseen the COVID-19 pandemic, nor that its far-reaching consequences would cause such worldwide turmoil and affect the lives of almost everyone. The loss of life and other human costs in terms of physical and mental suffering are distressing, and place tremendous pressure on healthcare and related services. The negative effects on the global economy far exceed those caused by the Great Recession of 2007 - 2009 and have occurred at a much faster rate, with repercussions and disruption occurring in almost every sector with widespread disruption, and affecting all Commonwealth member nations.

The Commonwealth Secretariat mobilised swiftly and vigorously, continuing to deliver value in answering the needs and supporting the collective and individual responses of our members. We have adapted our operations through contingency and crisis planning and by deploying more advanced technologies, digital products, tech training and talent to accelerate adoption of innovative systems and approaches.

In June 2020, we convened the first-ever virtual Commonwealth Leaders Meeting, at which in their COVID-19 statement Heads of Government committed to solidarity and mutual support. In May 2020, Commonwealth Health Ministers met virtually and agreed to coordinate their response in tackling the pandemic. They welcomed the suggestion to remove user fees in relation to COVID-19 testing and treatment for vulnerable people or those in vulnerable situations, according to national context and legislation, including migrants, refugees and people living in poverty. Health Ministers also welcomed specific Commonwealth coordinated action and the proposal to support existing commitments to establish 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, and in alignment with existing global efforts, including the UN Global Supply Task Force.

Having launched the Commonwealth COVID-19 dashboard offering crucial data and analysis to assist governments and health workers, the Commonwealth Secretariat continues to work closely with WHO to address the pandemic by curating accurate information and fighting misinformation. The Secretariat has also been invited by WHO to serve on the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator technical working group, in support of this global initiative to produce and distribute equitably the COVID vaccine.

To enable our member countries, particularly small states, to manage the unprecedented economic downturn, we accelerated work on debt management and disaster finance and, in partnership with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, on fintech. With the climate emergency continuing unabated, the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub has continued throughout the year to support vulnerable states with securing funds to tackle climate change. To date, over \$33.9 million of funding has been raised, and \$646 million worth of projects have been applied for in the pipeline.

Steps have been taken to adapt implementation strategies in order to maintain delivery of in-country support via partners. For example, instead of deploying a Commonwealth mission on the ground to observe the June 2020 election in Malawi, civil society organisations were supported to mobilise citizen observation and early warning initiatives. A similar approach with a local citizen observation group was adopted for the 2020 electoral process in Seychelles.

Commonwealth Trade Ministers met in London in October 2019 for the first time in more than a decade. They endorsed an ambitious action plan to fast track the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda and to deepen engagement on trade and investment among the member nations of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Secretariat continues to facilitate the work of the five Connectivity Clusters through which 42 Commonwealth countries are cooperating to develop trade solutions in an increasingly polarised world. Support was provided by the Secretariat to twelve member countries on developing action plans for trade facilitation. Fourteen countries have been supported with the sustainable management of their natural resources. Forty-two countries have now joined one or more Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups to cooperate on developing and implementing measures to protect the ocean.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has increased support for member countries to address violence against women and girls, a scourge sadly exacerbated by the pandemic. An example of this is assistance provided to Seychelles with its Domestic Violence Bill. The COVID-19 pandemic has also created new threats and exacerbated existing challenges for young people. These have made the robust Commonwealth Youth Programme more valuable than ever, built as it is on principles of youth-led action so that young people are empowered to take control of their own destiny. Commonwealth youth networks, including on climate change, sport for development and peace, disability, bring young people to the forefront of international, regional and local action, helping to break down barriers and create positive and lasting change.

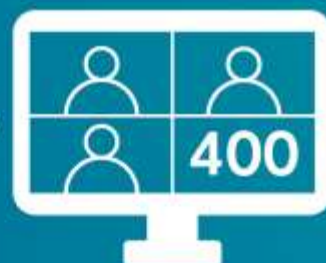
Work by other teams in the Commonwealth Secretariat continues to deliver solutions to longstanding and newly-emerging problems, and in the period covered by this Annual Results Report a guide on cyber-security and elections was published and Commonwealth Anti-Corruption benchmarks were finalised. Support for small and vulnerable states to have their voices heard at the hubs in Geneva and New York continues to be provided through the Commonwealth Small States Offices. These are exemplary practical expressions of collective Commonwealth commitment to mutual support and the value of multilateralism these times when they are increasingly in jeopardy yet more sorely needed than ever.

Commonwealth Secretary-General The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC

**44** projects being  
delivered, across all  
**54** Commonwealth  
countries

USD  
**\$33.6M** of climate finance  
mobilised for **21** projects

**400** participants  
attended the  
Commonwealth  
Youth team  
webinar series



**13** Trade advisers, **2** based in Geneva,  
supporting **48** beneficiary countries,  
regions and institutions



**150** The Secretariat trained  
150 debt managers (up  
from 87 last year) to  
support effective debt  
management



Action Plans for **12** member countries  
developed to support investment facilitation





**81** delegates from **30** countries participated in the meeting under the theme "Delivering a coordinated Commonwealth COVID – 19 response"

**5** Commonwealth Connectivity Clusters with participation from **42** member countries supporting trade connectivity

The **Seychelles** adopted the **Domestic Violence Bill 2020** with Secretariat support



**42** Commonwealth countries have joined one or more Blue Charter Action Groups

**47** case studies have been developed by the Action groups



**14** member countries implement policy towards the sustainable management of their natural resources'



**10,000** new social media followers in 2020



The **CVE Unit** delivered **38** capacity-building trainings with over **1500** direct beneficiaries



**4** evaluations completed of the Secretariat's support: 2 country, 2 programme evaluations



Launch of the "Commonwealth Best Practice Guide on Cybersecurity for Elections" in March 2020

The Election Cybersecurity project reached over **35** countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia-Pacific regions

**6** elections where Commonwealth Observer Groups were present (Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Namibia, Dominica, Guyana)



Three capacity-building events reaching **60** election professionals from **24** Commonwealth Election Management Bodies

# Highlights and Success Stories

## Democracy

*Projects being implemented under this strategic stream are designed to support the strategic objectives of greater adherence to Commonwealth political values and principles. They encompass the work of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, good offices for peace, elections and countering violent extremism. This section highlights results in the areas of strengthening electoral processes and institutions, increasing women's political participation and supporting member countries in addressing the threat of violent extremism.*

### *Secretary-General's Good Offices for Peace*

During the reporting period, the Secretary-General's Good Offices for Peace continued to respond to member countries' requests for interventions in the domain of strengthening political dialogue and peace-building. Within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Offices provided remote advisory and supported home-grown initiatives implemented by national institutions.

The Secretariat supported the Malawi Public Affairs Committee (PAC) to engage in shuttle diplomacy between key political stakeholders and former President Peter Mutharika. Building on previous dialogue with presidential candidates, PAC diplomacy focused on securing a commitment from former President Mutharika on the message of peace to Malawians and the facilitation of a smooth transition of government. The PAC diplomacy, especially through former President Bakili Muluzi, contributed to peace after the announcement of the official results of the election.

The Secretary-General's Good Offices deployed two senior electoral advisers to the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) after the 2 March 2020 general elections. This effort supported the chair of GECOM until the election process was credibly and transparently concluded. The Secretariat's adviser position remained the only expert position in Guyana embedded within GECOM and providing trusted advice in accordance with Commonwealth democratic values and principles.

The Secretary-General conducted a joint visit to Cameroon in November 2019 with the chair of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Secretary-General of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF). This mission and ongoing dialogue are bringing together key international partners in support of the government's efforts to resolve the current crisis in the country.

### *Inclusive dialogue and women's political participation*

Following the nullification of the May 2019 tripartite election, Malawi held a fresh presidential election in June 2020. Therein, the Secretariat supported the 50:50 Campaign Management Agency to activate a Women Situation Room and a Joint Domestic Gender Delegation (JDGD), based on a request from the Malawi Ministry of Gender. This formed part of integrated Secretariat support to domestic election observation and early warning initiatives in the member country.



Figure 1: The Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, speaking ahead of International Women's Day in March 2020, at a Commonwealth gathering calling for an end to gender inequality by 2030.



The JDGD consisted of representatives from key women-focused organisations; female political and election analysts; and legal, gender and media experts in Malawi. In the lead-up to the polls, the teams played a role in sensitising the public on the issues of cyberbullying and violence against female campaigners and issued press statements condemning violence against women campaigners. The JDGD also visited a sample of 210 polling units across Malawi and collected and analysed data on the political and electoral environment; the degree of inclusivity of women as voters, electoral officers and observers; and gender-based violence on election day.

Their election observation report provided a holistic overview of the inclusivity of the election and recommendations on ways to improve voting could be improved for women. This was later presented to elected President Lazarus Chakwera to continue advocacy for equal representation of women in his new cabinet.

## *Elections*

In 2019/20, the Secretariat continued to provide support in relation to strengthening electoral processes. Positive changes can be seen in supported member countries. A number of countries have demonstrated engagement with electoral reform, including Cameroon, The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. In Cameroon, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Secretariat has been piloting the provision of remote technical assistance. Requests for technical assistance, received from countries at various stages in their respective electoral cycles, and on a variety of different issues, demonstrate the value of the Secretariat's full-cycle approach to engagement and the level of trust in the Secretariat to deliver high-quality assistance.

The pandemic has limited the ability of the Secretariat to respond positively to observation requests to date. However, steps are being taken to adapt Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) methodologies and protocols to resume observation missions. In the meantime, the Secretariat has reoriented its focus towards other means of supporting member countries, including through the development of knowledge products and 'virtual' assistance. In the past six months, one COG has been deployed, to Guyana. Observation missions to Malawi, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis and Vanuatu had to be cancelled as a result of COVID-19.



Figure 2: Commonwealth Observer Group, Namibia, November 2019

Gender mainstreaming in this area was pursued through equitable gender representation on COGs, through ensuring gender experts were present and through the production of knowledge products on gender, for example the Gender Checklist for Elections and the Handbook on Gender-Inclusive Elections in Commonwealth Africa.

## Success Story: Political finance regulation and electoral support services achievements

The Secretariat has continued to solidify its position as a thought leader on new and emerging electoral issues. The latest publication in this area is entitled *Political Finance Regulation: A Best Practice Guide to Commonwealth Legislative Approaches*. In many countries, unregulated political finance threatens to corrode public trust in politicians and political processes, including elections. This Guide, aimed at election management bodies (EMBs), senior election officials and the wider electoral community, provides detailed advice to member countries embarking on regulating this area, as well as those seeking to improve existing legislation.

The Guide incorporates best practices from across the Commonwealth, compiled from detailed studies of political finance legislation in 26 member countries. It gives due consideration to new and emerging discourse on the use of political finance legislation to address election misinformation and foreign interference campaigns on social media, as well as to regulate the use of cryptocurrencies and 'dark money' in political campaigning. This product, with a definitive Commonwealth perspective, will be invaluable to the promotion and embedding of Commonwealth norms and principles for years to come.

While long-term impact cannot yet be measured, the Guide has had some immediate impact. At the March 2020 Validation Worksop, EMB representatives called for the Commonwealth to move to a Phase II of this body of work. Specifically, EMBs called for the publication of a Guide focused on the implementation of political finance regulation, and further requested that the Secretariat produce reporting templates that EMBs can adapt to the country context. These EMB requests demonstrate the value of the Secretariat's publications to EMBs, which are an important component of the Secretariat's full electoral cycle approach to its engagement with member countries and its efforts to promote Commonwealth democratic norms and practices.

Indeed, since the onset of the pandemic, knowledge products have become an increasingly important tool for maintaining the Secretariat's engagement with EMBs, including on how the pandemic has affected their electoral timetable and preparations. Based on a detailed survey completed by Commonwealth EMBs, the Secretariat will be publishing a pan-Commonwealth paper that identifies key principles and emerging good practice on how to plan and conduct elections during this public health crisis. This will be followed by a series of detailed papers that identify further emerging good practice at the regional level. The response rate on the initial questionnaire, and attendance levels at webinars on the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrate a significant demand for knowledge exchange and peer-to-peer support among EMBs.

## Countering violent extremism initiative

The Secretariat continues to progress on Commonwealth-wide initiatives to support new or improved mechanisms, policies and programmes on countering violent extremism (CVE). Examples include promoting education as a CVE tool; advancing the integration of CVE into global efforts on youth, peace and security; promoting action to prevent terrorist misuse of the Internet; and encouraging cooperation between researchers and policy-makers through the CVE Cadre of Experts.

One of the key outcomes the Secretariat is seeking is closer cooperation within civil society, and particularly with youth organisations and member governments.

In 2019/20, a key part of the focus was on developing engagements with Commonwealth member countries beyond the four countries of initial engagement. The Secretariat undertook technical assistance visits and delivered activities in Jamaica, Kenya and Sri Lanka on a variety of CVE-related topics. These served as the foundation for assistance to countries to better understand the drivers of extremism. Overall, as recognition that extremism affects a broad range of countries increases, there is a growing receptiveness across the Commonwealth to engaging in CVE.

With the impacts of COVID-19 limiting the ability to travel, the Secretariat continues to be present at a variety of virtual CVE events, participating and presenting to ensure continued visibility within

the CVE sphere and to promote the needs and interests of Commonwealth countries (especially small states). For example, in June 2020, the Secretariat participated in the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law Virtual Consultations on Rule of Law-Based Multi-Actor Intervention Programmes for P/CVE. This is part of the Secretariat commitment to facilitating small state participation in multilateral CVE forums.

### Success Story: Bangladesh - Amader Porichoy, 'Our Identity'

In November 2019, the Secretariat launched the Amader Porichoy ('Our Identity') initiative. This discusses the subject of identity in Bangladesh anchored in a film that explores the lives of two people from different backgrounds set during the 1971 independence struggle. The first event was attended by student representatives from a number of Dhaka-based universities, graduates of the Faith in the Commonwealth programme (May 2018 cohort), senior officials from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and dignitaries including the British High Commissioner and the United Arab Emirates High Commissioner.

The Secretariat delivered three of four phases of this initiative in Dhaka (November 2019), Dhaka (December 2019) and Sylhet (February 2020). The final phase in Chittagong was postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, more than 800 participants have engaged, from a mix of disciplines and geographical backgrounds (the Sylhet workshop being the most diverse). The workshops included discussions and debates on students' understanding of identity in a globalised world, the role of religion vs. culture, misinformation and fake news, and the challenges facing students on and off campus, including student political groups and the role they play in universities.

This initiative is being delivered by experts from the Bangladeshi diaspora, thereby giving young people access to a pool of relatable role models. This not only promotes the core tenets of the programme through inspirational leadership exposure but also promotes a deeper understanding of different cultures, internationalism and what international opportunities can look like. Representatives of the government of Bangladesh have reiterated their support and welcomed this timely and innovative project held on key dates, such as International Mother Language Day, Liberation Day and the 100-year celebration of the founder of the nation, and in the lead-up to the 50-year anniversary of Bangladesh's independence.



Figure 3: Amader Porichoy initiative in Dhaka, Bangladesh, November 2019



### *Challenges and lessons learnt in Democracy*

The global pandemic and resulting lockdowns prevented the deployment of approved missions to Grenada, Jamaica, Malawi and Solomon Islands and the convening of six multi-stakeholder workshops planned between April and June 2020. Although this has had heavy impacts on the Secretariat's ability to deliver outcomes, it has emphasised the importance of building the local capacity of partner national institutions to embed long-term results. During lockdown these partner national institutions in Malawi and Jamaica (NICE, 50:50 Campaign) demonstrated their ability to take forward initiatives by scaling up best practices in inclusive dialogue peace-building and women's political participation, and deployed their own resources in replicating activities delivered through project support.

The shift from the delivery of in-person training workshops to virtual meetings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the role that such virtual meetings can play going forward. Another key learning is to ensure there is a focus on building trust and cooperation between governments and civil society organisations. Although the vast majority of participants recognise that neither government nor civil society can counter violent extremism on their own, there remain real barriers to cooperation, including security protocols and trust issues. This has been factored into the 2020/21 delivery plan.

## Public Institutions

*Projects being implemented under this strategic stream are designed to support the strategic objective of more effective, efficient and equitable public governance. They encompass work in human rights, rule of law and public sector governance.*

### Human rights

The Secretariat continued to support Commonwealth small states to improve their constructive engagement with international human rights mechanisms in Geneva, encouraging enhanced participation in the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) through delivering statements, co-sponsoring resolutions and championing the perspectives of small states on existential matters such as climate action. Support provided by human rights advisers based in Geneva contributed to reducing small states' backlog in reporting to human rights treaty bodies, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). To further sustainability, the Secretariat also provided advice to small states on creating institutional mechanisms at the national level for follow-up and implementation of recommendations. In partnership with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, the Secretariat supported engagement between Commonwealth small states and civil society/human rights defenders. An external review of this work and interviews with beneficiaries confirm that the Secretariat is effectively strengthening Commonwealth small states' capacity to bring their views to international fora.

The Secretariat also continued to support the strengthening of eSwatini's National Human Rights Institution, achieving a milestone with revised legislation now submitted to the Cabinet, induction of new commissioners facilitated through South-South cooperation, and provision of strategic planning advice. Technical assistance to take forward the establishment journey in Belize and Grenada was postponed as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. This work is expected to resume virtually in 2020/21, as the Secretariat pivots delivery strategy and engages with member countries to meet their needs.

### Success Story: Supporting Commonwealth small states to participate in the UN human rights mechanisms and give durable effect to their outcomes

Commonwealth small states continue to face challenges in their effective participation in international human rights mechanisms based in Geneva. This is the result of a number of factors, including lack of resources to establish a permanent presence in Geneva, there are 12 Commonwealth small states without a permanent mission in Geneva and limited financial and logistical support available for capital-based officials to participate in regular meetings in Geneva.

These are some of the challenges the Secretariat sought to address through its project titled Supporting Commonwealth Small States to Effectively and Constructively Participate in Geneva-Based International Human Rights Mechanisms and Give Durable Effect to Their Outcomes, funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The project supported appointment of two human rights advisers at the Commonwealth Small States Office (CSSO) in Geneva.

Under the project, the Secretariat provided human rights technical assistance and advisory support for Commonwealth small states to effectively undergo Universal Periodic Reviews (UPRs), to comply with Treaty Body reporting obligations, to articulate human rights issues in the HRC and to exchange best practices with other states and international organisations. Since April 2019, the Secretariat has provided technical assistance to six small states - Fiji, The Gambia, Grenada, Guyana, Dominica and Kiribati, in their participation under the UPR process. This support has included assistance in the preparation of national reports, preparation of national statements and training on the modalities of the UPR Working Group. It has also

conducted five in-country trainings, in Dominica, The Gambia, Grenada, Kiribati and Malawi.

The Secretariat further assisted six small states, Guyana, Malawi, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Sierra Leone and Vanuatu to enhance their participation at the HRC by supporting statement preparation and organising five pre-session briefings to provide updates on HRC-related activities in upcoming sessions. As a result, the number of statements these states delivered increased substantially - as compared with zero statements by some states in previous sessions. For example, Vanuatu was advised and delivered seven statements at HRC42 and HRC43 as compared with no statements at HRC41; similarly, Sierra Leone delivered seven statements at HRC42 compared with one statement at HRC41.

With the Secretariat's support, four Commonwealth small states - Dominica, Grenada, Guyana and St Vincent and the Grenadines, have stepped up their engagement with Treaty Bodies by submitting overdue reports or participating in constructive dialogue in Geneva.

To escalate visibility and to share best practices from the Commonwealth small states, two seminars and five side events were organised in Geneva with missions from Fiji, Maldives, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago and the UK. This also helped the Secretariat strengthen partnerships with United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UN Women, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Article 19 and the Universal Rights Group.

### Success Story: Secretariat support to the eSwatini Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration

In November 2019, the Secretariat convened a working session with the eSwatini Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration (ECHRPA) and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR). This served as an orientation for the ECHRPA's deputy commissioners and a capacity-building exercise for existing staff. Drawing on its experiences of 23 years, the KNCHR shared its standard operating procedures and best practices in the key areas of institutional strengthening, accreditation, case management and stakeholder engagement. The Minister of Justice, the President and Deputy President of the Senate, and the Chair and members of the Justice Portfolio Committee participated in select sessions, as did officials from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Office of the Attorney-General, the Ministries of Labour and Health, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Royal eSwatini Police Service and the eSwatini Defence Forces.

Hon. Pholile Dlamini-Shakantu, Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, attended the working session discussion with the Justice Portfolio Committee. She noted the important role of the ECHRPA in promoting and protecting human rights in eSwatini, stating that, 'It is integral in promoting the rule of law and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.' She emphasised that the working session would simultaneously strengthen the ECHRPA and help Parliament better understand the role of the ECHRPA and the challenges it faces. Hon. Dlamini-Shakantu thanked the KNCHR for its assistance and expressed gratitude for technical and financial assistance from the Secretariat.

The working session led to a number of actions, including a meeting with senators to further explain the role of the ECHRPA and its work and to explore synergies between it and Parliament; recognition and prioritisation of the need to adopt and implement IT systems; and an agreement to begin drafting a new strategic plan, develop an accreditation plan and timeline, and finalise standard operating procedures on complaints handling.

Following the working session, Sabelo Masuku, Chair of the ECHRPA, said, 'The whole orientation programme was impactful in the sense that we now have partners. It has led to a promise to have some memoranda of understanding signed. Our

Commissioners are also very happy. It has closed a big gap.’ He added that, ‘The Commonwealth had a big impact because it gave the programme credibility to our partners and stakeholders.’



Figure 4: The Commonwealth Secretariat working session with the ECHRPA and the KNCHR

In addition to capacity-building, the Secretariat supported revision of the ECHRPA Bill, convening a virtual validation meeting in June 2020 with the ECHRPA and stakeholders in eSwatini from government, civil society and academia. The revised Bill clearly sets out the ECHRPA structure, appointments process, mandates and independence. The revisions bring the legislation in line with both the Constitution of eSwatini and the Paris Principles.

### *Rule of law and Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform*

The Secretariat launched the guide ‘Cybersecurity for Elections - A Commonwealth Guide on Best Practice’ in March 2020 to support implementation of the mandate of the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) for the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration. The guide is a sustainable knowledge product available online and free of charge. More than a year in the making, it is based on an in-depth questionnaire sent to all Commonwealth EMBs; research missions in Ghana, Pakistan, Trinidad and Tobago and the UK; and regional training workshops in Africa, Asia-Pacific and the Caribbean. It offers a raft of recommendations that can be tailored to national contexts to help election professionals. The product was developed to help EMBs to identify and manage cybersecurity risks and it is hoped that its use will support member countries.



Figure 5: Launch of the ‘Cybersecurity for Elections - A Commonwealth Guide on Best Practise’ guide in March 2020

The Commonwealth International Arbitration Study was completed in 2019 and was welcomed by Commonwealth Law Ministers at their Meeting in November 2019. Ongoing consultations with Commonwealth countries over the Law and Climate Change Toolkit, the Anti-Corruption Benchmarks, civil procedure law reform, model data protection provisions and the model investment contract provisions resource reflect progress in the development of these tools with member countries.

The Secretariat continues to work to strengthen the management of vulnerable witnesses, assessment of the efficacy of gender-based violence legislation and the jurisprudence of equality. Member countries participating in the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting welcomed the focus on cases of violence against women and girls.

### Success Story: Supporting the mentorship of legislative drafters and law reformers in small Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean

A memorandum of understanding between the Secretariat, the government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission established the Commonwealth's first regional exchange programme. This will enhance the legislative drafting and law reform capacity of the relevant professionals in small Commonwealth countries and strengthen their institutional frameworks. Trinidad and Tobago will host the programme with coordination support from the OECS Commission and oversight from the Secretariat. This new regional approach to delivering assistance to small Commonwealth countries builds on earlier capacity-building interventions in the region and comes at a critical time as the Secretariat continues to pivot its strategic in the COVID-19 affected environment.

This exchange initiative seeks to overcome challenges in job mentoring for most OECS states. It is critical that law reform experts in these countries are fully equipped to ensure the legislative and law reform programmes of the countries are not adversely affected. The institutional frameworks of the offices they work in must also be strengthened, and procedures and processes leading to professional outputs must be in place. The initiative will also enhance the already cordial relations between participating member countries.

Trinidad and Tobago will initially host three officers at a time from each participating country. (drafter, law reform expert and law revision expert) for agreed periods of time. Participating officers will also benefit from exposure to the procedures and processes necessary for well-organised and highly effective and efficient Drafting, Law Reform and Law Revision Offices.

Implementation was intended to begin in February 2020; this has been postponed as a result of COVID-19, with remote models of delivery explored.

### Public sector governance

The Secretariat promotes the strengthening of public administration and public sector governance.

During the reporting period, a key achievement was improvement in the work undertaken by Zambia's Anti-Corruption Commission as a result of the development of a four-year Strategic Plan with the Secretariat's support. For the first time, the Commission has been able to clearly align its work with Zambia's National Development Plan and the National Results Framework, which will enable the assessment of its impact on addressing corruption.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat also responded to a request by the chief executive officer of the Anti-Corruption Commission of Seychelles to build capacity among its Board members with a focus on the importance of fundamental leadership responsibilities and management skills. The training was delivered in October 2019 and attended by 15 Board members and Commission senior managers. It built on current leadership and management capabilities and identified steps to better manage corruption risks. The training was well received, and the Secretariat has since received a subsequent request from Seychelles to provide technical assistance to its Anti-Corruption Commission, which is currently exploring future areas of potential engagement.



Another key achievement in the area was the Secretariat's collaboration with the African Development Bank to deliver a senior-level management and leadership programme for the heads of Anti-Corruption Agencies (ACAs) in Commonwealth Africa in November 2019. This initiative was designed to address the critical challenge facing many ACAs, of lack of managerial and leadership skills. This work builds on lessons from earlier interventions, in particular with respect to the unsustainability of one-off-stand-alone training programmes.

In December 2019, five Commonwealth Africa member countries expressed satisfaction with capacity-building provided through the Secretariat's Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Exchange Learning in The Gambia. The focus was on leveraging IT to manage risks in achieving good governance and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

*'The discussions we had were enriching, and at the same time challenging us on the progress we need to take to actualise the benefits of these important reforms... The exchange learning programme was timely and educative.'*,  
Enterprise Risk Management team leader from Kenya.

Technical assistance was also provided to eSwatini on introducing ERM in the Ministry of Finance and six line ministries. The minister of finance conveyed his appreciation of the Secretariat's support during the Secretary-General's visit to the country.

### *Challenges and lessons learnt in Public Institutions*

In the area of human rights, the visibility of the Secretariat in Geneva is creating confidence in small states and partners. Requests for technical assistance by small states are increasing. As much as possible, the Secretariat aims to sustain its presence in Geneva and to enhance its technical assistance to requesting states. Engaging partners and experts from countries with similar experiences give beneficiaries confidence their specific context is understood and that strategies/solutions discussed are relevant. Advance planning is essential to effective delivery. Regular communication early in the process is emphasised in planning. Pre-training questionnaires provide a baseline and ensure beneficiary needs are properly identified and targeted.

In the area of ACAs and networks, the Secretariat must focus on delivering 'value for money' through leveraging regional networks and partnerships to deliver benefits to more member countries with limited resources. Impactful and relevant in-country work will be fully supported by member countries, which will also be in a better position to cost-share to deliver enhanced outcomes.

To ensure sustained engagement and facilitate greater impact, the Secretariat has begun to focus more in depth on fewer changes in delivering technical assistance in the areas of public financial management and risk management. This approach has also enabled increased collaboration across the Secretariat. Working with partners with local presence such as the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in Zambia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Lesotho has enabled the Secretariat to define its niche support and avoid duplication. In The Gambia and Sierra Leone, the Secretariat has been working with independent local institutions including the Supreme Audit Institution to monitor reforms. The Secretariat plans to up-scale this as a part of its pivot in delivery strategies in the COVID-19 context.

## Youth and Social Development

*Projects being implemented under this strategic stream are designed to support the strategic objective of people of the Commonwealth fulfilling their potential with dignity and quality in a healthy environment. They encompass work in youth, sport for development and peace, education, health and addressing violence against women and girls.*

In the area of social development, the Secretariat has revised the programme to enhance its effectiveness, creating structures to monitor and support implementation of ministerial meetings actions and mandates; shifting towards evidence-based policy-making, with a greater focus on research and analysis; embedding partnership model in programmes; and developing a more comprehensive, inclusive and effective 'Learning for Life' approach.

### Youth

The Commonwealth's youth section has maintained its enviable niche in the international development space and its strong reputation for thought leadership and innovative and effective responses to existing global challenges such as climate change and emerging issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In relation to data-driven advocacy, building on results from previous years, the Secretariat has collaborated with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to develop a youth development index based on five pillars: education, health and well-being, employment and opportunities, participation and engagement. In relation to the professionalisation of youth work, during the reporting period, the Secretariat collaborated with the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth and the Namibia College of Open Learning to support more than 330 youth workers and leaders in Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, Canada and Africa.

Youth leaders received training in effective and evidenced-based youth policy and advocacy and creating strong national and regional youth councils. They also received support to participate in youth-led action around entrepreneurship and employment, and to attend and contribute to important regional and global forums such as those held by the Africa Union and the United Nations.

In addition, the Secretariat delivered training to more than 100 senior government officials from Commonwealth regions on youth work, youth employment, youth participation and youth mainstreaming, and developing youth entrepreneurship policy. A model law on the professionalization of youth work was developed and 35 baseline studies on youth work were completed.

The Secretariat continues to support the creation and the strengthening of youth development associations across the Commonwealth, with 11 Commonwealth youth networks currently active. During the COVID-crisis, Commonwealth networks have sprung into action with a number of youth-led youth-focused initiatives, including the following:

- The Commonwealth Children and Youth Disability Network launched a hospital Communication Passport for the disabled, a #DisabilityYouthC19 Children and Youth with Disabilities COVID 19 Twitter Chat and a Children and Youth with Disabilities Statement and Roundtable Discussion.
- The Commonwealth Youth Entrepreneurship for Asia hosted a webinar series for members in India and Sri Lanka.
- The Commonwealth Youth Health Network launched a #YouthAgainstCOVID19 campaign with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Prezi, the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UNMGCY) and other partners.

The Secretariat continued to deliver policy support to member countries. Ghana's National Youth Policy was finalised with the Secretariat's support and technical assistance was provided to The Bahamas, Belize, Kenya and Uganda.

### Success Story: Commonwealth youth ‘Taking Charge of Our Future’

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges for youth in the Commonwealth, affecting unemployment and entrenching barriers to empowerment. As part of a Secretariat-wide rapid pivot to digital delivery, the Commonwealth Youth team has launched a new webinar series, ‘Taking Charge of Our Future’, to take place from July to December 2020, to amplify the voices of youth regarding policies affecting their future.

The series offers a forum in which young people from across the Commonwealth can discuss pressing issues and agree on tangible action items to be presented at the next CHOGM. The webinar series focuses on the five CHOGM pillars of employment, climate change, technology, education and equal opportunity.

*‘Young people need a seat at the table where decisions are made about their future. This series will allow us to consult with young people as equal partners in coming up with solutions that leaders can consider to respond to their needs, particularly in light of the pandemic.’ Commonwealth Youth Council Vice-Chair, Darrion Narine.*

The first webinar session held in July 2020 convened 400 participants and over 2,700 Facebook views, the largest viewing in Secretariat history on the Youth Facebook page. A survey taken by participants at the session suggested a lack of opportunity to take part in decision-making is preventing around half of them from taking a lead. Stressing the need for intergenerational spaces, youth leaders insisted young people should be equally involved and valued in non-youth panels and that their views should be fully recognised in decision-making processes.

### Sport for development and peace

The global leadership of the Secretariat on sport and the SDGs has been underscored by the establishment of a global community of practice and engagement with the African Union, the Ibero-American Sports Council, ASEAN, UN Women and other global leaders to strengthen systems to measure, quantify and enhance the contribution of sport to economic and social development.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat developed a preliminary sport sector results frameworks aligned with National Development Plans and identified SDGs for Jamaica and Mauritius, as well as supporting establishing similar frameworks for additional countries including Canada, Fiji, Lesotho and Namibia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the challenges member countries face in relation to technical and institutional capacity limitations. The launch of the Massive Open Online Course on designing effective policies and programmes on sport and the SDGs in partnership with DFAT and sportanddev has been key in supporting technical capacity in the response to the pandemic. Over 2,000 learners registered for the course in its first two months of operation.

In response to COVID-19, the Secretariat launched a gamut of digital tools, including an online Sport and Coronavirus resource hub to assist countries to share information, resources and good practice on responding to the impact of the virus in sport; publication of research into the impact of COVID-19 on sport communities; and hosting the Commonwealth Forum on Sports and COVID-19.



## Success Story: Active Mauritius

Well-designed sport and physical activity strategies can make a valuable contribution to national development and achieving the SDGs. Based on strategic guidance provided by the Secretariat, the government of Mauritius launched the national Active Mauritius initiative in late 2019 to encourage more people to participate in sport and exercise regularly. Physical inactivity is a key risk factor for lifestyle disease; however, 57 per cent of Mauritians who do not engage in physical activity said that they were willing to become more active, while 79 per cent said that they enjoyed taking part in sports.

The Active Mauritius strategy developed and implemented by the Mauritius Sports Council is aligned with the philosophy that underpins the National Sport and Physical Activity Policy 2018-2028. It draws on the Secretariat's 'Rising to the Challenge through Sport' guidance and recommendation report delivered to the government in 2018. Campaigns in Mauritius promoting the benefits of an active lifestyle aim to garner results toward achieving SDG 3.4, reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease and stroke, obesity and Type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, with additional Secretariat support, Mauritius is also the first country in Africa to introduce an indicators framework within its national monitoring and evaluation system to quantify areas in which sport is making a positive impact in terms of achieving the SDGs.



Figure 6: The Active Mauritius initiative

## Education and health

In the health space, the Secretariat delivered a non-communicable disease (NCD) legislation workshop to Antigua and Barbuda led by technical experts, to support overall legislation drafting and capacity-building in the Caribbean region addressing specific NCD risk factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption. The Secretariat is undertaking similar work in the Pacific with the support of regional health ministers.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat held a number of virtual joint advocacy and information-sharing meetings in collaboration with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), UNESCO regional offices and other partners to discuss impact and responses to the pandemic. A notable event is the first-ever virtual Health Ministers Meeting held in May 2020 to address the pandemic, covering 31 countries and involving 81 participants. Commonwealth health ministers agreed to coordinate their response in tackling the pandemic; endorse the removal of fees for tests and treatment, especially for migrants and refugees, as appropriate within national contexts; and create a voluntary mechanism to share and distribute extra medical supplies, including ventilators and testing kits. As a result, the Secretariat is currently expanding the scope of the development of an essential medicine price-sharing platform in collaboration with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to focus on tools and diagnostics for COVID-19.

In the learning space, the Secretariat is developing a set of training modules for school councils in Seychelles to advance gender-sensitive learner-centric pedagogies based on situational analysis and stakeholder consultation. Identified areas requiring in-depth training include governance and management, legal responsibilities and budget planning. The training modules will be pilot tested in conjunction with the Ministry of Education over the next financial year.

Building on last year's work with 10 SADC members on the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework, initial monitoring of implementation has seen good progress in the areas of governance and education systems capacity. Tanzania has strengthened its communication of education policies and guidelines at different levels across the education system. Seychelles has similarly strengthened its monitoring and evaluation processes around policy planning and performance.

Substantial progress was also made in the roll-out of the Technical Vocational Education and Training Self-Assessment Toolkit and Entrepreneurship Guidelines in Sri Lanka in February 2020. The workshop saw 26 participants from across Sri Lanka's ministries, departments, education and training institutions, and the private sector. Participants were provided with materials to allow them to run similar assessment exercises and workshops within their own organisations in collaboration with stakeholders.

### Success Story: Commonwealth Researchers in Pursuit

With most Commonwealth countries closing schools and turning to remote learning, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected more than 776.7 million children, parents and teachers globally. Such closures may have amplified pre-existing inequalities. In response to this, the Secretariat has launched an ambitious project called Commonwealth Researchers in Pursuit in partnership with the non-profit organisation, JET Education. The research project has a twin focus on agile research and the capacity-building of a group of about 120 young researchers through a unique opportunity to work under the guidance of experienced researchers to examine the impact of COVID-19 on education systems under 15 interrelated educational work streams.

The research themes include looking at how governments position and activate public institutions such as school systems in multi-pronged efforts to contain COVID-19. The researchers also explore issues of access and inclusivity in education for the most disadvantaged and marginalised in times of health emergencies; harnessing information and communication technology (ICT) and innovative digital low-cost solutions while ensuring access, equity and safeguarding during and post-COVID-19; and innovative financing mechanisms for the public education sector.

Participants will contribute to shaping responses to the stressors and disruptions facing education systems using an evidence-based approach. Real-time facts and findings from the challenge will be shared with decision-makers and stakeholders in the education field to shape their COVID-19 responses. The call for applicants/young researchers ran for two days and received approximately 275 expression of interests. Two research scholars from the Department of Mass Communications and Journalism at Gauhati University, Hoimawati Talukdar and Raja Das, were selected for the project launched by the Secretariat to examine the impact of COVID-19 on education.

### *Economic costs of violence against women and girls*

The Secretariat is committed to protecting and empowering women, girls and other vulnerable groups across the Commonwealth. As part of this commitment, the Secretariat began pioneering ground-breaking research to estimate the direct and indirect economic costs of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in 2017. Subject matter experts at the Secretariat completed an EconVAWG assessment framework for two countries, Lesotho and Seychelles.

In the reporting year, the Secretariat presented the initial report on VAWG to the government of Lesotho, highlighting that the cost of inaction was an estimated 5.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017. The study provided an opportunity to effectively design, in partnership with state institutions and civil society actors, a multi-agency intervention to address the issue.

### Success Story: Seychelles Domestic Violence Bill 2020

Gender-based violence in Seychelles is deeply rooted in gender inequality and can be a daily reality for many women and girls. A study conducted in 2016 showed that more than half of the sampled female population in the country had experienced some form of gender-based violence. Despite being a small island developing state with limited resources, Seychelles is undertaking serious steps to conform to CEDAW. Gender mainstreaming remains a priority for the government of Seychelles.

The Secretariat worked in close partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports from the inception of the initiative to estimate the overall cost of VAWG to the economy. This was estimated to be 4.6 per cent of GDP in 2016, 1 percentage point higher than the country's annual education budget.

The Secretariat also supported the Attorney-General's Office to review Seychelles' national policy and legal frameworks for gender-based violence, and particularly the Domestic Violence Bill. The Bill was adopted in June 2020, providing a legal basis for defining different forms of VAWG, criminalising acts of domestic violence. It further sets out the role of police in relation to victims in need of shelters; imparts powers to social services to take up legal action against abusers, even in cases where the victim removes their case; and increases the options available to third parties seeking protection for survivors.

The new legislative framework is a critical step in addressing VAWG in Seychelles, enabled by the Secretariat. To implement it, the Secretariat has delivered training to law enforcement teams in Seychelles to help survivors get the support they need, as well as promoting increased reporting, police referrals, prosecutions and convictions. This will contribute to existing data on VAWG and support future policy developments. Police officers participating in the training recommended the programme be extended.



Figure 7: Seychelles adopts the Domestic Violence Bill in June 2020

## *Challenges and lessons learnt in Youth and Social Development*

The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial impact on the delivery of projects across the Youth and Social Development space. It has highlighted the importance of robust contingency plans and risk management systems. It has also led to areas of learning, including recognition of the potential and utility of digital technology as both a primary and a contingency tool, leading to future integration of digital tools into the Secretariat's delivery strategies.

The Secretariat faces continued challenges with regard to a lack of suitable data on the EconVAWG initiative, necessitating the collection of primary data. This has been exacerbated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a slow-down in data collection and monitoring.

In relation to the Youth programme, the Secretariat is working to increase engagements with senior officials in member countries to take forward the agreed actions and implement mandates from the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings and CHOGM. Enhanced partnerships have emerged as a key driver for the ongoing and future work of the Secretariat. COVID-19 and related restrictions have highlighted the limitations of service delivery that relies predominantly on in-country travel, while creating a strong sense of pertinence for greater collaboration with on-the-ground partners.

## Economic Development

Projects implemented under this strategic stream are designed to support the strategic objective of more inclusive economic growth and sustainable development. They encompass work on trade and economic policy, debt management, oceans and natural resources.

### Trade

The Secretariat continued to support individual countries to develop trade policies and implement trade agreements, as well as taking forward advisory support on international trade policy issues, particularly to small states through the Trade Advisors Project in Geneva. The Secretariat continued to support global advocacy on international trade policy issues affecting developing countries, including by partnering with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the United Nations Trade Forum on the SDGs and Climate Change and the Third Oceans Forum. The Secretariat also convened a Commonwealth Commission on Least Developed Countries Trade-related issues, which examined the impact of natural disasters and the importance of effective graduation frameworks. Technical advisory support was provided through the Hubs and Spokes Programme consolidation phase to the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and the African Union Commission (AUC).

Technical advisory assistance to member countries on trade competitiveness continues to support intermediate outcomes in five key result areas: design of national export strategies and export diversification plans; investment facilitation and promotion; trade facilitation through reforms of customs processes and procedure; design of national trade policies that support sustainable development objectives; and support for regulatory reforms to enhance trade in services.

In the reporting period, the Secretariat provided technical support to 12 countries, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei, Cameroon, The Gambia, Grenada, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. It facilitated three regional initiatives: the East African Community focused on trade facilitation; the Economic Community of West African States reviewed the regional investment protocol; and CARICOM/the Caribbean Association of Investment Promotion Agencies focused on investment treaty negotiations, planning and facilitation. The Secretariat further supported the second trade summit of the Intra-Commonwealth Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Association and the Annual Forum of Developing Countries programme in collaboration with the Institute for Sustainable Development and UNCTAD.

As part of its delivery strategy pivot during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat undertook regional-based research work to examine the impact of the pandemic on micro-enterprises in the informal sector, given the critical value of this sector in many member countries.

### Success Story: Supporting e-commerce in Sri Lanka and Cameroon to boost global digital trade

In a world of rapidly changing technology, e-commerce accounts for a growing share of global trade in goods and services and is predicted to increase exponentially in the next few years. Participation in the global digital economy demands substantial investment in organisational capabilities, process innovation and institutional learning. E-commerce is widely recognised as an important tool for innovation, competitiveness, job creation and growth. It presents huge potential for entrepreneurs and SMEs to expand their market reach and make their goods and services available to overseas buyers. To maximise the opportunities within the digital trade landscape for developing countries, there is a need to develop and implement effective legal, policy and regulatory frameworks at national, regional and international levels as appropriate to facilitate trade and protect the interests of consumers and businesses, while maintaining the regulatory policy space for governments to achieve their development objectives.

The Secretariat has been supporting Cameroon and Sri Lanka to boost their participation in global digital trade. In Cameroon, the Secretariat supported the development of an e-



commerce strategy to provide strategic direction and guidance to link e-commerce to the National Development Plan and other strategic national development policy instruments, including the National Trade Policy and the Industrial Development Policy. When fully implemented, this will lead to an increased contribution of e-commerce to national GDP and facilitate employment creation, poverty reduction, economic diversification and further integration into the multilateral trading system.

The Secretariat has also helped Sri Lanka assess its e-readiness. E-commerce development is multidimensional. If it is to develop optimally, either at the level of individual enterprise or at the national level, the maturity and readiness of each strategic component part needs to be assured. The Sri Lanka e-readiness assessment report presents an overview of the e-commerce benchmarking and maturity models in various countries and jurisdictions guided by the UNCTAD-recommended e-commerce maturity assessment guidelines and proposes a five-parameter model for Sri Lanka: consumer readiness; business readiness; IT infrastructure and accessibility; logistics and delivery; and policies, laws and regulations. This benchmarks the maturity of the various components of the e-commerce regime and makes recommendations on enhancing micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) participation in the global digital trade landscape.



Figure 8: The Commonwealth Secretariat supports Sri Lanka e-readiness

### Success Story: International trade policy - supporting member countries through COVID-19-related trade analysis

The Secretariat supports member countries with research and analysis, capacity-building, consensus-building and global advocacy on trade and development issues. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the global trading landscape. The World Trade Organization (WTO) projects a 12-32 per cent fall in merchandise trade alone, which will significantly affect Commonwealth countries, as around 70 per cent of their total trade is in goods. Services trade has also been severely affected, especially the tourism- and hospitality-related services sectors in Commonwealth Caribbean and Pacific members.

In response to these fast-changing global developments, the Secretariat adjusted the international trade programme of work to examine the implications of COVID-19 for Commonwealth member countries, especially small states, least developed countries (LDCs) and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most Commonwealth countries - 47 of the 54 members - are net importers of the medical equipment and devices needed to treat COVID-19. Cutting-edge analysis of the trade in COVID-19-related medical supplies has enabled the Secretariat to identify the main suppliers of these goods, especially personal protective equipment and ventilators, and to assess the exposure of Commonwealth members to a wave of export

restrictions by leading suppliers.

Similar analysis on various other issues has been conducted, including the impact of COVID-19 on food supply chains and food security; on Commonwealth goods and services trade, investment and participation in global value chains; and on specific sectors, such as tourism and digital trade. A major focus has been to provide policy recommendations for a more sustainable and resilient economic recovery; and to highlight the impact of the pandemic on women, who are disproportionately at the forefront of many professions and sectors directly exposed to it.

To disseminate the research and findings, the Secretariat created a special COVID-19 edition of the *Trade Hot Topics* publication series. In addition, it established partnerships with other multilateral organisations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the WTO's Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) for LDCs to undertake joint projects on specific aspects of COVID-19 and its implications for the Commonwealth. The WTO's EIF has published three special blogs prepared by the Secretariat on COVID-19-related issues affecting LDCs (access to medicines, trade in food products and effects on the tourism sector) in its *Trade for Development News* online platform.

### *Economic policy and small states*

The impacts of COVID-19 have amplified this area of work with respect to small and vulnerable states. The Secretariat has progressed the development of the Disaster Risk Portal which is evolving to meet member countries' needs around emerging health risks. It will be launched at the 2020 Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM).

The Commonwealth Fintech Toolkit forms the cornerstone of the programme to support small and other vulnerable states. With COVID-19, member countries are seeking mechanisms for continued economic activity and safer banking transactions, to secure continued business and new job creation. The Toolkit provides technical guidance on selected fintech topics and offers a framework for building an enabling environment for each country. To enable Commonwealth member country governments to access more targeted training on fintech, the Secretariat has also entered into a partnership with the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge to secure participation on their fintech courses.

### *Success Story: Synergies and learning from Economics of COVID-19 webinars*

In line with its commitment to support small states, the Secretariat launched a series of virtual webinars on 'The Economics of COVID-19' to examine the struggles of Commonwealth developing countries as a result of the pandemic. These webinars aligned with strategic objectives on building the resilience of small states as well as using Commonwealth convening power to advance member countries' positions on international development finance.

The seminars focused on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, including on employment, tourism, trade and SMEs. It also explored the potential combined effects of climate shocks. Panellists included Commonwealth ministers, senior officials, the private sector and youth representatives. In total, around 600 active and engaged participants attended the seminars.

The webinars were an opportunity for the Secretariat to assess common and different COVID-19 effects and policy responses to identify areas for collaboration, such as tourism and sovereign debt. They also provided a platform to share experiences on COVID-19 responses, ascertain help needed and share lessons on mistakes to avoid while preparing to tackle the economic crisis.

Based on the outcomes of this series, the Secretariat is advancing research work on the impact of COVID-19 on tourism and resultant rising debt levels. Additionally, these issues will be discussed at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers meeting on 13 October 2020, and at an extraordinary meeting for small states to be held with the international finance institutions on 1 October 2020. Following on from ministers' calls during the series, at the aforementioned

meetings the Secretariat will be seeking to facilitate a statement on how finance ministers can work together to address impacts and discuss how countries can reorient their productive sectors to reinvigorate growth and jobs.

This series further raised awareness of the plight of fellow member countries and resulted in an offer of assistance by two member countries, which followed up to enquire on how they could assist small state partners. One member country has offered medical supplies and another is coordinating discussions among small states to define their priorities and lobby for assistance.

### *Debt management*

Commonwealth countries are reeling from the devastating economic impact of COVID-19. Public debt is likely to be significantly affected. Economic decisions need to be made on public debt. These decisions need to be based on reliable, transparent and efficient data. This is the only way to accurately assess both short- and long-term impacts of any debt agreement. The Secretariat track record in providing member countries with effective debt recording and management tools is as relevant as ever. The Secretariat has progressed substantially in the provision of debt data quality assurance, debt policy advisory and implementation of Meridian, the new debt management software and internet-based platform developed by the Secretariat.

During this reporting period, Commonwealth Meridian was implemented in 15 countries, nine more than last year - namely, Barbados, Belize, Cook Islands, Cyprus, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Lesotho, India, Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, Papua New Guinea and Trinidad and Tobago. Platform implementation in these nine countries has made good progress.

The Debt Data Quality Assessment framework was piloted in two countries, Ghana and Papua New Guinea, to provide feedback on its usability. The member countries were given the results of the assessment and assistance on how to further improve the quality of their database. Following the feedback from the two countries, the Data Quality Assessment framework was revised. The framework was formally launched in November 2019 during the UNCTAD debt management forum. The framework is now to be fully incorporated into Meridian and available to user countries to monitor debt data quality. The tool will be invaluable to debt managers, who continue to face challenges in recording, monitoring and disseminating debt data, free from errors and omissions. The framework will also boost the effectiveness of Commonwealth's Meridian debt management programme and UNCTAD's Debt Management and Financial Analysis System.

Through the implementation process, the Secretariat trained 150 debt managers, up from 87 last year, on using Meridian. Each training workshop benefited from lessons learnt and feedback provided by previous training participants. A joint training was planned with the World Bank in the last quarter of 2019/20; this was cancelled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretariat is pivoting to e-training to ensure locally available expertise can support implementation until the Secretariat can be on the ground again. A survey is scheduled for 2020/21 to assess the progress and impact of the training on debt managers' skills and day-to-day use of Meridian.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat made significant progress in supporting debt management policy reform in The Bahamas. Draft public debt management legislation developed with technical assistance from the Secretariat was presented to the Cabinet for approval. It has passed through internal review by the government and peer review by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and is expected to be enacted in 2020/21. The new legislation will establish a new debt management framework, improve accountability and transparency in debt management operations and modernise public debt management infrastructure in line with best international practice.

An externally funded three-year project entitled 'Strengthening Public Debt Management Framework and Developing Government Bond Market in The Bahamas' has also been successfully established. The project is funded jointly by the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund and the government of The Bahamas and will promote long-term public debt sustainability in The Bahamas by strengthening capacity of the government to effectively manage its public debt.



## *Ocean governance*

Many Commonwealth member countries are committed to the development of sustainable and integrated ocean governance, yet implementing the internal structures to manage the variety of social, economic and environmental considerations of an integrated ocean-based economy can be limiting. The Secretariat continues to support the development of Blue Economy/Blue Growth approaches among coastal member countries, and to strengthen capacity in natural resources governance reform and the energy transition, as access to marine resources plays a critical role in shaping economic and social development.

The Secretariat's ocean governance technical assistance has continued to support member countries in securing the full extent of their maritime jurisdiction under international law by defining and agreeing their maritime boundaries, and strengthening local capacity to foster good governance and stewardship. Expert advisers have worked in person and now remotely with member countries towards developing integrated coordination and decision-making structures, such as ocean governance teams and national ocean policies. Continued progress has been made in the development of guidance notes for the Regional Ocean Governance Team and National Ocean Governance Committees with the OECS and a workshop has been conducted in Kiribati on its draft ocean policy.

In Guyana, the Secretariat's support on good governance and certainty of jurisdiction in the maritime sector has resulted in the delivery of advisory reports on an appropriate regulatory framework for its maritime zones and the drafting of regulations under the Maritime Zones Act for the establishment of safety or buffer zones in its exclusive economic zone.

A review of the limits of Seychelles' maritime zones has been conducted, which aimed at apprising the maximum limits the country is entitled to claim under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and to verify internal boundaries used in establishing marine spatial planning to meet Seychelles' international conservation commitments.

Support to the strengthening of maritime governance has achieved good outcomes in Saint Lucia, where in-country and remote assistance in implementation of the findings of the International Maritime Organization resulted in the signing of a Corrective Action Plan in December 2019. Maritime pollution prevention and other laws giving effect to key international maritime instruments were finalised during the period under review and the establishment of a separate Maritime Administration was raised in Parliament and is close to being realised.

Additionally, engagement with the Pacific Maritime Boundaries project partners continued during the 19th Meeting in Sydney, Australia. Support was provided to Pacific member countries for the preparation of submissions to the International Law Commission regarding the legal implications of sea level rise. A new research project to review the impacts of climate change adaptation measures on livelihoods and communities, building on the work of the Commonwealth Group of Experts under the 1989 Holdgate Report, has commenced.

## *Natural resources*

Natural resources and in particular petroleum and minerals are an important catalyst for industrialisation and broader socio-economic development. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented disruption in global oil markets. The precipitous fall in oil costs has devastating consequences for Commonwealth members in which the oil and gas sector generates a large component of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings.

In response to the unfolding situation, the Secretariat together with Chatham House and the Natural Resources Governance Institute, through the New Petroleum Producers Group, organised a webinar series under the theme of 'Fostering Resilience.' This included nine webinars over three months on key themes, each with an average of 50 participants from ministries, regulators, national oil companies, partner organisations, companies, industry experts and non-governmental organisations.

In addition, the Secretariat undertook analysis on the impact of COVID-19 on the oil and gas sector as it has repercussions for all Commonwealth countries - either as exporters or as importers. The research paper covered the outlook for the sector, the vulnerability of members to such market shocks and key implications for Commonwealth countries, and was issued under a newly created *Natural Resource Insights* publication series.

In the reporting period, the Secretariat continued to provide needed natural resources technical assistance to 11 member countries, to promote and support the sustainable management and effective governance of petroleum and minerals (see Table 1).

Table 1: Commonwealth Secretariat natural resources technical assistance

Country	Key outcomes of technical assistance
<b>The Bahamas</b>	The government accepted the Secretariat's recommendations on a petroleum sector fiscal regime. Following several reviews, drafting of legislation and a model agreement to reflect those positions commenced.
<b>Barbados</b>	A draft oil and gas local content policy and outline was developed for a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF), which is being reviewed by the government. Final approval of funding from the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)-India Fund for the local content project is awaited.
<b>Belize</b>	The government is reviewing final revised drafts of several legal instruments prepared by the Secretariat to strengthen the legal, fiscal and environmental framework for the petroleum sector. These include drafts of the Petroleum Act, Petroleum Regulations and the Model Petroleum Agreement and amendments to the Income and Business Taxation Act.
<b>Cook Islands</b>	The government accepted the Secretariat's recommendations on due diligence for deep seabed mining, incorporating the recommendations in the draft exploration regulations and internal procedural documents. Recommendations on the tax regime for deep seabed mining were provided to the government.
<b>Guyana</b>	Guyana, with the Secretariat's assistance, continued to make steady progress operationalising the SWF, which now has a balance of over US\$50 million. This included submitting an annual reporting template, presenting international best practice on SWFs to the Public Accountability and Oversight Committee, discussing the Investment Mandate with government and assisting Guyana to join the International Forum for SWFs.
<b>Kiribati</b>	The government accepted the Secretariat's recommendations regarding marine scientific research mandates. Following several reviews, a draft protocol was written and implementation is imminent. Strong progress was made on drafting the exploration regulations, fee structure and tax regime for deep seabed mining, which will help the government maximise the benefits from this industry.
<b>Malawi</b>	The government accepted Secretariat recommendations for petroleum sector legislative reforms. Following this, initial drafts of a new petroleum law, new petroleum taxation legislation and a model production agreement were submitted; stakeholder consultations on the recommended petroleum sector reforms were also held.
<b>Namibia</b>	The government is reviewing the revised draft Petroleum Act, the Petroleum Regulations and the Model Petroleum Agreement submitted by the Secretariat. This includes provisions for implementing the draft Local Content Policy, which is awaiting Cabinet approval. The Secretariat also supported building capacity to maximise benefits from the sector by delivering training on economic modelling and providing recommendations for strengthening the Government Negotiating Team. Planned capacity-building on contract negotiations in March 2020 was rescheduled as a result of COVID-19.
<b>Papua New Guinea</b>	Support was provided to the government to complete all work required before establishment of the SWF Board. The government's decision on establishing the Board is currently pending.
<b>eSwatini</b>	The government accepted the Secretariat's proposals on a new mining fiscal regime. Preparation of amendments to the Income Tax Act and the Mines and Minerals Act has commenced.

<b>Vanuatu</b>	The Secretariat completed diagnostic evaluation of the petroleum sector legal and fiscal framework. Recommendations for strengthening the regulatory framework have been submitted to the government for consideration.
<b>Deep sea mining</b>	The Secretariat provided technical assistance to member countries in the development of an international fiscal and legal regime for deep seabed mining. This included technical support at various international and regional workshops (the International Seabed Authority (ISA) Annual Meeting, Nauru, Kiribati, Regional Environmental Management Plan development workshops) and convening a legal liability workshop. African Group: a briefing session on deep sea mining was held in New York City (January 2020) to provide background and commentary guidance on the draft exploitation regulations developed by the ISA. The Secretariat also supported attendance of Sierra Leone and South African delegates at meetings and workshops.

Further to bilateral technical assistance, the Secretariat continued global advocacy on behalf of member countries at various international fora on natural resources, including the Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative, the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Intergovernmental Forum on Mining, Minerals, Metals and Sustainable Development and the ISA. Significant progress was also made on advancing the Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition Agenda.

The Secretariat, in collaboration with Chatham House and the Natural Resources Governance Institute, co-organised the Seventh Annual Meeting of the New Petroleum Producers Group in Uganda. This was attended by several member countries, including The Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, and other new and emerging new petroleum producers as well as leading industry experts. The event delivered an international thematic dialogue, on a number of key issues in the extractives sector, and strengthened peer-to-peer collaboration among countries.

### *The Commonwealth Blue Charter*

The Commonwealth Blue Charter initiative continues to go from strength to strength, now bringing together a total of 42 Commonwealth countries in one or more Blue Charter Action Groups. In this period, a new Action Group on sustainable coastal fisheries was launched, championed by Kiribati. This takes the total number of Action Groups to 10, championed by 13 member countries. The Action Groups have been building membership, developing terms of reference and action plans and engaging with external partner organisations from civil society, science, the private sector and foundations. Most of the Action Groups now have a roadmap on what they can achieve by next CHOGM and over the next five years. The Secretariat is supporting the Action Groups and their Champions by providing guidance, assisting in convening meetings, addressing training and capacity-building needs and communicating progress.

Six Action Groups have met to date, with three meetings supported during this reporting period: Mangrove Ecosystems and Livelihoods in Sri Lanka, Marine Protected Areas in Seychelles and Sustainable Aquaculture in Cyprus. Unfortunately, scheduled meetings of the remaining four Action Groups and the All-Champions Meeting had to be postponed as a result of COVID-19.

An online knowledge exchange platform was launched for the Blue Charter Action Groups and has become the primary platform for Blue Charter members to share information and disseminate case studies and best practice guides. As of June 2020, all 10 Action Groups have been supported with the development of Action Group-specific background papers, case studies and training opportunities. These in-depth technical outputs have been an invaluable source of information for Action Groups to inform the development of their Action Plans and have been positively received.

*‘The reading notes and case studies are best suited for the respective action items as well. I must thank the Secretariat and the team for compiling such an excellent piece of information!’ Ocean Specialist, Government of Fiji.*

The Blue Charter programme has supported both gender and youth mainstreaming through the development of project planning checklists, best practice case studies and sharing online resources.



Figure 9: The Blue Charter initiative supports Blue Charter Action Groups.

### Success Story: Action Groups activating in-country action

The Blue Charter has supported member countries to make demonstrable progress in defining, planning, protecting, managing or developing their ocean space. Seychelles has made an aggressive commitment to protect its marine territory. In June 2020, Cyprus announced that it was developing a national aquaculture strategy and it has now opened it for public consultation. Fiji has developed a comprehensive national ocean policy with plans for 30 per cent of Exclusive Economic Zone protected and 100 per cent managed. Namibia seeks to improve its national institution's capacity to develop a Blue Economy policy. Belize has passed a new Fisheries Resources Bill that will help make the country's small-scale fisheries more sustainable for both marine life and the people. Sri Lanka (Champion of the Mangrove Action Group) has recently launched a comprehensive national mangrove policy.

Building strategic partnerships has been a key component of the Blue Charter's progress. At the Our Oceans Conference (Oslo, October 2019), the Secretariat signed a memorandum of understanding with Vulcan Inc. to assist in the sharing of knowledge, data and expertise in relation to coral reefs within the Commonwealth, supporting the work of the Coral Reef Protection and Restoration Action Group. As part of a webinar hosted by the Secretariat on World Oceans Day (June 2020), the Commonwealth version of the Allen Coral Atlas was launched. It is now also available on the Commonwealth Innovation Hub, to support countries in accessing live data to support the management, restoration and protection of their coral reefs. Also at the Our Oceans Conference, the Secretariat hosted with Bloomberg a high-level breakfast to bring government representatives together with philanthropic funders to discuss the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Fund.

### Challenges and lessons learnt in Economic Development

COVID-19 has restricted the Secretariat's ability to undertake missions in project countries and attend other international meetings and workshops. It has also affected member countries' engagement as key partners in country have been redirected to COVID-19 response teams. Progress has slowed but delivery has continued, and virtual engagement is being strengthened and made feasible where partnerships have already been established. Rapport already built between advisers

and country counterparts through previous in-person missions have been the bedrock of progress made virtually during this period.

In the area of debt management, the Secretariat put together a report on lessons learnt in the implementation of the new Commonwealth Debt Management System, Meridian, in member countries. Lessons highlighted in the report have been used to revise the implementation plan and the approach for subsequent implementation.

On trade interventions, key lessons have been that partnerships are key for the Secretariat to leverage and collaborate support to member countries, and to gain visibility and traction outside its membership. Countries with dedicated export, investment or trade facilitation agencies are better able to build sustainability. Some deliverables were not under the control of trade advisers - for example, the number of negotiated proposals or trade agreements resulting from advisory expertise - and trade facilitation remains largely a nationally focused initiative. Much of the work in this area involves incremental support offered based on in-person assessment of member country-specific needs and analysis of how the support in terms of policies and laws developed will be implemented. Travel to these regions to continue to develop relationship and ascertain needs is key to effective delivery.

Across the suite of Economic Development initiatives, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the implementation of programme and activities. Responding to the pandemic has meant designing new methods of programme delivery. Adapting to the use of digital platforms to convene meetings and doing so successfully will change the way engagement takes place going forward.



## Small and Other Vulnerable States

Projects implemented under this strategic stream are designed to support the strategic objective of strengthened resilience of small and other vulnerable states, including adaptation and mitigation against climate change.

The Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva and New York continue to provide subsidised office space for small states to maintain a presence in these locations. This has enabled small states to engage in global issues and discussions taking place in these key United Nations locations.

### *The Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub*

Since the commencement of its operations in October 2016 in Port Louis, Mauritius, the CCFAH has established itself as an eminent entity within the global climate finance landscape. Its technical assistance programme has been successfully implemented in the 10 most climatically vulnerable states in the Africa, Pacific and Caribbean regions.

In the past year, a National Climate Finance Adviser was deployed to Tonga and provided assistance in drafting two funding proposals approved for funding by the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The first project grant, of US\$500,000, was approved in October and will support a two-year 'readiness programme' preparing Tonga's National Designated Authority to better engage with the GCF and manage activities sponsored by the fund in the country. The second grant, of US\$462,692, approved in December is for the Readiness Proposal of the Kingdom of Tonga for the Assessment and Reform of the Tonga Outer Island Solar Electrification Society for engagement with the GCF-Approved Tonga Renewable Energy Project.

In Antigua and Barbuda, a National Climate Finance Adviser mobilised funding of US\$180,560 in December 2019. The National Climate Adviser in Jamaica supported a regional application that successfully secured a further US\$1.3 million for a Caribbean regional initiative, the 'Enhancing Caribbean Civil Society's Access and Readiness for Climate Finance'. Of this, Jamaica will be allocated some US\$200,000.



Figure 10: The Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, speaking at the UN Climate Change Conference COP25, December 2019.

The Secretariat delivered a side event during COP 25 in December 2019 entitled 'Unlocking Climate Finance - Perspectives from Small and Other Vulnerable States.' The event facilitated discussions on the challenges in accessing climate finance, highlighting the institutional bottlenecks for smaller countries and possible approaches in structuring bankable climate change projects, etc. It also reviewed adequacy and availability of climate finance in the context of financing needs of small island developing states and LDCs and sharing some of the best practices from the experiences of

the CCFAH. A range of stakeholders, particularly from smaller and island states, shared their challenges and experiences in a structured dialogue.

### Success Story: Supporting the use of rapid mapping technology during Tropical Cyclone Harold

CommonSensing is an innovative consortium project to support Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to build resilience by developing satellite-based information services to enhance climate action. The project has completed the first iteration of the CommonSensing Platform for Fiji, and the Secretariat participated in the technical demonstration section that showcased the platform. The platform will offer the three countries access to rapid mapping technology to enable informed decision-making in times of emerging hurricanes.

This year, in the wake of TC Harold, the Secretariat played a key role in ensuring engagement with relevant government counterparts on the use and value of satellite applications provided by consortium project partner the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). This was particularly successful in Vanuatu, where the Secretariat made a direct connection with government counterparts, with rapid mapping support deployed for Vanuatu and Fiji for TC Harold.

The CommonSensing Consortium is led by the UK Space Agency's International Partnership Programme (IPP) and implemented in partnership with UNITAR-UNOSAT, the Secretariat, Satellite Applications Catapult, Devex International, the UK Met Office, Sensonomic and the University of Portsmouth. It helps generate the data countries need to inform critical decision-making during times of crisis. It can therefore support more effective climate projects in the long term and more robust applications for climate finance. This project builds on ongoing work by the CCFAH, whose data will also help refine applications for climate finance from international donors.

The Secretariat convened a virtual event with UNITAR and Caribbean member countries to share lessons learnt from the TC Harold engagement in the Pacific. Commonwealth Secretary-General The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, while stressing the relevance of access to satellite-based rapid mapping information in the Caribbean, explained that, 'Responding effectively to these complex challenges of disease and disaster will rely more than ever on data that is accurate, reliable and timely, as well as country cooperation to share knowledge, experience and expertise.'

### Commonwealth Small States Offices

The CSSOs in Geneva and New York continue to provide subsidised office space for small states to maintain a presence in Geneva and New York. This has enabled small states to engage in global issues and discussions taking place in these key United Nations locations.

Expressions of appreciation for the work of the CSSOs were received from several hosted missions during the reporting period. The Permanent Mission of the Commonwealth of Dominica conveyed its appreciation for the office space made available and the opportunity for it to bring its voice to the United Nations.

The partnership between the Permanent Mission of Samoa and the Secretariat has been critical for the country in terms of providing a stable 'home-away-from-home' space and atmosphere for its mission and staff. The Secretariat also assisted the Kiribati Permanent Mission to promote its national development plan and in advocating for support to critical issues affecting the country.

### Success Story: Advancing small states' interests at the United Nations - Vanuatu

Small states such as Vanuatu often have a very small foreign service budget and face enormous challenges to voice concerns and advance their position in the international arena. Engaging with the United Nations is a key pillar of Vanuatu's foreign policy in addressing these challenges; however, the complex and interconnected process involved in doing this requires member countries to coordinate and engage with each other to respond to global issues.

Recognising these challenges and honouring its commitment to give voice to small states, the Secretariat's CSSO supported and facilitated a very fruitful year for the Vanuatu Permanent Mission to the United Nations. Between July and September 2019, the Mission served its last quarter as the Vice-President of the General Assembly. Vanuatu participated in the General Committee Meetings and chaired General Assembly Plenaries.

As of January 2019, the Mission began its roles sitting on the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the Commission for Population Development. Sitting on the Executive Board has been particularly rewarding not only for Vanuatu but also for the Pacific Islands, as Vanuatu has worked to advocate for a greater UNOPS 'footprint' in the region. This has spurred the UNOPS Secretariat to take a more active interest in partnering with Pacific Island countries to facilitate projects within its expertise.

Beyond multilateral engagements, Vanuatu's Permanent Mission has also opened the door to bilateral engagement, as almost all independent countries have representation in New York. These negotiations facilitated by the Mission have enabled Vanuatu to secure finance for three projects with a combined value of more than US\$2 million.

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected work undertaken by the CSSO. It complied with ordinances from the host governments, the United Nations and the Secretariat to close its office and operate under working from home arrangements for an indefinite period. This led to a reduction in services to resident Missions, with support delivered remotely and when needed. Meeting rooms and other on-site facilities were also closed and the management of mail and other deliveries was compromised. This resulted in unplanned expenditure and cancelling of future meetings.

### *Challenges and lessons learnt in Small and Other Vulnerable States*

For the CCFAH, key lessons learnt included the need to allow more time for results to mature as capacity-building for climate finance projects is resource-intensive, and funding proposals can take up to two and half years to finalise. For these reasons, advisers should be placed for a minimum of three years. Management of national advisers in different locations is complex. Providing them with guidance and timely responses requires more capacity than is currently available. Demand for coordination and management is going to increase as the CCFAH grows and places more advisers and secures more finance.

For the CSSOs, the key lesson reinforced is the importance of multilateral diplomacy as the only meaningful avenue through which concerns of small states can be heard at the global level. Global security threats such as climate change, ocean conservation and management will require global solutions and it is imperative that member countries are able to sustain their presence and voice their concerns through their Permanent Mission to the United Nations.



## Enabling and Internal Outcomes

### *Partnerships and innovation*

Partnership is at the core of the Commonwealth Secretariat 2017/18-2020/21 Strategic Plan. The Secretariat's first Partnership Strategy was adopted in July 2018 in line with SDG 17; it outlines the ambition to partner across member countries, Commonwealth organisations, international partners, regional organisations and private sector/philanthropic organisations to enable the Secretariat to achieve greater impact with its work, deliver better value for money and improve its visibility and reputation.

The reporting period was a notable year for the Secretariat, seeing new partnerships with critical international actors, such as the United Nations and the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund, as well as cementing existing ones. Partnerships underway during this reporting period are included in this section as well as an in annex.

### *Commonwealth organisations*

Building on from the Commonwealth@70 celebrations that began in January 2019, the Commonwealth@70 Committee oversaw a vibrant and growing network of Accredited Organisations - a testimony in itself to the importance of the Commonwealth's shared principles and aspirations. The Secretariat's commitment to Commonwealth Accredited Organisations was demonstrated through a series of grants and sponsorships, including to:

- The Commonwealth Education Trust's Teach 2030 Partnership Development Visit to Zambia
- The Commonwealth Pharmacists Association's production of a video tutorial on hand sanitisers
- The Commonwealth Human Ecology Council's work on mangrove-related activities in Fiji, The Gambia, India, Malaysia, Maldives and Samoa

Partnerships with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and Commonwealth Accredited Organisations were strengthened with a focus on member countries that would benefit from the joint activities.

- In Mozambique, the COL worked with 15 schools in all regions of the country to develop quality content in Portuguese.
- In Tonga, the Aptus device, a COL innovation, helped restore classes in the aftermath of a cyclone. This device is deployed in schools destroyed by the 2019 cyclone in The Bahamas.
- In The Gambia, Kiribati, Sierra Leone and South Africa, the COL is supporting school-based teacher development to improve learning outcomes.

### *International partners*

Following on from the strategic partnership agreement between the Secretariat and the United Nations finalised in a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed in December 2019, the Secretariat has completed plans to initiate two projects in collaboration with the India-United Nations Development Partnership Fund. This will be supported by the government of India and implemented in partnership with UNDP under the management of the United Nations Fund for South-South Cooperation.

The first project aims to promote long-term public debt sustainability in The Bahamas through strengthening its capacity to manage public debt effectively. The second aims to create decent work and inclusive growth for Barbadian citizens through increased local participation in the supply of goods and services to the in-country energy value chain. This represents a critical step for the Secretariat in leveraging its resources and expertise in partnership with United Nations agencies on advancing the SDGs within Commonwealth countries.

Other notable work areas being delivered through international partnerships include the following:

- In sport for development and peace, engagement with the African Union, the Ibero-American Sports Council, ASEAN and UN Women took place to measure, quantify and enhance the contribution of sport to economic and social development.
- In the international trade space, the Secretariat established a partnership with FAO, UNCTAD and the WTO to undertake joint projects on the impact of COVID-19 on Commonwealth LDCs.

### Regional organisations

While the Secretariat works closely with all Commonwealth regional organisations and bodies, this reporting period witnessed a particularly extensive portfolio of work with CARICOM. In the area of education, CARICOM received technical support in revising standards for teaching and school leadership, which will guide countries in the region to develop or revise their national standards. In the area of CVE, the Secretariat provided technical support to deliver a joint workshop focusing on understanding contemporary challenges in preventing violent extremism.

For the Hubs and Spokes Programme, the Secretariat continues to partner with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the African Union Commission (AUC), with Trade Advisers placed in these regional organisations as part of the programme's exit and transfer of ownership strategy.

#### Success Story: Regional consultation on e-commerce with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Commission

The Trade Adviser project at the CSSO in Geneva, in collaboration with the OECS Commission, organised a regional consultation on the state of play of e-commerce discussions at the WTO from 31 October to 1 November 2019 in Castries, Saint Lucia.

The consultation provided an opportunity for senior government officials and telecoms regulators of OECS member countries to consider their positions on a wide-range of issues with respect to the trade-related aspects of e-commerce ahead of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference scheduled for June 2020, postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The activity generated a clear roadmap for OECS member countries, with respect to their engagement at the WTO on e-commerce as well as their development of an e-commerce strategy that supports OECS firms, particularly MSMEs, to capitalise on the digital economy. The OECS Commission subsequently requested the Secretariat's technical assistance undertake an e-commerce readiness assessment of member countries. The Secretariat's International Trade Policy Section and the Trade Competitiveness Section will jointly support this work.

Dr Didacus Jules, Director-General of the OECS Commission, commended this regional meeting as an *'important and potentially game-changing intervention'* for the OECS Commission and its member countries, and noted that, *'These critical outcomes confirm the success of this intervention as one of the more productive activities of its kind.'*

### Private sector and philanthropic organisations

The Secretariat's long-standing partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies is an outstanding example of its ability to deliver better services and enhance the lives of Commonwealth citizens. As a part of this partnership, the Secretariat signed an MOU with eXXpedition during the reporting period. eXXpedition is an all-women voyage and scientific mission to investigate the causes of and solutions to ocean plastic, through contributing to world-class scientific studies, shifting perceptions to inform and educate on the problem of micro-plastics, as well as creating a community of empowered leaders.

Another exciting new partnership, with the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, is offering fintech training to Commonwealth member countries to boost government capacity and knowledge on the industry. This will see over 100 finance professionals from Commonwealth governments funded by the Secretariat to attend online fintech courses offered by the two universities. This will help member countries diversify their economies after the COVID-19 crisis, increase efficiency,

expand financial inclusion and promote growth. Participants will learn about fintech from the perspective of both regulators and innovative entrepreneurs. The Cambridge course will focus on helping regulators and policy-makers understand the technologies behind fintech and the potential regulatory and policy implications.

Other notable work areas being delivered through partnerships with private organisations include the following:

- With respect to the Blue Charter, the Secretariat signed an MOU with Vulcan Inc. to support work of the Coral Reef Protection and Restoration Action Group hosted on the Commonwealth Innovation Hub.
- In the Youth space, the Secretariat is collaborating with the Rajiv National Institute of Youth and the Namibia College of Open Learning to support more than 330 youth workers and leaders across the Commonwealth to advance the professionalisation of youth work.
- In December 2020, the Secretariat partnered with USAID and Wilton Park to hold a forum on addressing youth-exclusion as a driver of violence and violent extremism. Through the partnership the Secretariat supported the participation of government ministers and experts from Kenya, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Pakistan.

### *Commonwealth Innovation Hub*

The Innovation Hub represents a key milestone in the innovation journey at the Secretariat. It is an interactive digital platform dedicated to creating shared value, unleashing innovation and fostering partnerships for all 54 member countries and 87 Commonwealth organisations. Over the reporting period, the Hub was further developed, with the creation and addition of new knowledge resources, data and digital tools.

A particular highlight is the addition of an interactive portal to display maps of coral reefs in 12 Commonwealth countries, with the help of real-time satellite data provided by partners at Vulcan Inc., as mentioned above. The partnership enables member countries to gain free access to satellite technology to help them monitor and protect endangered coral reefs from threats such as climate breakdown, overfishing and pollution. This is vital as Commonwealth countries hold nearly half of the world's remaining tropical reefs, and nearly all reefs are at risk of extinction in the coming decades.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretariat leveraged existing platforms, including the Hub and the SDG data portal, to support the monitoring of the pandemic through the Commonwealth COVID-19 Dashboard. The Dashboard provides timely data to support governments and other organisations to analyse and respond to the pandemic more effectively. In addition, the Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre was created to underpin a united response by acting as a directory of useful information, data and resources.

### *Challenges and lessons learnt in Partnerships and Innovation*

A key lesson has been the importance of resource planning, planning for uncertainty and managing stakeholder expectations in ensuring outcome sustainability. This encompasses risk management and planning to allow for greater flexibility and capacity to respond to changes in work patterns. There is also a pressing need to gain greater understanding of the Secretariat's 'informal partnerships,' such as those without a formal MOU, which will make it possible to better track the impact of such collaborations. Working more closely with the monitoring and evaluation team will also make it possible to better understand the impact of partnerships and innovation.

### *Gender Mainstreaming*

The Secretariat promotes gender equality and women's empowerment as core values enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the Secretariat's Gender Policy. Guided by this commitment, the Secretariat aims to ensure gender is mainstreamed in its own internal policies, structures, processes, systems, operations and programmes of assistance. The Commonwealth supports

member countries to integrate gender issues in the development of national policies, frameworks and development programmes for the enhancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Some highlights of our work during this reporting period that enhances gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment are set out below.

## Human rights

The Secretariat's technical assistance contributed to Kiribati successfully reporting to CEDAW by building capacity of the national task force and reported satisfaction with the assistance provided. The Secretariat commemorated International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia with a webinar on the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups in partnership with the Commonwealth Equality Network and Kaleidoscope Trust. The event featured the United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, who commended the Secretariat and partners for the timely and substantive dialogue on this matter.

## Education

Technical assistance to support boys' educational achievement was strengthened through a partnership with UNESCO involving a technical consultation on boys' disengagement from education, and country briefs on findings from the case studies to advance gender equality in and through education and boys' right to quality and inclusive education. The Secretariat continues to influence global thinking on gender equality, as a member of the United Nations Girls' Empowerment Initiative Global Advisory Committee. Additionally, UNESCO asked that the Secretariat be on its Reference Group and steer reflection on policies for gender equality and boys' education.

## Countering violent extremism

The Secretariat has ensured that women are included in all of its workshops in order to increase their ability to be represented in decision-making on peace-building and preventing violent extremism. The CVE team has run several gender-related initiatives and launched research on gender-sensitive CVE approaches, including the following:

- Ensuring CVE policies/programmes recognise and involve women and girls as critical stakeholders and decision-makers.
- Ensuring policies and programmes are based on gender-sensitive analysis of the conditions conducive to involvement in violent extremism.
- Developing a gender-sensitive approach to reintegration/returnees.
- Designing and supporting gender-sensitive programmes, while ensuring women/women's services are part of programmes with prisons, police, community organisations and others.

Furthermore, gender is a key consideration in the design of all activities led by the CVE team, and the Secretariat has delivered activities specifically focused on gender-sensitive CVE in Cameroon (July 2019) and Trinidad and Tobago (2018) and integrated sessions on gender into CVE training delivered in Kenya (February 2020).

## Trade

The Secretariat is making concerted efforts to include gender considerations in the development of new trade interventions for member country support. For example, analysing the e-commerce ecosystem in Cameroon and Sri Lanka revealed that women were disproportionately affected by a lack of access to digital infrastructure and had limited knowledge of e-commerce trading systems. To remedy this, an e-commerce training manual was developed and has been deployed for women-owned MSMEs in Sri Lanka.

## *Improved organisational performance and results*

The Secretariat has made concerted efforts to systematise its approach to delivery and measurement of results. It has developed a suite of smart portfolio practices, including annual delivery plans, Quarterly Performance Reviews and enhanced Results-Based Management (RBM). It has introduced a Results-Based Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning system, which is now in implementation. It has further developed the Programme Management and Information System to better harmonise planning, monitoring, evaluation, learning and reporting.

A number of monitoring practices have been piloted and embedded, including detailed project monitoring plans, gender-sensitive indicator training, delivery tracking and quarterly performance reporting and monitoring missions. These practices have improved project performances through the production of quality monitoring information and enabling adaptive learning. A key element has been ensuring gender mainstreaming throughout the Secretariat's planning, monitoring and reporting system. Gender considerations also form part of the Quarterly Performance Review and annual project review process.

The Secretariat commenced planning for 2020/21 in January 2020 with training and briefing sessions for staff. Based on lessons learnt and senior management feedback, Quarterly Performance Reviews were conducted for all project teams for quarters 1, 2 and 3. This focused on reviewing teams' progress to outcomes, budget utilisation, risk management and capacity needs. Quarter 3 reviews included discussions on COVID-19 impacts on results and pivots made to delivery, as measures adopted by member countries to tackle the pandemic have also had an impact on the Secretariat. This also allowed the Secretariat to engage in a forward-looking discussion, as uncertainty was and still is high. There have been several shifts in member countries' prioritisation in addressing the pandemic, affecting uptake or progress of technical assistance in other policy areas, as well as absorption capacity and/or connectivity issues limiting the Secretariat's ability to engage with member countries.

The Monitor, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategy and outcomes were further strengthened in 2019/20 through ongoing implementation of the MEL Designated Fund. The Fund follows international good practice in ensuring ring-fenced funding for the Secretariat programmes and encouraging the generation and use of quality results information. The fund is the cornerstone to strengthening RBM across the organisation.

During 2019/20, four evaluation reports were published (two countries, two programmes); a further five evaluations were initiated and are in progress. Two partnership evaluation reports were undertaken and completed to support regional and Commonwealth affiliate organisations in the review of their interventions. Country evaluations were of Barbados, Guyana, Sierra Leone and Uganda and provided lessons and insights into the outcomes of earlier Strategic Plan interventions at the country level.

In the past year, the evaluation delivery tracker system has supported better delivery and helped monitor performance to track delivery of evaluation reports. Increased use of the peer review mechanisms has provided substantial input into the evaluation process, in particular for programme-level evaluations. These processes have helped support improved quality of evaluation reporting at the project, country and programme levels.

In the past three years, RBM learning has been rolled out across the organisation and an online RBM training course is accessible to all staff and Commonwealth organisations. Gender-sensitive indicators training has been conducted and information and training sessions on MEL and planning, monitoring and reporting have been held. This greater focus on learning has been emphasised through new evaluation and learning strategies: facilitating the coordination and publication of management responses to all evaluations; tracking the utilisation of evaluation recommendations; extending the suite of communication products to ensure wider engagement with evaluation findings; and implementing quarterly evaluation seminars and an annual evaluation and learning week.



In the reporting period, the Secretariat successfully supported meetings of the Board of Governors, the Executive Committee and the Accreditation Committee as well as a substantial number of *ad hoc* working group meetings. The Secretariat provided support logistically and through the provision of papers and outcome documents. In addition, the 34th Commonwealth Diplomats Induction Programme was conducted successfully in November 2019. Twenty-five delegates from all five regions attended. In the induction feedback, 93 per cent of attendees indicated that their objectives for the meeting were either ‘well met’ or ‘very well met.’

The Delivery Plan and budget were approved on time, with requests for further inputs on a COVID-19 Strategy and some adjustments in the area of democracy and small states.

### *Challenges and lessons learnt in improved organisational performance and results*

The Secretariat will adapt and learn from delivery outcomes while continually testing assumptions, considering risks and addressing potential drawbacks. Consultation, exchange and learning with member countries, beneficiaries and partners will be essential to ensure the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of these strategies to achieve outcomes in the Strategic Plan and support the evolving needs of member countries.

The Secretariat is conscious of the impact of COVID-19 on its delivery strategies and is pivoting these to achieve results in the short, medium and long term. This pivot has included a greater emphasis on digital products, digital access and digital delivery of meetings and capacity-building initiatives. It has featured a greater emphasis on research, the generation and sharing of knowledge and best practice to support member countries in the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 world. It has required a stronger delivery partnership with Commonwealth organisations, multilateral/regional institutions and regional and local partners and consultants to deliver in-country assistance.

## Consensus Building

The reporting period was a challenging one for the Secretariat and all member countries, given the ongoing changes and uncertainties brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was especially true for Consensus Building, with a renewed call for the Commonwealth to act together to support each other through shared resources, knowledge and expertise to save the lives of Commonwealth citizens and minimise the economic fallout. This culminated in the virtual meeting of Commonwealth Leaders and representatives from across the Commonwealth on 25 June 2020 to share solutions and ways of working to combat the impacts of the pandemic.

In his speech, Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerit reiterated that the Commonwealth was uniquely placed to advocate on behalf of its members, particularly small states, on issues that threatened their survival. The leaders also explored a range of solutions, such as technological tools, that had helped combat the pandemic, the role of good governance in supporting the fight against the pandemic and accelerating cooperation on trade and finance across the Commonwealth.

### *Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting*

The meeting of the Commonwealth Law Ministers convened in November 2019 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, brought together Law Ministers and senior officials from across the Commonwealth. The Law Ministers adopted a Declaration on Equal Access to Justice, unanimously resolving to remove barriers to access to justice in their respective countries, and to deliver SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions by 2030.

In addition to adopting the Declaration on Equal Access to Justice, Law Ministers achieved consensus on a number of issues, including the review of the Model Law on Electronic Evidence, vulnerable persons in the justice system, diversity in the judiciary, international cooperation in criminal matters, work on reform of civil procedure law, international commercial arbitration, legal tech, technical assistance and anti-corruption.

During the CLMM, Law Ministers discussed different aspects of Commonwealth law such as how to face new challenges. A major study on international commercial arbitration in the Commonwealth posited this as a method that could support the resolution of cross-border disputes.

Furthermore, Law Ministers welcomed a package of anti-corruption benchmarks, drafted by the Secretariat, designed to help governments and public sector bodies measure their anti-corruption activities, and make improvements if needed.



Figure 11: Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting convened in Colombo, Sri Lanka, November 2019

### *Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting*

This year's virtual CHMM was convened on 14 May 2020, ahead of the 73rd World Health Assembly and against the backdrop of the global pandemic, making the meeting more pressing than ever. The CHMM saw the participation of 81 delegates from 30 countries, including Ministers of Health, senior officials and experts, under the theme 'Delivering a Coordinated Commonwealth COVID-19 Response.' Ministers endorsed removing fees for coronavirus tests and treatment, especially for migrants and refugees, as appropriate within national contexts, and creating a voluntary mechanism to share and distribute extra medical supplies including ventilators and testing kits. They also agreed on the need for solidarity and cooperation among Commonwealth countries and that working closely with the World Health Organization throughout the crisis was vital.

### *Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers*

The next Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting, 21CCEM, will be held in Kenya in 2021. Over the reporting period, the Secretariat worked to encourage member countries to take actions in line with the Nadi Declaration, with an updated progress report tabled at the January 2020 Commonwealth Education Ministers Action Group Meeting in London.

### *Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting and G20 Outreach*

The Commonwealth Finance Minister Meeting (CFMM) was held in October 2019 in the wings of the IMF and World Bank Annual Meetings. 35 member states attended 2020 CFMM and 21 Ministers. The meeting focused on areas of constituency relevance around the use of disruptive technologies, particularly blockchain; promotion of state contingent financing instruments to assist disaster affected countries and related debt relief. Due to the proliferation of fintech activities, Secretariat was tasked to also look into digital taxation. The Senior Officials Meeting and Commonwealth Central Bank Governors' Meeting preceded the Ministerial meeting. Vulnerabilities of small states to climate change, and the need for technical and financial support was raised at different but befitting platforms during 2019 UNGA. This has resulted in the Secretariat advancing a need to develop an advocacy strategy for small states. The Commonwealth Economic Development report has been completed and close collaboration with all small state high commissioners has been sought to ensure early buy-in on the small state advocacy strategy.

### *Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting*

In October 2019, the Commonwealth Trade Ministers Meeting was officially convened for the first time in 14 years. Trade Ministers adopted an outcome statement committing to deepening their collaboration to support all members, especially those that are capacity-constrained, to participate in the multilateral trading system and boost economic growth. Trade Ministers also took stock of the work members had undertaken together under the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment. They approved the Connectivity Action Plan developed by the clusters and the Secretariat and identified the next steps to take forward their cooperation.

### *Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda*

The Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment (CCA) is a proactive member-led initiative aimed at maximising the opportunities for value creation and capture posed by the digital economy for socio-economic growth among members. Its mandate is to boost intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 trillion by the year 2030, increase investment and reduce unemployment. To achieve this, five different connectivity clusters were developed (Digital, Physical, Regulatory, Supply Side and Business to Business) with members working on all clusters while prioritising specific areas, with a cross-cluster approach to implementation of activities.

## Success Story: The Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda - pilot phase

In the two years since it was operationalised, the CCA, with the dedicated work of its clusters and stakeholders, has achieved some remarkable milestones and is on track to deliver the initial initiatives in the Connectivity Action Plan. To date, the CCA has brought together hundreds of policy-makers from 75 government ministries, departments and agencies, in addition to 12 specialist knowledge partners, 13 regional and national private sector organisations and three Commonwealth Accredited Organisations.

Policy-makers have benefited greatly from having a platform by means of which they can engage in peer-peer learning, in addition to obtaining in-depth insights into the challenges facing the private sector. This is important, as consensus on effective policies and regulatory frameworks at the national level is highly dependent on having a well-rounded perspective from all stakeholders. Knowledge partners like UNCTAD e-Trade for all, the OECD, World Bank, FAO and several other United Nations agencies have played a critical role in charting the way forward by providing specialist knowledge and an evidence base for best practices. Such knowledge exchange is useful in developing robust yet flexible digital strategies to meet existing and future demand. In implementing the Connectivity Action Plan, the clusters have undertaken various initiatives.

The Business-to-Business Connectivity (B2B) Cluster, led by Bangladesh, plays a central role, operating in a crosscutting manner that influences the work of the other clusters by ensuring the incorporation of the needs of the private sector. The cluster has supported greater interface and dialogue between the public and private sectors assisting member countries to attract investment.

The Digital Connectivity Cluster, co-led by South Africa and the UK, centred on promoting understanding of the impact of digital transformation and supporting capacity-constrained members to create a strong environment for digital trade, has brought members together to share views and experiences. The cluster has developed six high-level principles, which provide a useful starting point for deepening collaboration among interested members. The development of an online Repository of Digital Policies and Regulations in the Commonwealth is also underway to help members identify best practice in regulation and policy-making in the digital age.

The Physical Cluster, led by The Gambia, focuses on sharing experience on digital infrastructure development to close the digital divide. The cluster will examine the role of private sector investment in bridging the digital divide and address challenges posed by a lack of access to affordable infrastructure. Key achievements of the cluster to date have included development of Principles for Sustainable Investment in Digital Infrastructure for Commonwealth Members, which will serve as a critical resource for policy-makers in establishing regional and national frameworks.

The Regulatory Cluster, led by Barbados, aims to improve regulatory regimes across the Commonwealth by creating an enabling environment for business and investment. This cluster shares experiences on improving ease of doing business performance and is engaged in an ongoing effort to develop a set of Commonwealth Good Regulatory Practices (GRPs) in conjunction with knowledge partners. In preparation, the Secretariat conducted a baseline survey of existing GRP factoring regulatory impact assessments, presence and performance of regulatory authorities and implementation of regulatory policy. A matrix was also developed to collate more information on members' individual capacity-building needs to support the implementation of GRPs.

The Supply Side Connectivity Cluster, led by Vanuatu, has focused on agriculture and fisheries value chains. It is unique in that it was initially almost exclusively small island developing states from the Caribbean and the Pacific. The initial focus on sectoral exchanges across regions has evolved to smart agriculture and fisheries as members acknowledge the significant role technology could play in rural job creation in the Commonwealth with an emphasis on MSMEs. A survey, capacity-building workshop and case studies have been prepared to build the evidence base needed for policy formulation.

Looking ahead, the focus shifts to supporting regional and national implementation of best practices and lessons learnt. With the recent COVID-19 crisis, the Secretariat is supporting the clusters to reprioritise to address their shared response to COVID-19.



Figure 12: Connectivity clusters meet as part of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda

### *Challenges and lessons learnt in Consensus Building*

In the area of consensus-building, several key learnings were highlighted:

- **Rule of law:** The monitoring mission carried out during the meeting clearly showed how Law Ministers and Senior Officials value the CLMM as a unique opportunity for networking and sharing ideas and experiences. This is the greatest strength of CLMM: no other forum for justice ministers provides such opportunities. The importance placed by beneficiaries on networking and sharing of experiences will guide the rule of law team and the Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform in the preparation of the next meetings. COVID-19 will also affect the delivery of events. The pandemic and related travel restrictions have led the rule of law team and the Office of Civil and Criminal Justice Reform to develop more virtual activities, such as webinars on rule of law-related topics, providing a platform for stakeholders and strengthening the relationship with partner organisations.
- **Health:** The Secretariat's first virtual ministerial meeting, CHMM, demonstrated that high-level meetings can be conducted effectively virtually. One lesson learnt is that continuous engagement and collaboration with stakeholders including internal teams, is needed for the implementation of all actions pertaining to the CHMM outcome statement.
- **Connectivity:** Cluster members need tools and support in implementing cluster guiding principles and policy reform. Flexibility in approach remains key to pan-Commonwealth consensus-building. There is also an increased need for case studies to help identify gaps in digital access and develop an evidence base for a good policy framework. Monitoring tools will help with more efficient delivery and achievement of sustainable outcomes.



## Communications

This was a period with a wide range of global media coverage of the Secretariat's work, with more than 31,630 articles appearing in mainstream media. Maldives' admission to the Commonwealth attracted a huge amount of media coverage around the world, as well as coverage received on events days such as World Oceans Day and Commonwealth Day. Interviews with the Secretary-General appeared in a number of major news channels such as Sky News, BBC News, Al Jazeera, ABC Australia, Reuters, the Jamaica Observer, TVC News (Nigeria), the Times of India, New Vision in Uganda, Cayman Compass, Edition in Maldives and the Samoa Observer (print).



Figures 13 and 14: High commissioners from Commonwealth countries attending the Maldives flag-raising ceremony in the gardens of Marlborough House in London, February 2020

Furthermore, the Secretariat received good coverage on the Commonwealth's coronavirus tracker, which showed daily case numbers in member countries. Visitors to the website increased by 38.43 per cent, from 5,245,698 to 7,261,818, and there were more than 10,000 new social media Twitter followers in 2020, reaching a follower count of 94,000 in total. Twitter impressions (the number of times Commonwealth content was displayed in user feeds) increased by 37 per cent to 8,424,733, compared with 6,123,733 in January-June 2019. The media team finalised a new media strategy to support strategic engagement, with media outlets supporting the Secretariat's communication engagement.

### Success Story: Commonwealth media toolkit

The Secretariat's work in Malawi, in partnership with the Malawi Electoral Commission, to develop a toolkit that journalists could use to report more fairly on the tripartite elections was a success. The intervention was in three phases: capacity-building phase, media monitoring and evaluation of election reporting.

In March 2020, the Toolkit and Project Report on building the capacity of media in Malawi to report fairly and objectively on national elections were submitted to High Commissioners in London in support of our Commonwealth Media Development work.

The toolkit captures best practice for campaign reporting across all branches of media, from community radio to national newspapers and state-run television. Media professionals, including reporters, commentators and editors, respected the product because they themselves had been instrumental in identifying the requirements for balanced election reporting in a Malawian context. It was judged to have made a significant contribution to improving journalism during the campaign, and towards providing voters with more of the information they needed to make an informed choice at the ballot box.

It is hoped that this project can be used to re-launch the Commonwealth Media Development Fund in a more focused way specifically to build capacity on electoral reporting, so that reporters can cover campaigns in a fairer and balanced manner.

## Delivery Progress for 2019/20

Three years into the Strategic Plan, the Secretariat is starting to see progress towards intermediate outcome-level results. At the intermediate outcome level, the Secretariat is looking specifically at **changes in behaviour, practice or performance of intermediaries or beneficiaries**. The below figure demonstrates progress against the Secretariat's intermediate outcome indicators alongside short-term outcome indicators and output indicators.



OI	Intermediate outcome indicator - 4 years
STOI	Short-term outcome indicator - 2 years
OI	Output indicator - yearly

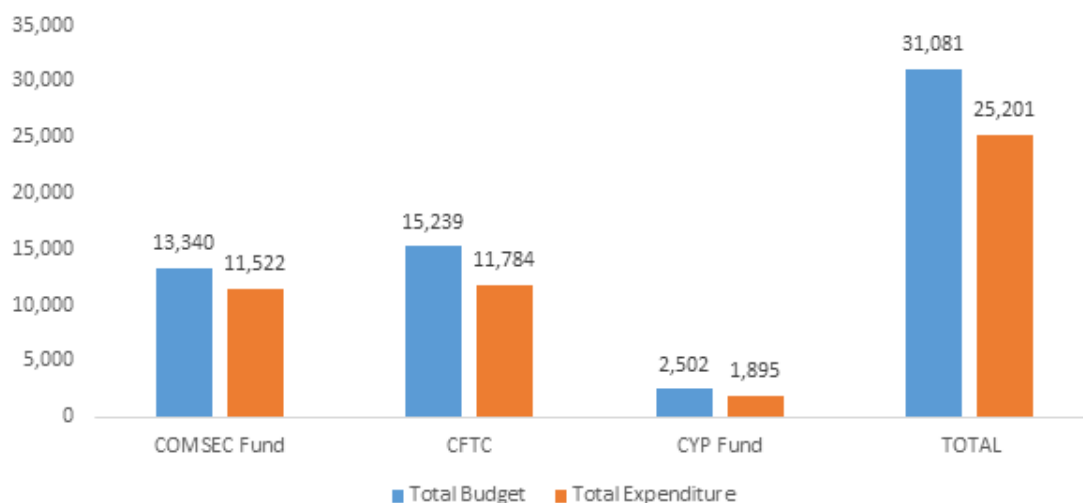
### *Making change happen across years and complex systems*

In many of the projects the Secretariat is delivering, intermediate outcome-level changes take multiple years to realise and involve engaging and influencing complex systems. The Secretariat works to influence these complex and systemic changes through a number of impact pathways and measures progress through 79 intermediate outcome indicators. Changes at the intermediate outcome are not small-scale changes but large shifts in policy, governance and decision-making at national and global level. Across these aggregated percentages, it should be recognised that the Secretariat is tracking vastly different indicators of change, depending on the impact pathway it is pursuing. A detailed technical report is provided in Part C.

## Financial Performance 2019/20

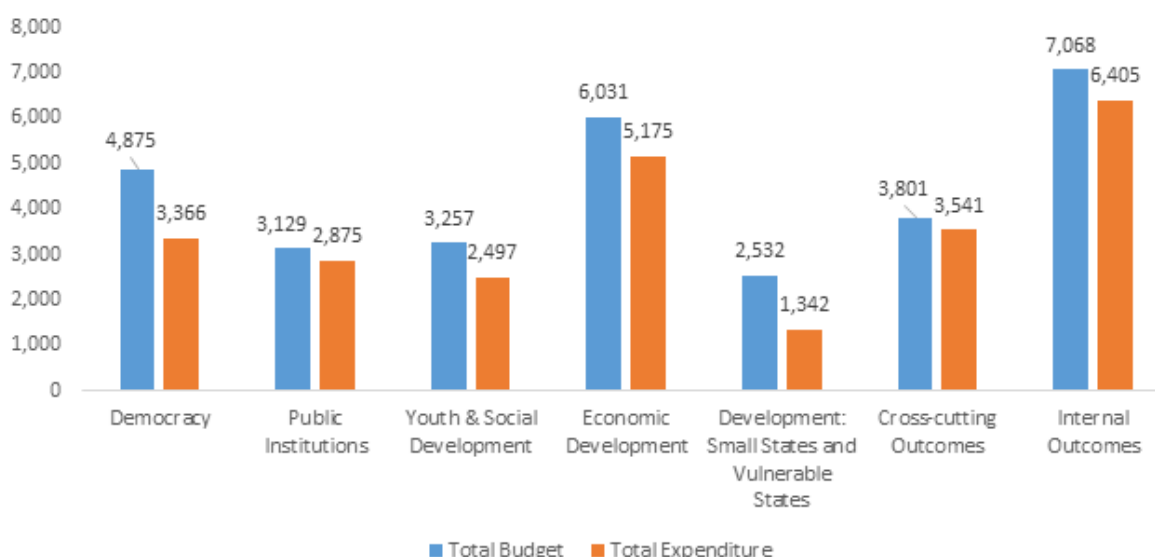
The Secretariat's total direct budget expenditures during the financial year ending 30 June 2020 amounted to **£25.2 million**. Of the approved budget, **49 per cent** was allocated to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and **43 per cent** and **8 per cent** were allocated to the COMSEC Fund and the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) Fund, respectively.

### Total direct budget - summary performance by fund (£ '000s)



Of the total approved direct budget for financial year 2019/20, the Secretariat allocated the highest share of the budget to its strategic outcomes, amounting to **£19.8 million (64 per cent)**, where expenditure reached **£15.3 million (77 per cent of the budget)**. Internal outcomes received a **23 per cent** share of the budget at **£7.1 million** with **£6.4 million (91 per cent)** spent. The remainder of the share of the budget was allocated to enabling outcomes at **£3.8 million (6 per cent)** with **£3.5 million (93 per cent)** spent. The figure below illustrates expenditure versus budget across each outcome.

### Total direct budget - summary performance by outcome (£ '000s)



## Annex A: List of New Partnerships 2019/20

Partner	Partner description	Description of the arrangement	Outcomes affected by partnership
Government of Australia	Government of Australia represented by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Renewed MoU Outlines financial support to implement a further phase of a Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Unit and implement the Commonwealth CVE Strategy.	1.4 Strengthened mechanisms of civil paths to peace in member countries to counter violent extremism.
<a href="#">E-Trade for All</a>	Multi-stakeholder global Initiative that aims to improve the ability of developing countries and countries with economies in transition to use and benefit from e-commerce by scaling up collaboration in the field of e-commerce globally.	Outlines collaboration on connectivity and digital connectivity particularly, the digital economy and digital trade, and collaboration in relation to technical assistance provided by the Secretariat to member countries on e-commerce strategies.	4.1 Effective mechanisms for improved trade, employment and business growth.
<a href="#">GSMA</a>	The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide, uniting more than 750 operators with almost 400 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and internet companies, as well as organisations in adjacent industry sectors.	Outlines how to create collaborative platform to encourage digital transformation; work in cooperation on projects that leverage the potential of mobile as an enabler for socio-economic growth and achievement of the SDGs.	Strengthened partnerships and innovations to support member countries and Commonwealth organisations.
<a href="#">International Solar Alliance</a>	International Solar Alliance provides a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar resource-rich countries to achieve the common goals of increasing use of solar energy in a safe, convenient, affordable,	Outlines areas of mutual concern to promote the development and scaling up of solar energy within countries of common operations.	4.4 Sustainable development of marine, other natural

Partner	Partner description	Description of the arrangement	Outcomes affected by partnership
	equitable and sustainable manner.		resources, including 'blue economies.'
<a href="#">No More Foundation</a>	NO MORE is dedicated to ending domestic violence and sexual assault by increasing awareness, inspiring action and fuelling culture change.	Outlines cooperation to implement initiatives through the promotion of 'The Whole System Approach' and 'Commonwealth Says NO MORE', that work on the prevention of domestic violence and sexual abuse with the aim of complementing the efforts on the Commonwealth's priority of ending violence against women and girls and achieving the Agenda 2030 and targets of the SDGs.	3.4 Women, girls and other vulnerable groups empowered and protected against violence and harmful practices
<a href="#">The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States</a> , Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago (host agency)	The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is an International Inter-governmental Organisation dedicated to regional integration in the Eastern Caribbean.	Outlines cost effective collaboration and cooperation among through an exchange programme facilitated by OECS Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to provide practice oriented capacity development to legislative drafters, law reform and law revision practitioners of the OECS Member States, which are also Commonwealth member countries, with a view to strengthening the relevant institutions.	2.2 Rule of Law Strengthened and access to justice for all



Partner	Partner description	Description of the arrangement	Outcomes affected by partnership
<a href="#">South Australian Cricket Association and Peace at the Crease Foundation</a>	SACA is responsible for managing, promoting and developing the game of cricket in South Australia.	Outlines collaboration to provide grants to fund advice, assistance and organisation of cricket programmes and facilities to support young people and promote equality and diversity in the Commonwealth; particularly in those areas affected by conflict and violence and other things such as advancing education; relieving poverty and unemployment; advancing health; raising awareness in equality and diversity; eliminating discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation or religion; promoting activities to foster understanding between people from diverse backgrounds; and cultivating a sentiment in favour of equality and diversity.	3.2 Sports contributes to sustainable development, health, and peaceful and just societies
<a href="#">United Nations</a>	The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. It is currently made up of 193 Member States. The mission and work of the United Nations are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter.	Outlines cooperation in areas of mutual and common interest by institutionalising the cooperation of the UN and the Secretariat in order to achieve the objectives of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.	Overall Strategic Plan.
<a href="#">UNEP</a>	The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, promotes the coherent implementation of the environmental dimension of sustainable development within the United Nations	Small scale funding agreement to deliver a project on the legal implications of climate change.	5.2 Increased resilience, adaptation and mitigation against climate

Partner	Partner description	Description of the arrangement	Outcomes affected by partnership
	system, and serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment.		change.
<a href="#">UNITAR</a>	The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) provides innovative learning solutions to individuals, organizations and institutions to enhance global decision-making and support country-level action for shaping a better future.	Outlines how partners will strengthen resilience to the effects of Climate Change of Small Island Developing States.	5.2 Increased resilience, adaptation and mitigation against climate change.
<a href="#">University of Dar es Salaam</a>	The University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) was established in August 1970, as a National University to transmit knowledge as a basis of action, from one generation to another; To act as a centre for advancing frontiers of knowledge through scientific research; and to meet the high level human resource needs of the Tanzanian society.	Outlines how the Commonwealth Secretariat and the University of Dar Es Salaam Department of Political Science will work in cooperation to deliver the Commonwealth Project on Prevention of Violent Extremism in Tanzania: Perception on Community Policing Regional.	1.4 Strengthened mechanisms of civil paths to peace in member countries to counter violent extremism.
<a href="#">Vulcan Inc</a>	Vulcan focuses on the issues facing oceans, climate, conservation, and communities. Along with partners, its unique approach includes game-changing data and technology, strategic grant making, advocacy, storytelling, and engagement to create lasting impact locally and globally.	Outlines collaboration on Vulcan's Allen Coral Atlas, which is a system that converts various sources of data on coral reefs to generate detailed maps, images notifications and other information on coral reefs, and is made publicly available as a resource to further research and conservation efforts on coral reefs around the world with the goal of using the Atlas to support the implementation or coral reef and other ecosystem planning, governance, monitoring, evaluation and management throughout Commonwealth	4.4 Sustainable development of marine, other natural resources, including 'blue economies'

Partner	Partner description	Description of the arrangement	Outcomes affected by partnership
<a href="#">Wilton Park</a>	Focusing on issues of international security, prosperity and justice, Wilton Park organises over 60 events bringing together leading representatives from the worlds of politics, diplomacy, academia, business, civil society, the military and the media.	countries. Outlines how Wilton Park Executive Agency and Commonwealth Secretariat will work in cooperation to deliver the Commonwealth CVE / Cadre Conference on Regional Approaches to CVE.	1.4 Strengthened mechanisms of civil paths to peace in member countries to counter violent extremism.
<a href="#">World Leadership Alliance (Club de Madrid)</a>	Club de Madrid acts to strengthen democratic leadership and institutional capacity to better tackle major global challenges.	Outlines a framework of cooperation building on each other's comparative advantage and ensuring coordination and sustainability of efforts to address common interests, shared vision and achieve the main goals of each organisation.	Overall Strategic Plan
<a href="#">World Resources Institute (WRI)</a>	WRI is a global research organization that spans more than 60 countries, with offices in the United States, China, India, Brazil, Indonesia and more. Our more than 1,000 experts and staff work closely with leaders to turn big ideas into action to sustain our natural resources—the foundation of economic opportunity and human well-being. Our work focuses on seven critical issues at the intersection of environment and development: climate, energy, food, forests, water, cities and the ocean.	In 2020, countries will be submitting updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Climate Action Enhancement Package (CAEP) delivers targeted, fast-track support to countries to enable them to increase the ambition and accelerate the implementation of their NDCs. CAEP aims to assist the NDC Partnership's developing country members in achieving two	5.2 Increased resilience, adaptation and mitigation against climate change.

Partner	Partner description	Description of the arrangement	Outcomes affected by partnership
		<p>overarching objectives:</p> <p>1) Enhance NDCs, including by raising ambition, as part of the Paris Agreements NDC update process;</p> <p>2) Fast-track implementation of NDCs, including by providing in-country technical expertise and capacity building.</p>	





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