


VOICES



COMMONWEALTH BLUE CHARTER

A call for co-ordinated action

 **EQUALITY AND JUSTICE**
A new alliance is launched

 **CHOGM 2018**
The summit and the forums

 **GENDER MATTERS!**
Programme in Colombo



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

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Henley Media Group

COMMONWEALTH

HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2018 REPORT



INCLUDES PERSPECTIVES FROM

HRH The Prince of Wales | Theresa May | Joseph Muscat
Amina J Mohammed | Shahid Khaqan Abbasi | Yoweri Museveni | Akinwumi Adesina
Frank Bainimarama | Julia Gillard | Freundel Stuart | Roberto Azevêdo

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WELCOME



As The Royal Commonwealth Society celebrates its 150th year, I should like to take this opportunity of introducing this 12th edition of *Commonwealth Voices* to say thank you to the many contributors supporters and Fellows associated with the Society's journey. There is no doubt that the longevity and work of the Society would not have happened without all of you.

I'd also like to introduce myself. Whilst I took up the Chief Executive post in mid-June, I am aware that this will be a first introduction for many readers. The following pages do, in many ways, reflect why I was attracted to The Royal Commonwealth Society. The newly formed Equality & Justice Alliance (pages 6-7), for example, in which we partner with three progressive organisations to deliver legal reform for Women's and LGBT rights, along with the often observed ability of the RCS to punch above its weight with events such as The Queen's Birthday Party Concert and the upcoming Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition Award Ceremony.

Other topics covered include The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (pages 12-13), CYGEN (pages 14-15) and examples of initiatives of RCS branches in Asia (pages 18-19), which all highlight both the thematic and geographic breadth of the Society's work. I am delighted to be associated with the Society at this point when, at the 150 year mark, it still actively demonstrates the value and values of the Commonwealth.

I look forward to working with the RCS team to ensure that the relevance and progressiveness of the Society is maintained. I hope you will be encouraged by our work as demonstrated in this edition of *Commonwealth Voices*.

Dr Greg Munro
Chief Executive





THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
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KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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ZIMBABWE

AND THE COMMONWEALTH

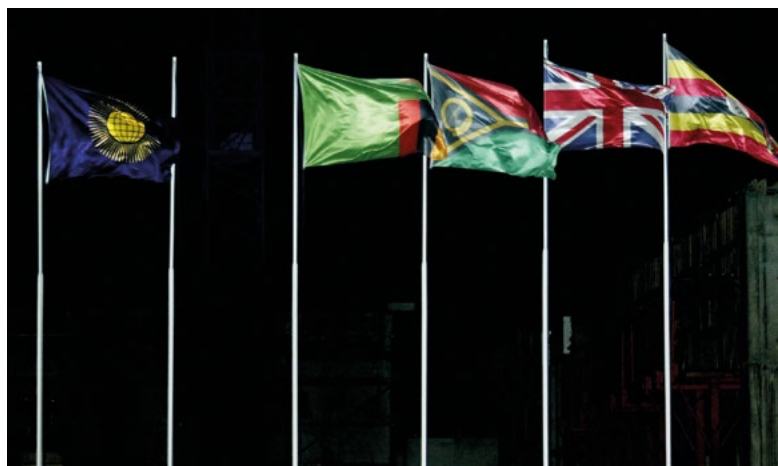
Zimbabwe's relationship with the Commonwealth has been a troubled one...

Zimbabwe was suspended by member states in 2002 after accusations of election-rigging and political persecution. When the suspension was extended at the 2003 CHOGM, President Robert Mugabe withdrew from membership and declared: "Zimbabwe quits and quits it will be".

Now Zimbabwe and the Commonwealth are back in the news, following Robert Mugabe's dramatic ousting from power in November 2017. His replacement is former Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who stepped up to lead the country for the remainder of Mugabe's term. Shortly after, in May 2018, Zimbabwe submitted an application to re-join the Commonwealth.

This was followed by the announcement of bellwether elections – a key test of whether President Mnangagwa's new image of Zimbabwean democracy and stability would be translated into actions, and of whether Zimbabwe could be re-admitted to the Commonwealth. On 30th July, the first Zimbabwean election to allow international observers in almost two decades – and the first ever where Mugabe was not on the ballot – took place.

↓ An empty flagpole representing Zimbabwe's absence from CHOGM 2003 – Abuja, Nigeria
Credit: AP Photo/Ben Curtis/POOL
© Commonwealth



Things got off to a good start, with observers reporting vast improvements in the political environment, including the freedom to campaign, and in the behaviour of the police and military. But with a surprise narrowing of polls that put opposition candidate Nelson Chamisa within 3% of President Mnangagwa, the stakes were raised and tensions mounted.

Soon after the counting of the votes began, Chamisa's MDC Alliance party began to claim that the vote had been rigged. On 1st August, its supporters took to the streets of Harare to protest and were met by security forces with water cannons and tear gas. Protesters were beaten and shot at, resulting in three deaths. These events were bitter reminders of previous elections when Mugabe's Zanu-PF party resorted to violence, post election, and were a blow to the credibility President Mnangagwa had been seeking to build.

Consequently, when the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission announced that Zanu-PF had won 144 out of 210 seats in the National Assembly, a question arose. Was Mnangagwa's victory rigged, or did the violence represent a widening chasm between the military and the ruling party? While, at the time of writing, the answer is still uncertain, the MDC is setting out to challenge the election result in court.

Zimbabwe now stands at a crossroads. It has been widely speculated that Mnangagwa's desire to reconnect with the Commonwealth represents 'low-hanging fruit' – a fast policy success for his administration and a way for Zimbabwe to boost its respectability internationally. With the election turning to violence and questions emerging about its credibility, that golden opportunity is now in the balance. The Commonwealth Observer Group has yet to release its final report, but as its preliminary statement concludes, 'this watershed moment for Zimbabwe should not be squandered. The Commonwealth stands in solidarity with you, the people of Zimbabwe'. What that means for Zimbabwe's future in the Commonwealth is a question yet to be answered.

THE SOCIETY AND THE COMMONWEALTH

Dr Linda Yueh is the new Chair of The Royal Commonwealth Society. Appointed to the Board of Trustees in 2016, she is Fellow in Economics at St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford, Adjunct Professor of Economics at London Business School, and Visiting Senior Fellow at the LSE IDEAS research centre. She is also an author; her latest book is *The Great Economists*.



I am delighted to have become Chair of The Royal Commonwealth Society at a time of tremendous enthusiasm for the Society and the Commonwealth.

With a new Chief Executive at the helm, Dr. Greg Munro, the RCS has entered a new phase full of opportunities.

There are three ways in which the Society is well positioned for the future.

The first is that the RCS is growing in terms of its work as a hub for civil society in the Commonwealth. With the British government at the helm of the Commonwealth for the next two years, the RCS is in a strong position to help co-ordinate the work of civil society organisations across the Commonwealth. Our work on equality has recently been recognised with a major grant from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office to work in partnership with other civil society organisations. In addition our own projects, geared to address youth and educational issues, continue to flourish.

The second is that the Society has entered into an administrative alignment with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), so that our ability to deliver our aim of supporting the values of the Commonwealth is strengthened

by sharing administrative costs with another organisation co-located in the Commonwealth Hub. There will be a number of shared posts, which is financially sensible. One of these is Dr. Greg Munro, who is now the head of the RCS as well as the Secretary-General of the CLGF, so we gain a passionate and experienced Chief Executive. This alignment realises the aspiration of the Commonwealth Hub, which is for Commonwealth organisations to work closely together and realise synergies in our work.

The third is that our brand is as strong as ever as seen during the recent CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) in London in April. We were privileged to help deliver The Queen's Birthday Party at the Royal Albert Hall at the conclusion of CHOGM 2018.

The concert was broadcast live on BBC One, marking a national celebration of Her Majesty's 92nd birthday. Also, our innovative project, The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC), organised with partners, garnered further support during CHOGM. The QCC was also the subject of an ITV documentary, presented by Sir David Attenborough, the highlight of which was a memorable conversation between him and The Queen as they strolled through the gardens of Buckingham Palace.

This year is special as it marks the 150th anniversary of the Society. So, I am privileged to have taken up this role when we are celebrating a century and a half of contributing to the worthwhile work of civil society in the Commonwealth. We are on a terrific footing to continue our work for another 150 years.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
bit.ly/RCSOurHistory
www.lindayueh.com



Leonard Cheshire/Jenny Matthews

DATA IS KEY

When I became Chief Executive of Leonard Cheshire in 2016 and learned of the full breadth and depth of our international work and its potential for transformative impact, it was both energising and exciting. The last six months has put our international reach and the need for better data into further perspective, following high profile events in London at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and more recently, the Global Disability Summit.

↑ **Emelda (left), with her friend Vivian. Through the Girls Education Challenge programme in Kenya, Emelda was supported by Leonard Cheshire to go back to school after losing her sight.**

In the global south 82% of people with disabilities live below the poverty line, surviving on less than one dollar a day. Coupled with the fact that 80% of people with disabilities on the planet live in the global south, in 2018 we all have a responsibility to provide more opportunities for some of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable people.

With 60% of the Commonwealth aged under 30, our key focus at CHOGM was the Youth Forum, which brought together over 500 young people and youth-focussed organisations. Leonard Cheshire took part in sessions which made recommendations on implementing inclusive youth policy to be considered by heads of government. We are actively engaging with young people with disabilities around the world, including in Commonwealth countries like Kenya and Zambia.

Through this work, we provide leadership training for young disabled people in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) to amplify their voices around the 2030 agenda set by the UN.

The Global Disability Summit held in July, in London, highlighted our programmes on inclusive education and economic empowerment and it was pleasing to receive recognition for our work from the Secretary of State for International

Development, Penny Mordaunt. We have worked with The Department for International Development (DFID) for a number of years and have recently extended our commitment in Kenya to enable a further 2,250 girls and 250 boys in the country to get a school place. Our pioneering education programmes in Africa and Asia have already supported 3,700 children with disabilities into mainstream education. But there is still so far to travel, as according to UNICEF, 90% of children with disabilities in the global south do not attend school.

Many governments do not know how many disabled people there are in their countries as a whole. The lack of disaggregated disability data has restricted development for some time, hindering policy planning, development, budgeting and the effective targeting of funds.

The UNCRPD defines persons with disabilities as those who 'have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. Therein lies the problem as effective data collection is a complex challenge. It is not as simple as asking: "are you disabled?" especially in the light of existing stigma and the cultural habit of only declaring severe disabilities rather than ones that are unseen or moderate.

Furthermore, the act of declaring your disability does not take into account an individual's specific capabilities or difficulties, therefore more sophisticated models are necessary. The Leonard Cheshire Data Portal, an exciting collaboration with DFID, was launched at the disability summit; in her closing remarks Penny Mordaunt described it as: "bringing together existing disability data for the first time on sixteen key development indicators from forty low and middle-income countries around the world".

The portal, which includes data on sixteen Commonwealth countries, aims to raise global attention and focus on a long-neglected area, to mobilise new

global and national commitments on disability and showcase good practice, innovation and evidence from across the world. In so doing accountability for implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of persons with disability can be enabled.

Accountability matters because it can cover judicial, administrative and political mechanisms and people with disabilities have historically remained almost invisible within the international legal system. Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) states a requirement to collect data disaggregated by disability and a need for 'appropriate statistical and research data to develop and implement policies', so policy makers have a base to build on as we redouble efforts to tackle the intractable problem of disability exclusion.

For the first-time, disaggregated data from multiple and diverse sources in forty countries is pooled together in one resource. Kenya is one of sixteen Commonwealth countries featured, detailing key development themes including inclusive education, economic empowerment, technology/innovation and stigma/discrimination.

Combined with our existing work in Commonwealth countries and beyond, the data portal is an important development and a potential game changer rooted in the principles and vision of the 2030 agenda.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.leonardcheshire.org
bit.ly/GlobalDisabilitySummit18



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Neil Heslop started work in telecoms with an MBA from Cranfield School of Marketing and a CIM Diploma in Marketing having lost his sight at the age of 21. Following a successful career in the corporate sector Neil advised the UK government on the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act and was awarded an OBE in 2002 for services to British Telecommunications and charity. Prior to being appointed to his current role at Leonard Cheshire, he was Managing Director at RNIB



EQUALITY & JUSTICE ALLIANCE

BETTER LAWS BETTER LIVES

Championing the Commonwealth value of equality has long been a cornerstone of the work of The Royal Commonwealth Society.

Following the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018, the RCS is delighted to announce the formation of the Equality & Justice Alliance – a new coalition of international NGOs which will support Commonwealth countries looking to reform discriminatory legislation. The alliance comprises four organisations – The Royal Commonwealth Society, Human Dignity Trust, Kaleidoscope Trust and Sisters For Change.

The Alliance was formed in recognition of the fact that discriminatory laws enacted during colonial times continue

to impact vulnerable people across the Commonwealth, particularly women and girls and LGBT people. At the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, expressed 'deep regret' for Britain's historic role in instituting 'discriminatory laws made many years ago [that] continue to affect the lives of many people, criminalising same-sex relations and failing to protect women and girls'.

The result of these laws is that women and girls and LGBT individuals do not have equal protection before the law and still suffer discrimination, violence and criminalisation in many Commonwealth countries. This includes laws that permit marital rape or domestic violence, or criminalise people on the basis of whom

they love. Even in countries where these laws go unenforced, their mere presence continues to leave people vulnerable to violence, harassment and discrimination, or unable to access vital services or justice.

In recent years, despite a difficult international landscape, Commonwealth governments have continued to lead on advancing human rights and equality before the law, with regional and world-leading reforms in Belize, Malta, Mozambique, Nauru and the Seychelles. Similar laws and legal systems make the potential for knowledge-sharing among Commonwealth member states considerable. Promoting the value of the Commonwealth, by sharing best practice between experts, civil society organisations and governments of how to build on successes, will be a key role of the Equality & Justice Alliance.

The Alliance will be working across three broad areas in support of legal reform. It will support Commonwealth governments that request technical assistance to reform legislation in order better to protect women and girls and LGBT people from discrimination. It will also work with civil society and high-level champions to enhance their ability to advocate for reform in their own countries and will promote dialogue and respectful discussion on legal reform in the Commonwealth.

Each organisation in the Alliance brings a different field of expertise to the coalition. At the RCS, our strong networks and convening power across the Commonwealth position us well to continue our work stimulating respectful dialogue among decision-makers, diplomats, young people and civil society on sensitive and difficult topics. The Kaleidoscope Trust, which acts as the Secretariat for the Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), will be contributing their experience promoting the voice of LGBT civil society, while Sisters For Change will add their extensive knowledge of using the law and justice to champion the rights of women and girls.

Director of the Human Dignity Trust, Téa Braun, whose organisation supports strategic litigation to reform sexual offences legislation around the world, said:

“

The law plays a central role in ensuring equality and human dignity for all, regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. The Equality & Justice Alliance is delighted to be able to help leverage global legal expertise and experience to support Commonwealth governments to pursue vital law reform to end discrimination and violence.”

Supported by a generous grant from the UK Government as a contribution to the ‘fairness’ theme of this year’s CHOGM, for the next two years the Alliance will engage with Commonwealth leaders, governments and civil society actors to advance equality and equal protection before the law. Central to the programme will be building the networking power of women’s and LGBT organisations to work together effectively to create change in their own countries, regions and across the Commonwealth.

Speaking upon the announcement of the Alliance, RCS Chief Executive Dr Greg Munro said:

“

The UK Government’s support of this initiative, as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, demonstrates the Commonwealth’s commitment to combat structural and systemic inequality and builds upon the Commonwealth’s proud history of taking action to promote and protect democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law.”

MORE INFORMATION
www.sistersforchange.org.uk
www.kaleidoscopetrust.com
www.humandignitytrust.org



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
CELEBRATING 150 YEARS



HUMAN
DIGNITY
TRUST





CHOGM 2018 ROUND-UP

Looking back to April, the scale and ambition of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2018 were impressive.

The presence of two Heads of Government stood out in particular. The first was President Barrow of The Gambia whose election victory brought The Gambia back to the Commonwealth following a five year absence; the second was Prime Minister Modi, ending India's 13-year absence from the meetings at government level. Mr Modi's presence was widely interpreted as a sign of a fresh interest in the Commonwealth from a growing Asian super-power.

↑ The official opening of CHOGM at Buckingham Palace by HM The Queen © Commonwealth Secretariat

Under the theme of 'Towards a Common Future', the summit explored a fairer, safer, more prosperous and sustainable future for Commonwealth citizens. The Commonwealth continued to lead the

way in pushing for global action on the environment, buoyed by its large membership of small island states. The major announcement was the groundbreaking signing of the Commonwealth Blue Charter on ocean protection, in addition to the extensive and forward-looking statement on plastic pollution and the urgent need to tackle carbon emissions. Joint statements from member states on cyber security, free trade and opposition to terrorism were also major components of the Heads' Communiqué.

Despite the welcome appearance of some unseasonably warm weather, the UK as host government got off to a rocky start, with an immigration scandal undermining Prime Minister Theresa May's attempt to paint Britain as an open and global nation after 2016's vote to leave the European Union. With Caribbean leaders using the opening of the summit to condemn the UK's treatment of the Windrush migrants, the UK government was forced to issue an apology.

In fact, 2018 was a CHOGM full of the unexpected, including the announcement of Rwanda as the 2020 Host and the appointment of HRH The Duke of Sussex as a Commonwealth Youth Ambassador. However, the anticipated announcement

in the British media was saved for the last day, with confirmation from the Heads that HRH The Prince of Wales would succeed HM The Queen as Head of the Commonwealth, in due course.

Away from the discussions of governments, CHOGM offered an impressive gathering of civil society from across the Commonwealth, with forums taking place for Youth, Women, People and Business. The Youth Forum included elections for the Commonwealth Youth Council and an action-oriented agenda to highlight young people's role in sustainable development and the advancement of Commonwealth values. At the Women's Forum, Trinidadian activist Zeleca Julien, provided an inspiring moment with her call for solidarity between communities to overcome violence experienced by women and girls, including in their own homes. The presence of activists from The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), championing equal rights for LGBT people, helped to ensure that the question of the safety and inclusion of women and LGBT people in Commonwealth societies was a key debate at the summit, with an unprecedented dialogue on advancing equal rights taking place across all three civil society forums. A calendar of side events was organised by Commonwealth accredited organisations, including the exploration of issues of modern day slavery, sustainable cities, women in business and disability rights. A highlight was the colourful exhibition of stunning portraits depicting LGBT activists from across the Commonwealth (see back cover).

In the build up to CHOGM, the RCS had convened a series of high-level meetings between government officials and civil society to explore each of the four inter-related themes. It also worked with other accredited organisations to contribute to policy discussions and the formulation of recommendations for Commonwealth action going forward, including advocating at the Committee of the Whole to ensure the inclusion of marginalised voices in the Heads' Communiqué. Around the Commonwealth, RCS branches held Commonwealth Conversations on CHOGM themes and participated in Commonwealth Big Lunches while in London, RCS staff,



branch representatives, Associate Fellows and members of CYGEN attended all four forums to promote RCS work in bringing together Commonwealth networks. RCS Director of Youth and Education, Helen Jones MBE, spoke on a panel at the People's Forum on Education, to share the outcomes of the Fiji Education Ministers' Meeting and the importance of gender-inclusive education.

At a reception held at the Palace of Westminster, attended by RCS, valued partners and high-level Commonwealth representatives, The Royal Commonwealth Society's President, Lord Howell, spoke of the crucial role of the Society in linking together the Commonwealth in an increasingly interconnected but troubled world. The week was rounded off with a spectacular concert at the Royal Albert Hall to mark Her Majesty The Queen's 92nd birthday, organised by the RCS and the BBC. Attended by Members of The Royal Family, Heads of Government and members of the public, and broadcast live by the BBC, artists from across the Commonwealth performed as a tribute to HM The Queen's long stewardship of the Commonwealth.

↑ Trinidadian activist Zeleca Julien speaks at the Women's Forum
© Commonwealth Secretariat

 **MORE INFORMATION**
bit.ly/RCSCHOGM2018

A BLUE CHARTER FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

In the lead-up to CHOGM, on the 6th April, The Royal Commonwealth Society and the High Commission for Canada convened experts and Commonwealth diplomatic representatives for a panel discussion entitled 'Blue Horizons'.

With the topic of sustainability and oceans on the Heads of Governments' agenda, the discussion at Canada House provided an opportunity to reflect on the role of the Commonwealth in promoting the sustainable development of the ocean, ocean governance, inclusive growth and the anticipated adoption of the Commonwealth Blue Charter at CHOGM.

The discussion was moderated by Catherine Blewett, Deputy Minister for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Canada. The panel included Dr. Larry Hildebrand, Professor and Canadian Chair at the World Maritime University; Angelique Pouponneau, Adviser to the Seychelles Mission to the UN and Vice-Chairperson for Inclusion and Engagement of the Commonwealth Youth Council; and Jeff Ardron, Adviser on Ocean Governance at the Commonwealth Secretariat and Lead on the Commonwealth Blue Charter Initiative.

Topics of discussion included balancing growth and adaptation, the private sector,

insurance, the high seas, meaningful conservation and the oceans in multilateral fora. A number of challenges and solutions, related to the sustainable development and conservation of the oceans, were identified. Among these issues, the increasing impact of climate change on industry and the need for meaningful conservation featured prominently.

Deputy Minister Blewett concluded by highlighting the current international focus on the oceans, viewing the principles to be put forward in the Commonwealth Blue Charter at CHOGM as a good first step, to be followed by further discussion among G7 countries and over the course of the UN Oceans Decade (2021-2030). She said: "It is clear that a principled approach to the blue economy is a key priority. A sustainable, co-operative and innovative approach is key". It was also noted that while there seemed to be broad agreement among Commonwealth member states on the principles of ocean management, there remained gaps to close in terms of legislation, enforcement, education and finance.

"We already have a myriad of ocean commitments; we already recognise the many challenges. Now, what we need is action. Eleven countries have committed to leading the Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups. That's a huge step forward. Next, we are looking for Commonwealth countries to come and join them in co-operatively tackling these shared ocean commitments and challenges."

Jeff Ardron, Commonwealth Blue Charter Lead at the Commonwealth Secretariat

MORE INFORMATION
www.thecommonwealth.org

Photo Credit: Terry Dörner

THE ROAD TO RWANDA

LOOKING AHEAD TO CHOGM 2020

Rwanda, the Commonwealth's newest member state, was selected to host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2020, after Malaysia withdrew its bid.

In many ways Rwanda represents the face of Commonwealth renewal, at a time when it is seeking to demonstrate new value across its member states. After all, the Commonwealth's newest member state is also one of just two Commonwealth countries with no historic ties to Britain. If Rwanda can prove that the Commonwealth can bring value beyond former colonial boundaries, CHOGM 2020 may provide a renewed impetus for new membership in Africa and beyond.

When Rwanda first joined the Commonwealth in 2009, the move formed part of a concerted strategy to move on from the horrors of the 1994 genocide by positioning the tiny African nation as a regional and global leader. Part of the appeal of hosting CHOGM will be to burnish further Rwanda's credentials as an international tourism and conference destination, with major new infrastructure projects already under construction to avoid a repeat of the gridlock that marred the Kigali 2018 African Union Summit. More crucially for the government however, CHOGM will coincide with the conclusion of Rwanda's lauded 'Vision 2020' development strategy – on track largely to deliver plans to transform the country from a low-income, agricultural economy to a middle-income

service economy by 2020. This impressive record reveals Rwanda as something of a development success story in Africa, boasting significant drops in poverty, a two-thirds reduction in child mortality, near-universal primary school enrolment, and an ease-of-doing business ranking higher than France. Rwanda will be keen to promote itself as a development leader and trusted partner when the Commonwealth Heads assemble in Kigali in 2020.

However there is likely to be criticism of Rwanda's human rights record, with accusations of assaults on democracy, civil society, media freedom and political opposition. These accusations have left Rwanda languishing near the bottom of Commonwealth democratic league tables, as one of only four Commonwealth countries labelled 'not free' by the respected think-tank Freedom House. Commonwealth Heads will be hoping to avoid a repeat of the controversial Sri Lanka summit of 2013, where allegations of war crimes and rights abuses against the host nation led several countries to boycott the meeting. The manner in which Rwanda responds, in the two years available to them to prepare for CHOGM, will be critical in demonstrating whether they can show a commitment to the values, and not just the value, of the Commonwealth.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.rwandahc.org
www.freedomhouse.org

THIRTY THOUSAND SQUARE MILES

OF THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH CANOPY

On the 20th April 2018, the largest-ever gathering of Commonwealth Heads of Government, through their Communiqué 'Towards a Common Future', highlighted the contribution of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC) to the conservation of forests for future generations.



Launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta in November 2015, the QCC seeks to create a pan-Commonwealth network of forests and botanical gardens that marks Her Majesty The Queen's service to the Commonwealth and conserves these important natural assets for future generations.

Since its launch, 41 Commonwealth countries have committed themselves to this visionary initiative in The Queen's name, with more than 90 individual projects or sites having been dedicated to the scheme to date.

From the conservation of mangroves and swamp forests in the Caribbean and South East Asia, to the concerted efforts of African nations to conserve their national biodiversity and address the growing threat of desertification, the QCC continues to

raise the profile of the Commonwealth and demonstrate the capacity of its 53 member states to act together to ensure forest conservation.

These diverse and varied dedications range in size from the two acre Queen Elizabeth II Park in Tuvalu, the Commonwealth's smallest member state, to Canada's 6.4 million hectare Great Bear Rainforest, one of the largest remaining tracts of unspoiled temperate rainforest left in the world. Together, they account for approximately 30,000 square miles (or some 7.85 million hectares) of indigenous forest being added to the QCC.

As a living legacy to The Queen's lifetime of service to the Commonwealth, it is fitting that The Royal Family has directly supported this innovative initiative. Indeed, this support has seen sites dedicated in each of the Commonwealth's five geographical regions as Members of The Royal Family have undertaken various duties on behalf of The Queen as Head of the Commonwealth.

From the tropics of northern Australia, where His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales dedicated the UNESCO World Heritage listed Forests of K'gari (Fraser Island) and



the Bulburin National Park in April 2018, to the islands of the Caribbean, where His Royal Highness The Duke of Sussex unveiled a number of dedications in November 2016 (*Commonwealth Voices* April 2017), the QCC has benefited from the enthusiastic engagement of The Royal Family.

The Queen's own interest in the natural environment has been evident throughout her reign, particularly as she travelled throughout the Commonwealth. This included her visit to South Africa in 1947 when, as the young Princess Elizabeth, she visited the Knysna and Tsitsikamma Forests of the Garden Route National Park, which now forms that country's dedication to the QCC.

Her Majesty's love of trees was explored in the April airing of the ITV documentary, *The Queen's Green Planet*, which saw The Queen and the incomparable naturalist, Sir David Attenborough, discuss trees, nature and conservation as they walked through the gardens of Buckingham Palace. To mark

the launch of the landmark documentary, a forest design was projected on to the façade of Buckingham Palace.

“Trees have been a part of The Queen's life, all her life. Now, she wants to make sure they remain a part of ours, for years to come. [...] The Queen's canopy now reaches the far corners of the planet and covers vast areas of forest. To be protected for the people of the Commonwealth, in her name, forever.”

Sir David Attenborough, *The Queen's Green Planet*

Efforts continue to secure commitment to the QCC from those few remaining, uncommitted countries.

The QCC is a partnership between The Royal Commonwealth Society, the Commonwealth Forestry Association and the award-winning UK-based charity, Cool Earth.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.queenscommonwealthcanopy.org

↑ **Top: A 'Palace Canopy' welcomes Commonwealth leaders to CHOGM 2018**

Left to right: The Prince of Wales unveils a new QCC dedication in Queensland, Australia

The Queen and Sir David filming *The Queen's Green Planet* at Buckingham Palace

GENDER MATTERS!

Since 2015, the RCS has been supporting the work of young gender champions across the Commonwealth through a youth leadership programme. Here Milena Bacalja Perianes reflects on the impact of a recent training workshop.

RCS was instrumental in establishing CYGEN, the Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network, in 2015, supported by the Australian government through DFAT. In July, thirty youth advocates from fourteen countries, RCS staff and CYGEN facilitators came together in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for the pilot of the regional training programme, 'Commonwealth Youth Champions – Gender Matters'.

The pilot, designed by the RCS and CYGEN as an international workshop and cultural programme, was supported by the Australian Government. The workshop aimed to train and support promising young advocates from the Commonwealth Asia-Pacific regions, to advance their work championing gender equality within their communities, and internationally. However, it turned into something even more valuable; an opportunity for a group of strangers who have felt the utter loneliness and isolation of their work and experiences to be drawn irrevocably together.

↓ Day One: participants establish guidelines for the workshop and on-going communications.

↘ The start of a cultural excursion, courtesy of the Sri Lanka Ministry of Tourism.

As a facilitator your job is clear – to neutrally create a space which enables a group to work together through a problem or towards a goal. Yet, in Sri Lanka, none of us could be neutral participants. We actively poured our experiences and heartbreaks into each other. And in doing so we somehow came to breach geographical, cultural, and linguistic barriers.

Whilst many of the stories shared were of violence, fear, and marginalisation those stories made us feel more connected and human than we could have imagined. Suddenly, we all felt less alone. Being vulnerable meant that every one of us was no longer defined by our darkest moments, but as whole beings that had endured and overcome tragedy. Every time someone gave of themselves, it was a testament to the resilience of our spirits.

Unsurprisingly, we didn't solve gender inequality in six days. We couldn't provide a way to stop homophobia, erase cultural intolerance, or overcome the gender gap. What we did was debate privilege (others' and our own), argue over power (how it is wielded and how we change it) and recognise our own position as advocates, community members, and sometimes even perpetrators. The participants, experts in their own right, challenged thinking, developed their own sessions and pushed us to learn, adapt and respond to their needs. And that's exactly what we did.

We examined the complex biological, cultural and social factors which have gendered our world. We pushed participants to move away from thinking of gender and sex as binary, but as fluid, personal and culturally relative ideas. We openly discussed LGBTIQ issues when some of the participants came





from countries where same-sex acts are illegal. We tried to understand what drives violence against women when some in the room were victims themselves. We argued. We listened. We laughed. We cried. And boy did we dance.

We weren't creating gender champions. They were already there. Living it, every day.

Time and time again we hear organisations, companies and donors talk about young people. But by always using the adjective 'young' we somehow reduce the value of individuals' experiences and expertise, as if youth is a temporary state thrust upon us which we must endure until we are grown, until we are enough. I can tell you right now, the thirty people I met in Colombo are already enough. They are parents. They are workers. They are students. They are activists. They are great thinkers. They are leaders right now, in every sense of the word.

Gender Matters was designed so that each participant would return to their community to implement a social action project – producing a 'trickle-down affect'. That's what made the project investable. In the coming months, we will see these amazing projects come about, including a campaign to reduce violence against women in South Asia, the development of the first LGBTI training in Sri Lanka (including the underserved needs of intersex people) and research into the impact of climate change on women in

the Pacific Islands. Big and small, they will all have an impact.

However, the greatest value of Gender Matters is not measurable by traditional standards. It is not the number of participants trained, people reached, or projects initiated. It is not a level of trickle-down to be tracked or captured. The reality is that social change doesn't trickle down, it moves upwards, sideways, loops around and sometimes even doubles back. It is fought for on the front lines, fostered in our ability to recognise our own vulnerability and that of others. Lastly, it lies waiting for us to want more for the world. It is this idea of connection and community, which we all still feel and will for a long time. That is the true measure of a success.

↑ Participants express experiences of gender-based violence through theatre.

MORE INFORMATION
bit.ly/RCSGenderEqualityNetwork
bit.ly/RCSBlogs



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Milena Bacalja Perianes A founding member of the Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network (CYGEN), Milena is a feminist entrepreneur, gender researcher and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights expert. She has designed and implemented women-focused programmes, working with the UN, World Bank, International AIDS Society and Simavi. Milena is Co-Founder of the Menstrual Health Hub.

THE COMMONWEALTH DIGITAL CHALLENGE

Media organisations across the Commonwealth are wrestling the disruptive effects of digital technology – with developments accelerating at differing speeds from country to country, writes **Nigel Baker**, Chief Executive of the Thomson Foundation.



A new competition has highlighted that digital technology is also re-inventing media roles – whether that of a newspaper journalist in Bangladesh, a government information officer in Barbados, or the provider of an SMS information service for farmers in east Africa.

Thomson Foundation worked with Buckingham Palace to launch The Commonwealth Digital Challenge – a competition to help provide young or aspiring managers, aged between 28 and 35, with the skills to embrace the changes. The inaugural programme was under the banner of the Elizabeth R Media Fund, run by the Thomson Foundation. It represents a re-branding of the Elizabeth R Broadcasting Fund, which was set up in 1995 to assist the development of broadcasting skills in the Commonwealth.

The first Commonwealth Digital Challenge attracted more than 100 entrants, from 23 countries. They had to outline a workplace

digital challenge and a potential solution, in 400 words. A panel of eminent media experts from India, South Africa and Canada selected fifteen finalists who were then invited to take three on-line modules in digital skills and newsroom management from the Thomson Foundation's e-learning programme.

Two joint winners were invited to London during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April:

John Otunga, 34, a project manager with a 'rumour management system', using mobile phone communication to counter violence in the in Tana River County, northern Kenya. The system uses SMS messages to dispel false rumours which can spark communal violence. His ambition is to expand the service into community radio.

Jessica Haynes, 30, a digital editor with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in Adelaide, plans to integrate chatbot technology and Facebook to increase engagement with the country's indigenous audiences and develop a dedicated online news service for them.

A wide network of media organisations and experts in London lent support to the winners, ranging from a chatbot expert at the BBC, to Facebook, Channel 4 News and the national news agency, the Press Association.

John said the visit to London was: "a great way of gaining wider exposure to media and journalism, which I need in order to build a link between rumour management and community radio. It means I avoid being a manager who doesn't realise what he has to manage."

Jessica said: "I feel like I've made some great connections which will help me achieve my goal."

The Thomson Foundation will provide the winners with further mentoring and plans a self-help group of finalists from future competitions. The foundation is the world's oldest media development charity and has trained journalists from every Commonwealth country in its 55-year history.

↓ Joint Winners of the inaugural Commonwealth Digital Challenge, Jessica Haynes and John Otunga



MORE INFORMATION
 www.thomsonfoundation.org

CITY BUILDERS CAN HOLD THE KEY TO PREVENTING CLIMATE CHANGE

Cities are one of the main polluters worldwide and the Commonwealth is host to some of the most rapidly expanding urban populations in the world, writes **Simeon Shtebunaev**, co-Vice-President for Students and Associates of the Royal Institute of British Architects and International Committee member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.



Nigeria and India urbanise at a rate of 4.6% and 2.8% respectively, far outstripping the rate of urbanisation of countries such as the United Kingdom (0.8%). Yet, when sustainability is discussed in the Commonwealth Head of Governments Meetings, urbanisation and sustainable urban planning are rarely in the spotlight. A recent survey by the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP) and Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) pointed to the lack of urban professionals across the Commonwealth. Paired with the fact that 60% of the Commonwealth is under the age of thirty,

“
now is the time to educate and inspire the future professionals that we will all need.”

In the run-up to the Youth Forum, the CAP Young Planners and the CAA Young Architects came together to question the importance of sustainable urban development in relation to achieving the Commonwealth Charter's objectives. To support our organisations' goals of ensuring a better future for young people and to illustrate how young planners and architects feel they can improve the Commonwealth, we asked all Young Planners and Architects across our

constituencies a question: 'How can Young People within the Commonwealth help deliver SDG 11 to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable?' Linking with the wider UN 2030 Sustainable Agenda is critical if the Commonwealth initiatives are to lead by example worldwide.

The passionate call was answered by Australia, The Caribbean, Malaysia, Nigeria, India, South Africa and the UK. Youth members stressed the importance of sharing practice and ideas outside their own profession to shape a more sustainable society across the Commonwealth. Others expressed the need to bridge the gap between 'young' and 'experts' and the need to listen to fresh, innovative ideas with better and deeper links to schools and universities.

We collated those ideas in a Youth Manifesto which we launched at the Royal Institute of British Architects Headquarters on the second day of the Youth Forum. Three representatives from the CAA and CAP engaged with the Youth Forum and used the manifesto as a guiding point throughout our participation in the action plan workshops. We were delighted to see that under the 'Sustainable Future' section of the action plan ideas such as the establishment of Youth Hubs and Professionals and Youth Exchange Networks were key items to be delivered over the next two year period.

CHOGM 2018 is the start for our campaign to bring young experts to the forefront in the debate of solving climate change. We want to communicate to politicians and NGOs that urbanisation and urban professionals can be the tools to solve climate change.

“
We need to plan the future of our cities intelligently and we need to discuss that future with our youth.”

MORE INFORMATION
www.commonwealth-planners.org
www.comarchs.com



ACTIVE IN ASIA

Regional Co-ordinators for India, Hari Om Dahiya and Shivani Wazir Pasrich have been engaged in activity aligned with that of OBW, an organisation founded by RCS Associate Fellow, Sadia Haque Jui.

↑ Ms Sadia Haque Jui welcomes Mr. Anubhav Somra; with Mr. Hari Om Dahiya and Mr. Amiya Parapan Chakra Borty

↓ Indian delegate, Ms. Modabbara Jawaid, speaks on India-Bangladesh relations

↕ Mr. Shamim Ahmed (I) and Mr. Hari Om Dahiya discuss the Commonwealth

In July, The Commonwealth Students' Welfare Group of India (CSWGI) and One Better World (OBW) in Bangladesh collaborated in organising the first India-Bangladesh Commonwealth Youth Conclave (IBCYC).

Hosted by the British Council in Dhaka the IBCYC was the first youth event to focus on Commonwealth collaboration between India and Bangladesh. CSWGI is a long-standing branch of the RCS in India, of which Hari Om Dahiya is President and OBW is run by Sadia Haque Jui. The outreach partner for the event was the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA).

The theme of the conclave was 'Youth as Agents of Change – developing a Commonwealth Partnership'. The two-day event brought together with stakeholders some 45 youth delegates from both countries to develop understanding of the Commonwealth and a closer youth engagement between India and Bangladesh. HE Dr Shri Biren Sikder, Minister of State for Youth and Sports, Government of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest; Ms Maisha Reza, Chairperson, Commonwealth Students Association (CSA) was Distinguished Guest of Honour. Contributors included Mr Tawseef Mannan Khan, Regional Co-ordinator of the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowship Programme (CSFP), British Council Bangladesh and Mr Anubhav Somra, Founder of the Australasian Network Undertaking (Australia and India). Other speakers included RCS Associate Fellows: Osama Bin Noor, Rahat Hossain, Shamim Ahmed and Amiya Parapan Chakra Borty.

Debates focused on socio-political issues (India-Bangladesh); Youth, IT and Social Entrepreneurship; and Youth and the SDGs. Delegates also engaged in group activities exploring and proposing solutions to the social issues of both countries.



“ The conclave provided delegates with a path through which they are encouraged to initiate change among them and spread it to the world. ”

Sadia Haque Jui

International Menstrual Hygiene Day on 28 May was marked in Delhi with the launch of the Niine Movement. Shivani Wazir Pasrich, RCS Co-ordinator, India, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Society of India and the founder of the Commonwealth Cultural Forum was invited to speak at the launch at the inaugural Menstrual Awareness Conclave in Delhi. The conclave marked the launch of the Niine Movement along with a five-year plan aimed at raising awareness of the importance of menstrual hygiene and tackling the taboos associated with menstruation in the country. The conclave was supported by India's 'Pad Man' and acclaimed Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar, along with actor Shabana Azmi, MP Meenakshi Lekhi; Deputy Representative UN Women of India, Nishtha Satyam; designer Raseel Gujral and others.



↑ Shivani Wazir Pasrich (r) with actor Shabana Azmi

“Menstruation or periods are often considered taboo in this sub-continent. Regardless of its significance to mankind, people have always shown a negative perspective towards it from the beginning of time, ignoring the health risks for women.”

Sadia Haque Jui

Earlier this year OBW in Bangladesh launched a series of ten Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Campaigns and Workshops throughout Dhaka city over three months. The principal objective of the sessions was to raise awareness of the need to

use hygienic menstruation pads during periods to ensure the protection of young girls and mothers from the risk of disease. Partnering with ACI Ltd. OBW provided information about menstrual hygiene and women's reproductive health awareness to some fifty underprivileged young girls and women participants in each session and distributed Freedom sanitary napkins provided by ACI. Sessions concluded with an awareness-raising discussion in which participants were encouraged to share their problems and raise queries regarding healthy menstruation hygiene which were answered by specialist members of the OBW team.

MORE INFORMATION
bit.ly/RCSAsia
www.facebook.com/obw.org.bd
www.niine.com

BRANCH FOCUS



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY
Cyprus Branch



↑ HRH Prince Michael of Kent

The inauguration of the RCS Branch in Cyprus took place on 26th April in the presence of HRH Prince Michael of Kent, the President of the House, the Minister of Labour and Social Insurance, the Minister of Transport, Communications and Works, MPs, High Commissioners and EU Ambassadors.

The keynote address was delivered by HRH Prince Michael of Kent, in which he highlighted the 'Opportunities and Challenges for Business and Investment

in the Commonwealth' saying: "The RCS Cyprus Branch comes at a time of renewed opportunity for the Commonwealth..."

In his welcome address Prof. Achilles Emilianides, Chairman of RCS Cyprus and Dean of the School of Law said: "The decision of the UK to exit the EU was the catalyst for our initiative to form the Cypriot Branch of the RCS. I strongly believe that there is a strong interest in re-invigorating the Commonwealth and this is both timely and necessary."

COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH

9-14 SEPTEMBER

Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association (CMJA) 18th Triennial Conference, Brisbane, Australia

13 SEPTEMBER

Commonwealth Roadshow - Model CHOGM, Manchester

15 SEPTEMBER

International Day of Democracy (United Nations)



18 SEPTEMBER – 5 OCTOBER

73rd Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA73), New York, USA

21 SEPTEMBER

International Day of Peace (United Nations)



23-26 SEPTEMBER

Universities of the Future: Global Perspectives for HR, Canada (The Association of Commonwealth Universities)

1-3 OCTOBER

Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation ICT Forum, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

3 OCTOBER

CGEF Girls Meeting, London (Commonwealth Consortium for Education)



5 OCTOBER

World Teachers Day (United Nations)

15-17 OCTOBER

The Royal Commonwealth Society International Meeting, London

10 NOVEMBER

The Commonwealth Fair, Commonwealth Countries League (CCL), London

23 NOVEMBER

Model CHOGM, RCS Wales Branch, South Wales

5-7 DECEMBER

Commonwealth ICT Investment Forum, London (Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation)

10 DECEMBER

Human Rights Day (United Nations)

TBC DECEMBER

Model CHOGM, RCS Birmingham Branch, Birmingham

18 DECEMBER

International Migrants Day (United Nations)

KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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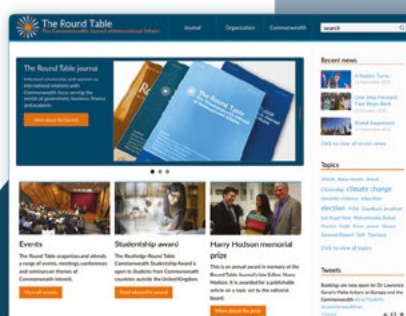


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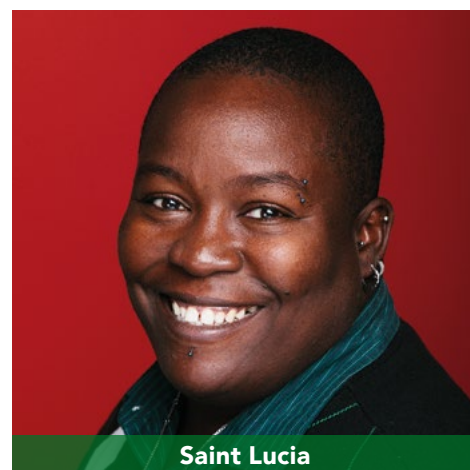
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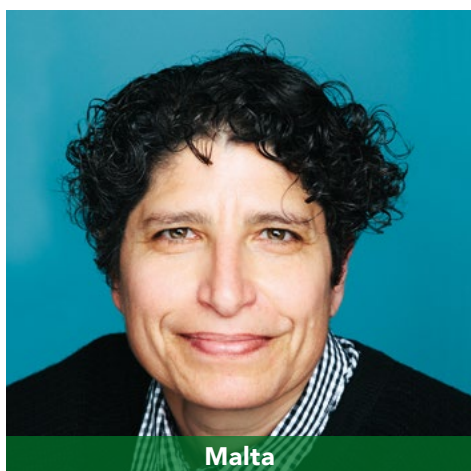
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