

Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan

2021/22 – 2024/25



The Commonwealth

Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan

2021/22 – 2024/25

Approved by the Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors

29 September 2021



The Commonwealth

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| CFTC | Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation |
| CHOGM | Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting |
| COVID-19 | Disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2 |
| CVE | Countering Violent Extremism |
| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SRF | Strategic Results Framework |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |

1. Introduction

1. The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states. Its special strength lies in the combination of its diversity and shared inheritance. Its members are bound together by respect for all states and peoples; by shared values and principles; and by concern for the vulnerable. The Commonwealth Secretariat in London is the backbone of the Commonwealth. It convenes summits and high-level meetings; executes plans agreed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government; promotes Commonwealth values and principles; and facilitates the work of the Commonwealth organisations.
2. The Secretariat's Strategic Plan 2021/22–2024/25 has been put together in a systematic, collaborative manner. Its development started in early 2020. Eleven Task Teams of the Secretariat and Commonwealth system have worked on it. It builds upon the lessons learned from the last decade, evaluative evidence of dozens of independent studies, including the Mid-Term Review and preliminary findings from the evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21, internal and external papers, especially the Forum of Small States (FOSS) document, as well as inputs from member countries. The Executive Committee and the Board of Governors have substantially contributed to the process, providing guidance to identify programme priorities and to sharpen the results framework.
3. The new plan is a short and smart document. It includes analysis of the context the Secretariat is operating in, lessons learned from previous plans and an organisational theory of change. It outlines a results framework aligned with the values and principles of the Commonwealth Charter. It includes mandates from Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), which the Secretariat has been asked to deliver. The plan advances the dual objectives of democracy and development. It reflects the Secretariat's commitment to the development and resilience of small and other vulnerable states, which comprise a majority of the Commonwealth's membership, and seeks to support member countries in progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
4. The plan intends to deepen and broaden the ongoing reforms to make the organisation more relevant, vibrant, joined-up and visible. During the implementation phase of this plan, results-based management (RBM), adaptive planning, and monitoring, evaluation and learning will be strengthened. Youth empowerment and gender equality will be further mainstreamed, through implementation of systematic gender equality and social inclusion analysis, programme design and consultation. Digitalisation of corporate processes and innovation in programme delivery will be pursued.
5. Partnerships with the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning will be leveraged, maximising the opportunity offered by the new strategic plans of the three organisations commencing at the same time. Priority areas identified by the three Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations include small and other vulnerable states, the environment and climate change, health and education skills and systems, technology-enabled development, gender equality, and youth development. Further, the Secretariat will strengthen engagement with all Commonwealth-accredited organisations

to the benefit of all member countries, advancing understanding of their work in-country and opportunities for synergy. Existing partnerships will be deepened, and new strategic partnerships forged.

6. It is imperative to emphasise that the Strategic Plan has been informed by the lessons learned from the last two plan periods and especially by the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation studies. The results of the mid-term evaluation and preliminary findings of the full evaluation of the last Strategic Plan have also been used to develop the draft plan. The approved Strategic Plan was due to come into effect from 1 October 2021. It will end on 30 June 2025.
7. The Strategic Plan is divided into five interconnected parts. The first part introduces the association and explains the way this document took shape. The second part talks about the complex and challenging context in which it has been developed and will be delivered. The third part outlines the organisational theory of change, while the fourth section provides the outcomes reflected in the Strategic Results Framework (SRF). A brief description of relevant programmes to achieve these results follows, with further details included in the first annual delivery plan. The last part describes the way in which the new Strategic Plan will be operationalised after its approval by the Board of Governors, including planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
8. In the dynamic context within which Secretariat operates, there is a need to continuously adapt the management ecosystem of decision-making and delivery with a view to improving effectiveness and efficiency. The operationalisation of the new Strategic Plan will also include reviewing and updating current guidelines and policies that have been in place to ensure greater transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and ethical practices. In particular, given the experience of COVID-19, greater use of digital technology and flexible working conditions will be evaluated and incorporated to improve the working environment, working conditions, productivity and job satisfaction.

2. Context

Threats and opportunities

9. The Strategic Plan commences as the Commonwealth faces multiple crises. The uncertain global context continues to shape many of our common challenges. The COVID-19 virus struck in late 2019, unleashing a global pandemic. The devastating social and economic fallout is expected to shape the short and medium term. In member countries, the pandemic has engendered loss of life and unprecedented pressures on health and social systems. It has grounded economies and exposed social and economic inequalities at the national, regional and global levels.
10. The pandemic has had differential impacts on individuals based on their gender, age, ethnicity, disability status and other social factors. Media reports from across the Commonwealth indicate that gender-based violence has risen during the pandemic, exacerbated by lockdowns and stress. The global health workforce is estimated to be more than 70 per cent female. However, women make up less than 25 per cent of senior leadership. As the risks of exposure, overwork and burnout for health workers continue over the course of the pandemic, the perspectives of female health workers are limited at critical decision-making levels.
11. The financial impact of the pandemic is evident with reports of job losses and the burden of unpaid care work being borne disproportionately by women. Analysis indicates that despite making up a smaller proportion of the formal labour force, women have been losing their jobs at a greater rate than men. McKinsey analysis in mid-2020 noted that women were disproportionately represented in industries that declined most that year due to COVID-19, including education, accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade, arts and recreation, and public administration. COVID-19 also appears to be having a disproportionate impact on women's entrepreneurship, including women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and microenterprises (MSMEs), in countries where such enterprises make up a large part of female labour-force participation. Many of these SMEs are involved in agriculture, tourism and related industries. With the decline of visitor arrivals in most Commonwealth countries, the demand for products and services in these sectors has also significantly declined, negatively impacting the livelihoods of women.
12. Older people and people with disabilities have been at increased risk, with most deaths occurring in the older age groups and overwhelmed health and social care systems restricting service provision. Young people's access to education has been severely curtailed, uncertainty over their economic prospects has increased and the impact of the digital divide has manifested clearly. Commonwealth health ministers have expressed grave concerns regarding the inequality in availability, access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines among Commonwealth countries, particularly lower middle-income countries, least developed countries and small and other vulnerable states, among our membership.

13. The climate challenge has been a concern for many decades now, but its effects are more evident than ever before. The climate emergency has become the defining crisis of the current times, disproportionately affecting small and other vulnerable states. The climate crisis needs to be dealt with urgently, holistically and collectively, ensuring international commitments are met and made more ambitious. The affected countries, many of which are Commonwealth members, need effective support to build resilience; more investment is also needed to secure effective and sustainable energy transition.
14. Women and girls are some of the most disproportionately affected by climate change but are also part of the community that is best placed to address the climate emergency. This is evidenced by the greater dependency of women and girls on land and natural resources, and the greater knowledge they have on the sustainable management of the same. Women are also the majority of the world's poor and as such disproportionately affected because of socioeconomic status and marginalisation in critical decision-making relating to policy-making, and in access to climate finance. Youth are a key constituency in climate action and have been increasingly mobilising to demand climate action. Youth participation in decision-making is essential to find and implement urgent solutions to the climate emergency.
15. The pandemic has underscored the critical importance of digital tools, new technologies, connectivity, innovation and partnerships as a means to both survive and thrive in the twenty-first century. Many member countries currently face a shortfall in resources, capacity, skills and infrastructure in this area. The digital age is increasingly shaped by big data, artificial intelligence, machine learning, the internet of things and remote sensing technologies. It is worth noting that more than 60 per cent of the Commonwealth population is young and relatively more 'digital savvy' than the older generations, presenting an opportunity to enable the digital and demographic potential of the Commonwealth. This will require support to address the digital divide in Commonwealth countries. Half the world's population are still offline, the majority of whom are women and girls.
16. The Secretariat has undergone digital transformation in the last few years, using some of these technologies to address shared challenges such as climate change, disaster management and ocean surveillance. In the new plan period, the Secretariat will continue to work with member countries and relevant Commonwealth organisations, regional mechanisms, international organisations and the private sector to adapt and thrive in this new context dominated by technological transformation. It will operate in a hybrid delivery mode to provide online as well as on-the-ground services to member countries and explore ways it can support member countries to harness the potential of technology to achieve the aims of Commonwealth Charter and the SDGs.

Organisational context

17. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted global travel and work practices and has affected the Secretariat's ability to deliver services from Marlborough House in London. It has imposed limitations to normal operations, compelling remote working and virtual programme delivery, and exacerbating physical and mental stresses. The Secretariat has responded well to the crisis, teams have never stopped working and delivering services to members. Most of its operations and services have been delivered remotely since the start of the pandemic. It developed and presented a COVID-19 strategy to members in June 2020.

Adjustments to the Secretariat's delivery plan and budget were proposed accordingly and presented to the Executive Committee in October 2020. The Secretariat continues to adapt, adjust and learn to serve member countries in this evolving context.

18. Voluntary contributions to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) have been declining. They have gone down by 27 per cent in the last six years. The shortfall has been met with an increase in extrabudgetary resources (EBRs). They are, however, not sustainable in the longer term. The decline in the CFTC may result in a smaller envelope of programme funding in the coming years. This will constrain the Secretariat's capacity to deliver required services to members.
19. The decline in the CFTC has been compounded by two further challenges. Members, especially small and vulnerable states, have suffered the most from the ongoing pandemic. Their capacity to contribute to Commonwealth funds has decreased on the one hand, while demand for the Secretariat's services has gone up on the other. The Secretariat will continue to achieve efficiency and leverage technology, innovation, and partnerships to deliver more services with less money in the coming years. The Secretariat will explore contingency planning in annual delivery plans and budget documents to ensure it can address financial uncertainty.

Learning from the past

20. The Mid-Term Review and Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21 evaluation recommended: a strategic focus on fewer areas, especially in CFTC programmes; the building of a shared vision and intent; and creating clarity and alignment around the Secretariat's core mandate and unique value proposition. The evaluation highlighted the need to make strategic choices and narrow the scope of the technical assistance portfolio, focusing on those areas where the Secretariat can generate and demonstrate its biggest value-add by renewing and leveraging its core assets and mandate. To enable this, it is essential for the Secretariat to develop a shared understanding of the Secretariat's core assets and how these could be renewed and leveraged as part of the Secretariat's core mandate and value proposition to achieve sustained change and larger impact.
21. To address these recommendations, the Secretariat has consolidated outcomes in the areas of peace, democracy, and governance in line with relevant paragraphs of the Charter and SDG 16. It has fully integrated the Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Development in the trade programme, while a strategic outcome on resilience and climate action has been introduced. Regarding small and other vulnerable states, the Secretariat is adopting a two-pronged approach, recognising the Secretariat's comparative advantage in this area. Small and other vulnerable states have a dedicated strategic outcome. This includes a focus on reducing vulnerability and increasing the financial and environmental resilience of small and other vulnerable states, as well as an outcome to ensure their voices and needs are heard and addressed in international processes. In addition, small and other vulnerable states will benefit from achievement of results in all other areas of the Strategic Plan. Sections 4.1 to 4.6 of this document detail how small and other vulnerable states will benefit from work towards all intermediate outcomes. Compared to the previous Strategic Plan, the Secretariat will redouble efforts to mainstream gender and for the first time it will adopt a mainstreaming approach to youth development.

22. To balance the need for prioritisation and strategic focus, this Strategic Plan, in its theory of change, distinguishes between Commonwealth global focus with select priority issues and member country focus that is a response to the unique needs of the membership. The Commonwealth global focus will allow the Secretariat to utilise its core asset as a convenor within trusted spaces to build on the consensus and advocate in a more consistent and strategic way on priority global issues.
23. Evaluations have highlighted the need to further partnerships with member countries to enhance impact and challenged the disconnect between Strategic Plan priorities and the wide-ranging demands for technical and advisory services. This mismatch dilutes the impact of Secretariat's programmatic work. Evaluations have highlighted the absence of people and organisational planning, which results in slow delivery and lesser impact. This is being rectified by designing an organisational development and people strategy that will be aligned with the priorities of the new Strategic Plan.
24. The evaluations have recommended that the Secretariat develops an adaptive, contribution- and utilisation-focused monitoring and evaluation-for-learning approach, which draws on an organisational theory of change centred on a core set of prioritised gender-integrated key topics (or 'big ticket items') and that helps to build an organisation-wide evaluative learning culture. An organisational-level theory of change (see Figure 1) has been developed that will anchor programme-level theories of change in the delivery plan that forms the basis for the measurement of change.

3. Theory of Change

25. The organisational theory of change provides the context, pathways, assumptions and risks that accompany the SRF at a strategic level and is not intended to provide a detailed explanation of our programmatic and project approach, which can be found in the accompanying delivery plan.
26. Our **strategic focus** towards 2025 will be mindful of the 2030 Global Agenda for sustainable development, recognising the ambitions and challenges of our 54 member countries, both national and shared. We will continue to advocate the values and principles of our Commonwealth Charter and advance the mandates of Commonwealth Heads of Government, while supporting member countries to fulfil their national contributions to the SDGs.
27. By 2025, we aspire to measurably advance the following **strategic outcomes** across member countries, and particularly small and other vulnerable states:
 - i. greater adherence to Commonwealth values and principles and advance good governance, *through strengthened **rule of law, democracy, peacebuilding, human rights, public institutions, and electoral processes** enabled by value-based leadership*;
 - ii. sustainable and inclusive economic and social development pertaining to **trade, financial and debt management, oceans and natural resources management and, health and education** systems;
 - iii. climate-resilient and low-carbon development to respond to climate and ocean emergencies, *through intra-Commonwealth co-operation on **sustainable ocean action and energy transition and increased mitigation and adaptation actions***; and that our
 - iv. **small and other vulnerable states'** needs and concerns will be addressed in global governance mechanisms and their resilience to shocks increased.
28. Our approach to **gender mainstreaming and youth empowerment** will be ensured by systematic gender and social inclusion analysis in the design of all our work, by prioritising the needs of excluded groups in delivery; and by measuring the impact of our work on these communities.
29. Our **focus** will be two fold, a Commonwealth global focus and member countries focus. On the **Commonwealth global focus**, we will advance joint advocacy, prioritising at least one global issue per strategic outcome. This will be delivered through an overarching consensus building and global advocacy strategy that draws on the convening and technical expertise of the Secretariat, the consensus position of member countries, and the contribution of Commonwealth organisations for a united common voice on global issues. On the **member countries focus**, we will continue to be responsive to direct member countries' requests in the strategic outcome areas, leveraging existing resources and partnerships. Identified member countries' gaps in meeting their national priorities towards achieving SDG targets will drive our direct technical support, in line with intermediate and cross-cutting outcomes.
30. The accelerator in this plan is **partnerships**. Building on the partnership strategy and in the face of limited financial resources, we will focus on strategic partnerships that provide additional resources to implement the Strategic

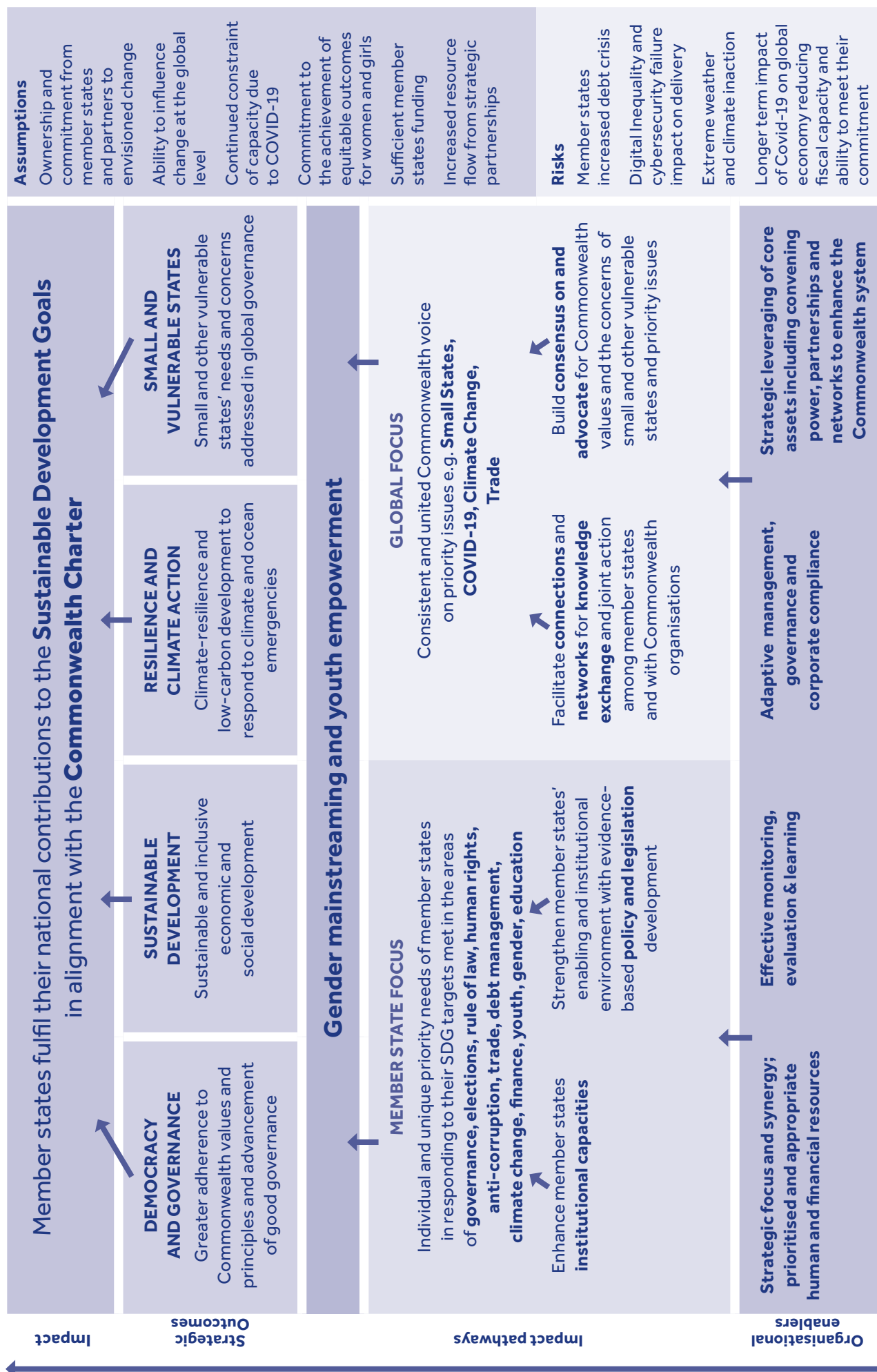
Plan. We will broker partnerships that link member countries with development partners, who can provide technical assistance and increase resource flow to global issues of concern to the member countries. A stronger partnership with Commonwealth organisations in the delivery of the Strategic Plan will be fostered to increase programme reach in member countries.

31. Our **pathways to impact** will be results focused and adaptive, encompassing both in-person and digital delivery as appropriate:
 - i. Convene member countries and partners to facilitate conversations, build consensus around Commonwealth values and positions, provide thought leadership and advocate for Commonwealth interests in regional and global policies. ***(Consensus Building, Thought Leadership and Advocacy)***
 - ii. Provide technical assistance and expert advisory for national and regional policy and legislative development, to foster an enabling environment for peace, good governance and sustainable development. ***(Policy and Legislative Development)***
 - iii. Provide tools, technologies and training to develop the capacities of leaders, technical officials, system actors and institutions, to improve performance and effectiveness in reaching peacebuilding, good governance and sustainable development goals. ***(Institutional and Capacity Development)***
 - iv. Facilitate and broker connections for ideas, knowledge and innovations, exchange, co-creative and joint actions to enhance the Commonwealth system and action networks. ***(Connectivity and Networks)***
 - v. Accelerate action through results-based, risk-informed and agile delivery, partnerships, innovation and the use of technology. ***(Organisational Performance Enablers)***
32. The impact pathways apply horizontally across strategic outcomes, programmes and projects, providing a valuable opportunity for collaboration, learning and sharing expertise on similar pathways across different policy areas. Impact pathways can also be mapped out vertically across outcomes, outputs and activities, providing a roadmap for intervention that is more easily measurable and comparable.
33. We recognise emergent and emerging **contextual issues** that may threaten these ambitions or present opportunities, including:
 - i. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on resilience building, and social, environmental and economic development.
 - ii. The unique challenges faced by our small and other vulnerable states on the confluence of global, economic, health and climate shocks.
 - iii. The existential crisis climate change poses to all, but particularly our small and other vulnerable states.
 - iv. Confronting the challenges to multilateralism and the rules-based international system, including through the rise of nationalism and regionalism, and threats to democratic processes and institutions.

34. Given the present context, our planning is developed against the following key **assumptions**:
- i. Our small state members will continue to need our support to advocate on their behalf at the global level and the Secretariat has the influence to bring about the targeted changes in global discourse and policies.
 - ii. COVID-19 will continue to impact on our ability to deliver across all outcome areas, while constraining the capacities of our member countries and the global community to attain the SDGs.
 - iii. Achieving equitable outcomes for women and girls in the Commonwealth will require decisive, targeted and co-ordinated actions with member countries and international organisations, including the Secretariat.
 - iv. Our member countries and partners recognise the role and contributions of the Commonwealth and are committed to their partnership with the Secretariat, its values and principles.
 - v. The decline in discretionary funding from member countries will not be redressed in the near term, as member countries prioritise their domestic COVID-responses.
 - vi. Sustained change in member countries requires longer-term engagements, supportive partnerships and coalitions across the Commonwealth system, with global stakeholders and at the national level.
 - vii. Ownership and commitment by member countries to the envisioned change.
35. The Secretariat has identified the following **risks** and will develop management mechanisms to address these:
- i. Member countries' increased debt crises could restrict their investment in sustainable development and funding for multilateral action, including through the Secretariat.
 - ii. Digital inequality and cybersecurity concerns may impact on delivery, especially as the digital offering expands to meet COVID-19 constraints or efficiency gains.
 - iii. Extreme weather and climate change could impact on member countries' environments and priorities and will potentially disrupt the Secretariat's priorities in country planning and delivery.
 - iv. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will have a negative impact on member countries' resources and enabling environments for development action, and the ability for the Secretariat to support member countries on the ground.

36. To unlock our organisational potential, the Secretariat will focus on delivery strategies and **organisational enablers** that:
- i. leverage the Commonwealth's core assets as a convener and trusted partner to build consensus on priority issues and strengthen strategic partnerships that increases resource flow to member countries, including through digital platforms;
 - ii. adopt a thematically focused and collaborative approach centred on important topics where the Secretariat can add the biggest value for the entire Commonwealth, and focus more on small and vulnerable states across the entire portfolio;
 - iii. apply evidence-based, risk-aware and data-driven tools to enhance our planning, decision-making and delivery;
 - iv. make hard strategic choices about investing financial and human resources to generate the best possible outcomes and optimise value/impact; and
 - v. design and implement appropriate monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches and methodologies to manage with agility, course correct, learn and adapt; and better knowledge share and communicate.
37. The Secretariat developed this organisational Theory of Change to accompany the SRF through a series of internal workshops, as the first step towards better communicating its organisational role and contributions and utilising this approach more explicitly in its planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning. Going forward, the TOC will be collaboratively reviewed and updated periodically in line with strategic reviews, drawing on the experiences and contributions of programme staff and stakeholders. Specifically, the assumptions and context analyses will be monitored, and learning and knowledge gained will be used to develop evidence bases, update MEL frameworks and approaches, and improve programme quality.

Figure 1: Theory of Change



4. Outcomes: Strategic, Intermediate, Cross-cutting and Organisational Enablers

38. The Commonwealth Charter is the compass for this plan. Strategic direction was provided by leaders, especially at the last two CHOGMs. National and regional priorities aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also guided the development of the strategic outcomes. Recovery from the pandemic will be a key consideration of the Secretariat's work in the new plan period.
39. The Strategic Plan's theory of change translates the spirit of Commonwealth Charter into a set of programmes and actions. It provides a rationale – why we do what we do. A results framework follows, which narrates outcome statements. Four **strategic outcomes** and interconnected streams of action are proposed for a longer-term duration of ten years. The intermediate outcomes, proposed for a 45-month action period (3 months short of 4 years), capture the desired state that will be achieved in the 12 action areas at the end of the plan. The impact pathways (outlined in paragraph 27) describe the major delivery mechanisms. The SRF also includes cross-cutting outcomes and organisational enablers for agile, accelerated and adaptive delivery.
40. The Secretariat has been trying to **focus better** in line with its comparative advantage. There were 149 programme outcomes prior to 2013. In the Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17, this number was brought down to 24, and placed under 6 strategic outcomes. The Mid-Term Review further reduced it to 22. In the 2016/17–2020/21 Strategic Plan, the Secretariat reduced the strategic outcomes from 6 to 5 and the intermediate outcomes from 22 to 17. In the proposed Strategic Plan, there are 4 strategic outcomes, 12 intermediate outcomes and 2 cross-cutting outcomes. This reflects better prioritisation and joined-up work with members, Commonwealth accredited organisations and other partners.
41. Following the SRF, a brief description of the Secretariat's work under each outcome is included. The text indicates areas where the Secretariat will continue existing work and initiatives it is currently exploring. The first annual delivery plan includes detailed information on each programme, including programmes' theories of change and how proposed new initiatives contribute to the achievement of the outcome.

Strategic Results Framework

| | Democracy and Governance | Sustainable Development | Resilience and Climate Action | Small and other vulnerable states |
|-------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Strategic outcomes | 1. Greater adherence to Commonwealth values and principles and advancement of good governance | 2. Sustainable and inclusive economic and social development | 3. Climate-resilient and low-carbon development to respond to climate and ocean emergencies | 4. Small and other vulnerable states' needs and concerns addressed in global governance |
| Intermediate outcomes | 1.1 Member countries effectively utilise mechanisms to further adherence of Commonwealth values and principles ¹ 1.2 Member countries conduct fair, credible and inclusive elections 1.3 Public institutions and frameworks in member countries strengthened to promote rule of law, access to justice, human rights and good governance | 2.1 Effective trade policy, increased competitiveness and co-operation 2.2 Sustainable public finance and debt management 2.3 Sustainable, equitable, transparent, and effective management, governance, and use of the ocean, energy, and natural resources 2.4 Inclusive and resilient education and health systems | 3.1 Enhanced intra-Commonwealth co-operation on sustainable ocean action and energy transition 3.2 Enhanced access to financial resources, technology and capacities for climate change adaptation and mitigation | 4.1 Policy positions advanced in global governance mechanisms 4.2 Reduced vulnerability to shocks and improved fiscal sustainability and access to financing |
| Cross-cutting | CC1. Effective participation and equal opportunities for youth in leadership, governance, economic and social development enhanced CC2. Gender disparities in access to political, social and economic rights and violence against women and girls reduced | | | |
| Organisational enablers | CI. Enhanced use of technology, innovation and digitalisation CII. Delivery through co-creative partnerships increased CIII. Dynamic risk management approach institutionalised | | | |

¹ Mechanisms include the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) and Good Offices and projects such as Countering Violent Extremism, Value-based leadership framework.

4.1 Democracy and Governance

Greater adherence to Commonwealth political values and principles and advancement of good governance

- Member countries effectively utilise mechanisms to further adherence of; Commonwealth values and principles
 - Member countries conduct fair, credible and inclusive elections
 - Public institutions and frameworks in member countries strengthened to promote rule of law, access to justice, human rights and good governance
42. The Secretariat promotes adherence to the Commonwealth's fundamental political values in line with the Charter of the Commonwealth. It does so by supporting dedicated mechanisms, such as the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), the Secretary-General's Good Offices and projects such as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). The Secretariat has been taking forward these outcomes since 2013. In the new Strategic Plan, the Secretariat will apply lessons learned and implement recommendations from relevant evaluations. It will continue to provide technical assistance to countries vulnerable to violent extremism, inter alia, through the CVE Cadre of Experts established at CHOGM 2018. The Secretariat will further mainstream youth and gender engaging with women's groups, youth and civil society organisations (CSOs) to strengthen knowledge, skills and networks on peace and CVE. It will facilitate knowledge creation, research and information campaigns to advance understanding of CVE. The Good Offices of the Secretary-General will continue to advance peace by providing direct assistance for the resolution of political disputes, strengthening the use of research and evidence to support peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
43. To advance **Commonwealth values and principles**, the Secretariat will explore the development of a Commonwealth leadership framework in consultation with members and accredited organisations. This will be based upon the association's values and principles as enshrined in the Charter. The framework will define Commonwealth leadership characteristics. It will also have guiding principles to advance the agreed Commonwealth positions in a joined-up and systemic manner. It will be for the benefit of members and Commonwealth organisations wishing to run leadership training and capacity-building programmes.
44. To **advance democracy**, the Secretariat will continue supporting member countries to hold credible, transparent and inclusive **elections** through technical assistance for electoral reform, peer-to-peer learning, capacity building and observer missions. Our work will be aligned with the *Commonwealth Guidelines for the Conduct of Election Observation*, adopted at CHOGM 2018. The Secretariat will continue to take forward the Commonwealth Election Professionals Initiative Phase III, developing the capacity of election management bodies and, particularly, young election professionals. In line with stated priorities of the Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meetings on advancing women's political leadership, the Secretariat will provide knowledge products and capacity building on inclusive democratic processes at all levels. The Secretariat will explore new initiatives to advance the democracy outcome, including the provision of data and social media analytics before, during and after elections.

45. To promote **access to justice, the rule of law, human rights and good governance**, the Secretariat will support and strengthen the core public institutions through context-sensitive technical assistance for legislation and policy development, capacity building, networking, and peer learning. The Secretariat will continue work to strengthen laws, institutions and co-operation frameworks to combat organised cybercrime in line with the Commonwealth Cyber Declaration. It will continue to address corruption, including through the Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks once these have been adopted by CHOGM and capacity development of national-level anti-corruption mechanisms. The Secretariat will help improve civil and criminal justice systems, through model laws and toolkits, and will provide legal expertise and capacity building and the placement of experts as requested by members.
46. The Secretariat continues to address inclusive justice, through the implementation of the Commonwealth Law Ministers Declaration on Equal Access to Justice once it is endorsed at CHOGM. The Secretariat will explore new initiatives, including piloting digital transformation of justice systems in a few countries; strategic partnerships; and the creation of a pro bono legal centre for small and other vulnerable states. To ensure effective participation and equal opportunities for youth, the Secretariat will explore how it can strengthen legal education, as well as hosting Commonwealth Moot Court Competition.
47. In the area of **human rights**, the Secretariat will continue to support members' participation in international human rights mechanisms, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council's (UNHRC) Universal Periodic Review (UPR). It will facilitate small states' participation in treaty body mechanisms through its Small States Offices in Geneva and New York. The Secretariat will also provide technical support for the enhancement of capacities, institutions, legislation, frameworks, and mechanisms that respond to members' needs and address evolving key human rights issues, including, for example, business and human rights, violence against women and girls, and freedom of expression and discrimination.

4.2 Sustainable Development

Sustainable and inclusive economic and social development

- Effective trade policy, increased competitiveness, and co-operation on the Connectivity Agenda
 - Sustainable public finance and debt management
 - Sustainable, equitable, transparent, and effective management, governance and use of the ocean, energy, and natural resources
 - Inclusive and resilient education and health systems
48. It is estimated that the Commonwealth members lost as much as US\$345 billion worth of **trade** in 2020 (including US\$60 billion in intra-Commonwealth trade) due to COVID-19. Small and least developed members have been hard hit. Global and intra-Commonwealth trade will be an essential route to 'build back better' and to have a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future. Trade recovery will unfold in tandem with several pre-pandemic trends — the reconfiguration of supply chains, coming of age of Industry 4.0 and acceleration of digitalisation. Revitalising trade, diversifying exports, promoting sustainable markets, and strengthening connectivity among Commonwealth countries and

their global partners are indispensable for recovery efforts, future prosperity and advancing the SDGs. It is widely acknowledged that implementation of trade policies and measures can have important effects on gender equality, reducing or entrenching inequality. It is imperative therefore that efforts to revitalise trade are informed by robust gender analysis and are designed to reduce inequality at the national, regional, and pan-Commonwealth levels.

49. The Secretariat will continue to prioritise support to small and other vulnerable states to enhance their **trade competitiveness** for a resilient and sustainable recovery. It will continue to support their transition towards sustainable markets, especially by promoting circular economy principles and sustainable production. This will be leveraging cross-divisional collaboration between trade, climate, debt and economic policy and small states experts. Technical assistance will continue to be provided with the aim to strengthen regional and local supply chains through the adoption of digital technologies and e-commerce. The Secretariat will continue to support the network of intra-Commonwealth micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and will enhance the participation of women and youth in supply chains, through the Intra-Commonwealth SME Association and its partnership with the International Trade Centre She Trades initiative. The Secretariat will also continue to support adoption and implementation of trade policies and export diversification strategies to build resilience. It will help strengthen regulatory policies to improve the business and investment environment. Access to finance for small states will be boosted through the Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility, which expands guaranteed risk coverage by participating banks (Standard Chartered and Bank of Baroda).
50. Member countries, especially small and other vulnerable states, will be assisted to prepare for **multilateral and regional trade negotiations** and to implement new and existing trade agreements, including through dedicated advisers in the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva. The Secretariat will continue to publish the biennial *Commonwealth Trade Review* and will produce other knowledge products and policy papers to support members on multilateral, regional and emerging trade issues, the SDGs, post-COVID-19 economic recovery and resilience building. The Secretariat will advocate for enhanced international support for small and least developed states, including those graduating from this category. The Secretariat will continue to support members to deliver the CHOGM mandate on the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda on Trade and Investment. Technical support will be provided to implement the Connectivity Action Plan. The Secretariat will support the work of Clusters and their thematic focus. It will also help convene the trade ministers as well as the senior officials meetings.
51. Addressing public **debt management** reduces the financial risk to governments, lowers vulnerability to financial shocks, strengthens market infrastructures and institutions, and helps foster sound public sector governance practices. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated public debt burdens and many small Commonwealth members are at risk of debt distress. Small and other vulnerable states experience challenges with high debt because of their unique vulnerability to disasters and economic shocks. The Secretariat will continue to support members to strengthen their capacity to meet financing needs and payment obligations, while advocating for systemic solutions to reduce small states' debt burden and vulnerability.

52. The Secretariat will further **debt sustainability** through ongoing technical assistance to develop governance, legal, institutional and policy frameworks for the management of public finance, and for developing government domestic debt markets and institutions. The Secretariat will continue to support capacity building through face-to face and e-Learning. Together with regional partners, it will continue to support the development of medium-term debt and contingent liability management strategies. The Secretariat will ensure that its debt management systems i.e., *CS-DRMS and Commonwealth Meridian*, remain fit for purpose and provide accurate, comprehensive and timely data to members for efficient management of their debt. The Secretariat will explore the development of a **Debt Statistics Hub** to enable debt transparency, policy decisions and technical analysis.
53. The Secretariat will continue to support members to sustainably develop and benefit from **marine and other natural resources** and institute good governance through policy and regulatory reform and capacity building. The Secretariat will continue to support in the development of policy, legal, commercial and environmental frameworks, as well as fiscal regimes to attract and sustain investment. The Secretariat will continue to work to strengthen natural resources reform and energy transition, as well as ocean governance, protection, and blue economies, to contribute to climate-resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economic development.
54. The COVID-19 pandemic has eroded human and social development gains made over the last 20 years. A renewed focus on social development in the Commonwealth, including on health and education systems, will ensure sustainable and inclusive development. Recognising the interconnectedness of health, education and sport, the Secretariat will continue to support members in using sport as an enabler of SDGs 3, 4, 5 and 16, in line with the Commonwealth Consensus Statement on Promoting Human Rights through sports endorsed by the Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting in September 2020. The Secretariat will continue to work with member countries on measuring the contribution of sport to national development priorities and wider sustainable development outcomes.
55. The Secretariat will support the development of sustainable and inclusive health systems, including through ongoing promotion of Universal Health Coverage, ongoing support to member countries on policy frameworks to address non-communicable diseases and key issues for women's health such as cervical cancer. Learning from the challenges of the pandemic, the Secretariat will accelerate work on equitable distribution and access to medicines by developing resources for the procurement of medical equipment, medicines and establishing a price-sharing mechanism. The Secretariat will explore how it can further promote mental health and well-being and emphasis on healthy lifestyles, raising awareness on physical activity, nutrition, rest and hydration, through initiatives such as Commonwealth Moves.

4.3 Resilience and Climate Action

Climate-resilient and low-carbon development to respond to climate and ocean emergencies

- Enhanced intra-Commonwealth co-operation on sustainable ocean action and energy transition
 - Enhanced access to financial resources, technology and capacities for climate change adaptation and mitigation
56. The Secretariat will continue to take forward the CHOGM mandate on the **Blue Charter**, an agreement by Commonwealth countries to co-operate in actively addressing their ocean-related challenges and commitments. The Secretariat will continue to support the **Commonwealth Blue Charter Action Groups** to implement water actions, according to action plans by member-driven and Champion-led action groups, helping to address the global implementation gap. The Secretariat will focus on building the capacity of the action groups in identified areas of need, and developing and resourcing critical, innovative, and scalable multilateral projects, including through the proposed action group fund.
 57. The Secretariat will support members' actions on accelerating sustainable energy transitions and progress towards achieving SDG 7 through the **Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition (CSET) agenda** mandated at CHOGM 2018. The Secretariat will explore the development of member-led action groups on the pillars agreed by Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Forum (CSEF): inclusive transitions, technology, innovation and enabling frameworks; and to facilitate co-operation and collaboration among members.
 58. **Climate change** continues to be a major challenge facing all members, particularly small and other vulnerable states. Increasing global temperatures, erratic rainfall and increasing frequency of extreme events and resultant loss of ecosystems and biodiversity are of growing concern. Climate change affects women particularly, with women making up 75 per cent of the populations displaced by climate emergencies and girls more likely to drop out of school when families are adversely affected by disasters. Women make up most of the people living in poverty and their survival is more dependent on natural resources affected by climate change. As well as being disproportionately affected by climate change, women and girls have a leadership role to play in resilience efforts.
 59. The Secretariat will continue to facilitate access to public and private climate finance, capacity development for members, particularly small and other vulnerable states, and will take forward advocacy and consensus building to ensure international policies, mechanisms and rules are responsive to the development needs of members most vulnerable to climate change. With an evolving **climate finance** landscape, the Secretariat will explore new partnerships, regional collaborations, innovative financial instruments, and financing mechanisms to enhance and support members to meet their UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Kyoto Protocol and Paris commitments. The Secretariat will accelerate engagement and inclusion of women and young people the climate change programme and all action on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

60. The Secretariat will enhance the role of the **Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub** (CCFAH). It will become an enabler for members, help build their technical capacity and enhance access to climate finance. Through the CCFAH, the Secretariat will support the development of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) investment plans and bankable mitigation and adaptation projects. Joint actions will be explored in co-ordination with relevant international conventions and partnerships. The Secretariat will provide evidence-based analysis to negotiate Commonwealth common positions, and to amplify the voices of small and other vulnerable states at Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings of the UNFCCC. The Secretariat will explore development of cross-directorate initiatives on clean energy transition, debt management, including for climate swaps, resilience of value chains, ocean and trade infrastructure. The Secretariat will explore how to best address climate change challenges around land and the use of innovative technologies such as earth observation, artificial intelligence, agritech and blockchain, where relevant and feasible.

4.4 Small and Other Vulnerable States

Small and vulnerable states' needs and concerns addressed in global governance

- Policy positions advanced in global governance mechanisms
 - Reduced vulnerability to shocks and improved fiscal sustainability and access to financing
61. Preliminary findings of the *Evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Small States* point to the value of a multi-pronged approach to addressing the resilience and developmental needs of small and vulnerable member countries. The strategic pillar of work will highlight the focused contributions of the Secretariat in addressing key structural vulnerabilities faced by small and other member countries in line with our core assets and role as 'influencer' and 'power broker' on the global stage. Reducing vulnerability to shocks will be the Secretariat's strategic priority, as well as advancing small states' positions in international governance fora, and improving fiscal sustainability and access to finance. Learning and progress made in this area will inform the mainstreaming of our responses to the needs of small states across the other three pillars, focusing on their **economic viability and sustainability**. Technical assistance and other services will be informed by the Forum of Small States (FOSS), non-paper and aligned with the priorities of members, specifically with respect to COVID-19 recovery and response.
62. A key component for addressing small states' needs will involve greater effort by the Secretariat in co-ordinating with members to advance their positions at global platforms such as the Group of 7 (G7), Group of 20 (G20), UN, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This will be done in collaboration with the Commonwealth's larger member countries. The Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting and the Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Small States will be used as co-ordinating mechanisms for forming common positions. The Secretariat will seek to achieve global agreement on the proposed Commonwealth **Universal Vulnerability Index** (CUVI). This will be progressed through the joint Commonwealth – UN Small States Advocacy Strategy and other relevant avenues.

63. In order to support the development of resilience to climate and other economic shocks, the Secretariat will provide capacity development support through fintech ecosystem development assistance, the disaster risk finance portal and diaspora investment assistance projects. Secretariat **fintech support** will aim to use financial technology as a basis for fast tracking financial inclusion in small and other vulnerable states, particularly involving women and young people. The **diaspora investment programme** will assist in increasing and diversifying existing financial resources. The Secretariat will continue to provide support through research, analysis and reporting on contemporary and emerging issues. It will **improve internal co-ordination** of all its work on small and other vulnerable states. The Secretariat will explore the development of a **Virtual Centre for Small States** (VCSS) to become a central hub of information, data and services to small and vulnerable states that will complement and further enhance the work delivered through the Commonwealth Centre of Excellence in Malta.

4.5 Cross-cutting Outcomes

- Effective participation and equal opportunities for youth in leadership, governance, economic and social development enhanced
 - Gender disparities in access to political, social and economic rights and violence against women and girls reduced
64. The cross-cutting themes of youth empowerment and gender equality will be reflected in all areas of the Secretariat's work. Two cross-cutting programmes will be developed with three key components: the first will bring together gender- and youth-related indicators and outputs in all thematic intermediate outcome programmes; the second part will include dedicated work to advance gender equality and youth development in-country and pan-Commonwealth. The third prong will map mainstreaming actions and capacity development for Secretariat staff and partners to take forward gender and youth mainstreaming-related outputs across the portfolio.
65. Focused work on youth empowerment will continue to prioritise strengthening youth engagement and participation in political, economic and social life, promoting equal opportunities for young people, promoting the professionalisation of youth work and promoting evidence-based development policy, including through use of the Youth Development Index. To promote and advance gender equality across the membership, the Secretariat will deliver focused projects taking forward priorities identified by Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers once these have been approved by CHOGM. Priority areas are women's economic empowerment; women in leadership; ending violence against women and girls; and gender and climate change. The Secretariat is committing to consulting with women in all their diversity and involving them in needs assessments, decision-making, and planning of initiatives, as well as in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects, to ensure that gender perspectives will be integrated into all aspects of the Commonwealth's work, as a strategy to achieve the goal of gender equality.

4.6 Organisational Enablers

- Enhanced use of technology, innovation and digitalisation
 - Increased delivery through co-creative partnerships
 - Risk management
66. Over the last strategic plan period, the Secretariat has upgraded its information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. It has enhanced the use of technology at all levels and has better capabilities in the development and use of applications, cyber security, data analysis, information and knowledge management, and internal process automation. Since 2016, a hybrid on-premises and cloud architecture has been designed and implemented to become both robust and resilient. The Secretariat is also providing core ICT support and advisory services to the Commonwealth Foundation, Climate Finance Advisers, Commonwealth Small States Offices, the Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators (CATA) and the Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT).
67. **Technology, innovation, and digitalisation** have fast-tracked the Secretariat's delivery of services to members. In the new plan period, the conventional ways of doing business, such as in-country election observation, will be augmented by location-based and context-sensitive technologies, as well as with citizen data. The Secretariat's support in climate change will be enabled by satellite and remote sensing data and early warning and response mechanisms. Technical services in trade, debt management, and economic and social development will increasingly use better and big data, analyses and e-sharing mechanisms to accelerate service delivery and to become more effective. Working with partners and recognising the challenges that small and vulnerable states face in designing and utilising digital infrastructures, the Secretariat is exploring how it can provide digital advisory services that would enable members to access digital skills, collaborate better and share good practices, further enabling digital inclusion of young people.
68. The **Commonwealth Innovation Hub**, launched at the London CHOGM in 2018, will continue to be a space for innovative and interactive resources developed by the Secretariat and Commonwealth organisations, such as the Legal Knowledge Portal, Commonwealth Coronavirus Response Centre, COVID-19 data dashboard and vaccination tracker, the Local Governance Knowledge Hub, and the Teach 2030 E-Learning Course, as well as the SDGs Data Portal, SDG Tracker and an SDG Data Explorer. The Commonwealth Secretary-General's Innovation for Sustainable Development Awards, launched in 2019, will continue to recognise, support and celebrate innovators from across the Commonwealth who are increasingly using new and creative ways to help communities achieve the SDGs.
69. In the plan period, the Secretariat will explore how it can enhance the innovation ecosystem workstream in collaboration with member countries and regional mechanisms. There will be an emphasis on **frugal innovation** and technology innovation in small states. The growing pool of innovative awardees will be helped to develop business plans, register intellectual property, and get funding through partnerships with relevant organisations.

70. Partnerships have played a key role in the delivery of Secretariat programmes in the last five years. Member countries as the shareholders and primary partners have been assuming leadership roles in the delivery of CHOGM mandates. The Blue Charter Action Groups and Trade Connectivity Agenda clusters are two examples. The Secretariat developed a **Partnerships Strategy** in 2018, which has helped the Secretariat form diverse partnerships. More than 50 new partnership agreements have been finalised with compatible multilateral, regional, civil society, philanthropic and private sector organisations, which have boosted the Commonwealth's resources, reach, capacity and impact. Notable examples are partnerships with the UN system, African Development Bank, CARICOM Secretariat and Bloomberg Philanthropies.
71. Co-creative partnerships will continue to play a pivotal role in the delivery of the Secretariat's programmes in the coming years. The last Strategic Plan evaluation emphasised national partnerships to ensure better outcomes and impact of the Secretariat's work. The share of projects delivered through technical and financial partnerships will be increased and monitored in the new plan period. Building on results achieved in improving engagement with Commonwealth accredited organisations, the Secretariat will work more closely and deliver collaboratively with them. The Secretariat will review the partnership strategy and explore the development of a resource mobilisation strategy and a private sector engagement policy. Priorities of partnership development include strengthening stakeholders' engagement, supporting and developing greater understanding and knowledge management of partnership results, increased transparency in partnership arrangements, and creating further spaces for collaboration. The annual delivery plan will include further details of how partnerships will be pursued and leveraged to enable achievement of the new Strategic Plan.
72. The Secretariat commenced its risk management journey with the development of a risk policy and strategy in 2011. It was embedded in the Secretariat's systems and processes between 2013 and 2016. This work has both broadened and deepened over the years and positively contributed to the growth and development of the Secretariat's risk maturity, moving from Fragmented Awareness (Level 1 Foundation) to General Awareness (Level 3 Established). In the new plan period, the Secretariat will strive to achieve an even higher stage of risk management.

5. Operationalisation of the Strategic Plan

73. The Strategic Plan will be operationalised through the established mechanism of annual delivery planning and budgeting. The Secretariat will prepare periodic progress reports on results, which will be also available on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) website. The Programme Management and Information System (PMIS) is being updated and upscaled to develop programmes and projects aligned with the intermediate outcomes, further integrating with other Secretariat online systems and processes. Information on project and programme designs will be available in the delivery plan and will be updated annually. The management (Senior Management Group and Senior Management Committee) and governance mechanisms (Board of Governors, Executive Committee, Accreditation Committee) will continue to monitor progress and provide requisite guidance to remain on the impact track. A mid-term evaluation of the plan will be conducted after 20 months. A full evaluation of the Strategic Plan implementation and preliminary impact will be conducted in the final year of its delivery.
74. The Secretariat's own staff is the greatest asset of the organisation and the resource that can be leveraged to deliver most value for member countries. The Secretariat's people and organisational development strategies will enable Commonwealth staff to deliver the Strategic Plan to the benefit of all member countries and Commonwealth citizens. Priorities for the people strategy and organisational development strategies include: attracting and retaining the best talent, celebrating the diversity of the Commonwealth; creating a safe and enabling working environment, taking into account the opportunities and changes brought about by the COVID-19 crisis; ensuring services and processes are fit for purpose, efficient and effective; developing talent and particularly management and leadership capabilities within the organisation; enabling culture change to make the Secretariat a learning organisation; and an open and inclusive culture. Senior management and the Secretariat's staff will take forward implementation of these strategies in a joined-up manner.
75. The Secretariat has taken significant strides in the past decade in embedding results-based management and monitoring, evaluation and learning in the organisation and ensuring every action of the Secretariat translates to impact in member countries. Significant lessons have been learned through this journey. In the new plan, the Secretariat will address lessons and recommendations from independent evaluations, audits and feedback.² These include ensuring more joined-up working and silo-breaking; strengthening relevance to member countries priorities' and sustainability; and strengthening and diversifying data and evidence-gathering capabilities and systems.³ The Secretariat will continue to foster a culture of transparency and accountability, through regular reporting and publishing of programme analyses and independent evaluations.

² Summarised in 2021 Lessons Papers Series: Enhancing Performance and Delivering SDG Impact.
³ Mid-Term Review of the Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2017/18–2020/21, February 2020.

76. In the areas of portfolio management and monitoring, evaluation and learning, the Secretariat will continue to balance agility and accountability and leverage opportunities for efficiency. It will further embed understanding of the organisations' key delivery strategies – its impact pathways, standardise and streamline measurement of progress, and will strengthen system integration and digitalisation across the portfolio. Adaptation and learning will be at the core of all portfolio development and management, monitoring, evaluation and learning initiatives.

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