



# Building a More Resilient Commonwealth

Strategic Plan 2025–2030



The Commonwealth



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# About This Plan

Our Strategic Plan for 2025–2030 sets out a clear and practical vision of how our work will lead to impact. It brings together three main areas of focus – democratic, economic, and environmental resilience – all underpinned by core values including youth empowerment, gender equality, and support for small and vulnerable states. It also draws on what makes the Commonwealth unique: our ability to bring people together, build consensus, offer trusted technical advice, and open doors through strong political relationships.

This Plan outlines our refreshed approach to delivering measurable impact. It clearly defines the essential foundations for success, identifies key risks, and ensures we remain agile and mission-driven as the circumstances and needs of our member countries evolve.



# Foreword from the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

We are living through a time of profound disruption: shrinking trust in institutions, rising geopolitical tensions, steep inflation, crushing debt, and the existential threat of climate change. These challenges affect us all, but they are felt most sharply by those with the least capacity to respond.

This is the moment for the Commonwealth to show both its relevance and its strength.

This Strategic Plan sets out how the Secretariat will focus its work over the next five years. It is not about doing more for the sake of it: it is about doing what matters for Commonwealth countries and their citizens, and doing it better. We will focus on helping our member countries build stronger democracies and more resilient economies, and support them in finding better ways to protect their people and the planet. We will pay particular attention to the needs of small and vulnerable states.



We will continue to recognise women and young people at the heart of what we do. We will work differently and more closely with the whole Commonwealth family: member countries, civil society, and Accredited Organisations. We will engage the private sector, international organisations, and philanthropists much more intensively as we expand our capabilities to deliver on our mission and deliver tangible benefits on the issues that matter most to our members.

This Plan aims to ensure that the Commonwealth remains relevant to the 2.7 billion people of our member countries. The challenges are complex and immense, but our determination to succeed is boundless. Together, we must move forward with purpose, with courage, and with an unshakable commitment to a Commonwealth that truly thrives.

**Let's get to work.**

*The Hon. Shirley Botchwey  
Secretary-General of the Commonwealth*



# Refocusing & Realigning Our Priorities

This Plan will strengthen the Commonwealth's ability to anticipate, withstand, and adapt to evolving challenges – whether democratic, economic, or environmental. We will prioritise our work to ensure value from every investment, building on our comparative advantages and aiming for measurable, lasting outcomes for our members.

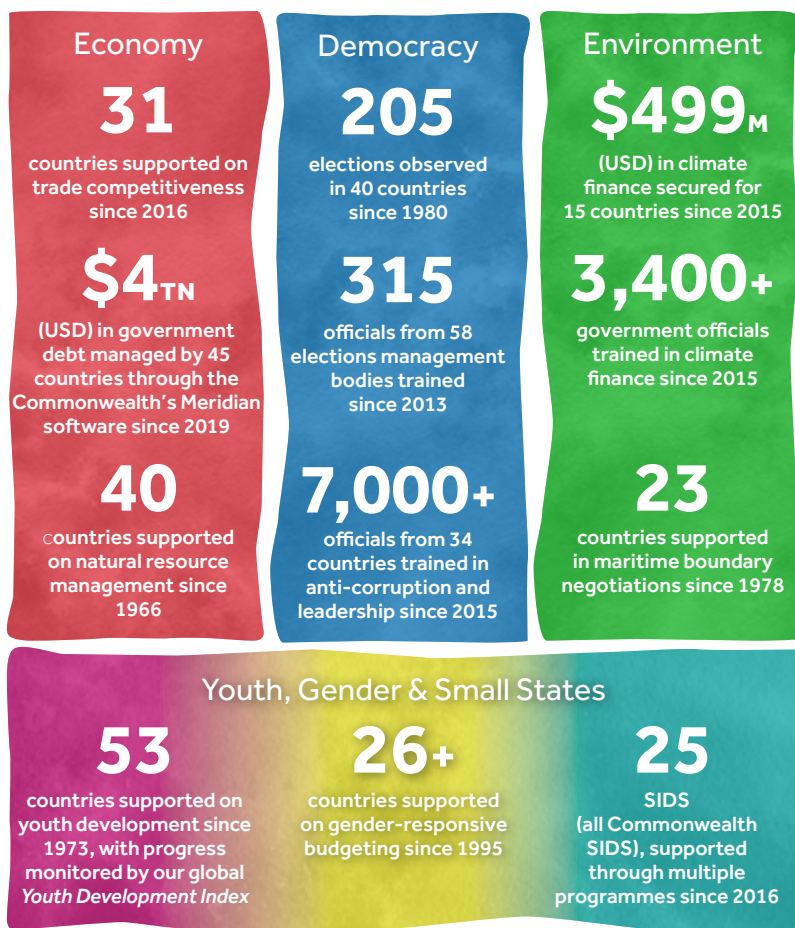
Democratic institutions are under pressure, and intergovernmental organisations are facing a resource crunch. It's becoming harder for people to speak out, take part in public life, and trust the systems meant to protect them. At the same time, debt is rising, prices are high, and access to finance is limited, making it difficult for governments to facilitate investment in jobs, schools, and public services. These challenges are compounded by the effects of climate change, energy insecurity, and the damage being inflicted on our oceans and natural resources.

While all Commonwealth members encounter shared challenges, the voices of youth, women, marginalised communities, and small and vulnerable states – including small island developing states – are vital. They bear the greatest burdens, but they also drive transformative progress.

These groups often encounter the most significant barriers – whether to meaningful participation in decision-making, employment, or control of their natural resources. The Strategic Plan acknowledges these challenges and commits to channelling resources, support, and platforms directly towards these change-makers, empowering them to build a resilient future.



# Reprioritising Our Core Strengths



By focusing on democratic, economic, and environmental resilience, and putting young people, women, small island developing states and other small states at the heart of everything we do, the Secretariat can help build fairer, stronger, and more inclusive societies. These are not separate issues but part of a shared agenda to protect people's rights, strengthen public trust, and secure a more sustainable future for all.

# Programmes: What Will Change?

	2021–2025 Plan		2025–2030 Plan
<b>1</b> Programme Structure	13 thematic programmes, 40+ projects	>>>	3 flagship programmes + 1 crosscutting programme, with stronger focus and oversight
<b>2</b> Democracy	Responsive support	>>>	Proactive early-warning system designed to anticipate democratic setbacks
<b>3</b> Economy & Trade	General trade promotion and support	>>>	Commonwealth advantage leveraged to improve access to finance, debt management, inclusive trade and investment
<b>4</b> Environment	Climate-resilient and low-carbon development	>>>	Climate adaptation and mitigation, sustainable energy systems, conservation, and sustainability
<b>5</b> Youth & Gender	Individual projects and partial mainstreaming efforts	>>>	Central to all programme design and delivery
<b>6</b> Small States	Selective programme delivery	>>>	Core programmatic priority

# Systems: What Will Change?

	2021–2025 Plan		2025–2030 Plan
<b>1</b> Organisational Culture	Project-led oversight and culture	>>>	Strengthened strategic alignment and oversight in line with an international civil service ethos
<b>2</b> Partnerships	Mostly bilateral	>>>	Multi-stakeholder partnerships aimed at enhancing programmatic impact
<b>3</b> Communications	Primarily event-driven	>>>	Programme-driven, strategic and brand-focused communications
<b>4</b> Secretariat's Role	Delivery partner and technical assistance provider	>>>	More targeted convener and trusted reform catalyst
<b>5</b> Monitoring & Evaluation	Activity and output-level reporting	>>>	Culture of accountability, learning and impact

# Democratic Resilience

## FOCUS AREAS

- Whole-of-cycle-election support to Commonwealth Countries
- Establishing early warning systems for democratic fragility
- Revitalising convening through:
  - » Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings
  - » Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meetings
  - » Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group Meetings
  - » Commonwealth Law Ministers Meetings







In many Commonwealth countries, democratic systems and intergovernmental organisations are under strain. Institutions often lack the capacity to resolve disputes fairly, respond to people's needs, hold decision-makers to account, or ensure the separation of power. Trust in public institutions and democracies is declining, especially among young people, with only one in five expressing trust in government. Overall, women account for only around a quarter of members of Commonwealth parliaments. Weak democratic resilience harms inclusion and representation, peace, and economic stability.

To help address such challenges, the Commonwealth Secretariat will work to establish an early warning system that will track signs of democratic risk and help target support where it is needed most, before problems escalate.

Using this data, we will support countries to strengthen their electoral systems, justice and human rights protections, and access to digital tools. We will also help open up space for civic and political participation, especially for women and young people, by working with local organisations and civil society.

# Economic Resilience

## FOCUS AREAS

- Modernise debt management with Commonwealth Meridian
- Increase Commonwealth trade and investment, including with the private sector
- Foster shared prosperity, especially for small states
- Through a Common Framework on Debt Treatment, advocate for more equitable terms for small countries
- Improve access to markets for young people and women

Many Commonwealth countries are facing rising debt, high inflation, and limited access to affordable finance. Small and vulnerable countries are hit hardest, with nearly 40 per cent of small island developing states in debt distress.

Trade is a key driver of resilience. Intra-Commonwealth trade reached US\$768 billion in 2021, and is projected to grow to \$1.2 trillion by 2027; our Heads of Government have set a target of \$2 trillion. To this end, we will help countries open new doors for trade and investment by harnessing the shared strengths of the Commonwealth. We will work with countries and partners to enable easier, fairer, and more digital ways of doing business that reduce costs and remove barriers, and to advance digital readiness and innovation to prepare young people for emerging economic opportunities. We will engage the private sector to expand investment readiness and access to finance. Through the Commonwealth Small States Offices, the Secretariat will ensure that even the smallest countries can thrive.

We will support countries to manage debt more openly and effectively, using our Meridian system to help governments make better-informed financial decisions. We will stand with small and vulnerable states to push for fairer access to finance and debt relief on the global stage. By working with partners such as the IMF, World Bank, and G20, and through coalitions like the Bridgetown Initiative (which proposes innovative and equitable ways to enable climate-vulnerable states to build true climate resilience), the Secretariat will make sure that our members' voices are heard, and that they have the tools they need to build stronger, more resilient economies.

Small businesses are the backbone of jobs and growth across the Commonwealth. The Secretariat will work with governments and partners to make it easier for entrepreneurs – especially women and young people – to access finance, technology, and new markets.



# Environmental Resilience

## FOCUS AREAS

- Unlock national and regional climate finance
- Address the health and climate nexus
- Champion small states and amplify climate advocacy
- Promote growth in green and blue economies
- Drive clean energy transitions

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time. Many member countries, especially small and vulnerable states, face serious challenges from climate change, energy insecurity, pollution, and the loss of ocean life and biodiversity. These pressures threaten people's livelihoods, harm economies, and strain public services. Women, young people, and marginalised groups are often hardest hit and left out of decisions that affect their lives.







The Commonwealth Secretariat helps countries manage their natural resources more sustainably, access climate finance, and support fair and inclusive energy transitions. We provide tailored technical advice, build capacity, and promote partnerships that bring long-term benefits. We also help member countries engage in international climate and environmental negotiations, ensuring their needs and priorities are heard.

The Strategic Plan will champion a Commonwealth renewables revolution that accelerates the transition to clean energy, supports research and development, and creates green jobs across our member countries.

# Cross-cutting Outcomes

A resilient Commonwealth must ensure that everyone can share in and contribute to that resilience. Negative social norms, ingrained stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and systemic challenges still shape how women and girls, young people, and other marginalised groups are viewed. These forces influence the rights and opportunities they enjoy, and limit their ability to contribute to democratic, economic, and environmental efforts.

The Strategic Plan recognises gender equality, youth inclusion and small states advocacy as key enablers of its success. Each of them will be actioned under each resilience pillar of the Strategic Plan in order to ensure equitable outcomes. This will include targeted projects designed to address youth exclusion and gender inequality, support global consensus on inclusion and equality, and champion the interests and needs of SIDS and other small states.



## Youth

Two thirds of people in the Commonwealth – more than 1.6 billion – are under the age 30. Too often, they are excluded from decisions that shape their lives and futures. Many face barriers to education, work, influence, and digital access.

The Strategic Plan aims to bridge the digital divide by harnessing new technologies to revolutionise distance education, to connect classrooms, communities, and capital, and to create financing instruments such as a Youth Entrepreneurship Fund.

## Gender

The Commonwealth is home to around 1.35 billion women and girls. Despite global commitments to gender equality, women continue to encounter significant social, structural, and legal barriers that impede their access to economic resources and political leadership. Underrepresented in the formal economy, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, women face challenges that limit their economic security and opportunities to influence policy and social change.

The Strategic Plan will address these issues by forging new partnerships and advocating for women and girls across the Commonwealth, with a particular emphasis on those in small and vulnerable states.

## Small States

This Plan takes an integrated approach to strengthening resilience among the Commonwealth's small states. All aspects of the Secretariat's work will be tailored to meet the unique challenges faced by small and vulnerable members. Technical support will address specific capacity gaps, and system-wide connections will be forged to enhance the impact of development efforts.

# Strategic Accelerators

## Modernising the Secretariat

We will transform our institutional and governance frameworks to improve corporate and communications efficiencies and accountability.

To achieve the objectives outlined in our Strategic Plan, the Secretariat's corporate and governance arrangements must evolve to meet contemporary challenges. This transformation will involve restructuring internal processes, updating systems, and modernising programmes to enhance efficiency and responsiveness.

We are committed to a strengthened partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat's Board of Governors, which is essential for our success and for shaping the institution's future.

To future-proof the Commonwealth and ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the needs of member countries, we will harness digital tools to accelerate and amplify the impact of our work.



# Strategic Partnerships

Collective and collaborative action is essential if we are to tackle our shared challenges.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has limited financial and human resources, while the challenges faced by member countries require large-scale, joined-up action.

In response, the Secretariat uses its convening power to bring together governments, the private sector, civil society, youth- and women-led groups, and development partners to work towards shared goals. It builds partnerships, facilitates dialogue, and connects ministries with experts, innovators, and technical partners.

Our partner ecosystem includes a network of 97 Accredited Organisations, our sister organisations the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning, as well as multilateral development banks and a host of UN and other international organisations. These partners have a wide range of expertise spread across all five regions of the Commonwealth.

By building these partnerships, the Secretariat can enable member countries to access co-ordinated support and more effectively tackle complex challenges together – including in the areas of education, health, and meeting the needs of older adults and people with disabilities.



# Leveraging AI, Emerging Technologies, & Digital Transformation

We will harness established and emerging technologies as force multipliers for our programme delivery, and to facilitate responsible, inclusive digital innovation across the Commonwealth.

To enable our member countries to deliver inclusive digital governance, we will support the deployment of ethical, fit-for-purpose solutions that enhance democratic participation, and public service delivery. In doing so we will address structural digital exclusion, particularly among women, youth, small states, and marginalised populations.

We will also strengthen national capacities through technical partnerships, resource-sharing mechanisms, and support for digital infrastructure, governance frameworks, and workforce readiness. By deploying data-driven tools we will help our member countries to strengthen public institutions and policy.



# Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning

Accountability and continuous improvement are the foundation for our success.

We are entrusted by our member countries to deliver meaningful results, and with that trust comes the responsibility to demonstrate how well we are doing. This means putting in place a strengthened monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) system that reflects international good practices and results-based management.

But an MEL system alone is not enough. Its effectiveness depends on the organisational culture that surrounds it. We are committed to fostering a culture of performance: one in which accountability is not just about meeting targets, but also about learning, adapting, and continuously improving.

Most importantly, we are placing the voices of our beneficiaries at the heart of our work. We will regularly gather feedback from member countries, implementing partners, and other stakeholders through internal and independent assessments to ensure our work remains responsive to their needs.



# Communications

Strengthening the brand of the Commonwealth by sharing our story will remain at the heart of our communications efforts.

The revised communications strategy will seek inspiration from the Strategic Plan, and our outputs will help people understand what we do, why it matters, and the difference that we are making to the lives of the 2.7 billion people across the Commonwealth.

The strategy will draw on the lessons learned from operationalising the previous communications strategy, as well as some of its key achievements. These include significant social media traction, positive traditional media coverage, a strong measurement and evaluation culture, and the establishment of a Commonwealth Communicators' Group (CCG). The CCG, which harnesses the strength of our Accredited Organisations, will consolidate the Secretary-General's vision of leveraging partnerships for building and showcasing results, as well as ensuring consistency of messaging across Accredited Organisations and partners.



# What Will Success Look Like?

By 2030, the Secretariat will deliver positive impacts on the quality of life of all of the Commonwealth's 2.7 billion people.

We will help prevent and resolve conflicts, protect civic space, and empower human rights defenders. More people, especially vulnerable women, young people, and those often left out, will become more active participants in politics and public life. Democracy will be more than just a promise, it will be a living reality, with stronger institutions that listen and respond to the needs of our people.

Shared prosperity will grow as our member countries, especially small and vulnerable ones, become more resilient to shocks and create opportunities for all. Small businesses, especially those led by women and youth, will have better access to markets, finance, and support.







We will help countries by increasing intra-Commonwealth trade to US\$2 trillion, opening new doors for businesses and communities. Climate change is the defining challenge of our time, and we will bolster country efforts to decarbonise and work towards a clean energy transition. We will continue to assist countries to access climate and blue finance, championing increased representation of women and girls in national and international climate decision-making. We will increase our efforts to demonstrate that there is a connection between the debt burden in Commonwealth countries and their fight against climate change. Together with our member countries, we will protect our global ocean and implement nature-based solutions to life-threatening conditions, especially on sea-level rise and food security. Importantly, we are building more resilient communities that can withstand climate shocks and adapt sustainably to secure their future.

Our young people are our greatest strength. We will help close the digital divide, connecting classrooms and communities and ensuring access to digital skills, and back young entrepreneurs and innovators with funding so that they can build the future they want.





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