

# Submission by the Commonwealth Associated Organisations to the Committee of the Whole 2022

*The Commonwealth Associated organisations appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting through the CHOGM Committee of the Whole and welcome the continued dialogue with Foreign Ministers towards developing a more innovative and strategic policy and operational partnership, based on our unique roles and shared Commonwealth values and objectives.*

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented crisis across the Commonwealth, causing further disruption to SDG progress, with the poorest and most vulnerable affected the most. At the same time, climate change is still occurring faster than anticipated with 2019 being the second warmest year on record. The pandemic has challenged democratic processes and governance systems at all levels, but it has also reinforced our interconnectedness and the value of working collectively.

The theme for CHOGM 2022 is ‘Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming’. Effective implementation of the commitments made in 2018 and at this CHOGM will help us to realise that Common Future. The Commonwealth Associated Organisations want to strengthen the existing strategic policy and operational partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat and member states, to be incorporated into the Strategic Planning of the Secretariat, to mobilise our members to support the collective recovery process across the Commonwealth, and to work together with our respective constituencies to uphold core Commonwealth values and to innovate and take transformative initiatives to scale.

To this end, the AOs are actively working towards the agreed sub-themes of the summit:

## **Governance and Rule of Law**

Democracy, good governance, adherence to human rights, the rule of law, and opportunities for all are core Commonwealth values promoting fairness and equity. The AOs are committed to upholding these Commonwealth values. With the challenges to democracy emerging and developing across the world, further compounded by the impact of COVID-19 and the increasing disconnect between people and the institutions that serve them, the need for better representation and inclusion is vital. Ensuring peaceful, just, and inclusive societies anchored in strong institutions is at the heart of attaining the 2030 Agenda. Such a commitment to good governance requires transformational leadership that is accountable and transparent, and that prioritises citizen engagement. We know that women and children have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and more inclusive institutions in the Commonwealth will not only strengthen governance and democracy, but also promote integration and reduce conflict in the jurisdictions they represent as we build back better. At

CHOGM 2022, we hope that the Commonwealth will reiterate and provide leadership on realising core Commonwealth values at all levels.

Through the established work of the AOs with our respective memberships, we are able to support peer-to-peer learning that enhances leadership, and the individual and collective effectiveness of parliaments, local governments and institutions at all levels to improve the quality of the institutional outcomes, and ultimately raise the public's regard for these institutions. The AOs place a great importance on mutual learning through projects such as The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's (CPA) Parliamentary Academy, a programme for Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to build and share their knowledge and skills and empower them to face existing and future challenges; and their parliamentary benchmarking work.

Furthermore, AOs such as the Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators (CATA) are actively involved with various Governments in the implementation of fiscal policies that may help to mitigate social inequalities (through expenditure stimulus and other tax policy measures) occasioned by the pandemic. Post-pandemic, Governments will have to look further on how to raise additional domestic revenues through widening of tax bases as well as closing tax leakages. CLGF is also working with national and local governments to enhance innovative local financing approaches, including through partnership with the private sector. The support of the AOs will be invaluable given their technical expertise in this area.

### **Sustainability (Trade and Environment)**

Economic growth and development, with decent work opportunities for all should underpin sustainable development in the Commonwealth. The AOs play an important role in creating the enabling environment for economic development and trade. Greater cooperation and a more collective approach across Commonwealth partners would further strengthen the Commonwealth trade advantage.

The AOs are actively engaged in this work from the local level, where local governments and cities play a convening role in promoting and enabling inclusive local economic development, to the national level where decisions about national trade policy are defined, to the global level, defining and promoting national and inter-Commonwealth trade and investment.

The ongoing debate on the reform of the international tax system through the OECD/G20 initiative has raised some critical issues which are likely to impact international trade between countries. Already some countries have threatened trade retaliations as a result of tax measures taken by their trading partners. AOs like CATA are actively involved in these discussions to ensure that the views of all our members especially the emerging economies are taken on board, and that the resulting consensus will not only secure revenues for these countries but also promote international trade.

The vulnerability of many of the Commonwealth states and the challenges of rapid and unplanned urbanisation; the impacts of climate change, particularly its disproportionate effects on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), natural disasters; and migration all signal the need for a Commonwealth approach which transcends borders and promotes cooperation and collaboration within and between states. The Commonwealth is playing a leading role in this regard, including through efforts to ensure shared commitments to global targets. CHOGM 2022 will be key in this regard in terms of mobilising the Commonwealth towards COP 27.

Strengthening resilience is a key priority, but successful adaptation and mitigation will depend on effective multi-level governance and partnerships. The AOs can and must work to bring their constituencies to the table to add value to Commonwealth advocacy and initiatives, and to ensure inclusive efforts towards sustainable development. The framework of the Agenda 2030 highlights multi-level governance as key to successful implementation and this should be incorporated into the Commonwealth's approach.

AOs are also actively working with their member countries on fiscal policy incentives that promote a cleaner environment. Introduction of carbon taxes, greenhouse gas emission taxes and fossil fuel taxes are some of the policy interventions being considered in many countries.

## **Health**

COVID-19 has served to starkly highlight health inequalities across the Commonwealth in terms of access to healthcare provision and the production and roll out of vaccines. Commonwealth coordination throughout the pandemic at all levels has however served to demonstrate the benefits of Commonwealth coordination and cooperation at all levels, and we should build on this approach. The AOs play a key role in ensuring a healthy Commonwealth through their policy responsibilities, public financing modalities, and indeed direct and indirect health provision. For example, CLGF's Health Cities Health People initiative recognises the role of cities and local governments in ensuring healthy communities through provision of public health services including waste management, water provision, drainage, housing, and infrastructure etc

## **Youth**

Youth and gender are mainstreamed across the work of the AOs. The AOs are committed to exploring and maintaining meaningful opportunities for youth to engage in policymaking and programmes. Some of the AOs have dedicated networks for youth and the CPA holds an annual Commonwealth Youth Parliament which provides an opportunity for young people from across the Commonwealth to experience aspects of parliamentary democracy and procedure. These networks and programmes demonstrate the role and purpose of parliaments and local governments as institutions for democracy and good governance.

In light of the pandemic's detrimental impact on formal and informal education and children's development and mental health, the AOs support future action taken by Commonwealth

Governments to help minimise the long-lasting effects of the pandemic. We must work to reduce the inequalities that have widened, as a result of the pandemic, between certain groups of young people and their learning and livelihoods. In post-COVID recovery policy, the AOs welcome actions taken to enable and encourage young people to return to education and the introduction of innovative steps to rebuild and strengthen education systems and institutions.

## **ICT and Innovation**

Whilst the past year has highlighted our ability to adapt and evolve through harnessing the advantages of technology, it has also brought to the fore the need to address the digital divide within the Commonwealth. As such, the AOs are keen to ensure the necessary support, training and resources are available to all members so that this divide can be closed, and we can all be equipped to interact with the same agility and flexibility.

The effective use of ICT and innovation are central to achieving *a Common Future*. The COVID-19 pandemic has served to accelerate steps to increase affordable, reliable, universal broadband connectivity and digital transformation across the Commonwealth. We believe that early adoption of ICT by governments can catalyse widespread adoption, therefore the AOs are keen to work with member states to maintain the momentum and to scale up innovation and implementation, whilst at the same time ensuring digital and cyber security are maintained. The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) has committed to support members with public awareness, upskilling and implementation programmes and to provide technical advice for transforming their societies and economies through ICT and innovation.

With 50% of the new urban population between now and 2030 projected to be in Commonwealth cities, the AOs are endorsing the Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation in the Commonwealth, championed by CLGF and other key Commonwealth partners, which highlights the potential strength of greater cooperation across the Commonwealth's network. Cities are centres of innovation and growth. A more coordinated approach to dealing with the social, economic, and environmental challenges facing cities will ensure that we build smart, healthy and resilient Commonwealth communities and cities, able to respond more effectively to existing and future challenges

The AOs are in a position to work with their members and constituencies to pilot new approaches in support of Commonwealth policy priorities and innovation, and to help identify and develop those that could go to scale.

## **Next Steps**

The AOs welcome the key thematic areas highlighted on the CHOGM agenda, which are closely aligned with global targets towards reducing inequality and promoting an integrated approach to social, political, economic and environmental development. Most importantly, the AOs welcome the focus on implementation.

According to the World Bank, in 2021, the estimated number of COVID-19-induced poor is set to rise between 143 and 163 million globally. With our respective constituencies, the AOs stand ready to play an active role in delivering on the recommendations of CHOGM 2022 to strengthen our collective reach and effectiveness.

We are calling on the Commonwealth to strengthen its partnership with the Associated Organisations and move towards a more collaborative approach to delivery. We are keen to capitalise on the Commonwealth's focus on prioritising implementation to use the CHOGM 2022 to put in place a timeline for collective programming to ensure that the AOs can play their full role in delivering on *our common future*.

We are calling on the Commonwealth:

- *To work with the AOs to support a more joined up approach to supporting member states in work towards achieving the SDGs and SDG 16 in particular, building on commitments to the Latimer House Principles and others set out in the Commonwealth Charter.*
- *To recognise and support the contribution of AOs to addressing the impacts of climate change and building resilience across the Commonwealth, especially in small and vulnerable SIDS, and in the context of rapid urbanisation and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.*
- *To consider further joint programming with the AOs, similar to the legacy projects such as the CP4D programme which followed the CHOGM 2018.*

**Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators (CATA)**  
**Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)**  
**Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)**  
**Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO)**

## Annex 1

### **Background to the Associated Organisations**

The Associated Organisations\* have pan-Commonwealth reach, membership structures and governing bodies; they are representative legal structures, mostly governmental or quasigovernmental in nature, which in some AOs involves democratically elected representatives, including national ministers, MPs, speakers of parliament and mayors. The AOs have a clear mandate derived from their membership and have received high-level political endorsement from CHOGM over many years.

The AOs are institutional networks, already setting Commonwealth standards and norms with their members and partners. Their broad range of programmes and networking support governments, local governments, and others in the improvement of public policy and effectiveness of services in response to citizen needs. Engagement with AOs provides practical sources of knowledge and shared learning. The AOs feel this partnership potential is underutilised and strive to play a much stronger role in our common future.

The values and commitments set out in the Commonwealth Charter and more broadly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) connect the AOs closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat. The core Commonwealth values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and good governance underpin the work of the Associated Organisations, each of which offers an opportunity for greater focus and emphasis in their respective fields, and a proximity to relevant decision-makers in member states.

The AOs are already trusted partners of governments and other key stakeholders across member states. They are nimble organisations with the capacity, staff, mandate, and resource mobilisation skills to innovate, and to develop and deliver policy and programme support in pursuit of Commonwealth goals.

The AOs bring together a huge network of institutions, decision-makers and change agents, which could play a much stronger and more coordinated role in supporting communities and societies that embody Commonwealth values. As the Commonwealth family continues to grapple with social, political, environmental and economic challenges, the AOs believe that a more strategic and operational partnership between the AOs and the Commonwealth Secretariat and others, will leverage the wider potential of the Commonwealth by:

- Enriching the policy debate and policy-setting in line with the values set out in the Charter;
- Contributing to more inclusive, proactive monitoring of the democratic values of the Commonwealth at all levels, including in the context of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), and measuring adherence to the core principles and values of the Commonwealth;

- Being early adopters of key Commonwealth policy priorities and strengthening efforts to support member states, local government and other key partners at all levels to promote and integrate them in their decision-making, governance and service delivery;
- Supporting innovation, piloting and testing of new approaches, e.g. the effective use of ICT and the integration and adaptation of digital technology, to enhance governance, democracy and service delivery;
- Better coordinating efforts to ensure that the Commonwealth is inclusive and that the needs of women, youth and minority groups are integrated across all areas of work and activity;
- Bringing a broader political direction to the Commonwealth mission – engaging ministers of sport, public administration, finance and local government, MPs, speakers, councillors and the private sector. The political mandate is already there, but with their extensive networks and mandates, as a collective the AOs can have a multiplier effect and influence across the Commonwealth;
- Adding value in their respective fields, and mobilising relevant members, partners and networks, and exploring a consortium approach to strategic programme development and resource mobilisation, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, to enhance the scale and impact of activities;
- Promoting and strengthening the Commonwealth brand to the widest audience, and raising the profile of the Commonwealth as a relevant and responsive partner bringing together people, political leaders at all levels, governments, business, and other stakeholders in practical ways to ensure a common future;
- Facilitating greater collaboration between governments and diverse stakeholders to foster harmonised approaches for addressing global challenges.

In view of their quasi-governmental nature, the AOs can play a very distinct role in reinforcing and strengthening Commonwealth policy priorities when setting their agendas, but also in aligning their work to strengthen the requisite governance, technical and delivery capacity of their members in support of a whole of government approach. The AOs are committed to building on areas where they are already working together to amplify and strengthen the Commonwealth voice and brand and this is best achieved in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat. To provide better and consistent efforts in this regard, the AOs need to participate in consultations, have greater access to ministerial meetings and opportunities to provide inputs. This allows AOs to set their own agendas and ensure they are working on the issues most relevant to governments and their citizens.

\*Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators (CATA), Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), Conference of Commonwealth Meteorologists (CCM), Conference of Postal Administrators (CCPA), Commonwealth Education Trust (CET).