Civil Society: A Force For Transformation
Message from the Chair

Over the past three years the Commonwealth Foundation has gained new members, consolidated and expanded its programmes, and built partnerships with governments, parliamentarians, the private sector, civil society and cultural organisations. Day by day the Foundation’s work is making a difference, particularly in the Commonwealth’s developing regions.

Success brings its rewards, but also its challenges as civil society organisations look to us for more support. Over the coming four years I and my successor will work with the Governing Board to do all that we can to ensure that the Foundation continues to expand its work. Civil society organisations and professional networks across the Commonwealth have a vitally important part to play in national transformation and they must have all the support we can give them.

Prof. Guido de Marco

Message from the Director

The challenge of transformation lies in finding innovative, sustainable and equitable development paths; in addressing social and environmental imperatives as well as economic ones. As we look ahead it is clear that strong civil society organisations are essential in addressing this agenda. Adapting to climate change, limiting the spread of AIDS, building respect and understanding between different identities and communities - these are not issues for governments alone. The work of the Commonwealth Foundation and its civil society partners is ever more urgent and necessary.

Civil society is a very broad grouping. Faith groups, trade unions, non-governmental, cultural and professional organisations all play their part. The Foundation recognises and promotes this diversity, strengthening grassroots organisations working in communities, building networks to link achievements and share ideas, creating opportunity for advocacy, dialogue and partnership. We aim to use our resources wisely, grow sustainably, address carefully identified priorities, and deliver meaningful outcomes.

Dr Mark Collins
Introduction
The modern Commonwealth, which has its origins in decisions taken 60 years ago, is today a community of 53 nations and their people, all of them equal partners within a globalised world. The work of our organisations is guided by shared principles of peace, security and sustainable development, which are elaborated in detail in the 1971 Singapore Principles and the 1991 Harare Declaration. The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation, both created by Heads of Government in 1965, share the headquarters in Marlborough House, London. They work in close cooperation; the Commonwealth Secretariat focuses on political affairs and technical programmes, while the Commonwealth Foundation focuses on Commonwealth people and their civil society, professional and cultural organisations.

The Foundation is an international organisation established under a Memorandum of Understanding between its member states which explains the broad purposes of the organisation, its governance, and its management. The Foundation’s existence reflects the rich array of civil society organisations associated with the Commonwealth, a number of which considerably pre-date the creation of the modern Commonwealth.

Vision
The Foundation’s Vision is of a Commonwealth where citizens are able to give voice to their aspirations, identify their own solutions and fulfil their role in society. It is a Commonwealth where citizens individually and collectively express themselves for the public good at local, national and international levels by facing global challenges, building strong communities and promoting citizens’ rights. It is a Commonwealth where civil society organisations realise their full potential, engaging with their governments and the private sector in the shared enterprise of transformational nation-building and international cooperation.

Mission
The Commonwealth Foundation’s Mission is to strengthen civil society organisations across the Commonwealth as they promote democracy, advance sustainable development and foster inter-cultural understanding.

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World View
The trends that shape civil society are dynamic and constantly changing, presenting both opportunities and challenges.

Global
Development challenges such as climate change, HIV and AIDS are increasingly experienced on a global level and across many sectors. The responses need to be flexible and multi-faceted, yet connected. Civil society organisations (CSOs) are making those connections and helping governments to find solutions.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) remain a top priority and they have proved useful, but we have passed the midway point towards 2015 and citizens are looking beyond these minimum standards to address the opportunities open to them and the quality of transformational development.

The institutions and processes that shape our lives increasingly operate regionally or internationally but civil society is all too often under-represented at these levels. The framework for international trade, for example, is policed globally and the details worked out regionally, but with no reference to civil society and few opportunities for citizens to participate.

National
CSOs are playing a greater role in shaping national policies and delivering services. In some cases the relationship between government, the public sector and civil society has become close and there is a spirit of partnership. Civil society’s relationship with the private sector has also evolved, with each borrowing a little from the other’s way of doing things.

Paradoxically, it is the view of civil society that at the same time as their contributions are being increasingly recognised by governments, their operational space is being constrained by anti-terror laws and other legal restrictions, repressive policing, cultural stereotyping, suspicion and limited freedom of information.

Not satisfied with only expressing themselves once every few years at the ballot box, citizens are forming their own groups, organisations and movements to effect change. Taken together, participatory and representative forms of governance can renew “The Westminster Model” so that it can better serve democracy in the contemporary Commonwealth.

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5. UN http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
In turn questions have been raised about civil society’s transparency and accountability. Practices have improved in regulation, reporting and governance, but these achievements are not fully recognised or embedded and there is increasing demand from governments for CSOs to be more accountable.

The diversity of civil society is one of its strengths, but it brings challenges of fragmentation, with organisations working in isolation and competition. Connections need to be made across civil society and with pan-Commonwealth networks in order to strengthen community cohesion.

The Citizen
The tendency in some Commonwealth countries to constrain the ability of civil society to operate has also had an impact on human rights – including freedom of expression, association and assembly, and the right to dissent. There are indications of a decline in the commitment of Commonwealth countries to promote, protect and realise citizen’s rights.

Rights based approaches to development helped shape the MDGs. Citizens are coming together to demand these rights, including education, healthcare, shelter, nutrition, decent work and a clean environment. They are asserting the importance of their cultures. They often do so on the basis of a shared identity or experience, and CSOs bring them together in social movements.

Gender inequality remains a major challenge and there is consensus that the further empowerment and education of women is fundamental to development, good governance and peace.

Citizens take on a wide range of voluntary responsibilities through their communities, but migration and globalisation tend to break down the formative structures and linkages. Opportunities to contribute through CSOs are increasingly important, giving citizens an active role in public life as advocates and volunteers. Help is needed to strengthen civic participation across the Commonwealth, and to build the social capital for transformation.

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Strategic Framework
The response to this world view is a Foundation strategy that identifies three sets of priorities, helping Commonwealth citizens to express themselves not only as individuals in their communities but also; through their organisations working nationally; and in international processes, where policies that have a local impact are increasingly being developed.

Facing Global Challenges:
• Addressing the challenges brought by globalisation such as mass movement of people towards cities; homogenisation of culture; and degradation of natural capital, including natural resources and environmental services
• Fighting inequality, which is reinforced by imbalances in trade and aid flows, and unequal access to technology and innovation
• Advocating for a voice for civil society in international processes that impact on development, democracy and diversity

Building Strong Communities:
• Strengthening structures and processes that enable citizens to participate in the way they are governed locally and nationally
• Supporting effective community stewardship of resources for development, and cooperation between diverse communities, thereby creating sustainable livelihoods
• Assisting governments and civil society to enable and strengthen civic participation, thereby building human capital for transformation

Promoting Citizens’ Rights:
• Lobbying for commitment to the inclusion of individual and citizens’ rights in major international treaties and conventions
• Strengthening Commonwealth processes and structures that give space for the voices of minority, marginalised and oppressed people, and which respect different identities equally
• Advocating the involvement of people in development processes and decisions on resource use that impact directly on their lives.
Response Modes

The Foundation will use the following generic modes of intervention to address the Strategic Framework:

- **Projects that address emerging issues of concern to Commonwealth citizens.** The Foundation will draw on its own strengths and partner with civil society and governments to make policy assessments, mobilise action through CSO networks, skills and expertise, and support training.
- **Resources that capture learning from the spectrum of Commonwealth civil society experiences in accessible formats.** The Foundation will produce case studies, toolkits, briefings and reports that help spread good practice and new thinking.
- **Submissions that influence high-level Commonwealth and global processes.** The Foundation will advocate the involvement of civil society in all Commonwealth Heads of Government, Ministerial and Committee Meetings, convene civil society to feed into these, and document the outcomes. Civil society commissions of enquiry and advisory bodies will be encouraged, as will links with parliamentarians.
- **Accolades that illustrate the Commonwealth’s commitment to diversity, development and democracy.** The Foundation will make awards to individuals and institutions in order to make the talents and achievements of Commonwealth people and organisations better known and to provide inspiration to others.
- **Grants that support civil society, including Commonwealth Associations, to meet commonly agreed goals.** The Foundation will increase its grants fund, help applicants to prepare proposals, and continue to use the Special Grants Reserve in crisis situations. It will strengthen its analytical and reporting facilities for member countries, and improve its knowledge management and evaluation mechanisms in order to achieve balanced representation.
- **Capacity building that strengthens the Foundation’s Commonwealth civil society partners.** The Foundation will address key factors that enable civil society to be a force for transformation. These will include networking and linking, leadership, accountability and support for volunteering. The Foundation will build the capacity of its civil society partners in these fields through exchange and the sharing of good practice.

These responses will be delivered through four operational programmes that address in a practical way the need to strengthen Commonwealth civil society at the global, community and individual level. These programmes are described in the following pages.
Programme 1: Culture

This programme views cultural expression as a fundamental human right and promotes inter-cultural learning, creativity, and mutual understanding and influence. It is founded in the belief that development best proceeds, good governance prospers and innovation occurs when there are opportunities for dialogue and people with different identities exchange their views freely in an atmosphere of respect and equality.

The Foundation will continue to support cultural achievement by and foster cultural sharing between practitioners and their networks, and bring their works to wider and more diverse audiences. It will do this by enhancing its current prizes, awards and funding schemes, developing new ones for film and music production and distribution, and through targeted grant-making. It will develop strong education and community outreach elements in such schemes.

This programme will complement its work at practitioner level by supporting the articulation and implementation of cultural policy that links cultural expression to development and governance concerns, and allows culture to contribute to all aspects of national development. The Foundation will do so by working in partnership with civil society, including cultural practitioner groupings, governments and other international agencies. A particular focus will be support to civil society’s engagement with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, and to enhance civil society interaction with Culture Ministers and Senior Officials, including Commonwealth Ambassadors to UNESCO.

The Foundation will take forward the Commonwealth’s new emphasis on promotion of respect and understanding between different identities, including working with media organisations to promote a pluralistic and diverse media and seeking opportunities to increase participation by women and young people. A continued focus will be on promoting cooperation between communities which prioritise their religious identities, particularly the strengthening of inter-religious collaboration at the grassroots level to enhance development and social cohesion.

The programme will make connection between issues of culture and the Foundation’s other work areas. The promotion of literacy, for example, will underpin other interventions. The programme will also generate practical learning on what culture in development means in practice, including how to undertake culturally-aware development and how better to use the power of culture for development.

Programme 2: Governance and Democracy

This programme is guided by the need to ensure that civil society’s opportunity and capacity for engagement with Commonwealth governments, parliamentarians and public servants in transformational development is enhanced through good governance, including appropriate regulatory, procedural, institutional, educational and democratic mechanisms.

In addressing the key transformational challenges of equality and other human rights, empowerment of women and marginalised groups, poverty reduction, debt sustainability and fair trade, the Foundation will promote civil society engagement with global agendas on human rights, financing for development and aid effectiveness, and Commonwealth ministerial agendas including finance, debt, women and trade. We will further enhance civil society’s opportunity to influence the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting through such mechanisms as the Commonwealth People’s Forum.

The Foundation will work with Commonwealth professional and non-governmental networks to strengthen human rights protection and compliance, with a particular focus on good governance, citizen participation and improved human rights observance, both in law and in practice.

The Foundation will review and analyse those laws and regulations, public policies, and participatory mechanisms that constrain or empower civil society. The information will provide a means for CSOs to improve their knowledge and to assess potential areas for reform of the legal and regulatory environment in which they operate.

The Foundation will work with CSOs to generate wider commitment to principles of accountability and transparency. In particular, the Foundation will foster development of accountability frameworks, toolkits and implementing principles that can be deployed to build capacity.

The Foundation will promote learning about citizens’ participation in governance by providing training and resources that develop the capacity, skills and confidence of civil society actors and individuals to participate in decision making and policy dialogue with governments and other stakeholders.

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Programme 3: Human Development

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) remain a key focus for this programme. Today, many children born in developing countries can expect a healthier, longer life and a better education than previous generations, but huge disparities still exist. The Foundation will support civil society organisations (CSOs) that promote development for all, enabling people to realise their full potential, achieve a decent standard of living and contribute productively to transformation and nation-building.

Further commitment to the right of health for all is needed if countries are to meet the health-related MDGs. The Foundation will strengthen and mobilise CSOs, including professional networks and umbrella groups (e.g. the Pan-Commonwealth Civil Society Network on HIV and AIDS), to address the key challenges of AIDS, child mortality, maternal health, and the health impacts of climate change and disasters. With a shortfall of health workers in at least sixteen Commonwealth countries, the Foundation will explore ways in which professional bodies and CSOs can address the issue.

Education is a fundamental human right and a key to social transformation, poverty alleviation and the achievement of the MDGs. This programme will promote quality education for all through Commonwealth associations and networks and support educational and cultural interchange through programmes for linking for development. Media organisations will also be supported in their work to raise awareness of development issues.

In support of the Plan of Action for Gender Equality, the Foundation will help CSOs to address disparity in education and achievement between the sexes, as well as the particular need for empowerment of women and girls, with a view to ending gender discrimination, gender-based violence, trafficking, abuse of women and children, and achieving the MDGs.

In line with international treaties, the Foundation will support the contributions to national development of people living with disability, including through the newly established Commonwealth Disability Forum.

This programme will also coordinate support for youth and initiate activities specifically to promote a cadre of active youth in the Commonwealth’s professional networks and associations.

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Programme 4: Communities and Livelihoods

This programme promotes understanding of the economic and social value that environmental services and renewable natural resources provide for communities and livelihoods, and a wider appreciation of the importance of science and technology in underpinning sustainable development at all levels.

A clean and healthy environment is a basic human right and underpins communities and their livelihoods. Managing pollution, waste, migration to cities and climate change are central themes, as is sustainable use of renewable natural resources such as forests and fisheries. Understanding the links between natural resources, environmental services, urbanisation and planning is also a priority in a world where city-dwelling communities have more people than those in rural areas.

In 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Government committed to the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan^{14}. The Foundation will play its part in the shift to sustainable low-carbon economies by mobilising the resourcefulness and expertise of civil society organisations. It will raise awareness and support planning for adaptation to climate change, particularly with socially marginalised communities living in vulnerable locations.

The Foundation will work with CSOs to raise awareness of the economic, social and environmental consequences of degradation of natural resources, profile good practice in managing natural resources and provide a platform for CSOs to communicate related concerns to governments. It will help civil society to engage in improved management of the world’s coastal and marine fisheries, optimising the contribution that fisheries can make to sustainable livelihoods. This will entail support to institutional arrangements, policies and capacities that deliver more effective governance of fisheries, and direct support aimed at empowering vulnerable fisher communities.

The Foundation will help civil society organisations to strengthen community management of forest resources and promote the economics of ecological and environmental services. In this context it will contribute to the Commonwealth’s Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme.

The Foundation will work with CSOs to improve understanding of the challenges brought by the mass movement of people towards cities. Through participation in the ComHabitat partnership the Foundation will promote capacity-building and learning in sustainable urbanisation with a view to improving human settlements in Commonwealth countries.

Resources

The ambitious and beneficial programmes outlined above will require sustainable growth in income. From an income base in FY 2006-07 of £3.2M with 93% (£3M) from member government subscriptions, the Foundation will implement a business plan foreseeing an income of £5.1M by FY 2011-12, with 67% derived from subscriptions (£3.4M) and 33% (£1.7M) from projects. This represents an average growth rate of about 10% p.a., made up of 2.5% annual growth from subscriptions and 7.5% from projects.

Project funds (£1.7M p.a. by 2012) will derive from development assistance budgets of donor countries and multilateral organisations (67%, or £1.1M p.a. by 2012), private sector philanthropic funds (22%, or £374K p.a. by 2012), and trusts, foundations and charities, including the Friends of the Commonwealth (11%, or £187K p.a. by 2012).

Diversification of income from projects will benefit Foundation member countries and add considerable value to their continuing subscription support.

Grants

Grant-giving is a vital part of the Foundation’s work. Grants and awards of various kinds are used to strengthen and implement programme objectives, as well as to reward excellence, innovation and endeavour.

Responsive and Commonwealth Association grants have remained at £700-800K for some years, but while the total amount awarded to CSOs since 2005 has increased by over 25%, the contribution to Associations has declined. Grant applications are growing exponentially, but for some parts of the Commonwealth fewer than 10% are successful, partly due to lack of funds.

The Foundation will therefore raise its responsive and Association grants to £1M, with 25% reserved for Associations. We will also find ways to build the capacity of grant applicants, report more effectively on overall grant-making, including awards linked to programmes, and encourage additional contribution to the grants fund.

The Special Grants Reserve, established to provide flexibility in responding to civil society’s needs in times of national crisis, has proved successful and will be maintained.
Communications
The Foundation’s plans for growth call for scalable and sustainable support in communications. To support the four programmes, a revised communications strategy will clarify messages, audiences and routes to our stakeholders both internally (staff, board and committees), and externally (official and unofficial Commonwealth organisations, civil society, private sector, charitable foundations, the media and in-country umbrella bodies).

Internally, the focus will be on improved appreciation and application of communication techniques to achieve programme aims. Externally, emphasis will be on developing communication products for new audiences and changing needs. These include the development and deployment of a focused media relations programme, a review of the Foundation’s website and print media to meet changing needs and technologies, and the development and review of messaging aligned to support for the Friends of the Commonwealth. The Foundation will make better use of existing in-country networks and the Civil Society Advisory Committee to inform CSOs about the Foundation and its work. In 2009 the Foundation will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the modern Commonwealth.

Organisation
Programmes and their managers will expand from three to four and a Senior Programme Manager will be employed to ensure cohesion and evaluation. The growing grants and events programmes will also require strengthened staff resources. By 2012 the Foundation expects to grow to about 30 staff.

In the medium to long term the Foundation will require significantly more working space than at present. This expansion will be negotiated and undertaken incrementally and at a speed that accommodates all those affected. Knowledge management will become increasingly important. Improvements in technology and administrative procedures will be implemented to ensure that the Foundation is increasingly able to learn from its experiences.

Monitoring and reporting on achievements and outcomes will be strengthened. The growing organisation will benefit from a culture that promotes teamwork and diversity at the same time as individual development; provides training opportunities for all; has a progressive approach to environmental performance; and has terms of service that encourage recruitment and retention of high calibre staff.
Governance

The Commonwealth Membership Report\textsuperscript{15} encouraged all countries to join, the Foundation and all overseas territories to associate closely through civil society. Currently, six countries are absent\textsuperscript{16} and only one overseas territory has taken up Associate Membership\textsuperscript{17}. Practical ways to overcome barriers and achieve full membership will be explored through the Governing Board.

Current contribution scales are out-of-date and will be reviewed.

Since 2005 every effort has been made to resolve issues with members in arrears. Policies will be developed to finalise any arrangements still outstanding.

Diplomatic induction courses and briefings on key issues will be presented.

The work of the Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC) will be strengthened regionally and nationally. The new CSAC terms of reference will be fully implemented and the impact of the Committee strengthened.

Conclusion

The Commonwealth is an extraordinary network of countries, large and small, rich and poor. With a quarter of the world’s population and nations, it has a unique opportunity for influence in shaping a better world. By helping to diffuse conflicts, tackling issues such as climate change and radicalization, or identifying divides that hold back development, it is a positive force.

A key paradigm for the millennium is a greater role for citizens in working with their governments and forging their own futures. The Commonwealth Foundation’s intergovernmental status, deployed in support of strengthening professional and civil society organisations and networks, speaks directly to this vision in a way that no other intergovernmental body can do.

Building on the achievements of 2005-08, the period to 2012 will see the Foundation further extend its reach. The watchwords are growth and dynamism in an era of Commonwealth endeavour that enables every citizen to reach their full potential and contribute to transformational and sustainable development.

\textsuperscript{16} Bangladesh, Fiji, Nauru, St Kitts & Nevis, Tuvalu, Vanuatu
\textsuperscript{17} Of all the Australian External Territories; New Zealand Associated Countries & External Territories; and UK Overseas Territories, only Gibraltar has taken up Associate Membership of the Foundation.
The Strategic Framework of the Commonwealth Foundation: 2008-2012
Contact Information
Commonwealth Foundation, Marlborough House, Pall Mall
London SW1Y 5HY United Kingdom

Tel +44(0)20 7930 3783 Fax +44(0)20 7839 8157
Email geninfo@commonwealth.int
Website www.commonwealthfoundation.com
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