

68TH COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

The Commonwealth – A Global Partner

WORKSHOP RESEARCH BRIEFING

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Workshop C: A Look Ahead to CHOGM 2026: Championing the Human Factor from a Gender and Accessibility lens

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Executive Summary

The Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 56 nations, finds itself at a pivotal juncture, navigating a world defined by geopolitical instability and unprecedented challenges to human rights. While its foundational values are enshrined in documents such as the Commonwealth Charter, their practical implementation remains an active project that must be championed by its legislative bodies.¹ This report argues that the 2026 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Antigua and Barbuda presents a critical opportunity to move beyond aspirational principles and solidify a tangible commitment to the "human factor" through a concerted, parliamentary-led effort. The central thesis is that Parliamentarians are not merely observers but are crucial instruments of good governance and human rights advocacy.

The analysis focuses primarily on gender and persons with disabilities, while also examining the intersecting experiences of youth, older people, minority groups, and migrants. It identifies a need for the consistent application of the Commonwealth's values across all member states, which can be addressed through proactive legislative action and robust civil society engagement. The report details how Commonwealth-affiliated organisations, such as the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network and the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, are instrumental in building capacity and providing a roadmap for progress.

The paper synthesises best practices from across the Commonwealth, demonstrating how Parliamentary Committees, targeted legislative reforms, and collaborative programmes can translate principles into tangible outcomes. It highlights the vital role of the Commonwealth People's, Women's, and Youth Forums as conduits for civil society voices, ensuring that high-level diplomatic communiqués are informed by the realities on the ground. Ultimately, the report provides a clear roadmap for Parliamentarians to influence the CHOGM 2026 agenda. The recommendations are grounded in the understanding that a modern, inclusive Commonwealth requires its legislative arm to actively address discriminatory legacies and champion the rights of all its citizens, thereby ensuring the Commonwealth remains a dynamic and indispensable force for peace and justice.

Introduction: Championing the Human Factor in a Changing Commonwealth

In an era marked by rising protectionism, populism, geopolitical fragmentation, and the erosion of democratic norms, the Commonwealth's role as a network for dialogue and cooperation is being profoundly tested.¹ The upcoming CHOGM 2026, hosted by Antigua and Barbuda, offers a crucial moment for the Commonwealth to reaffirm its purpose and demonstrate its enduring relevance.

Previous CHOGM meetings, such as the 2022 gathering in Kigali, have tackled pressing issues like climate change and trade, while also drawing scrutiny from civil society groups regarding the human rights records of host nations.² The effective application of the Commonwealth's principles in a complex world remains a key focus for the association.

This report is predicated on the understanding that the Commonwealth's strength lies not solely in the consensus of its heads of government, but in the institutional capital of its legislative bodies. Parliaments, as the primary institutions representing the will of the people, are the most effective agents for ensuring the Commonwealth's shared values are not merely abstract declarations but are translated into practical, enforceable laws.¹ The purpose of this briefing is to provide a comprehensive, expert-level analysis of how Parliamentarians can champion the "human factor," with a primary focus on gender and persons with disabilities, at CHOGM 2026. The report will argue that the final Communique must be more than a statement of principle; it must be a legislative call to action, informed by the voices of civil society and underpinned by a nuanced understanding of intersectionality. This analysis will draw on the Commonwealth's foundational documents, the outcomes of past CHOGM meetings, and the critical work of its specialised networks and civil society partners to provide a strategic and practical roadmap for legislative action.

Section 1: The Commonwealth's Foundational Commitment to Human Rights

1.1 The Commonwealth Charter and its Normative Framework

The Commonwealth's identity and shared purpose are rooted in a foundational normative framework. At the heart of this framework is the Commonwealth Charter, which serves as a modern declaration of shared values and aspirations.¹ The Charter affirms a commitment to core principles such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.³ It explicitly recognises the "inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes" and highlights the role of Parliaments as "essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance".¹

A core tenet of the Charter is its unequivocal opposition to discrimination. The document states, "We are implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds".³ This provides the legal and moral basis for action on human rights issues. Furthermore, the Charter recognises that human rights are "universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and cannot be implemented selectively".³ This principled stance is meant to guide the actions of all member states and underscores the importance of a robust system of accountability.

1.2 The Legacy of Progress: Human Rights in Previous CHOGM Communiques

An examination of past CHOGMs reveals a recurring pattern of both progress and challenge in upholding the Commonwealth's human rights commitments. The 2018 London Communique, for example, included commitments to "strengthening national human rights institutions," demonstrating a recognition of the need for formal mechanisms to protect citizens.² The 2024 CHOGM in Samoa, held under the theme of "One Resilient Common Future," marked a significant step forward. This meeting was preceded by a historic Human Rights Forum, whose outcomes were intended to guide the discussions of Commonwealth leaders and influence the final Communique.⁵ Many Commonwealth Organisations and Associations, including the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Commonwealth Journalists Association, Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative have also made a written submissions to the Committee of the Whole to "strengthen the Communiqué, ensuring it is grounded in human rights".⁶ These submissions identifies a need to go beyond general statements to address specific gaps and make the document more impactful.⁶

However, the selection of Rwanda to host CHOGM 2022, for instance, drew an open letter from 24 organisations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, urging leaders to speak up on the host nation's human rights record.² This highlights that while formal mechanisms exist, such as the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG)¹, the real force for change often lies in the "soft power" of parliamentary diplomacy and civil society pressure. A proactive, dual strategy is therefore necessary for Parliamentarians: they must work within formal processes while also engaging directly with the civil society ecosystem to inform their advocacy and legislative agendas.

1.3 A New Vision for the Commonwealth: The Priorities of the Secretary-General

The Commonwealth's commitment to the human factor is being championed by a new voice from within its leadership. The election of Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey as the first African woman to serve as Secretary-General marks a transformative moment for the organisation.⁷ A former four-term Member of Parliament in Ghana, she has stated that her vision is for a Commonwealth that is "purposeful, ambitious, effective"⁸ and "relevant to [its members'] efforts to build resilience - democratic resilience, economic resilience and climate resilience".⁹ This commitment is reflected in her six priority areas for repositioning the Commonwealth: Democracy, Trade and Investment, Youth, Education and Skills, Climate Change, Small States, and managing the institution effectively.⁹

Central to her vision is the empowerment of people. She has stated that her personal journey was inspired by the "harsh realities of disempowered women"⁹ and has professional experience working on the Gender and Children Committees of Parliament.¹¹ In her first months in office, she has made women's economic empowerment a "cornerstone" of the Secretariat's work, advocating for policy

reform, capacity building, and digital solutions.¹² She has also called for a gender perspective to be integrated into budgeting and policy planning.¹² Beyond empowering women to participate in the marketplace, she argues that women must "co-own the table, set the agenda, and write the rules" to achieve meaningful influence.¹²

On youth, the Secretary-General recognises that over 60% of the Commonwealth's population is under 30 and has called for a concerted effort to leverage this "demographic dividend".⁸ She has prioritised investment in education and skills-training to empower young people to "participate meaningfully in the workforce of modern economies".⁹ She also stresses the need to encourage youth participation in political and civic life to bridge the gap between young people and policymakers and to prepare them for future decision-making roles.⁹ She has specifically called for policies to ensure that young people have equal opportunities regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background.⁹ The new Secretary-General's broader vision of "inclusive development" and her pledge to champion "equality and inclusion" align with this ongoing institutional work.

Her past experience as a Member of Parliament has shaped her views on the role of legislators. She has urged her parliamentary colleagues to "reflect deeply" on the goals of the Commonwealth Charter and to "focus... on the goal of attaining and maintaining the democratic ethos" of the community.¹³ This perspective, combined with her commitment to working with accredited organisations as "solutions partners" ¹⁴, underscores her belief that Parliamentarians are indispensable agents of change who can ensure that the Commonwealth's principles are translated into tangible action for all citizens.

Section 2: Primary Focus: A Gender and Accessibility Lens

2.1 Gender and Equality: Advancing the Rights of Women and Girls

The Commonwealth Charter explicitly recognises gender equality as an "essential component of human development and basic human rights".³ This fundamental principle is championed by a dedicated ecosystem of Commonwealth bodies. The Commonwealth Women's Forum (CWF), a key event at CHOGM, serves as a platform to highlight women's political, economic, and societal contributions and to inform leaders' discussions on gender equality.¹⁵ The CWF 2024 focused on critical issues such as women in leadership, economic empowerment, the nexus of gender and climate change, and the urgent need to end violence against women and girls (VAWG).¹⁵

Complementing this, the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) network is a central

vehicle for parliamentary action.¹⁶ The CWP's mission is to increase women's representation and ensure that Parliaments become "gender-sensitive institutions".¹⁷ To this end, the network has developed practical toolkits, including the 'CWP Gender Sensitising Parliaments Guidelines' and a "Seven-Step Field Guide".¹⁷ The network also provides an annual "Gender Strengthening Fund," an annual grant of £90,000 made available to each of the CPA's 180 branches to support projects that align with the CWP's mission.¹⁷ This funding mechanism provides a powerful model for translating policy into tangible, on-the-ground change, demonstrating the direct link between a dedicated network, a funding mechanism, and measurable outcomes. CWP Regions, especially those across the BIMR, Africa, Australia, Pacific and Canada have pursued long-standing initiatives to promote parliamentary-based gender equity and equality initiatives, most notably the Canadian mentoring programme.

Beyond this, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Gender Section plays a critical role in advancing these priorities through targeted programmes. The Secretariat has a long-standing commitment to gender equality, which was previously guided by the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (PoA) from 2005 to 2015.¹⁸ This has continued with a renewed focus on several key areas. A "cornerstone" of the Secretariat's work is women's economic empowerment, with initiatives that include policy reform, capacity building, and digital solutions.¹² This is supported by partnerships, such as the ITC SheTrades Commonwealth+ Programme, which fosters an enabling business ecosystem and improves the competitiveness of women-led businesses to trade.¹⁹ The Secretariat also delivers digital boot camp training workshops for female entrepreneurs to increase their digital trade opportunities.²¹ In addition, the Secretariat has launched a best practice guide to assist policymakers in integrating gender equality into national climate action.²¹ The Secretariat is also a driving force behind the "Commonwealth Says NO MORE" campaign, which works to end violence against women and girls (VAWG) and has introduced a new grant programme to support this effort.²¹ The Secretariat's Gender Section also convenes key events, such as an annual consultation of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries and civil society organisations, to review progress on gender equality priorities and the SDGs.²²

2.2 Accessibility and Inclusion: Advocating for Persons with Disabilities

Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan was developed by the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum with the aim of being formally adopted by leaders at the October 2024 CHOGM in Samoa.¹ This plan is a direct response to a call from Heads of Government in 2018 and 2022 to implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Commonwealth has long recognised the urgent need to advocate for persons with disabilities, as evidenced by the 2007 statement from Heads of Government affirming the need to adopt, ratify, and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).²³ The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF) was established to provide a "one voice" for

disabled people across the Commonwealth and to "engage and influence" the CHOGM process directly.²³ The forum's core aim is to see the UNCRPD and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fully implemented in every member country.²³

On a parliamentary level, the Commonwealth Parliamentarians with Disabilities (CPwD) network, established in 2017, plays a critical role in championing the representation of persons with disabilities in politics and encouraging all Parliamentarians to include a "disabilities perspective" in their legislative, oversight, and representational functions.²⁴ The CPwD network provides practical support through its many resources and of particular note the "Capital Investment Fund," which aims to improve the physical and technological accessibility of Parliaments.²⁴

2.3 The Prism of Intersectionality: A Nuanced Approach

A simple, single-axis approach to discrimination, focusing on one identity at a time, is often insufficient to address the complexities of people's lived experiences.²⁵ Intersectionality is the concept that different forms of discrimination, such as race, gender, and disability, intersect to create unique, multi-layered experiences of disadvantage.²⁵ This more nuanced approach is essential for developing effective, equitable legislation.

The Commonwealth's shared colonial history is a source of enduring inequality that requires legislative action. Legal frameworks in the Commonwealth Caribbean, for example, have yet to fully adopt this approach, perpetuating marginalisation rooted in a colonial legacy that links gender, race, class, and social and geographical origin.²⁵ This highlights that the Commonwealth's institutional capital, while beneficial for cooperation, can also be a conduit for the very inequalities it aims to oppose. Therefore, the work of Parliamentarians is not just about creating new, progressive laws, but also about actively addressing discriminatory legal frameworks that are a legacy of their shared history, and more importantly, ensuring such laws are effectively implemented through its scrutiny and accountability mechanisms.

The need for an intersectional approach is also evident in countries like Australia. While the Australian Public Service is still building its knowledge around this concept, it has already found that employees with disabilities consistently report higher rates of harassment.²⁷ Other reports detail how housing challenges, often perceived as a general economic issue, are particularly acute for "older women" and "women with disabilities," whose compounded identities make them more vulnerable to homelessness.²⁶ This further demonstrates why a simple gender or age analysis is incomplete and why a more holistic, intersectional perspective is crucial for effective policymaking.

Section 3: The Human Factor Unpacked: Beyond the Core Focus

3.1 Fostering Inclusivity for Diverse Races, Religions, and Ethnicities

The Commonwealth is a diverse association of people from different races, languages, and religions.⁴² Its core principle, enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the 1971 Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, is to be "implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds".⁴² The CPA further reinforces this commitment by uniting Parliamentarians across its network "irrespective of gender, race, religion or culture".⁴⁴

To put these principles into action, the Commonwealth has implemented a number of initiatives. The Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with the Khalili Foundation, launched the "Faith in the Commonwealth" programme to promote Global Citizenship Education and religious literacy through the Commonwealth Faith Festival.⁴⁶ These initiatives aim to foster collaboration and understanding among youth and community groups and have equipped young leaders with skills to facilitate interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding in their communities. For instance, "Youth Training of Trainer workshops" have been held in countries like Bangladesh, Kenya, and Trinidad and Tobago, where young leaders learn to run training workshops on social cohesion, gender equity, and interfaith dialogue.⁴⁶ This work is essential for addressing the "disparities" and "heightened level of discrimination" that some minority groups face within the Commonwealth.⁴⁸ The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) also champions this work, celebrating the Commonwealth's diversity and working to leave no one behind in the pursuit of human rights.³⁸

3.2 Fostering Inclusivity for Youth and Older People

The Commonwealth is a profoundly young organisation, with over 60 per cent of its 2.7 billion citizens aged 29 or under.¹ To harness this "demographic dividend," it is essential to ensure that young people are not just a statistic but are active participants in political life. The Commonwealth Youth Forum provides a platform for young people to deliberate on issues and present recommendations directly to leaders at CHOGM.²⁹ Parliamentarians have a critical role to play in translating these recommendations into legislative action. The example of calls to lower the voting age to 16 is a direct way to empower young people and ensure their voices are heard.³⁰ Many other Commonwealth bodies also champion this work, for example the Royal Commonwealth Society, the Commonwealth Youth Council and the CPA through its Youth Parliament's initiative.

Similarly, the rights and needs of older people and other minority groups require a proactive,

legislative approach. The UK Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee has highlighted the need to address the "disparate impact" of ageing and has called for the government to create a dedicated unit to build an evidence base on the challenges facing older people, including intersectional issues related to race and sexual orientation.³¹ In Australia, the Law Reform Commission has demonstrated how legal frameworks can protect the rights of older Australians, particularly in safeguarding their autonomy and decision-making capacity.³²

3.3 Protecting the Rights of the LGBT+ Community

A significant challenge to the Commonwealth's stated commitment to non-discrimination is the legacy of colonial-era laws. Homosexuality remains a criminal offence in 29 of the 56 Commonwealth member states.³³ The responsibility for reversing this legacy is a matter for Parliaments, with the support of a key ecosystem of organisations.

The Human Dignity Trust (HDT) is a leading organisation that provides legal and technical assistance to challenge these discriminatory laws in court, working to address the legacy of British colonial-era legislation.³³ The organisation has worked with activists to push the boundaries of legal arguments, as evidenced by a recent legal breakthrough in Saint Lucia where the country's High Court struck down the law criminalising same-sex intimacy.³³ Similarly, the Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN), founded in 2013, provides a platform for LGBTI activists and civil society organisations to share expertise, gather evidence, and engage in Commonwealth policy processes.³⁴

The CPA has also supported parliamentary-led initiatives, such as CPA BIM Region's LGBT+ network which was established in 2025 and the LGBT+ Online Community network facilitated by TCEN. More broadly, the Global Equality Caucus has advocated for change amongst its global membership of LGBT+ advocates.

Furthermore, organisations like Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) are working directly with legislators to provide the tools and resources needed to champion human rights. PGA has developed advocacy resources, such as the "Toolkit for Legislators in the Pacific Region," to guide Parliamentarians in advancing inclusive and rights-based approaches to governance.³⁵ This resource outlines legal and policy frameworks, international human rights obligations, and good practices to help Parliamentarians create safer and more equitable societies by repealing harmful laws and challenging stigma and violence.³⁵ The path forward for the Commonwealth is not to simply celebrate a shared past, but to acknowledge and address its problematic elements, making the legislative branch the primary agent of this course correction.

3.4 Safeguarding the Rights of Migrants and Displaced Persons

The issue of migration is a complex and pressing challenge for many Commonwealth nations, intimately linked to development, poverty reduction, and national policy-making.³⁶ For a significant number of people, migration is not a choice, as they are displaced by factors such as conflict, persecution, or environmental devastation.³⁷ The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) are committed to addressing these issues by working to eradicate modern slavery and human trafficking through research, advocacy, and grassroots mobilisation. The CHRI also runs the Commonwealth 8.7 Network, a global network of civil society organisations focused on this issue.³⁸

The Commonwealth is actively developing frameworks to help its member states manage migration. The Secretariat is creating a new tool, the Model Memorandum of Understanding for the Recruitment of Migrant Teachers, to help countries address “brain drain” by protecting the rights of migrant teachers and assisting in managing their international recruitment.¹⁸ The Commonwealth has also hosted a series of workshops on remittances in collaboration with the World Bank to identify constraints and share best practices.¹⁸

Smaller jurisdictions, such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS), are particularly vulnerable to these pressures. Climate change-related migration can cause an influx of people from rural to more urban areas, creating a significant burden on limited resources.³⁹ These nations also face youth out-migration and critical skills shortages in sectors like education and healthcare, which the Commonwealth is working to address through initiatives like The King's Commonwealth Fellowship Programme. Furthermore, a World Economic Forum report reveals additional hurdles faced by migrants with disabilities. These individuals encounter bureaucratic complexities in obtaining official recognition of their disability and often struggle with a lack of accessible workplaces.⁷ This highlights the need for a coordinated, rights-based approach to migration that considers the intersecting challenges of gender, disability, and migrant status.

3.5 The Commonwealth's Role in Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals

The Commonwealth's work is intrinsically linked to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but the pace of change to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is currently “insufficient”.¹ The Commonwealth has a number of mechanisms to help address this. The Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), for instance, has as a core aim to see the SDGs fully implemented in every member country.²³ Similarly, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is determined to leave no one behind as they advance towards achieving the SDGs.³⁸ The new Secretary-General, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, has stated that the Commonwealth should “become the leader for a new international development cooperation model” that can transform economies

and "deliver inclusive development and climate resilience", underscoring the Commonwealth's potential to drive progress. She has also identified "Climate Change" as a priority area for repositioning the Commonwealth and has called for a concerted effort to foster "equality and inclusion". The CPA has a specific mandate to support its member branches in strengthening their practices to meet SDG 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful, just, and inclusive institutions.⁴⁰

Section 4: The Wider Ecosystem of Support and Influence

4.1 Informing the Communique: The Influence of the Commonwealth Forums

The CHOGM is a central event in the Commonwealth calendar, but its outcomes are not determined in a vacuum. A series of parallel forums—the People's Forum, Women's Forum, Youth Forum, and Business Forum—are central to the process, providing a "unique opportunity" for civil society and citizens to engage directly with leaders.⁴¹ The recommendations and declarations that emerge from these forums are intended to inform the leaders' discussions and, ultimately, the final Communique.¹⁵ The 2024 CHOGM in Samoa, for instance, produced a "Youth Declaration," which demonstrates that these forums can have a direct and measurable impact on the official outcomes.¹⁵ This parallel, civil-society-driven process provides a vital bottom-up driver of change that can counteract diplomatic inertia and ensure the high-level Communique is grounded in the lived experiences of citizens.

4.2 The Role of Civil Society and its Partners

Independent, non-governmental organisations are crucial for holding governments and the Commonwealth to account. The Commonwealth Foundation is a key player in this ecosystem. The Foundation actively engages with the CHOGM process. Direct engagement provides leaders with the nuanced, on-the-ground data and advocacy they may otherwise miss. The relationship between the forums and civil society is symbiotic: the forums provide a formal channel for civil society to be heard, and civil society, in turn, provides the advocacy and information that strengthens the Communique.

4.3 Strengthening the Legislative Arm: The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and its Networks

The CPA continues to be a central mechanism for inter-parliamentary collaboration. Its primary purpose is to provide a platform for Parliamentarians to "exchange ideas" and identify "benchmarks for good governance".¹ The CPA's specialised networks—CWP, CPwD, and the CPA Small Branches network—are instrumental in addressing specific human rights issues and building the capacity of legislatures to be more representative and effective.¹⁷ This is demonstrated through their

workshops, publications, and funding initiatives. The existence of these dedicated networks, combined with their ability to secure and distribute funding, is a proven model for translating policy into tangible outcomes. The very act of producing and disseminating this report is, in itself, a form of the kind of parliamentary strengthening it advocates for.

Policy Recommendations: A Roadmap for Commonwealth Parliamentarians

A key component of this advocacy is securing the explicit backing of Heads of Government at CHOGM, as demonstrated by the drafting of the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Protocol Action Plan which was created with the aim of being formally adopted by leaders at the October 2024 CHOGM in Samoa.¹ Based on the preceding analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to provide a detailed, actionable roadmap for Commonwealth Parliamentarians to champion the human factor at CHOGM 2026.

Establish a Mandate for Intersectional Analysis: Parliaments should legislate for the mandatory use of intersectional impact assessments for all new policies and legislation. This will require the collection and use of disaggregated data that captures the multi-layered experiences of vulnerable groups, moving beyond single-axis frameworks to create more effective and equitable laws.²⁵

Champion Legislative Reform to Address Colonial-Era Legal Frameworks: Parliamentarians must seize the opportunity to be agents of historical correction. This requires introducing and advocating for private members' bills to repeal discriminatory, colonial-era laws, such as those criminalising homosexuality. Working with organisations like the Human Dignity Trust and Parliamentarians for Global Action can provide the necessary legal and advocacy support to achieve this goal and ensure a modern, inclusive Commonwealth.³³

Ensure the CHOGM Communiqué Includes a Specific, Actionable Human Rights Annex: Parliamentarians should lobby their national executives to ensure the CHOGM 2026 Communiqué includes a specific, measurable, and funded annex on human rights. This should move beyond general statements to detail binding commitments on gender-responsive budgeting, UNCRPD implementation, and legal reform. Drawing on the recommendations from the People's, Women's, and Youth Forums will be vital in this process.⁶

Increase Funding and Leverage Networks for Tangible Change: Parliamentarians should advocate for an increase in national contributions to Commonwealth bodies, particularly the CPA, to expand the CWP's Gender Strengthening Fund and the CPwD's Capital Investment Fund. These are proven models for translating policy into tangible, on-the-ground outcomes and serve as a powerful example of what can be achieved through coordinated effort.¹⁷

Facilitate Meaningful Engagement with Civil Society: Parliaments must establish formal mechanisms to hear and integrate the recommendations of civil society forums like the Commonwealth People's, Women's, and Youth Forums into their legislative agenda. This ensures a bottom-up approach to policy-making, where legislative priorities are directly informed by the lived experiences of citizens.¹⁵

Prioritise the Sustainable Development Goals: Parliamentarians should champion the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by introducing and scrutinising legislation that directly addresses them. This includes a legislative focus on gender-responsive climate policies, inclusive education and health care, and other measures to address the "insufficient" pace of progress towards the 2030 deadline. This work can be informed by organisations like the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, which are specifically focused on the implementation of the SDGs.³⁸

Establish a Standing Commonwealth Parliamentarians' Forum: Parliamentarians are the primary representatives of the people and are crucial to the success of the Commonwealth's values.¹ While existing forums allow for civil society and youth engagement, there is a need for a dedicated, formal space for legislators to contribute to the CHOGM agenda. A standing "Parliamentarians' Forum" would institutionalise a direct line of communication between legislatures and the Heads of Government. This would provide a platform for Parliamentarians to advocate for key human rights issues, scrutinise executive commitments, and ensure the final Communique is a legislative call to action, thereby strengthening the Commonwealth's democratic legitimacy and accountability.⁴¹

Seek Formal Adoption by Heads of Government: Parliamentarians must not only legislate but also advocate for high-level political commitment to their causes. Documents like the Commonwealth Disability Inclusion Action Plan are specifically drafted with the objective of formal adoption by Heads of Government at CHOGM, underscoring the importance of gaining top-level political buy-in to ensure a protocol is fully implemented across the Commonwealth.¹

Table 1: A Roadmap for Parliamentarians: Championing the Human Factor at CHOGM 2026

Human Rights Challenge	Commonwealth Framework/Mechanism	Role of Parliamentarians	Example/Best Practice
Gender Inequality & VAWG	CWP Guidelines, Commonwealth	Advocate for gender-sensitive legislation	CWP Gender Strengthening Funds

	Women's Forum ¹⁵	and budgets, scrutinise government gender policies.	for parliamentary projects. ¹⁷
Disability Discrimination & Lack of Accessibility	CDPF, UNCRPD, CPA/CPwD Capital Investment Fund ²³	Legislate for UNCRPD implementation, ensure parliamentary accessibility, raise awareness.	
LGBT+ Rights & Colonial-Era Laws	Commonwealth Charter's opposition to discrimination ³	Introduce private members' bills, advocate for decriminalisation, use parliamentary committees to scrutinise rights violations.	Saint Lucia High Court striking down laws with support from Human Dignity Trust; PGA's toolkit for legislators. ³³
Exclusion of Youth, Minorities & Older Persons	Youth and People's Forums, SDG 16 ²⁹	Promote youth participation in legislative processes, establish committees on minority affairs, champion policies to address intergenerational challenges.	Lowering the voting age, establishing Youth Parliaments. ³⁰
Inclusivity for Religions, Races & Ethnicities	Commonwealth Charter, Commonwealth Faith Festival ⁴²	Promote interfaith dialogue, champion legislation to protect minority rights, and counter discrimination and prejudice.	Commonwealth's "Faith in the Commonwealth" initiative and Youth Training of Trainer workshops. ⁴⁶
Intersectionality	Intersectional analysis (e.g., as applied in the Commonwealth Caribbean) ²⁵	Use disaggregated data and qualitative evidence to inform policy, mandate	Australian Public Service's focus on intersectional data in diversity and inclusion

		intersectional impact assessments for all new legislation.	reports. ²⁷
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, various Commonwealth bodies ³⁸	Champion SDG implementation through legislation, scrutinise government progress, and integrate a focus on inclusive development into all policy areas.	The CDPF's core aim to see the SDGs fully implemented in every Commonwealth country. ¹
Parliamentary Engagement at CHOGM	Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), CHOGM ¹	Advocate for a formal, standing 'Parliamentarians' Forum' as part of the official CHOGM programme.	The existing Commonwealth People's, Women's, and Youth Forums serve as a model for how civil society voices can inform the Communique. ⁴¹

Conclusion

The Commonwealth's future as a beacon of shared values rests not on the strength of its shared history alone, but on the shoulders of its legislative institutions and the Parliamentarians who lead them. As this report has shown, CHOGM 2026 presents a crucial opportunity for the association to reaffirm its relevance by translating its foundational principles into tangible, cooperative action. The role of the Parliamentarian is paramount: they must serve as vigilant guardians of democratic values, proactive agents of legislative reform, and collaborative partners in an ecosystem that includes civil society, youth, and other key stakeholders.

By focusing on the human factor through a nuanced gender and accessibility lens, and by embracing the complexity of intersectionality, Commonwealth Parliaments can ensure that the Communique from CHOGM 2026 is a document of substantive change, not just symbolic aspiration. By championing the rights of women, persons with disabilities, and all other vulnerable groups, Parliamentarians can not only live up to the promise of the Commonwealth Charter but also ensure the association remains a dynamic and indispensable force for building a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world.

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About the CPA

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) connects, develops, promotes and supports Parliamentarians and their staff to identify Benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA collaborates with Parliaments and other organisations, including the intergovernmental community, to achieve its statement of purpose. It brings Parliamentarians and Parliamentary staff together to exchange ideas among themselves and with experts in various fields; to identify Benchmarks of good practices and new policy options they can adopt or adapt in the governance of their societies.

Endnotes

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