

A world map is centered on the page, rendered in a dark red color against a background that transitions from orange on the left to red on the right. Scattered across the map and background are various yellow letters (q, d, c, s, r, u, e, a) and several sets of concentric yellow circles resembling sound waves or ripples. The overall aesthetic is modern and global.

# The People's Commonwealth

More voices for  
a fairer world



Commonwealth  
Foundation

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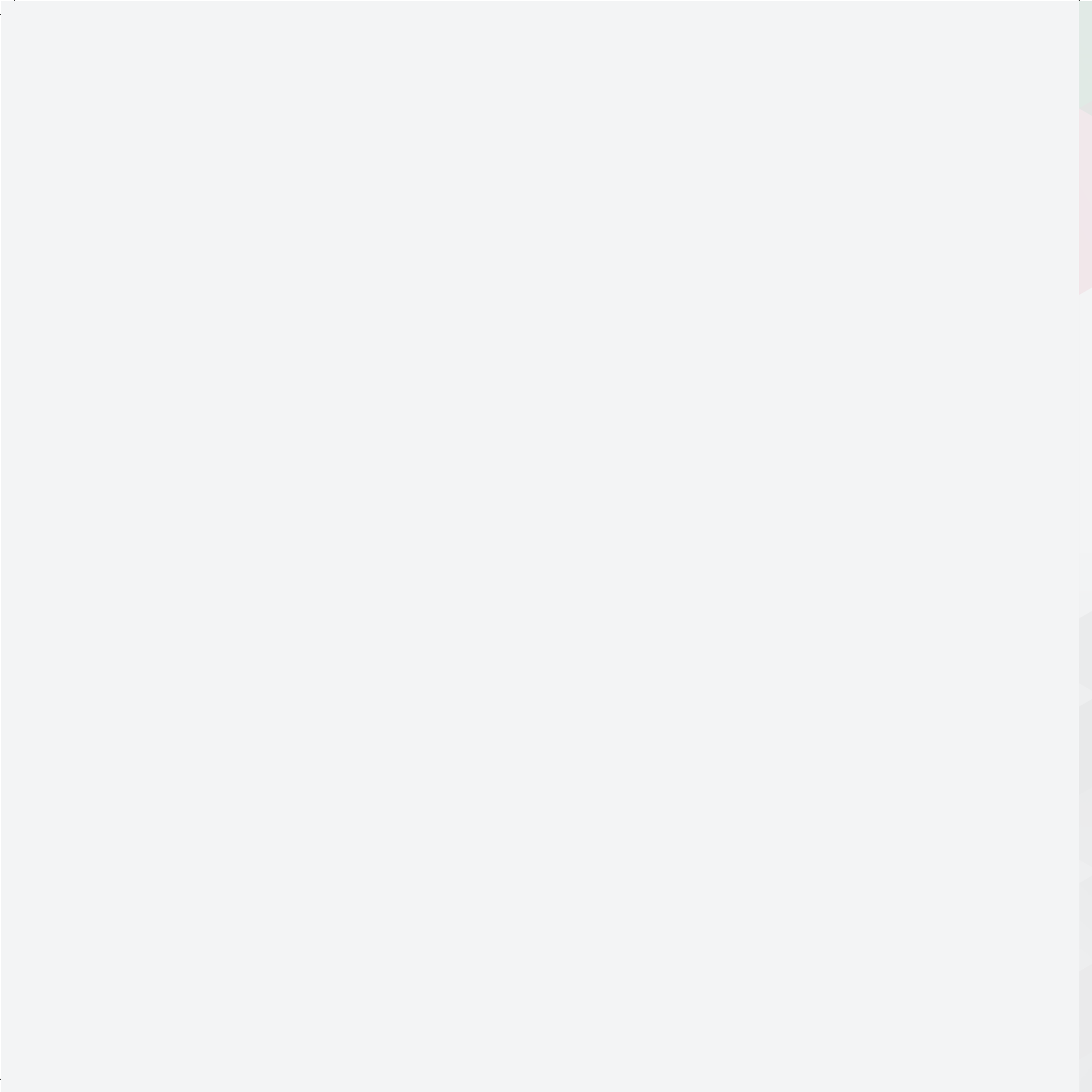
The Commonwealth Foundation was established by Heads of Government in support of the idea that the Commonwealth is as much an association of peoples as it is of governments. It is a unique, stand-alone multilateral organisation; it is funded by and reports to governments, which have given it a mandate to support civil society. The Foundation is dedicated to advancing people's participation in all aspects of public dialogue so that ultimately their quality of life is improved.

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Since 2012 the Commonwealth Foundation has focussed on building a culture of people's participation. We've been doing this by developing the capacity of civil society to play its part in making policy more relevant and making institutions more responsive. Here we provide a glimpse of the work we have supported and the impact that it has had.

The Strategic Plan for 2017-2021 builds on five years of achievement and further sharpens our work to amplify less heard civic voice. This theme is rooted in our practice and resonates with the global development agenda, which acknowledges open and accountable governance as the key to social progress.

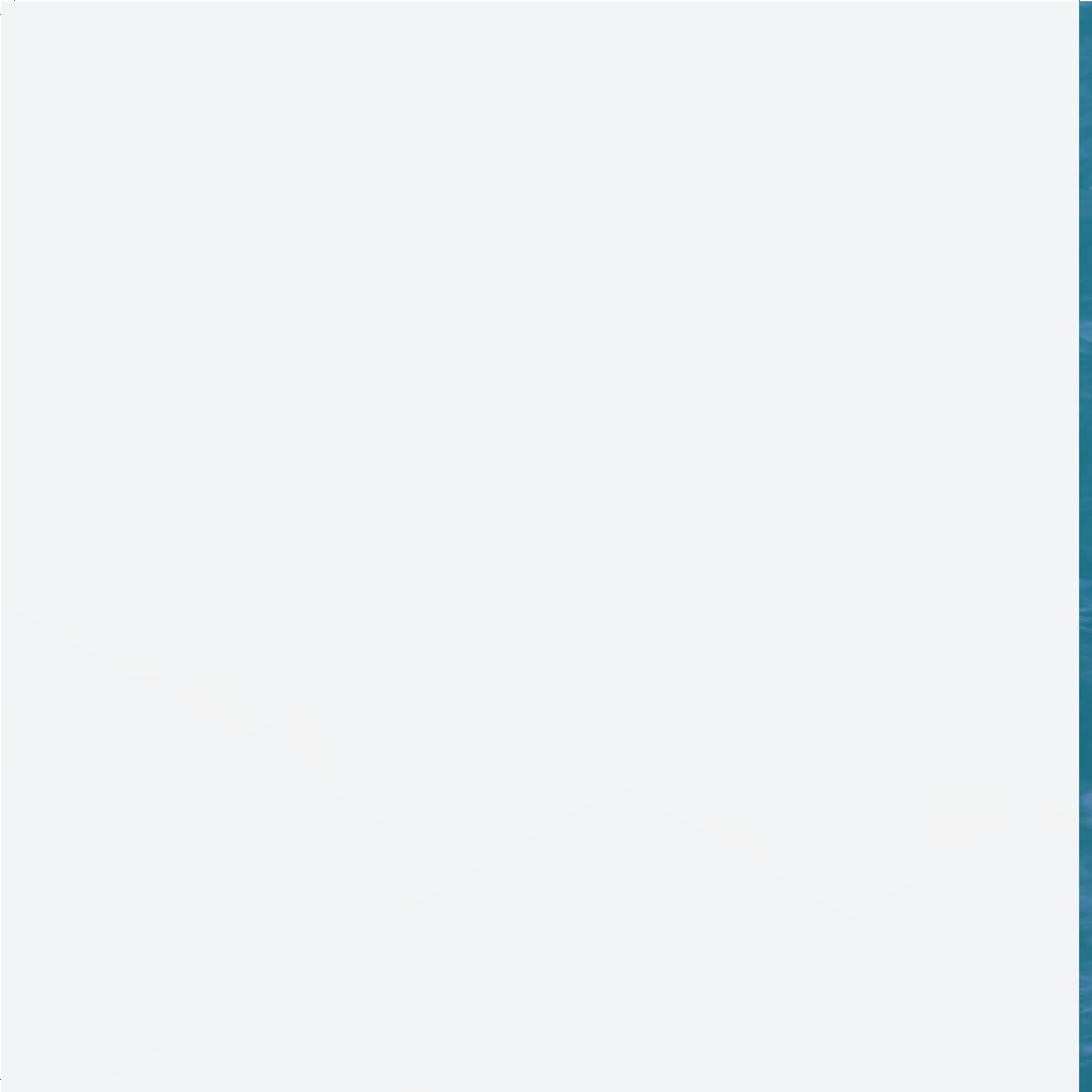
Our tagline is "More Voices for a Fairer Society" because we know that some are not heard and that achieving inclusive governance for development is a journey. Less heard voices can make a powerful case for change. Through our programmes and grants we walk with partners as they make their own contribution to sustainable development.

The insights included in this publication bring our ambitions to life. They show how bringing civic voice into contact with policy makers can improve policy for all. They show how cultural expression can improve our understanding of other people's experience. They show how institutions that are accountable are better suited to meeting people's expectations.

Welcome to the Commonwealth Foundation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Vijay Krishnarayan'.

**Vijay Krishnarayan**  
Director-General





## Oceania

*For Epeli Hau'ofa*

Karlo Mila

Some days  
I've been  
on dry land  
for too long

my ache  
for ocean  
so great  
my eyes weep  
waves

my mouth  
mudflats  
popping with  
groping breath  
of crabs

my throat  
an estuary  
salt crystallising  
on the tip of my tongue

my veins  
become  
rivers that flow  
straight out to sea

I call on the memory of water  
and

I  
am  
star fish  
in sea

buoyed by  
lung balloons  
and floating fat

I know the ocean  
she loves me

her continuous blue body  
holding even  
my weight

flat on my back  
I feel her

outstretched palms  
legs wide open

a star in worship  
a meditation as old as the tide

my arms, anemones  
belly and breasts, sea jellies  
Achilles fins, I become  
free-swimming Medusa

my hands touching  
her blue curves

fingers tipping  
spindrift

a star in worship

a wafer in her mouth

a five-pointed offering

she swirls  
counter-clockwise  
beneath me, all goddess  
all muscle, energy  
power, pulse

oh, the simple faith  
of the floating

letting go  
in order to be held  
by the body water of the world

some days  
this love  
is all I need

*Karlo Mila is a poet from the Kingdom of Tonga*



Our grants create  
opportunities for  
less heard voices

Being heard in a society  
that leaves no one behind

Masinga and Zibele,  
Children's Radio Foundation  
youth reporters host a  
discussion on stigma and HIV  
awareness.

© Luke Daniel, 2014 World AIDS  
Day celebration in Khayelitsha,  
South Africa.

## Young People Leading the Debate on HIV and AIDS



### Discovering new talent

- 70** Young people trained
- 45** Taking part regularly
- 17** Facilitators trained
- 3** Young people now on staff



### Amplifying unheard voices

- 10** Audio dramas produced
- 41+** Hours of air time
- 300,000**

Radio audience reached

In South Africa the Children's Radio Foundation is creating a space for young people to talk about health issues and empowering them to use their experiences to enhance community health services.

The Commonwealth Foundation supported project-led training in radio and reporting skills for young people to produce exciting, informative and entertaining broadcasts and events. Radio programmes featured music and poetry as well as debates on issues young people wanted to discuss. They had previously felt silenced by community pressure to not talk about HIV and sex.

"It's one part radio, one part performance, and that keeps drawing in a large audience," explained Michal Rahfaldt, Executive Director at the Children's Radio Foundation. "The project continues to be effective in working with young people to raise awareness on HIV and AIDS and reaching thousands of listeners. They're increasing the numbers going regularly to youth-friendly clinics for treatment and family planning services."

"85% of the young people attending the clinic were young women and girls but we've seen more and more young men coming to the clinic through the programme," explained Michal. "It's become a space where marginalised LGBTI young people also feel safe to contribute to the discussion and share their experiences."

### Discover More

To find out more about grants go to [commonwealthfoundation.com/grants](http://commonwealthfoundation.com/grants)

### Young people with HIV and AIDS influencing improvements in services and their delivery

#### Changing minds of staff and young people

Young people set the agenda about the issues that affected them. "In one show they talked about their fear of going to the clinic and how they were ashamed because everyone would know they were infected with HIV because the clinic staff would put a sticker on the patient files that indicated what they were being treated for," explained Michal. "So, when you saw the nurse come out into the waiting room and call in a patient everyone would be able to identify that they were being treated for HIV according to the sticker."

It was a simple barrier between young people and service providers and after they talked about it on air the nurses at the clinic quickly responded and changed their way of working.

Government support for youth-friendly services showed the trainees and their listeners how important it is to understand their rights and speak out about discrimination. The nurses and staff have changed during this project too and now listen seriously to comments about clinic times and the way services are delivered. People have seen firsthand the positive difference having a voice can have for everyone.

#### Enhancing knowledge and skills

Young people were the biggest recruiters for training and developing an audience. They used their own networks including peers, family members and schools. Understanding their rights was part of the training and a message that was continually repeated in broadcasts. "It had a ripple effect and resulted in an incredible mix of young people that had a lot to say and a lot to offer," said Michal.

Some trainees want to become journalists, one trainee is doing a film course and three of the young people who were part of the original group are now working for Children's Radio Foundation engaging new cohorts.

"They have become role models for other young people," said Michal. "It's empowering and enticing for young people to see that the leader of their group started off where they were. It gets them to understand they're not just participating in a one-off programme but there is a plan for progression that they can be part of." ■

## The Power of Stories

Commonwealth Writers, the cultural initiative of the Commonwealth Foundation, inspires and connects writers and storytellers across the world, bringing transformative stories to a global audience. We believe that well told stories help people make sense of events, engage with others and take action to bring about change. We are committed to tackling challenges faced by writers in different regions, working with local and international partners. We identify and deliver projects in Commonwealth countries, but our community is global.

*"We hear a lot about literacy and its importance... But we hear less about a literacy of the imagination, about how writing and its practice as an art and craft actually improves how we see and understand our lives and imagine better lives for ourselves. This is what makes Commonwealth Writers indispensable."*

**Fred D'Aguiar, 2015 Commonwealth Short Story Prize Judge**

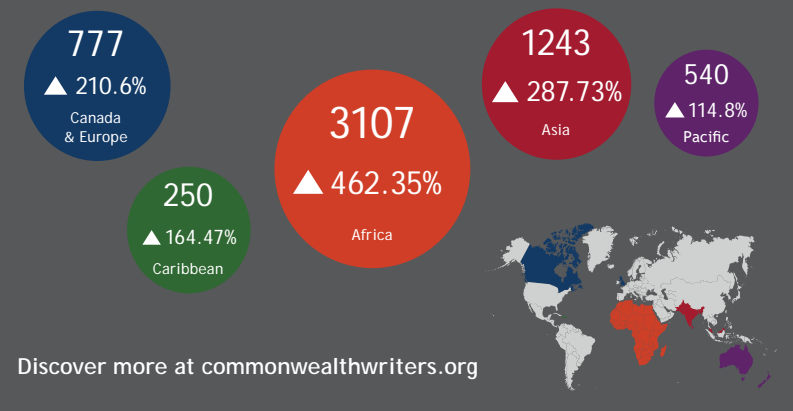
### The Commonwealth Short Story Prize

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize started in 2012 with the launch of Commonwealth Writers.

Free to enter and with a global reach across five continents, the Prize seeks out talented writers and stories from new and emerging voices. Entries often come from countries with little or no publishing infrastructure and from places that are marked by geographical, geopolitical or economic isolation. The Prize brings them to the attention of an international audience.

Emphasis is placed on reaching less heard voices outside publishing, academic and

### Commonwealth Short Story Prize Entries Increased by 3,822 Submissions from 2012-2017



other established networks, particularly in countries where stories are rarely given a global platform.

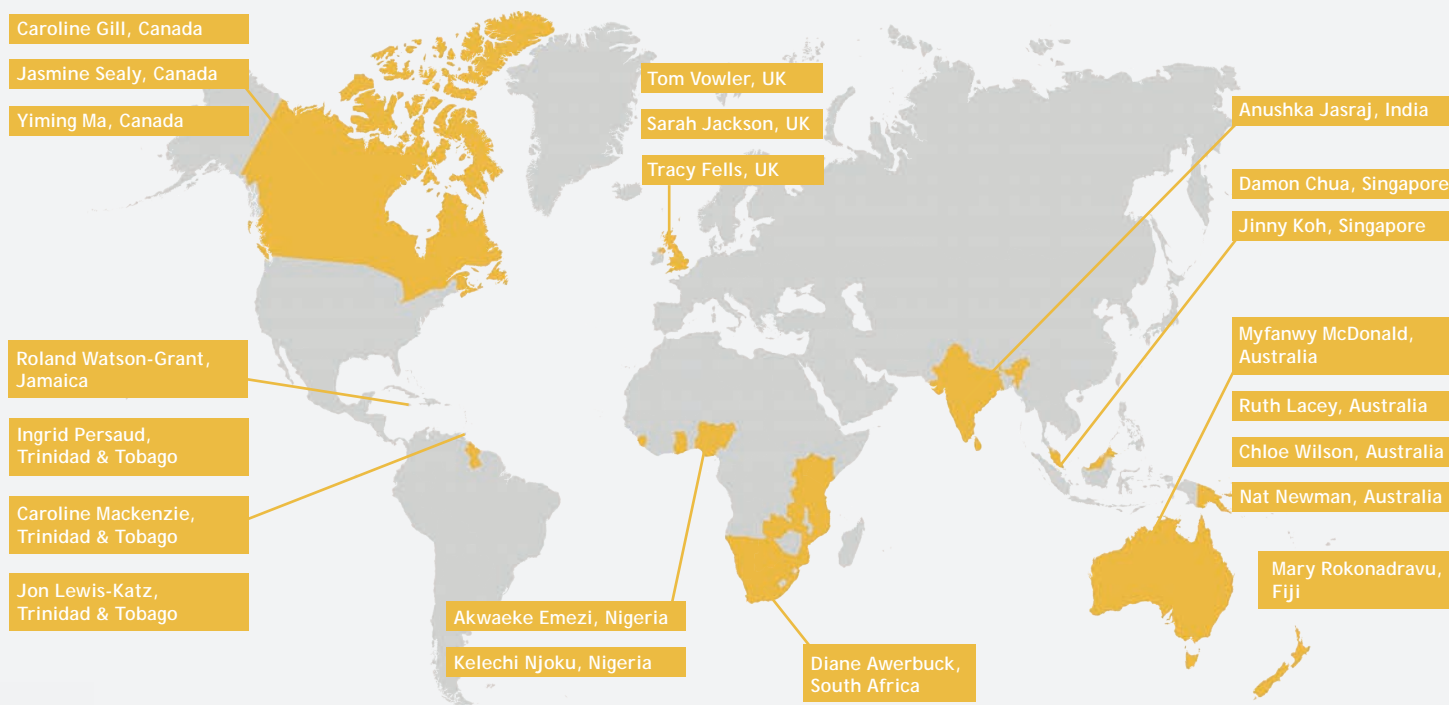
*"I am very happy to receive the Commonwealth Short Story Prize, which provides an inclusive, accessible and international platform for participation which is particularly helpful for new writers."*  
**Parashar Kulkarni, overall winner, 2016 Commonwealth Short Story Prize**

The Prize attracts thousands of entries each year and the figure is rising. Nearly 6,000 entries were received in 2017 (increased by 3,800 submissions from 2012) from 49 of the 52 Commonwealth countries.

The Prize has received support from the Sigrd Rausing Trust and the Jan Michalski Foundation for Writing and Literature, as well as benefitting from the partnership with the literary magazine *Granta* which publishes the regional winners each year. ■

*"These short stories will take you on a journey that spans cultures, eras, generations and diverse ways of being and seeing. To read them is to inhabit other worlds."*  
**Bernardine Evaristo, Chair, 2012, Commonwealth Short Story Prize Judging Panel**

## 2017 Commonwealth Short Story Prize Shortlist



Mary Rokonadravu.  
© Mary Rokonadravu.

### *Famished Eels* By Mary Rokonadravu

“ I grew up imagining the digging of little graves at the edge of sugar cane. In rain. It was always night rain, as if miscarriages or infant deaths only occurred in rain-drenched darkness. In childhood, I added details from Bollywood films to it: night wailing, tug-of-wars over linen-swaddled baby corpses. Murder. Narayana strangles his own children. He uses an old cotton sari. There was no photograph of him so in my mind he wore the face of the Bollywood villain Amjad Khan. Rewind a few years to the port of Calcutta and the ship that crossed the kala pani, the black waters, and he is Amitabh Bachchan. He was the designated toilet-water carrier on the

ship to Fiji - this much was whispered behind hushed curtains at home. At celebrations he is remembered as an astrologer, squinting his face at the heavens, reading palms on a heaving sea. He reads prosperity into suicidal hands, keeps men and women breathing until landfall. He has not created life yet. Nor ended any.”

Mary Rokonadravu from Fiji won the 2015 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for the Pacific region. In 2016 she received the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology's (RMIT) Writers Immersion and Cultural Exchange Fellowship. ■

Read the full story  
[granta.com/famished-eels/](http://granta.com/famished-eels/)

## Young Women Engaging In Local Governance In Pakistan

Aware Girls is an organisation that enables young women to train their peers to exercise their right to vote and become part of civic life in North-West Pakistan. With support from the Commonwealth Foundation, Peace Direct collaborated with Aware Girls encouraging young women in the conflict affected districts of Swabi and Mardan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to voice their opinion and improve their leadership skills to enable greater political participation.

**W**ithin the first year of the project 1,349 young women were inspired to vote for the first time and campaigned for women candidates in local elections. Many continue to campaign for gender equality and have become part of a national network of hundreds of peace activists making their voices heard on global issues; including preventing radicalisation and protecting the rights of people facing discrimination and violence from extremism.

"In Pakistan often the women who take part in politics are from politically influential families who are already part of parliament," explained Gulalai Ismail, who founded Aware Girls when she was 16-years-old with her sister Saba. "Usually, common women don't see themselves as part of the system and don't believe they can get elected because they don't come from an influential family and have little or no voice in the decision making processes."

### Young women as local leaders

"We provide the background support but it is the young women themselves who are the leaders and they tell us what support they need to improve their knowledge of the law and their opportunities. They're aware of their responsibilities as role models to reach out and mobilise other young women," said Gulalai.

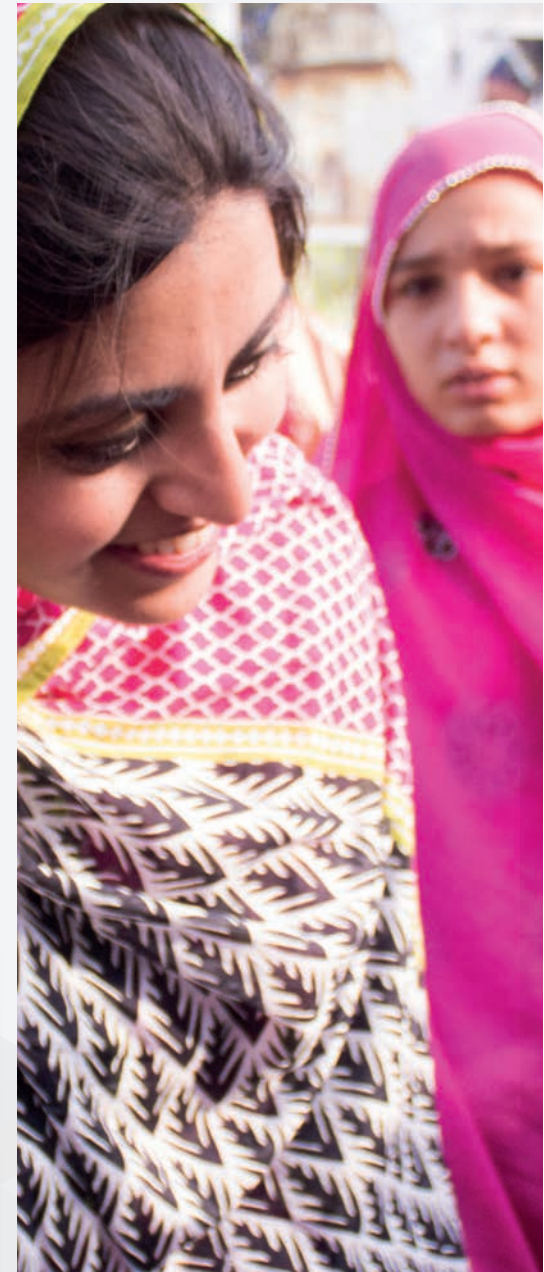
Aware Girls sessions use active learning processes designed to empower women. Simple actions, made without male help, like putting up banners or moving chairs for a meeting build confidence and leadership skills. Attending comes with a responsibility to share knowledge by cascading the training to hundreds of other young women in their communities and encouraging them to vote and be part of amplifying women's voices.

"Often the young women will work together to find a solution to their problems especially as many of their challenges come within their families," said Gulalai.

### Taking action and becoming role models

There were two five-day residential training days for 30 young women in each district as part of the project. "When I found out about this women-led organisation, Aware Girls, conducting training for women about their rights, especially political rights, I decided to join," said Salma Yasir a trainee from Swabi.

"Attending this training was a turning point in my life. When the local elections were announced for 30 May 2015, I submitted my papers for the reserved seats for women. I was appointed as the Village Councillor," said Salma.





Project training.  
© Dania Ali,  
Stars Foundation,  
Aware Girls.

### After training...

All of the training participants interviewed in Swabi and Mardan said that their knowledge about human rights in general and political rights in particular increased after the training.

Participants have engaged in peer education or holding community meetings. Some have helped women apply for identification cards to vote.

Four young women who attended the training went on to stand in local government elections and won.

### Holding policy makers to account

The project established Citizen's Committees in the districts of Swabi and Mardan; engaged with political party representatives; and ran radio campaigns led by young women to challenge views and inform the wider community on women's roles and rights.

Akbar Hoti from Mardan, a member of a Citizen's Committee, said "The Charter of Demands that we have created is a historic document and we will make sure it gets implemented. The Committees can do a lot if they want to bring about change, at individual as well as collective levels."

"Now the political parties are not only aware, but their local representatives have also committed they will address the barriers towards women's political participation and will not become part of any pact which prevent women from voting," said Gulalai. ■

### Citizen's Committees

Citizen's Committees are multi-sectoral local groups which include journalists, lawyers, civil society and representatives of political parties.



### Citizen's Charter of Demands

The Citizen's Committees conducted policy dialogues and collaboratively drafted a Charter of Demands on women's participation in party politics. This was presented to the major political parties.



### Paving the way for women's participation in politics

Based on the Citizen's Charter of Demands, two political parties established Anti-Sexual Harassment Committees at their district level office to ensure that women have a safe working environment.



## Influencing Policy on HIV and AIDS in Kenya



One of the trained partners under Commonwealth grant engaging with the young people on how to engage in public participation and governance processes at county level.

© Kelin Kenya.

Caroline Peres Achieng Oyumbo, a widowed mother of two boys was banished from her matrimonial home in Ragwe village on the slopes of Ngeri-Kisiambi hills in Homa Bay County, after she refused to be inherited as Suba culture demands.

KELIN, a human rights organisation supported 300 such cases in Kenya to ensure widows and orphans have access to justice. In the Suba community widows are often subjected to costly cleansing rituals, forcing them to have sex with a less privileged person, whose main duty is to cleanse widowed women before they are inherited.

With the support of Commonwealth Foundation, KELIN started working with paralegal teams so that communities could understand the law and be involved in governance processes. The case was settled using *Alternative Dispute Resolution* methods, which are a traditional justice systems recognised by the Constitution of Kenya. Money was transferred to Caroline's account, earmarked for her children's education. She was also allocated ten acres of land, and has been allowed to construct a house, contrary to the Suba customs where a widowed woman cannot construct a house unless she is inherited.

Based on a story by Kentice Tikolo

Before the project, Caroline would have been condemned to live alone for ten years in a rented house in Mbita town. "My case is not an isolated one," said Caroline. Her case was traced by Davis Ochieng, a Luo elder from Nthiwa, a member of the Mbita-Suba Paralegal Team, who had been trained on human rights issues through workshops organised by KELIN. Caroline has now joined the paralegal team, and has traced and supported the resolution of seven cases.

"We have come across several devastating cases where women in particular have been denied their right to own and inherit property based on cultural beliefs," said Allan Maleche, Executive Director of KELIN. "We also build capacities of village elders, church leaders, local administration officers and other respected members of the society, who have always helped us in bridging the gap between the victims of cultural practices and the community."

Peter Oduk a community worker trained by KELIN said, "we learnt how we can engage with budgets for health related issues or how to conduct public participation so that people can get involved in the legislative process. We have been called upon in the budget making process of the county. We have been able to voice our opinion in terms of the allocation for the health sector. We also have been able to have dialogue meetings with the County Assembly and county officials in regards to issues of health, specifically HIV and AIDS."

"You have to make the connection from the grass root to the top level," explained Allan Maleche. "It is important that service users in the communities know their rights but also that the people who provide the services know what's expected of them and know what their responsibilities are." ■



### Enhancing protection and rights of people living with HIV and AIDS (PLHIV)

The project covered counties with high HIV prevalence in Kenya, including Kisumu, Homa Bay, Kakamega, Bungoma, Mombasa and Kilifi.

- 6 County Consortia set up
- 56 County representatives trained
- 40 CSOs networks established
- 6 Public debates conducted
- 800 Handbooks given out

This advocacy work enabled more people from civil society to participate in debating and challenging current laws on the rights of PLHIV and AIDS and governance processes.



## Southern African Alliance for Youth Employment



Citizens UK is internationally recognised for organising communities to act together for power, social justice and the common good. They enable socially and economically disadvantaged communities in Britain and Ireland to better participate in society and promote more effective working of decision making institutions.

**citizens**<sub>UK</sub>

The Economic Justice Network (EJN) in partnership with the Commonwealth Foundation supported the establishment of the Southern African Alliance for Youth Employment (SAAE), providing a platform to national and regional advocates to raise awareness for youth employment.

SAAE's vision is a Southern Africa where young people have access to gainful and productive employment that enables them and their communities to be lifted out of poverty.

The alliance aims to play a coordinating and facilitating role for young people's networks working on youth employment. SAAE constitutes youth organisations from Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia. Alliance members are elected to a six member Working Group serving as the highest decision making body.

### Amplifying civic voices

The Alliance advocated for widening the involvement of civic actors in the region on youth employment policy with national and regional governance structures.

Irene Garoës from the Namibia chapter explained that for her SAAE is unique. "It is showing commitment to solving the problem as opposed to just talking about it or recognising it." She welcomed the efforts to involve young people in each of the region's countries to find holistic solutions to this common problem facing Southern Africa.



### Influencing decision makers

The Alliance has been recognised by the three main non-state regional institutions for civil society, the trade unions and the churches. "The major stakeholders of SAAE are the three sectors and ....it is not easy to bring together these three apexes to work together. So we are that link," said Rev. Malcolm Damon, EJN Executive Director.

### Learning exchange on winning campaigns

Every year the Commonwealth Foundation organises a Partners Learning Exchange to bring together civil society. It is an opportunity to share good practice and lessons learned in implementing projects. The 2015 partnership exchange was designed to facilitate interactive learning between SAAE and Citizens UK. During the exchange they shared knowledge to support the youth employment alliance in building its national constituency and developing its advocacy programme. ■

SAAE  
working group  
at Partners  
Learning  
Exchange  
© SAAE

## Making the Global Sustainable Development Goals Local



Namhla Mniki-Mangaliso.

© The Commonwealth Foundation.

The Africa Working Group (AWG) is a platform for a broad coalition of over 150 likeminded African civil society organisations committed to improving lives on the continent. The Commonwealth Foundation facilitated interaction between the Group and their counterparts in African governments engaged in finalising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN in New York in 2015.

Namhla Mniki Mangaliso, Executive Director of African Monitor, which acts as the secretariat for the Group explained that the coalition is unique, because it brings together different organisations and networks that want to make an impact in Africa by collectively amplifying their voices.

### Giving voice to Africa's aspirations globally and regionally

Namhla commended the Commonwealth Foundation for understanding the need to localise development. "The Commonwealth Foundation is a perfect niche. It gave the boost we needed to get going with

what turned out to be a fairly important relationship with the UN African Group."

Establishing the group has given members time to talk about the SDGs and co-create local solutions. "We want the lives of African people changed in radical ways," said Namhla.

At the time of the SDG negotiations there wasn't engagement between the UN African Group and African civil society. "In fact there was barely any presence of independent African civil society within the UN system," explained Namhla.

### Domestication of the SDGs in Tanzania and Cameroon

Being part of the SDG negotiations gave the AWG impetus. They returned to engage civil society leaders, presidents and ministers. The Group saw the need for a pilot programme to show how civil society could help translate the global goals into national policy and implementation. Tanzania and Cameroon were selected and the Commonwealth Foundation supported the AWG to learn from the results of what was happening in both countries.

"In Cameroon, government hadn't begun to think about how it was going to engage with stakeholders, so the process that civil society started ended up being endorsed by the planning ministry as a way of making sure that there was going to be multi-stakeholder engagement. In Tanzania, civil society set up an SDG platform and developed a monitoring and evaluation framework. The government decided to establish a multi-stakeholder forum, where government, business and civil society organisations come together to work on the SDGs. AWG members form part of the CSO coalition," said Namhla. ■

*"We are still faced with absolute poverty, huge unemployment issues and huge problems with governance. The SDG framework provides an opportunity within which that can change, but that's not going to change by having the right policies in place, it's going to change by implementation."*

*"What distinguishes the Foundation has been the ability to understand those organic processes and the willingness to listen to what would work. It fits in very well with their new strategy, which is around civic voices because it's about understanding the very many ways citizens can organise themselves, in order to improve governance and in order to improve democracy, not for its sake but to make real impact in the lives of people."*

**Namhla Mniki Mangaliso**

## A Gathering of Stories

### adda

In Bengali, adda describes an informal conversation that takes place at length; in Hindi it can be traced back to a 'perching spot', in Punjab it is a pit stop on long highways where travellers stop and exchange news. Put simply: an adda is a meeting place.

Read adda stories  
[addastories.org](http://addastories.org)

The work of Commonwealth Writers can bring about change: "through their commitment to tackling the issues in their communities, bringing attention to the backwaters. I still haven't got over the connection my adda story has provided to readers, whose geographic distances have made them emotionally distant from the happenings in the North [of Nigeria]." Ajinomoh Caleb, author of *Purple Voices*.

adda is Commonwealth Writers' online platform for unpublished fiction, nonfiction and poetry. Writers speak in their own voice, from their own histories, beyond the editorial appetites and dictates of the market. ■

"Today there are growing numbers of Ugandan refugees in Kenya. ... running away from home because of ... whom they choose to love." *Facing the Mediterranean*, Isaac Otdi Amuke



Socrates Mbamalu, illustration by Musa Omusi  
 © Musa Omusi

### Writer Isaac Otdi Amuke, CNN MultiChoice African Journalist 2016 Competition Finalist

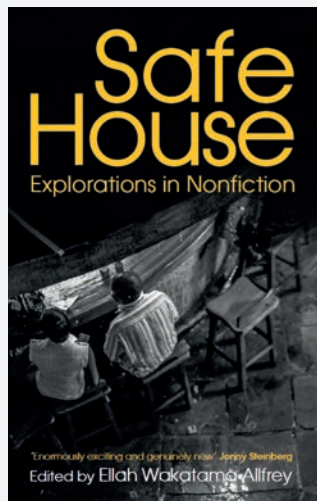
Nairobi based writer Isaac Otdi Amuke's first connection with Commonwealth Writers was through a nonfiction writing workshop in Uganda in 2014. His piece on Ugandan students in Kenya was subsequently published in the Commonwealth Writers' anthology of African writing, *Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction*.

Isaac has also written a piece for adda, *Sofia's Nine Lives*, about drug and human smuggling across the Kenya-Uganda border.

*Facing the Mediterranean* was first written for the Commonwealth Writers' website, gained international recognition and won Isaac a highly commended Features Award in the prestigious CNN MultiChoice African Journalist 2016 Competition.

### Speaking out about homophobia

In this story Isaac exposes the fears, hopes and aspirations of gay, lesbian and transgender Ugandans after the Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2014.



Published by Dundurn Press (Canada), and Cassava Republic Press (Africa and the UK). *Safe House* is one of a number of anthologies produced in partnership with publishers around the Commonwealth.

*Safe House: Explorations in Creative Nonfiction* is a collection of stories on contemporary African themes, including the movement of refugees, the Chinese presence in Africa, LGBTI concerns and the impact of the Ebola crisis. Unlike much nonfiction written about Africa, the writers featured in *Safe House* live and work on the continent, part of a growing number of African nonfiction authors.

"What I hoped to encourage [was]...a personal voice that allowed the writer to become a part of the story. The expression of such subjectivity requires a particular combination of confidence and vulnerability. In their individual expressions of this combination, the contributors begin to define a specifically African genre of creative nonfiction, one inflected by the geography and politics, the cultures and histories, of this continent," said *Safe House* Editor Ellah Wakatama Allfrey.

## Promoting Community Solutions in Urban Sri Lanka



Construction of new main sewer line in 248 settlement, Sri Sangaraja Mawath, Colombo.

© Reall (trading name of Homeless International)

**Community members are transforming local facilities in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with support from SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre, Reall and the Commonwealth Foundation.**

A widowed mother of five, Nona Bintam earns about 400 rupees a day (just under £2). Precariously Bintam has kept her family afloat for years. She has brought that determination to the role of Chairperson of her Community Development Council. Recently on finishing building a set of community toilets, Bintam painted the new walls herself.

The toilets are the result of a partnership between the Community Development Council set up by the project, the Colombo Municipal Council and the SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre. The community knew the toilets at Wekanda Road were always filthy and poorly lit. After addressing this, they added western style commodes for the elderly and showers with privacy. K. A. Jayaratne, President of SEVANATHA said, "It is clear people have the ideas and the initiative, but our system does not help them carry it out."

Based on a story by Smriti Daniel

Part funding came from the Sri Lankan government, with SEVANATHA imparting training and the communities leading the projects. "People have a certain feeling - they think this is their own project. They become the owners of it," said Municipal Treasurer, K D Chitrapala.

Community Development Councils and savings groups enable community cooperation, pooling of resources and engagement with authorities in planning settlement improvements. For the members of the saving scheme it is a safety net. Nei Sulfika Ahmed had turned to loans to pay for schoolbooks, medicines and utilities. She worries they will be evicted but the work of the Community Development Councils and the links with the Women's Bank bring hope. "I feel sometimes like I can do anything," she said.

Beginning in 2014, similar Community Empowerment Projects were rolled out in 40 underserved settlements by SEVANATHA. The project is timely as Sri Lanka's capital city is being reimagined. An estimated 77,643 families in underserved settlements await assistance with infrastructure and land ownership. The success of the Community Empowerment Project showcases solutions that could prove sustainable and cost effective alternatives for the future. ■

**20 Community Development Council across 6 districts of Sri Lanka set up**

Community Councils trained in

Financial management including bookkeeping



Managing a community based organisation



Land and housing rights



## Tackling the Spirit Child Phenomenon in Northern Ghana



Stopping the harming of 'spirit children'

12,266

Children and families reached

94

Concoction men, soothsayers and chiefs against it

275

Women's cooperatives taking part



Adija and Madu at the Feo Health Centre.

© AfriKids

Poor access to healthcare results in maternal deaths and higher numbers of children being born with conditions like cerebral palsy. In parts of Ghana children with disabilities or whose births concur with tragedies are sometimes labelled as a 'spirit child' and blamed for misfortune, resulting in abuse, neglect and infanticide.

To address the issue a project led by AfriKids, with support from the Commonwealth Foundation used local knowledge to engage with community leaders, families, schools, local services and government to raise awareness about the rights of children and generate solutions.

### Establishing a community dialogue

Improving engagement between community opinion leaders, government, health, law enforcement and education authorities was the first step. This soon led to leaders openly declaring the end of child infanticide in their communities and by-laws in local languages. "My people have declared that we will never kill a child as a 'spirit child'," said the Chief of Bongo.

The project created Child Rights Clubs with schools to improve children's knowledge of their rights through drama and debates. After engagement with the project team the police authorities and local government committed to taking action in future if the practice occurs.

### Providing better services for vulnerable children

Adija's son Madu [pictured] was paralysed on the left side of his body after a difficult labour. Adija believing Madu was a 'spirit

child' hid him but now gets counselling. Madu is making progress through physiotherapy.

Regular forums at the clinic bring mothers together for training sessions and give them the opportunity to share their opinions on what would be appropriate support for them and their children from health providers and government. Health screenings have been introduced in hospital and trainers promoted the importance of home visits by health workers.

It is difficult for the mothers to leave their children to go to work so some have received loans to start homebased businesses along with additional training and counselling to build levels of confidence so they can start their own businesses.

### Turning offenders into advocates

The project focused on changing behaviour rather than blaming people for practising inherited beliefs. The family of a 'spirit child' may have gone to a soothsayer to ask the ancestors whether the child is for this world or paid a concoction man to kill their child.

Training programmes with support from veterinary officers aimed to ensure reformed concoction men had the skills to care for animals, particularly goats as they'd previously received animals in return for dealing with 'spirit children'.

After training concoction men and soothsayers are speaking out against the practice. Soothsayers have stopped diagnosing children as 'spirit children' and are instead encouraging parents to attend local health centres. ■

## Fiction that Makes a Difference

*"Fiction makes a difference because it influences the reader. It influences the minds of human beings. The only thing that has ever caused a policy maker to change their mind has been the minds of ordinary people who have coalesced behind movements - that's what brought about change in the world. The way we tell stories is just this really powerful way of getting people to think about the things that matter to them through the voices of your fictional characters."*

**Diana McCaulay**

Jamaican writer Diana McCaulay's short story *The Dolphin Catcher* was the Caribbean Regional Winner of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize in 2012. Her recent piece for Commonwealth Writers, *Giving up on the earth*, is a call to protect Jamaica's natural environment.

### Submissions in other languages to the Commonwealth Short Story Prize

The Commonwealth Short Story Prize is open to entries translated into English.

Both the original writer and the translator are rewarded. The Prize accepts entries in a number of languages other than English, the best of which are translated and put before the international judging panel.

Entries at [commonwealthwriters.org/submit-an-entry](http://commonwealthwriters.org/submit-an-entry)

### *The Dolphin Catcher*

'Go home,' the old man said, but his voice was soft. 'Go home, pickney. After you 'ave school tomorrow. You mus sleep a nighttime.' He fired the engine and it caught first time and Lloyd stood on the beach and watched his grandfather's boat slide across the harbour - he would never catch the fast boat. What was done that night was done and the next day Lloyd heard that the captured dolphin had drowned and the dolphin men were angry and were threatening to find another group of dolphin catchers on another island.

After that, Lloyd's father stopped visiting his mother and his grandfather came around less often. 'Why Gramps staying away?' he asked his mother.

'Big man business,' she said.

'Bout di dolphins?'

'What you know 'bout di dolphin-dem?'

'I saw dem,' he said. 'Catchin dolphins. Gramps try fi stop dem.'

His mother kissed her teeth. 'Dat old man, mi swear sey him lick him head. So what if di tourist dem waan see a dolphin? So what if a man waan pay a money for a big fish? Ketch dem all, is what mi sey. How you tink your school book get pay for?'

'Dolphin not a fish,' Lloyd said.

'But hear dis now. Same stupidity. Don't dem live inna di sea? If you live in di sea, you is a fish. Go do you homework.' And then her mantra. 'As God a mi witness, you nah going end up a fisherman. As God a mi witness.' ■



Jamaican writer and environmental activist, Diana McCaulay.

© Diana McCaulay.

### Read the full story

[commonwealthwriters.org/the-dolphin-catcher-by-diana-mccaulay/](http://commonwealthwriters.org/the-dolphin-catcher-by-diana-mccaulay/)

## Energising Caribbean Regional Policy Engagement

Civil society has been looking for ways to formally engage in policy dialogue with the regional Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM). Policy engagement had been ad hoc and unsatisfactory for both governments and civil society.

In response, the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC) established the Caribbean Consultative Working Group (CCWG) with support from the Commonwealth Foundation to develop civic capacity for engagement. Between 2014-2017 a pilot project included civil society organisations in six countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago). The grouping chose sustainable energy as the focus for policy analysis and advocacy.



The project included workshops on advocacy skills and policy training, and researched sustainable energy. National consultations were held in each country at which government, civil society and the private sector participated. The consultations presented the results of the policy research; establish sustainable energy as an issue for civil society in the Caribbean; with the aim to shape public policy.

Hazel Brown with representatives from the Caribbean civil society discuss sustainable energy priorities for the region.

© CPDC

The process informed a proposal for a Regional Sustainable Energy Strategy which was submitted to CARICOM. CPDC is now participating in the CARICOM Caribbean Sustainable Energy Roadmap and Strategy.

Devon Gardner, Programme Manager for CARICOM Energy said, "The bottom line is, if it is that we are to shape energy strategy and policy and to deliver actions on the ground, we must know what it is that our people are prepared to do to meet their energy goals and objectives. And without civil society, that question can never be answered." ■



Man Booker Prize Winner Marlon James writes the introduction to *So Many Islands: Stories from the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Indian and Pacific Oceans*.

**COMMONWEALTH  
WRITERS**

### *So Many Islands*

An anthology of stories from the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Indian Ocean and the Pacific

Edited by Nicholas Laughlin  
Introduction by Marlon James and  
afterword by Sia Figiel

A vibrant collection of fiction, nonfiction and poetry, engaging with a range of human stories behind the reports and statistics of island life in the face of global warming and rising sea levels.

Published October 2017 by Telegram Books, Little Island Press and Peekash Press in association with Commonwealth Writers

To find out more about CCWG go to [commonwealthfoundation.com/project/ccwg](http://commonwealthfoundation.com/project/ccwg)

## Global March for Child Rights



Two children looking at temple lights.  
© Dick Verton

Global March Against Child Labour is supporting advocacy and legislative reform to address child labour in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

### Changing attitudes and taking action

With support from the Commonwealth Foundation, Global March worked with local partners to collaborate with and train Law Enforcement Agencies and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) on the rights of children. Discussions with the District Task Force in India resulted in raids on illegal placement agencies, which harboured and supplied trafficked children as domestic workers and for sexual exploitation. The project has changed the attitudes of police dealing with cases. For example, police use more sensitive and child-friendly practises when interviewing victims.

### Changing the law through advocacy

Across Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, civil society partners constructively engaged with policy makers and government departments. In India the local partner reported that, "Support from the Commonwealth Foundation helps sustain our widespread legislative advocacy efforts for systematic change and improvements in drafting and implementing existing laws for the protection of the basic rights of every child in the country."

In Bangladesh the Government approved the Domestic Worker Protection and Welfare Policy in December 2015. The policy addresses some of the key child rights issues and specifies the minimum age for employing a child domestic worker.

In Pakistan the Commission on the Rights of Children Bill was approved by the National Assembly Cabinet in July 2016. A shift in the attitudes of parliamentarians towards to the rights of children has been reported as a result of advocacy work.

The project also engaged with law firms to bring about legislative reform. After the training, local partners developed Public Interest Litigation in India, and for the first time in Pakistan. These represented children in court to advocate for their rights to freedom, fair wages and a life free from the fear of violence and abuse. ■

*"Public Interest Litigation is the most effective tool to deal with social evils as it can go beyond the letter of law and helps courts to set precedents."*  
Ms Geetanjali Goel,  
Director, National Legal Services Authority, India at the project workshop on legislative advocacy.

*"Whenever and wherever a society fails its children and young people, it fails itself... As we speak, around 160 million children are languishing in child labour. The world must listen to the voices of the young. They are rising up for freedom... We have to make the Commonwealth a Commonwealth free from child slavery."*

Kailash Satyarthi, Nobel Peace Laureate 2014 and Honorary President of Global March Against Child Labour, Commonwealth Day Observance 2016.



# Rural Entrepreneurs for Social Change in Pakistan



**350** Entrepreneurs trained including:

**31%** Adult women

**48%** Female Youth

**8%** Male Youth

HOPE International Development Agency in partnership with Pakistan Kissan Trust improved the livelihoods and basic rights of poor communities through rural entrepreneurship and social change.

## Mobilising community action

To increase collective social action to secure basic service provision and rights Pakistan Kissan Trust supported by the Commonwealth Foundation formed Community Action Groups (CAG). Made up of poor farming communities, members gathered monthly and successfully lobbied local government for improved community resources.

Group members helped 1,574 people (70% women) obtain Computerized National Identity Cards and helped register 450 births during the project.

## Fertile ground for entrepreneurs

Vulnerable CAG members were trained in income generating activities such as business plan development, production methods, marketing skills, record keeping and thereafter to set up small local businesses.

Based on their choice of business (ranging from embroidery to farming organic vegetables) entrepreneurs formed Common Interest Groups. Groups developed an operational plan for a small household or collectively owned business, shared ideas and were linked to other groups and market actors.



## Improving local services

The project also engaged with 55 other civil society organisations to form thematic networks. They organised consultations with government officials to identify strategies to help alleviate problems faced by rural communities, including food shortages, violence against women, lack of livelihood opportunities, market linkages, missing school facilities, and lack of healthcare. Five civil society networks launched campaigns focusing on vulnerable farmers' rights in the media. ■

Female farmer from Moza Akbarwala UC 49 District Jhang tending her kitchen garden.

© Pakistan Kissan Trust



**156** Businesses established including:

**10** Food processing units with 15 entrepreneurs per unit

**140** Small household businesses

**6** Sewing centres

**200**

Community Action Groups formed

**147** ..... Mixed gender CAGs

**53** ..... Female CAGs

**6,364**

Members

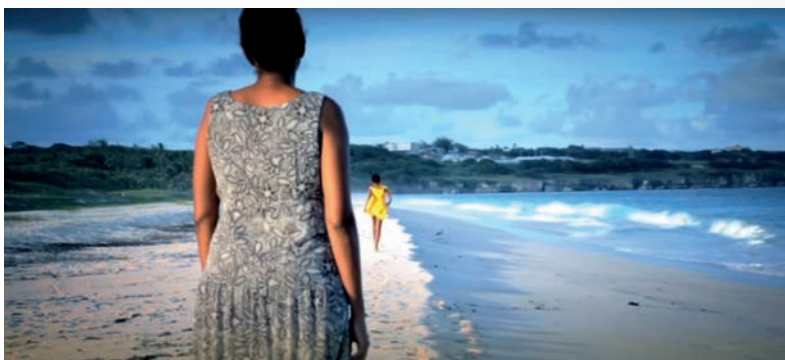
**62%** ..... Female

**51%** ..... Youth

**200**

Monthly CAG meetings held

## Short Film *Auntie* Tackles the Social Costs of Migration



Still from *Auntie*, by Lisa Harewood.

© Lisa Harewood.

### Film Inspiration

In 2013 the Commonwealth Foundation supported filmmaker Lisa Harewood's short film *Auntie*, a story about the impact migration has on a child left behind, which would become the inspiration behind an outpouring of tales in the Barrel Stories Project. Launched in 2015 the project has become an online platform for people from the Caribbean to share records and experiences about parental separation and migration at [barrelstories.org](http://barrelstories.org).

Lisa described the significance of the barrel, "I see the barrel as a way that people who have migrated maintain their links - it provides material support. But also that barrel is also a reflection of how well they are doing - and is a reflection of their emotional state...It really is a link between the home they left behind and the home they are trying to build in the new place."

### Award Winning

Melissa Noel's interview with Lisa for *Voices of New York* was one of the winners of the 2016 Global Media Competition. It was recognised for 'Breaking Stereotypes on Labour Migration' by the International Labour

Organisation in collaboration with the UN High Commission for Human Rights and the International Federation of Journalists. Noel said that Lisa Harewood wanted the Barrel Stories Project to not only be a tool through which people can share their stories, but also a resource to promote change.

"In all this, the space in which I have been most deeply affected is in the living rooms of the people who share their 'Barrel Stories' with me. It is there that I have seen the healing that can take place by empowering someone to tell their own story... They can, through this space, find similarities or find differences, find fellowship, find healing. It is also a place where people who have no idea about this particular aspect of the Caribbean experience can come and be educated."

"The Barrel Stories archive is an oral history archive but it is not meant to just be some place that you passively sit and listen, it's meant to be something that actually reaches out and helps to impact policy and parenting, as well as impact adults who have not talked about this before," said Lisa.

### International Screenings

*Auntie* went on to gain recognition globally. It has been screened at more than 25 film festivals and events around the world. Following the success of the film and the wider Barrel Stories Project, Lisa Harewood has been invited to speak at colleges and universities, where the film is being used as a teaching tool. She has participated in panel discussions and literary festivals, and presented at academic conferences.

"Commonwealth Writers supports projects on issues that may be controversial or not of interest to other kinds of funders, especially at the local level," said Lisa. ■

In the Caribbean when parents migrate, their child would be left in the care of others - a family member or trusted person in the community often referred to as an 'auntie' if they are female. During their absence parents who are financially able provide material support both in the form of cash as well as goods packed into barrels which are shipped to the region. The carefully selected contents of the barrel become a way to show love and care - whether household goods, school supplies, the latest fashions or foodstuff. Children who are parented in this way are sometimes referred to as 'barrel children'.



Barbadian film writer, director, and producer Lisa Harewood.

© Sophia Wallace

## Commonwealth Stories in Translation

"An exciting omen for the future of Bangla-language literature translated into English"

Leading Bengali translator Arunava Sinha believes that translation is becoming more and more important in a globalised world. "This voice (in another language) needs to be heard louder than ever before. So that the uniformity of literature is disturbed. So that readers know that stories are told in every corner of the world, stories very different from the ones they know, stories that can transport them to places they have never been," he said.

### *The Book of Dhaka*

Languages of the Commonwealth are many and varied, and stories from the vast majority of these languages are rarely translated into English. Commonwealth Writers is working with writers, editors and translators to bring more of these stories to a wider audience.

In partnership with the Dhaka Translation Center in Bangladesh, Commonwealth Writers ran workshops for emerging fiction translators



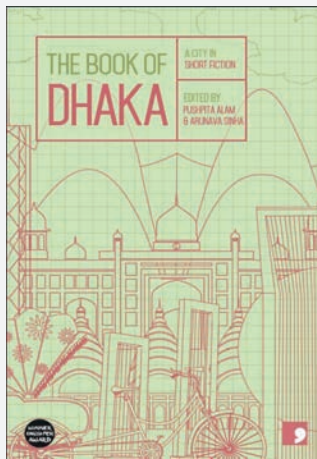
'The Capital' by Ayham Kazoun, illustrated by Vaishali Jain  
© Vaishali Jain

from Bangla into English in 2014 and 2015. Bangla is one of the world's most spoken languages with an active literary community, yet there is very little Bangla literature translated into English.

"Bangladesh, along with other Bengali-speaking parts of the Indian subcontinent, boasts a varied millennium-old literary tradition of which little is known in the outside world", said Kaiser Haq, director, Dhaka Translation Center.

This project culminated in the publication of *The Book of Dhaka*, which was widely acclaimed. *World Literature Today* wrote: "The quality of the translations and their editing is a testament to the quality of output from the workshops...These stories are as alive as the city they celebrate and describe. The *Book of Dhaka* is an exciting omen for the future of Bangla-language literature translated into English." ■

### *The Book of Dhaka: A City in Short Fiction*



An anthology of short stories about Bangladesh's capital city by some of the country's leading authors.

"This is a Dhaka seen through the fictional lens of writers who have lived through the city's ugliness as well as its sheer beauties...This book stands to reason that collaborative efforts can actually make a difference and bridge the gap between cultures and languages, between the east and the west." *The Dhaka Tribune*

Published by Comma Press, UK, and Bengal Lights Books, Bangladesh.

### Kiswahili-English Literary Translation Project

Commonwealth Writers is working with Soma Book Café in Tanzania on a Kiswahili-English literary translation project. Skilling up Tanzanian fiction translators and showcasing Kiswahili poetry and prose in a forthcoming anthology.

## Amplifying Voices for Gender Equality in East Africa



EASSI ED Marren Akatsa-Bukachi (holding a microphone) speaks at the launch of the EAC Gender Barometer supported by the Commonwealth Foundation

© EASSI

The Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI) monitors the commitments of East African governments towards gender equality. EASSI in partnership with women rights alliances in each East African Community member state, has been campaigning for a regional Gender and Development Bill.

The Bill aims to consolidate policies to advance gender equality in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres for the benefit of women and men into one legal framework. The Commonwealth Foundation has supported EASSI's advocacy on the Gender Bill by enabling interaction between EASSI and members of the East African Legislative Assembly.

Implementing those commitments requires governments to take a series of actions including formulating policies that remove gender based discrimination, guaranteeing women's rights, and providing the necessary

services for the realisation of these commitments. These actions require financial resources, institutional mechanisms and accountability frameworks that should be integrated in national plans and budgets.

### East African Community Gender Barometer

The implementation of the Gender Bill, demands work at both the regional and national level so EASSI has developed an East African Community (EAC) Gender Barometer. This tool has been developed to support decision makers nationally and regionally to gauge progress toward gender equality.

Citizens views on government performance are a fundamental component of the barometer that integrates the use of a 'Citizen Score Card'. The barometer offers evidence based information for holding governments accountable to their gender commitments.

### Regional engagement

The Commonwealth Foundation supported a multi-stakeholder dialogue on Gender Equality in Kampala in May 2017. Under EASSI's leadership the dialogue provided a space for civil society, government representatives from Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda as well as women's rights activists to interact on the findings of the EAC Gender Barometer. At the dialogue a government representative from Seychelles offered the SADC experience on the use of the barometer and spoke of how important the collaborative partnership to advance gender equality was. In addition five policy briefs based on identified gender priority issues were developed to include targeted policy recommendations on realisation of gender equality in the EAC. ■

*"The Commonwealth Foundation has been an invaluable partner in helping us create awareness and raise the profile of our campaign for an East African Community Gender Equality and Development Bill and the accompanying EAC Gender Barometer. Thanks to this support, the draft Gender Bill will soon reach the final stage for adoption by the East African Community. Thank you Commonwealth Foundation."*

**Marren Akatsa-Bukachi,**  
EASSI Executive Director

The Gender Barometer has been pioneered by Gender Links; a Southern African civil society organisation which successfully advocated to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for a regional gender protocol.

## Constructive Engagement: Mental Health Legislation Reform in Seychelles and Botswana

### Did you know?

Mental health legislation in 20% of Commonwealth countries was enacted prior to 1960 before modern medical treatments and international human rights conventions were available.

Due to project activities cabinet memorandum in both Botswana and Seychelles have accepted the assessment that existing legislation does not meet the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. They have supported the drafting of new mental health legislation.

Women suffering from mental health illnesses are at greater risk of violence, injury, abuse, neglect, maltreatment and exploitation. The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation with support from the Commonwealth Foundation aimed to protect women's mental health rights through advocacy for reformed legislation in the Seychelles and Botswana.

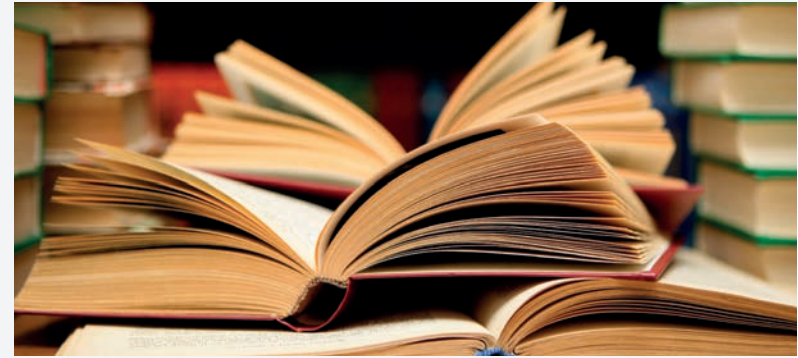
**M**ental illness is frequently stigmatised forcing people to live in denial and preventing them from seeking help when they need it. When they do seek help, they face barriers such as a lack of culturally appropriate services and information, and deprivation of their human rights.

### Changing the landscape through legislative reform

The risk to women is recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Research by Dr Soumitra Pathare in 2013 from the Indian Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy concluded that the specific needs and rights of women, adolescents and children were not being met by mental health legislation in many Commonwealth countries.

### Civic voices engaging on legislative reform

In Seychelles and Botswana, a National Mental Health Advisory Committee (NMHAC) was organised with the full support of



government. It brought together lawyers, policy makers, health practitioners, civil society representatives, people with mental health vulnerabilities and carers. Drafting instructions for a new mental health bill has been developed and endorsed in both countries. The instructions explain the issues the proposed legislation is intended to solve, the benefits and objectives of the new legislation as well as a description of how the proposed legislation will work. The Botswana and Seychelles governments have indicated their commitment to move forward and enact new legislation.

© Abhi Sharma

The NMHAC in both countries have committed to continuing to meet as formal committees to see the drafting instructions become new mental health legislation and are submitted to Parliament. They also intend to continue as committees to ensure implementation of the legislation. ■

## Defining Governance for Resilience

*"The term resilience has gained credence as a policy response to growing levels of insecurity, complexity and vulnerability in our everyday lives. Resilience is life."*

**Vandana Shiva,**  
Keynote speaker at CPF 2015

The Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) is a biennial event held prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. CPF 2015 was jointly organised by the host Government of Malta, civil society organisations and the Commonwealth Foundation. CPF 2015 critically explored policy-based actions under the theme: "What Makes Resilient Societies?"

CPF provides an opportunity for civil society to engage with Commonwealth leaders and debate key issues facing Commonwealth people. The diversity of civil society organisations across the Commonwealth offers invaluable opportunities for people to work together towards more equitable societies. CPF is an arena to share knowledge, good practice and shape the narrative of future policies.

Commonwealth People's Forum 2015 was attended by more than 330 participants from 44 countries. The main outcome was the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience and it was accompanied by 10 papers that were produced based on the discussions at CPF 2015.

Indigenous knowledge  
as a driver of  
resilience

Climate resilience  
in small states

Cultural responses to  
conflict

Small states and the  
green and blue  
economy

Migration and  
resilience

Women, agency  
and responsive  
governance

Planning for resilient  
urbanisation





## What makes societies resilient?

Engaging with  
**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and  
Transsexual and/or Intersex  
Policy: Issues and Challenges**

Transformative education and sustainable  
development in small states:  
**Building resilience through  
skills and livelihoods**



“Transformative education - not a degree - is needed to prepare citizens to find solutions.”  
CPF 2015 participant, *Commonwealth Insight on Transformative Education and Sustainable Development in Small States*.

“We are not free until each and every one of us is free.”  
CPF 2015 participant, *Commonwealth Insight on Engaging with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual and/or Intersex Policy: Issues and Challenges*. ■

From left to right:  
Commonwealth  
Foundation Insight  
Papers: CPF 2015  
series.

CPF 2015 launch  
with Sir Anand  
Satyanand,  
Commonwealth  
Foundation Chair,  
2012-2016

© Commonwealth  
Foundation

## Starting Young for Inclusive Governance



Students from Bon Air High School and El Dorado East stage a spirited Mock Council debate.

© CALGA  
Trinidad &  
Tobago.

The Caribbean Association of Local Government Authorities (CALGA) is encouraging young people to get involved in civil society.

With Commonwealth Foundation support CALGA aims to promote democratic principles and public ethics with young people. Cultural Activist Rubadiri Victor who designed the training model and manual for the project explained they're co-creating opportunities for secondary school students to speak, debate and develop leadership skills by presenting ideas to their newly formed student councils or engaging with councillors in their chambers.

"One of the first things we work on is letter writing and communications," said Rubadiri. "Students write letters to their school principal and then to local government about issues in their communities. The young people often have very different ideas on what needs to be done and the councils have committed to listening to their solutions."

"Our young people want to do something. They're the future leaders of government and are holding their principals to account. They're finding their voices and creating

the model of how young people can be part of democracy in the Caribbean. They've delivered lists of demands and complaints to local governments councillors," said Rubadiri.

### Young voices in the community

Opening up access for young people to their school and local government has created an environment that is more responsive to having a dialogue with students in the development of policy and delivery of public services. Many young people are attending council meetings to engage with councillors on public markets, road safety, and public facilities such as toilets, water fountains and water quality.

Learning about the need for sustainable development whether debating human rights, gender equality or cultural diversity is built into the programme. At a meeting with young people at New Amsterdam Town Hall in Guyana the Town Clerk Merlyn Henry said; "the involvement of youth in local government system and community governance is extremely important today to sustainability and democracy."

### Young voices online

Young people in the Caribbean are finding new ways to be heard, aided by access to information and social media. The project's Facebook page shows the level of engagement. Photos and videos of events, songs, drama and extracts from their letter writing campaigns make a rich mix of civic activity. ■



Training a new generation

610 Students trained

57 Trainers involved



## Raising Carers Voices in India

**1,500+**

Carers positively impacted through training for home-based work, like goat rearing and tailoring.

97% of carers in India are women who often work without pay to look after a family member with a chronic illness or disability at the cost of their own health, education and livelihood. Carers Worldwide with support from the Commonwealth Foundation is advocating for social provision and protection for India's carers.

“This project is creating the first opportunity for carers to come together, be seen and make their voices heard. It's a huge step forward for this vulnerable group who, until now, have been unrecognised by their communities and wider society,” explained Anil Patil, Founder of Carers Worldwide.

### Facilitating peer support

The project supported district level Carers' Associations, allowing people to communicate with peers and giving them a platform through which they can make their issues known to development and district government agendas.

“The carers group is a safe space for me. Previously, I was lonely and isolated. Now I have the chance to discuss my personal problems with people who really understand,” said a member of Carers Group in Chakralla village. They also learned advocacy skills, to allow them to participate in their own development.

### Government support for Carers

Through the project 443 carers gained access to government schemes such as financial



support for income generation activities and received government supported livelihood training compatible with caring. In addition, carers under the project have received medical insurance for people with disabilities which means carers no longer pay for health care.

For women like Sudhamai who cares without any source of income the group has been a lifeline. “Recently I had problems with finance, so I borrowed money from the support group to start my own homebased business,” she said.

### Changing policy for carers

Carers Worldwide has been invited to work with the state government of Karnataka to formulate the guidelines on implementation of India's new Disability Act, which will improve standards of health and wellbeing of carer givers too. Carers Associations are working with over 100 organisations to develop a national strategy to secure support for carers. Local partners are advocating for a national movement for carers wellbeing. ■

Gyanamma and her son Naveen, aged 3, who has cerebral palsy.

© SAMUHA Samarthyaa

*“The project is working small miracles in the village. Like a drop of ink in a bucket of water which changes the whole colour. Long may the ink drops last.”*

Anil Patil, Founder of Carers Worldwide



In March 2016, my colleagues and I sat under a tree in a village in Northern Ghana with women farmers sharing their experience in interacting with their local council on issues they face. A year later in May 2017, we found ourselves in Geneva facilitating a policy dialogue between civil society and policy makers in the health sector, in advance of the Commonwealth Health Ministerial Meeting. Two instances worlds apart in geography and time, but not in spirit.

In support of civic voice, the Foundation navigates the terrain we know as governance, at different levels. The stories gathered here give readers a sense of the range of civic participation in governance across the Commonwealth. It highlights meaningful lessons derived from reform work and how creative expression, through our programme Commonwealth Writers, continues to inspire.

As we begin a new strategy period, the Foundation with its partners will continue to engage in a deeper understanding of country-specific governance systems, policy choices and ways by which these policies are executed, implemented and inform the functions and functioning of the system.

The terrain of policy reform is arduous and its fabric complex. The Foundation with its partners is convinced that the key thread at the heart of governance is civic voice, as it engages collectively in policy processes and hold government to account to its national development plans, its adherence to and ratification of internationally agreed conventions, treaties and agendas such as SDG 2030. The many ways civic voice, those less heard, can inform and influence public discourse. This we call the People's Commonwealth.

The Foundation and its partners look ahead to the next four years, with an effervescent audacity to amplify civic voice - women's and those of all people in their diversity - in support of an inclusive and fairer Commonwealth. Now more than ever...

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Myn Garcia'.

**Myn Garcia**  
Deputy Director-General



## Do you have a **story** to tell?

Well told stories can help to reveal the world, enrich our experience of it and imagine how to change it.

**The Commonwealth Short Story Prize**

Read more stories and find out how to enter at [commonwealthwriters.org/our-projects/the-short-story/](http://commonwealthwriters.org/our-projects/the-short-story/)

## Looking for **support?**

Commonwealth Foundation Grants are for projects that contribute to effective, responsive and accountable governance.

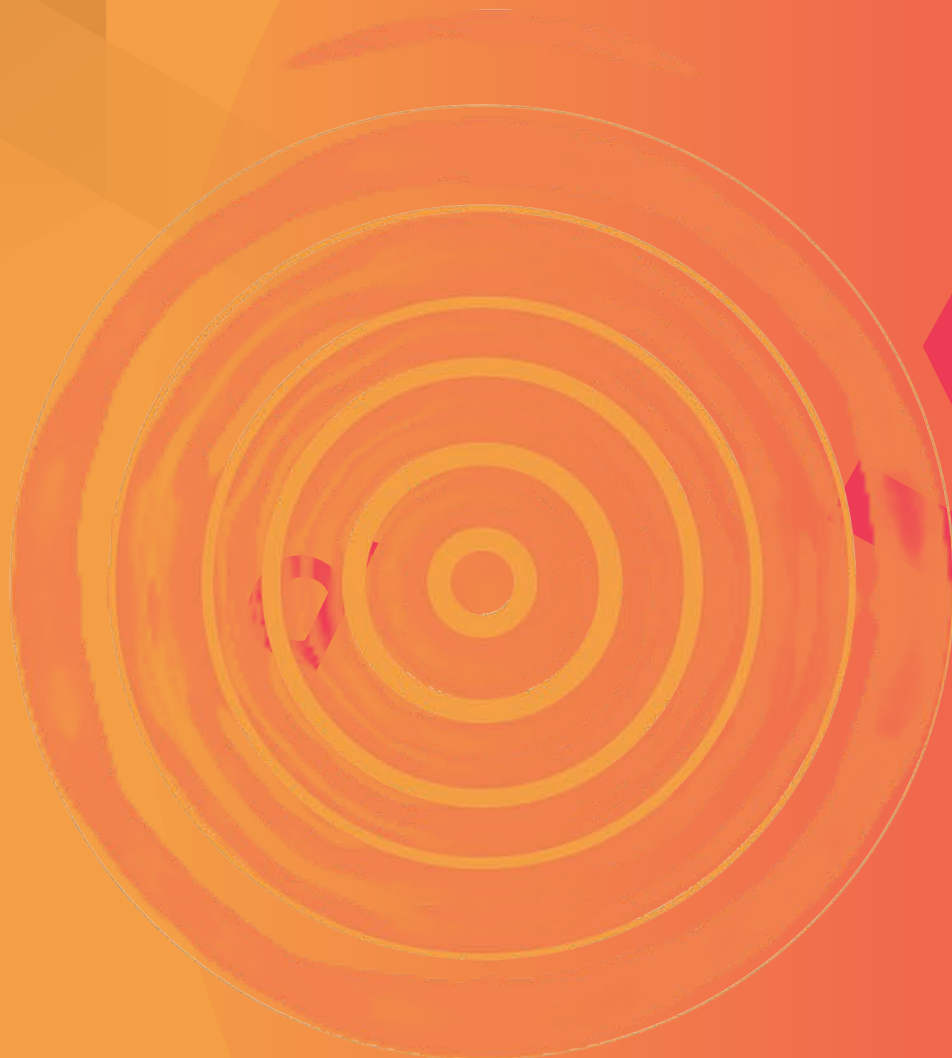
We make grants to civil society organisations for multi-year projects that strengthen civic voices in Commonwealth member states.

Find out more at [commonwealthfoundation.com/grants/](http://commonwealthfoundation.com/grants/)



Commonwealth  
Foundation

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