The Commonwealth of Values

Conversations with The Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma

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1. VALUES-DRIVEN ORGANISATION

“We now live in a global society with a plurality of alliances and ever increasingly complex patterns of trade, migration and communication. Unlike the certainties in the economic and political alliances in the Cold War, the twenty-first century is one of fluid alliances, and changing dimensions in regional and global dependency. The old world was one of power alliances – of the Hobbesian zero-sum gain realpolitik. We now face a more complex panoply of allegiances and players. Non-state actors, business, media, civil society have all developed transnational reach to influence international responses to global challenges. Professor Anne-Marie Slaughter... has turned her attention to this new world order saying it is neither an international system of nation states, nor is it a clique of NGOs. The global system is a complex web of networks – it is a networked world order. In moving from the Cold War, we have shifted from a hierarchy of power alliances between governments to an array of networks of power.

For individuals, particularly those in developing countries, the new world can provide both exciting opportunities and present – to some – a frightening scenario that threatens marginalisation. It is easy to understand how individuals feel disempowered in the complexity of the new world... For many, the multiple opportunities that a world with lower national boundaries offers are overshadowed by a sense of powerlessness... Our challenge at the Commonwealth, as a global community, is to bring the values and principles of the new global order to our citizens... Having responsive and inclusive solutions to global challenges relies on strong global governance... In stepping up to address global challenges, the Commonwealth can continue to evolve as a modern and flexible organisation for the advancement of common ideals and the goals of democracy. We do so not only in promoting our values within our member states but also in promoting an international system that is anchored in values – international governance built on the principles of legitimacy, responsiveness, representativeness and accountability.’ (Sharma 2010a)

So shared His Excellency (HE) Dr Kamalesh Sharma, the fifth Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, before a captivated crowd assembled in the Auditorium Jacques-Freymond at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, Switzerland, on 1 March 2010. It was his second address at the institute, the first having been delivered 21 years earlier. Over those two decades, Sharma, a stalwart of the Indian Foreign Service, had pursued a most distinguished international career that culminated in two of the most prestigious postings to which an Indian diplomat might aspire, first at India House and then at Marlborough House in London. He had served as India’s Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, to the German Democratic Republic, to Kazakhstan, and to Kyrgyzstan, and as India’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Over the 1990s, he was also involved closely with the process that led to the formulation and adoption of the Millennium Development Goals. Thereafter, he was the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General to East Timor from 2002 until 2004, before being appointed the High
Commissioner of India to the UK from 2004 until 2007, before being selected to serve the Commonwealth as its Secretary-General in 2008.

It was during his time as High Commissioner in London that Sharma also served as a member of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation, both of which were based at Marlborough House. It was over this period that he represented India at the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) meetings in London in February and November 2005; and led the Indian delegation at the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting (CFMM) held on the eve of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November 2005. Thus, Sharma was neither a novice unfamiliar with the rules, ways and networks of the evolving world of global governance, nor was he a stranger to the large family of nations and associations in the Commonwealth. His speech in Geneva, entitled ‘The Commonwealth and Global Challenges’, outlined his vision for the Commonwealth and aptly devoted sufficient time to ‘values in a multi-faceted international context’, an overarching theme that would drive much of what Sharma would seek to achieve over his eight years in office.

In his 2010 paper on the role of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Stuart Mole, a former Director of the Secretary-General’s Office under Chief Emeka Anyaoku and also a former Director-General of the Royal Commonwealth Society, identified serving as the guardian of Commonwealth values as one of the four key functions of the office. The other three functions he identified were serving as the motor of Commonwealth consultation, as chief executive of the Commonwealth Secretariat and as protagonist for the Commonwealth (Mole 2010). Indeed, each Commonwealth Secretary-General, on assuming office, has sought to establish or clarify what the values of the Commonwealth are and ensure it moves forward as a values-driven organisation. It was during the tenure of the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith, that the Commonwealth Heads of Government, assembled at the Singapore CHOGM of 1971, issued the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles that first set out the core political values that would underlie the Commonwealth’s membership criteria. In doing so, they ensured that the Commonwealth was not simply an enlarged vestige or a more inclusive successor of what once was an old Empire club, but that it would be primarily a values-driven organisation relevant to the present and the future. Indeed, this vision would also shape the contributions of the second Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath Ramphal, both in his efforts against the racial politics in southern Africa and in his efforts to transform the Commonwealth’s identity to an international body, aligned with ‘the pursuit of man’s highest purposes’, that would serve as a ‘global asset in the world’s search for a new way forward’ (Ramphal 2014, pp.250–2).

Likewise, the third Commonwealth Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku, on being selected for the role, pledged, in his acceptance statement at the Kuala Lumpur CHOGM in 1989, to use all the energy and resources available to him to work towards ‘a Commonwealth whose actions will foster its values’ (Anyaoku 2004, pp.128–9). It was during the tenure of Anyaoku that the Heads gathered at the Harare CHOGM in 1991 adopted the Harare Declaration, which authorised the Commonwealth Secretary-General to make the pursuit of democracy and good governance key priorities in his agenda, bolstering his role as champion of Commonwealth values. Together, the Singapore Declaration and the Harare Declaration constituted the most important documents in the Commonwealth’s uncodified constitution; and they publicly emphasised the values-driven nature of the organisation. The fourth Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don McKinnon, counted among his greatest successes the use of his good offices as Secretary-General to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Although Anyaoku ought to be credited for bringing good offices to the fore, it was under McKinnon that good offices grew to be better regularised. It was also under McKinnon
that the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group, which was established to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare Principles, assumed greater form and substance. The memoirs and other writings of the first four Commonwealth Secretaries-General offer a more thorough and insightful overview of how each strove to bolster the role and perception of the Commonwealth as a values-driven organisation.

The fifth Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, assumed office particularly conscious of this role as guardian and champion of Commonwealth values. In his address to the 54th Annual Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, hosted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 5 August 2008, he outlined his agenda for the Commonwealth in terms of defining, embodying and promoting its values:

‘It has been a rich and intense baptism into the Commonwealth – its political reach, its practical impact, its role as a trusted partner. My vision for it continues to develop. It will build upon the existing pillars of Democracy and Development, which alliterate just as well to Governance and Growth. Governance continues to be a core Commonwealth strength, with our superb track record in strengthening democratic processes and institutions. Growth will be the biggest determinant of success, and where we judge it evident in two particular groups of society – women and young people – then we will know that it is real.

But we envisage a third ‘G’ as part of our vision for the Commonwealth, and that is Globalism. Globalisation is a phenomenon; globalism is a positive orientation towards this compressing world. We are part of a compacting world, in which change is unstoppable, and so, too, is the imperative of integration. The good effects of trade, culture and technology now cross borders as easily as the ill effects of disease, climate change and environmental degradation or terrorism. Global economic phenomena embrace all, whether they are rising energy or food prices, or financial turbulence. The Commonwealth belongs to that world – indeed, it straddles it. It must believe that it can help influence and shape it.

Perhaps my greatest wish for this organisation is that it becomes ever more globalist in its outlook, in keeping with the globalisation of our collective lives. Heaven forbid that it looks in on itself, as a boutique organisation. We can pursue our enlightened goals in alliance with more people who recognise our credibility, reach, global commitment and exceptional pedigree. We can find new partners in governments beyond our membership, in different inter-governmental bodies, in Foundations or the private sector. We can see our models of best practice used far beyond our own confines. Everything about the world that we live in, and the attributes that we ourselves bring to it, decree that we should continue to look outwards, and to invest our huge access and our own authority, for even greater causes.’ (Sharma 2008a)

Towards the end of his second term, he shared:

‘The Commonwealth is often described as a values-based organisation. The utterance that it is so would be a truism bordering on banality – don’t all organisations like to describe themselves as values-based? – were there not to be a vital, formative and driving truth about it. The Commonwealth is a values-based organisation in a special way. In one respect, its declared goals are not much different from those of many other organisations. It is the way the Commonwealth embodies these shared aspirations, which sets it apart. It is not easy to nail it in any pithy way. It resists encapsulation and seeks elaboration. Although almost a truism, it is not often appropriated how this essential quality of the Commonwealth, which
draws other countries to it, expresses itself. The way it is generally perceived is that it should be more of a troubleshooting organisation. But it works in deeper ways.

In almost all public encounters, an exchange on the colonial pedigree of the Commonwealth becomes inevitable. Was it a residue, an afterthought, a consolation prize, or – as a vocal media critic of the Commonwealth framed it – a “phantom limb” of empire? The Headship of the Commonwealth by the Queen, and the exceptional support from the Palace and the British Government were the case in point. I abjured any suggestion that these were matters of optics and of a British desire to support the royal connection with the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has a high degree of comfort in retaining the Queen as its Head. Furthermore, through its existence, the Commonwealth has grown in an organic way, with mostly newly independent British colonies progressively expanding its membership.

After all, the diversity of the Commonwealth embraces the world’s biggest democracy and the largest countries and economies of all regions, as well as many of the world’s medium-sized and smaller states. It has representation within the industrial G-7, a quarter of the world’s leading economies in the G-20, BRICS, the group of emerging economies, groups of small island developing states as well as micro-states, and the group of landlocked nations. Asia, Africa, the Americas, the Pacific, the Caribbean and Europe are all represented. This makes the Commonwealth a template of the whole world. If this world’s variety feels that the time has come for an idea, it is already potentially a global idea. The Commonwealth does what it can do because of what it is. It’s thought leadership carries a special authority because of the representative weight of the human community behind it.

But the respect Commonwealth action enjoys derives from more than its geographical spread. It springs from its demonstrated ability to create a common ground of values on which all its members stand despite this variety. In its ability to do this, it asserts a deeper vein of shared humanity which reconciles these differences in a higher and shared aspiration. The diversity of the membership of the Commonwealth has a crucial working on its world view. It is an organisation which believes implicitly in the indivisibility of the human community. The origins of the modern Commonwealth are both implausible and inspirational. When the founders of the United Nations met in San Francisco in 1945, they had as an aim to create an international organisation. When the founders of the Commonwealth met in London in 1949, they did not seek to create an international organisation: they were recreating a colonial family at the dawn of the approaching era of decolonisation.

The task for this fell primarily to the Prime Ministers of India, Pakistan and Ceylon, which had just then emerged as independent countries. Of these, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the destiny of the reborn or stillborn modern Commonwealth lay in the hands of Nehru. A successor Prime Minister from an opposition party who strongly opposed India joining the Commonwealth at the time, as a young legislator, told one of my predecessors at a CHOGM that it was only decades later that he appreciated the wisdom of Nehru. I have long held that the handful of people who created the London Declaration, which created the Commonwealth, enacted one of the greatest acts of statesmanship of the twentieth century. The modern Commonwealth straddled the old and the new. It allowed that which was frictional with the colonial past to be consigned to history and for emerging nations to work with commonality they shared through this history.

In the way it progressively expanded its membership as newly-independent countries emerged, it served immediately to internationalise even the smallest of states, which would
otherwise have found it difficult to rapidly consort with larger states from all parts of the world on an equal footing. In a CHOGM Retreat, leaders from the Caribbean and the Pacific give their world view, and those from some of the largest countries and leading economies globally listen. Beyond their regional context, these small states would find no other intimate setting to enable this, certainly not in the United Nations. It is the Commonwealth which gives the small states the confidence and self-belief of being members of a world community of leaders. This is no small service to them.

Two months after taking over as Secretary-General, I spoke to some leaders of the need to proclaim this Commonwealth credo independently at the highest level to aid seminal advocacy work of the Secretariat. In mid-June 2008, we convened 11 Heads of Government in London to establish a Commonwealth position on rethinking and reforming global institutions. I stressed that, first, we seek a UN, World Bank and IMF which are equal to the expectations of a speedily transforming world. Second, we seek a new system of global environmental governance. We believe it was a ground-breaking event, founded on three quality research papers which were acute in diagnosing problems and offering remedies. This was the only occasion when the Heads had met in a mini summit, even if a representative one, apart from the regular meetings of the Heads, barring one called in the specific context of the question of South Africa.

It was anticipated that when Heads of Government met again in September, the weight of the 11 in arguing for global change should become the weight of 53. Indeed, the June 2008 Marlborough House Statement on Reform of International Institutions was adopted by Heads of Government at a special meeting in New York later in 2008, and came presciently ahead of the most profound downturn in global economic activity in recent history. It provided a shared approach to underpin positions taken by individual Commonwealth members in the debates of other international fora, on addressing the crisis and on reform of international financial institutions, international environmental governance and the United Nations.

Since 2009, the principles contained in the Statement have been validated and reflected in several global initiatives. At its Seoul Summit in November 2010, the G20 committed to strengthening the legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness of the IMF through quota and governance reform – as highlighted in the Marlborough House Statement. In setting out its Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth, the G20 recognised a key principle in the Marlborough House Statement, in acknowledging the need for national ownership of a country’s policies as the most important determination of success. The period since 2009 has seen the operationalisation of the Financial Stability Board, and a number of principles in the Marlborough House Statement – including representation, flexibility, transparency and responsiveness – have been central to its discussions as it pursues its work. At the same time, the Secretariat has duly focused on issues of particular relevance to small and vulnerable states, including growth with resilience, debt, financial inclusion, innovative financing for development, climate change financing and trade.

Such an association of shared faith comes naturally to the Commonwealth. It has had its passages of turbulence in the phase of decolonisation of Africa, but has a consistent history of being able to create common ground on which all can stand in collective belief, skirting divisive political and ideological debates of the times. This ability comes from the freedom and flexibility leaders have to address any issue they decide upon without prescribed constraints.'
Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group

Another initiative of the Commonwealth that Sharma was quick to praise as an effective defender of its values that, furthermore, was strengthened over his tenure was the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG). He stated:

“This, most of you will know, is the rotating group of nine Foreign Ministers, established in 1995, which reviews what we term “serious or persistent violations” of those stated values. The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) is the guardian of what we most cherish: it is what distinguishes the Commonwealth from other organisations, both in being able to censure its members, but also holding out to them the hand of non-judgemental support, which promises to help in strengthening their democracy and its institutions. We led the world in this venture of setting standards and appraising ourselves – and others have sought to replicate the model. Many of you will be familiar with its work over the years, and the fact that almost all – with the exception of Zimbabwe – who have been suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth have sought to return. Those who returned had made enough quantifiable progress – often with our help – to do so.

Pakistan is a case in point. In mid-April 2008, two weeks into my tenure, CMAG lifted the suspension of Pakistan, which had been applied in late-November 2007 at the time of the Kampala CHOGM. Suspension need not imply censure: we accept that all of our member states are permanently journeying towards the model of democracy. Pakistan’s derogations at the time of the state of emergency were removed with parliamentary elections of February. Our commitment had been to walk with that country to support the government’s stated aim to make Parliament the ultimate authority in Pakistan. Another example is Sierra Leone, which even asked to be kept on the CMAG agenda after its return to the Commonwealth, to keep it up to the mark in the long, painful and delicate task of emerging from a horrible period of civil war. Sierra Leone saw CMAG as supportive of its nation-building, and not censorious of its state failure.

There was also a general sense among our Commonwealth Heads of Government that more is needed of CMAG. Although it may not have been just to say that CMAG lacked teeth, it did need the will and the capacity to look beyond “unconstitutionality”, at the other values that are open to serious violation, within constitutionally elected governments. I also saw it as the group’s challenge to reinforce its image as one that can cheer on and encourage as well as chide where necessary, and as one that sees accidents building, rather than cleans them up afterwards. If more countries are on CMAG’s constructive consideration, and if there is more of an understanding that the group is intended to be supportive, this will have the effect of lessening the stigma – real enough, as our members repeatedly tell us – of being “CMAG-ed”. Just as democracy is a work in progress, so is CMAG; and the impetus comes from within: it was CMAG’s own recommendation to Heads that it review its own scope. The group understands that it has a sensitive task before it in striking a balance that member states find to be fair.’

Sharma was also mindful of how sensitively the Commonwealth Secretary-General would have to negotiate his relationship with Commonwealth Heads of Government so as to drive such reform effectively. Reflecting on how he understood, embraced and strove to fulfil this role, he noted:

‘Every Secretary-General has to think about core quality – what higher values does the organisation stand for, and how these can be advanced. He or she, firstly, must be sensitive to reign and, secondly, require depth of political ownership. The root for achieving this
cannot be what the Secretary-General is asking the Heads of Government to do, but enabling a situation where the Heads direct the Secretary-General to do it, because if the ownership in principle is not established of this goal, then in any discussion among Heads, this item can be put aside as in the past. Accordingly, as Secretary-General, I worked through CMAG telling them to make a proposal themselves to the Heads in the CHOGM, Port of Spain, as to what these new ambition levels should be.’

Sharma added, ‘Now, CMAG itself has been a body that was birthed in emergency, and the relationship between the SG and CMAG – how each engaged with the other – is itself of interest’.

In the mid-1990s, there was the deteriorating human rights climate under the military regime of General Babangida and then General Abacha in Nigeria, which raised the possibility of the country being suspended from the Commonwealth; and this, in turn, threatened to make Anyaoku’s position as Secretary-General untenable. Nigeria had already been facing criticism at the Auckland CHOGM in 1995, when the news arrived that the playwright, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight others, for whom some Commonwealth leaders had been pleading with Abacha for clemency, were brutally executed (Mole 2010, p.51). Nelson Mandela, who – on the basis of the reassurances he received from the Nigerian government – had explained to his fellow Heads of Government that the executions would not be carried out, felt particularly betrayed and advanced the call for Nigeria’s expulsion from the Commonwealth (Anyaoku 2004, p.144–5). Subsequently, at the Retreat in Millbrook, the decision was taken to suspend Nigeria from the Commonwealth. As a Nigerian holding the office of Secretary-General of an association from which Nigeria had been suspended, Anyaoku’s position had become precarious, but as the Heads of Government at Auckland reaffirmed their faith in him, and the reasons for the suspension reflected his own view of the regime, Anyaoku did not resign or have to resign (Ibid, p.163). Moreover, the episode fuelled the drive among Heads of Government and the Secretary-General to have a mechanism in place whereby Commonwealth values could be upheld and persistent violations by any member of the principles enshrined in the Harare Declaration could be dealt with (Mole 2010, p.54).

Moving ‘from rhetoric to action in the area of promoting democracy’, in Anyaoku’s words, was the need of the hour; accordingly, he prepared a memorandum that served as the draft of the Millbrook Statement of Action, which Commonwealth Heads of Government adopted (Anyaoku 2005, p.146). The Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme, introduced in 1995 to implement the Harare Declaration, mandated the Secretariat to provide advice, training and other forms of technical assistance to governments in promoting the Commonwealth’s core values – democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. When a member state was in clear violation of the Harare Principles, the programme mandated the Secretariat, and especially the Secretary-General, to take appropriate steps to express the collective concern of Commonwealth countries and to encourage the restoration of democracy within a reasonable timeframe. It also permitted suspension and expulsion from the Commonwealth and the employment of further bilateral and multilateral measures by all member states as measures to reinforce the need for change (Menezes 2015, pp.28–9). The programme also established CMAG to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare Principles. The group was to be convened by the Secretary-General and comprise the foreign ministers of eight countries, plus the foreign minister of any other member state, invited to participate on an ad hoc basis, who could add value to CMAG’s consideration of a situation. Following the Coolum CHOGM in 2002, during the tenure of McKinnon, it was agreed that the foreign minister of the country of the chairperson-in-office should also be an ex-officio member of CMAG (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012a). While CMAG initially focused its attention on The Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, which were

During the tenure of Sharma as Secretary-General, as already indicated, Sharma preferred working through CMAG, encouraging them to make a proposal to the Heads in the CHOGM, Port of Spain, as to what the new ambition levels should be. Sharma recounted:

‘As the attitude among the foreign ministers showed, CMAG could not simply be a body which suspended member states; there had to be consideration of what it should do beyond, and it was not clear in what way precisely CMAG – simply by suspension of members – was also advancing, not just defending, Commonwealth values. By focusing only on one value, there were legitimate fears that CMAG would be reduced to a one-trick pony. There was, hence, need to go to Heads and move for Commonwealth values, and the Port of Spain CHOGM of 2009 served as a forum where ideas and recommendations could be put forward and explored. At the Trinidad and Tobago CHOGM in 2009, Commonwealth Heads of Government adopted the Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles as our new template, for which CMAG is now the guardian. They also agreed that “consideration be given to strengthening the role of CMAG, in order to enable the group to deal with the full range of serious or persistent violations of the Harare Principles”. While CMAG had hitherto dealt decisively with the unconstitutional overthrow of constitutionally-elected governments, it had not always been able to address other situations where Commonwealth values and principles were being seriously or persistently violated. CMAG was also conscious of the perception of the group as a ‘punitive body’, which made constructive engagement difficult. The leaders also recognised that CMAG needed to play a more constructive and proactive role in assisting member countries to uphold our shared political values, and thus that the mandate and working practices of the group would require review and further elaboration.’

Thus, with the encouragement of the Secretary-General, the foreign ministers of the nine member countries within CMAG then worked for more than two years to make a key recommendation in which eight situations, which might be regarded as constituting a serious or persistent violation of Commonwealth values, were identified and recommended:

1. the unilateral abrogation of a democratic constitution or serious threats to constitutional rule;
2. the suspension or prevention of the lawful functioning of parliament or other key democratic institutions;
3. the postponement of national elections without constitutional or other reasonable justification;
4. the systematic denial of political space, such as through detention of political leaders or restriction of freedom of association, assembly or expression;
5. a national electoral process that is seriously flawed;
6. the abrogation of the rule of law or undermining of the independence of the judiciary;
7. the systematic violation of human rights of the population, or of any communities or groups, by the member government concerned; and
8. significant restrictions on the media or civil society that prevent them from playing their legitimate role.
Sharma notes:

‘This being very sensitive political terrain, it took a long time to gain convergence – that
democratic values had to be safeguarded. So, Heads instructed that a formal recommendation
from CMAG should be prepared and furnished to them, so it became their recommendation,
through CMAG, to the Secretariat. This was done between the Port of Spain CHOGM of 2009
and the Perth CHOGM of 2011, where the recommendations were approved. The adoption
by Heads of Government at the 2011 Perth CHOGM of CMAG’s recommendations on
strengthening its role was a critical and timely step forward for the Commonwealth in its
promotion of the values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. Core
changes included clearer guidelines and timeframes for engagement with agreed indicators as
to the types of situations and developments that might be regarded as constituting a serious or
persistent violation of Commonwealth values. CMAG’s review also demonstrated that
Commonwealth governments listened carefully to the voices of those Commonwealth citizens
who have called for a more effective and engaged CMAG. It was my privilege to assist the
members of the group in their deliberations and producing these recommendations.’

Thus, a distinctive feature of Sharma’s tenure was the reform of CMAG itself, which included
both a widening of its mandate and a greater and more defined role for the Secretary-General.
Sharma reflected:

‘It took four years for this intent to be realised, but events endorsed the thought that there
was no short cut to securing lasting advance in strengthening the oversight of values by the
Commonwealth. The Heads of Government also agreed that the Secretary-General will speak
out publicly in expression of collective disapproval of serious or persistent violations; and
that CMAG will be the custodian of the 2009 Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles.
This has enabled the Secretary-General to strengthen his good offices with member states
and also defined the Secretary-General’s role vis-à-vis CMAG more clearly, as it was an
innovation that the Secretary-General presented to the CMAG tour d’horizon of this
engagement to advance Commonwealth values with any particular country discussed, but
without making that country a formal agenda item which is perceived as a rebuke. Even in
relation to the good offices of the Secretary-General, countries were willing to work with the
Secretary-General as they wished to avoid becoming an item on the agenda for CMAG. In
this role, the Secretary-General worked to bring the eight figures outlined above to the
attention of the governments; only when the Secretary-General gave up – that is when the
response seemed insincere or seemed to lack political will – that the matter was referred to
CMAG. Thus, CMAG emerged as a tool of last resort, as Heads hoped not to be put on its
agenda; and engagement became a more possible – and actually more preferred – alternative.’

At the concluding press conference of the Perth CHOGM in 2011, Sharma noted:

‘The Commonwealth walks with its eyes on the horizon and with practical toolkits in its
hands, and we have seen evidence of that this week. The upgrading of CMAG is of
tremendous significance. There is agreement to lift the bar. We will, of course, continue to
be an organisation that finds its own niches and way of doing things in a constructive spirit– we are an organisation that always aims to offer the helping hand before any wagging
finger. CMAG had become perceived as censorious; there has been a re-balancing to ensure
that CMAG can engage earlier and constructively in future.’ (Sharma 2011a)

He also shared in his address to the UN Human Rights Council, ‘Commonwealth leaders
raised the level of expectations they have of themselves by authorising that group to become
more proactively and positively engaged’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011a).
‘Good offices’ work

The ‘good offices’ of the Secretary-General is another tool in the toolbox of the Commonwealth that has proved especially valuable in preventing political tensions and conflicts from erupting or escalating. The use of good offices – that is, the use of one’s legitimate stature to act as an impartial third party to help prevent or resolve disputes in the international realm – was established as a legitimate practice through the efforts of the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and has been employed since by many leaders of international organisations. It is also a flagship programme at the Commonwealth Secretariat, where it is conducted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Secretary-General’s staff, or the Secretary-General’s Special Envoys. One Secretariat contribution, furnished for use by the Commonwealth Secretary-General in 2010, provides the following details:

‘The Commonwealth is in a unique position to undertake the good offices efforts within its membership for several reasons. First, the Commonwealth is a values-based organisation. These timeless values of freedom, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and sustainable development have been adopted, reaffirmed and advanced by Heads of Government in various communiqués and declarations.

Second, the Commonwealth is a member-driven organisation. The Secretary-General’s good offices efforts have been recognised as valuable to member states. Heads of Government have endorsed that he continues to conduct these activities and have assured him that he has their support. Such activities take place at the request or concurrence of the government in question.

Third, the Secretary-General’s good offices role depends highly on the trust that his office engenders because it is impartial and discreet. Commonwealth members appreciate the Secretary-General’s good offices efforts because he neither takes sides nor attracts public attention to his endeavours.

Finally, the Commonwealth has the capacity to ensure the sustainability of conflict resolution efforts by supporting the country with the appropriate technical assistance programmes after a political agreement has been reached. In this regard, the Commonwealth Secretariat has been viewed as a significant, skilled and trusted partner, and its assistance has always been well received by the parties concerned.

The Commonwealth’s good offices efforts, however, also face some significant challenges. Three challenges it constantly has to grapple with are:

1. how to engage the parties when they themselves do not want or see the need for change;
2. how to publicly demonstrate that the Commonwealth is a values-based organisation and yet be seen to be working with even the most repressive of governments as partners; and finally
3. how to maintain the discretion and confidentiality of Good Offices initiatives and still safeguard its image in the media and among all Commonwealth citizens.

The Commonwealth always maintains an extended hand to all who are willing to engage in dialogue. This it does no matter how misunderstood its actions might be to the public or how alone it might stand in the international community for pursuing good offices in some instances. Often the Commonwealth faces criticism from the human rights community and the media because it is not in favour of a “naming and shaming” strategy. Additionally, the
Commonwealth does not believe that it is appropriate or effective to conduct good offices in the public eye. Should either happen, the Commonwealth loses the trust of the parties and is then regarded as an adversary rather than as a partner. Hence, engaging in good offices requires not only empathy and patience but also an unwavering commitment to the end goal and the common good.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010a)

Reflecting on the good offices work, Sharma commented:

‘Through this practice, the Commonwealth has encouraged dialogue and defused tension in member countries over many years: places as diverse as Guyana, Cameroon, Swaziland, Lesotho, Tanzania, Kenya, Bangladesh, Maldives, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Fiji. I think immediately of the agreement we brokered between Zanzibar and mainland Tanzania; or our support for a new system of political representation in Lesotho. The fact that we have done all this work, and recorded such successes, is a measure of the unique trust and confidence that member states place in us. In general, my predecessors and I have chosen as special envoys people with experience in senior political roles: former ministers and Heads of Government, for instance, who can engage with real empathy and at the highest levels. My Envoy in Fiji, for instance, was Sir Paul Reeves, a former Governor-General and Archbishop of New Zealand. In Maldives, it was the former Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand and my predecessor as Secretary-General, Sir Don McKinnon. Further diplomatic weight can be applied beyond the envoys themselves, including the Commonwealth Chairperson-in-Office. In 2006, President Obasanjo of Nigeria visited The Gambia in support of the Commonwealth’s engagement there, persuading the political parties to sign a Memorandum of Understanding – drawn up by our Envoy General Abubakar – to govern the conduct of the 2008 Presidential Election.

Good offices work is an intuitive process of ebb and flow, to and fro, building delicate relationships and rebuilding bruised ones. A key to our good offices work is time: time to build relationships; and time to help rebuild or create strong democratic institutions. A quick fix is rarely – if ever – possible. Hurried solutions to longstanding tensions rarely last, and the aftermath of failed agreements can be harder to overcome than the original problem. What is more, objectives can change and evolve. No two Commonwealth mediations are the same, but all will exhibit the four qualities of inclusiveness, impartiality, local ownership and international partnership. “Inclusiveness” means that the envoy will seek to be in direct contact with all of the leading groups in society. He or she will consult with such as church groups, political actors and civil society networks, human rights activists, media and women’s groups – all in the cause of gaining widespread support for the task in hand. “Impartiality” means that the envoy must give equal time to government and opposition within parliament, which is not always easy when (as an intergovernmental organisation) the Commonwealth is often presumed to be working in tandem with the government. “Local ownership” means that the commitment to reach a solution must be spearheaded by the government, and most obviously by the Head of that Government. Our good offices work has been strongest where it supports an ongoing programme of domestic reform to which a government is fully committed. ‘International partnership’ means that the Commonwealth’s good offices are given extra weight by being shared with others in the international community. Our work in Guyana involved the UN, the OAS and CARICOM; in Maldives, the EU was incorporated; and in Fiji, the UN and the Pacific Islands Forum.

Almost all of the good offices work is supplemented by longer-term programmes of technical assistance designed to support reform initiatives and to strengthen democratic institutions. So, the quicker and less-defined work of the envoy is frequently complemented
by the slower and carefully structured assistance projects carried out by Commonwealth technical experts. Take the one example of Cameroon, where human rights training has been given to police and prison officers; an adviser has brought women’s concerns into government planning; an IT expert has developed solutions to computerise judicial reforms; while the Commonwealth has also been instrumental in the conception and planning of the new Independent Election Commission. Rarely can Commonwealth good offices be measured specifically for what they are. Most likely, they can be measured for what they are part of. But the results of peacebuilding in action are remarkable, and constitute far more than an absence of conflict or tension. I have already alluded to a particular favourite example, which is that of Maldives. Was Maldives a place of violence? No. But was it by logical extension “at peace”? No, neither. Consider what happened in that country at the end of 2008, when a one-party state of over 30 years’ standing negotiated and introduced a new constitution and then conducted its second ever multi-party elections. It saw power change hands – and smoothly. All this, with Commonwealth help and advice behind the scenes, and assistance in building institutions. President Nasheed himself told CHOGM in November 2009 that his country is the definitive Commonwealth success story.

Of course, one battle won does not mean that further tensions could and would not arise. By the end of 2011, there was unrest fomented by accusations that Nasheed was failing to protect Islam, and in January 2012, the tensions were only exacerbated when Nasheed ordered the arrest of the Chief Justice of the Maldives Criminal Court accusing him of blocking the prosecution of former President Gayoom’s allies. Nasheed did so, despite my phoning him to advise him against the arrest. In February 2012, Nasheed resigned, with conflicting accounts emerging about the real reasons for his resignation, including allegations of coercion and intimidation. The Commonwealth Secretariat kept a close watch on the events in Maldives as they unfolded; and I convened an extraordinary meeting of CMAG and sent a ministerial mission at once. The country’s membership of CMAG was placed in abeyance, and Maldives remained on CMAG’s formal agenda. Furthermore, I appointed Sir Don McKinnon as my Special Envoy to Maldives to push for an impartial investigation into the reasons for Nasheed’s exit from office, as well as to seek an inclusive settlement along with early elections. The special envoy helped strengthen the Commission of National Inquiry, looking into the constitutionality of the transfer of power in February 2012. The Commission had been accused of being neither independent nor impartial, but with McKinnon’s involvement and CMAG’s engagement, significant improvements were made to ensure independence and impartiality in its investigation. The report of the Commission found that Nasheed resigned voluntarily and of his own free will, and that the change in the Presidency was legal and constitutional. I urged all concerned to respect the finding of the Commission so that, moving forward, all actions and reactions reflected the sense of responsibility and restraint necessary in the best national interest. Later in 2012, President Waheed briefed CMAG and committed to implementing the recommendations of the report, with Maldives subsequently taken off CMAG’s formal agenda and re-instated its CMAG membership.

The Presidential Elections in 2013 gave rise for renewed concern. In September 2013, although Nasheed won by a significant margin against Waheed and prepared for the run-off election against Gayoom’s half-brother Abdulla Yameen, the Supreme Court annulled the election and cancelled the run-off ballot. Although the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG), led by Dr Lawrence Gonzi, former Prime Minister of Malta, that had been first deployed for the 7 September Presidential Election found that the electoral process was credible and satisfactory, the Supreme Court stated there were electoral irregularities. Observers were also present for the elections scheduled for 28 September and 19 October
that were subsequently cancelled. When Nasheed triumphed against his rivals again at the elections on 9 November and prepared for the run-off vote scheduled for 10 November, it became more evident that something was not quite right when the Supreme Court cancelled the vote and set a new date for the run-off election that breached the deadline prescribed by the Constitution, in recognition of Yameen’s request for additional time to campaign. CMAG decided to place Maldives back on its formal agenda, while six observers were deployed in five atolls across Maldives for the 16 November election. Following the run-off ballot, while Nasheed had only increased his vote share from 46 per cent to 48 per cent, Yameen’s vote share increased dramatically from 31 per cent to 51 per cent. Nasheed accepted defeat, and Yameen was inaugurated as the new President. Dr Gonzi shared that the ‘16 November 2013 Maldives presidential run-off election brings to a successful conclusion what has been a credible but unnecessarily protracted, electoral process’, and CMAG removed Maldives from its formal agenda. The role played by the Secretary-General’s good offices engagement was much appreciated, and the deployment of the special envoy also assisted in developing a co-ordinated international approach to the contentious transitions, as well as to long-term institutional development in Maldives.

Likewise, our work in Swaziland entailed assisting the country in making progress in achieving its democratic goals. During my first official visit to Swaziland in August 2012, I had the honour of calling on the Prime Minister; the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs; the Minister for Youth and Sports; the Chief Justice; the UNDP Resident Representative; Commonwealth High Commissioners and experts; the Chairperson of the Elections and Boundaries Commission; the Acting Chairperson and other Commissioners of the Human Rights Commission; the Executive Director of the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental Organisations, and civil society and media representatives. In September 2013, a Commonwealth Observer Mission led by Dr Bakili Muluzi, former President of Malawi, observed the national elections and called for measures to ensure the separation of powers and the enactment of legislation to allow for political parties. That September, I also appointed an adviser to provide enhanced access to key stakeholders in Swaziland and to promote greater adherence to Commonwealth values and principles. In July 2014, I appointed Dr Muluzi Special Envoy for Swaziland to continue engaging the Kingdom to undertake further democratisation efforts in the run up to the 2018 elections. Since his appointment, the special envoy visited Swaziland on several occasions, met with a range of stakeholders, and advanced practical measures aimed at implementing reforms already reflected in Swaziland’s revised constitution.

Similarly, our work in Lesotho saw government and opposition brought to agreement over a series of reforms to the electoral and parliamentary system. The Secretary-General’s good offices engagement with Lesotho was undertaken between May 2012 and March 2016, with the aims of strengthening and helping sustain coalition governance, and promoting implementation of agreed governance reforms that would break the country’s historical cycle of political crises. These political crises often involved a collusion of political leaders and a politicised security sector personnel against a backdrop of weak governance structures. The Commonwealth, in collaboration with regional partners, intervened in such political crises in 1994 and 1998 respectively. In 1998, the Commonwealth supported the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in the adoption of a political agreement by an Interim Political Authority (IPA), set up following post-electoral violence due to the rejection of results by the opposition. This resulted in the adoption of a new Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system for parliamentary representation, which was deemed to be a better alternative to the destructive “winner takes all” approach. As Lesotho sought to integrate the MMP system into its governance architecture, further crisis ensued
(over a disputed seat allocation among government and opposition political parties) following the parliamentary elections in 2007. The Commonwealth again supported SADC mediation efforts under the auspices of the former President of Botswana, Sir Ketumile Masire. Hence, the May 2012 elections were critical to the evolution of the MMP system, with Lesotho acquiring its first Coalition Government thereafter. In the absence of a clear winner, the “pre-coalition” leaders met with, and were advised by, Dr Bakili Muluzi, Chair of the Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) deployed to observe those elections, and Dr Rajen Prasad, a COG member and New Zealand MP who was familiar with the MMP system also used in New Zealand. The leaders expressed an interest in receiving further advice from Dr Prasad under the auspices of the Commonwealth, which they subsequently conveyed to the Secretary-General in an official letter. This marked the genesis of the Secretary-General’s good offices in Lesotho.

At the government’s request, the Secretary-General appointed Dr Prasad as Commonwealth Expert Adviser to the Government of Lesotho. In June–July 2014, the New Zealand Parliament, in association with the Commonwealth Secretariat, hosted a one-week study tour of New Zealand for a delegation of Members of Parliament and senior officials from Lesotho led by the Deputy Prime Minister of Lesotho, Mothetjoa Metsing. The aim was to enable them to better understand government under a MMP system. During their stay, the delegation focused on understanding the operation of effective parliamentary processes in a MMP environment; forming and sustaining coalition governments; maintaining an independent and politically neutral public service; and the transition period after an election. They also heard about how coalition agreements were negotiated, and were informed of the processes and structures that assist coalition governments to be sustained in New Zealand. In a letter dated 11 July 2014, the Government Secretary requested the continued support of the Secretary-General’s good offices through Dr Prasad. In response, the Secretary-General appointed Dr Prasad as his Special Envoy to Lesotho to make further progress with the Commonwealth’s good offices engagement in the Kingdom. The Secretary-General’s good offices provided advice and recommendations on reforms to the Government of Lesotho, which have been widely recognised and endorsed by SADC and other partners. Dr Prasad and other partners also continued to advise Lesotho on the formation of successful coalition governments and sustaining the same. Along with others, the Commonwealth supported Lesotho through successful snap elections in February 2015. In its immediate aftermath, Dr Prasad worked with the seven coalition partners formed after those elections in drafting the Coalition Agreement. This agreement, which captures the reform agenda as a priority task, remains the guiding document for the second Coalition Government. The Prime Minister of Lesotho, Pakalitha Mosisili, and the United Nations Development Programme praised the work of good offices in Lesotho.

Another example worth citing is Fiji. In December 2006, Fiji’s military regime was suspended from the Councils of the Commonwealth, with CMAG “unanimously and unequivocally condemn[ing] the military takeover of Fiji’s democratically-elected government”. At the Kampala CHOGM in 2007, Heads reiterated CMAG’s call for the restoration of constitutional rule and democratic government as soon as possible and no later than the March 2009 deadline to which the military government had committed itself. Likewise, CMAG, at its meetings in May and September 2008, stressed the importance of adhering to the deadline. Nevertheless, in his address to the UN General Assembly on 26 September 2008 and in his interaction with Secretariat officials, the Interim Prime Minister made clear that Fiji would not be holding elections in early-2009. Furthermore, on 10 April 2009, after a Court of Appeal ruled that the Bainimarama government was illegal and invalid, President Ratu Josefa Iloilo of Fiji announced that he had abrogated the
Constitution, dismissed the judiciary and appointed himself Head of State. He reinstated Commodore Bainimarama as Prime Minister and introduced (and repeatedly extended) a Public Emergency Regulation, limiting freedom of assembly and conferring sweeping powers on the police and military. At its meetings, CMAG took note that Fiji was in contravention of Commonwealth values and principles, but the Commonwealth continued to engage with Fiji in efforts aimed at the restoration of civilian constitutional democracy. I remained in contact with the Interim Prime Minister. My Special Representative, Sir Paul Reeves, visited Fiji on multiple occasions. The Commonwealth also worked closely with the UN on negotiations and preparations for the President’s Political Dialogue Forum (PPDF). However, on 12 June 2009, the Interim Prime Minister declared that the PPDF process, which was meant to be inclusive, independent, time-bound, without any pre-determined outcome and facilitated by the Commonwealth and the UN, would no longer go ahead. Given how significantly the situation had deteriorated, CMAG, at an extraordinary meeting convened on 31 July 2009, resolved that Fiji would be fully suspended from the Commonwealth unless it firmly committed to reactivating the PPDF. Following the dissatisfactory response, Fiji was fully suspended on 1 September 2009.

Following the suspension, the Secretariat and Sir Paul Reeves remained in contact with various interlocutors in Fiji and the region regarding the situation, with the aim of supporting good faith efforts for the restoration of democracy. At its eve-of-CHOGM meeting that year, CMAG also discussed whether non-participation in Commonwealth sporting events should be included in the measures taken against countries fully suspended from the Commonwealth. In February and March 2010, Commodore Bainimarama stated in media interviews that Fiji would consider withdrawing its membership if the Commonwealth continued to pressure his government about democracy. In January 2010, the Fiji Commonwealth Games Association (FASANOC) filed action against the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) in the Court of Arbitration for Sport, disputing FASANOC’s suspension from CGF and the consequent exclusion of Fiji’s athletes from competing in the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi. On 31 March, the court dismissed the appeal by FASANOC on the basis of the written submissions received. Over the next years, senior officials from the Secretariat met with the Fijian Foreign Minister, Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs, senior officials and regional interlocutors on multiple occasions, whether in London or Fiji, to assess recent developments and to engage with the government and key partners. In August 2010, Sir Paul met with Bainimarama and Foreign Minister Kubuabola in Fiji: Bainimarama cited some Commonwealth members’ bilateral travel bans as the key barrier to substantive Commonwealth engagement with Fiji, and declined to consider Sir Paul’s suggestion that the Commonwealth and Fiji explore possibilities for assistance toward the return in democracy. On 11 October 2010, in a speech commemorating Fiji’s 40th anniversary of independence, President Nailatikau stated that Fiji intended to ‘return to full membership in the Commonwealth’. While he did not indicate any specific action in this regard, the President said to ‘those who have closed the doors to us, we will tirelessly seek through quiet diplomacy to reopen those doors, including [the] doors of the Commonwealth’. The Commonwealth also liaised closely with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and the UN. These efforts eventually paid off when the government moved towards holding democratic elections later in 2014. Consequently, CMAG partially lifted the suspension in March 2014, and following the elections on 17 September 2014, Fiji was reinstated as a full member of the Commonwealth on 26 September 2014.

I myself have been personally involved in some of our good offices work, especially when the sensitivity of a particular situation requires that just the Secretary-General intervene. The example that comes to mind is the issue of the legislation threatening the further criminalisation of homosexuality in Uganda. I hoped that my behind-the-scenes work, in a
spirit of transparency and respect, would contribute to the retracting of a bill that had attracted widespread international concern. In public, we uphold the position that Uganda must decide its own affairs, that its laws are sovereign, and that its parliament is indeed the place to debate them. We could – and did – explore together the relevance of the Commonwealth of Values, and its members’ collective stand against discrimination and their commitment to human rights. In private, we can talk about support, solutions and options in a climate of trust. By the same token, our quiet engagement (respectful of their sovereignty) with the Government of Malawi over the recent release from prison of two homosexual men in fact led, I am told, to public recognition in the media in Lilongwe. I recognise that a balance has to be struck here between quiet engagement and public understanding of where the Commonwealth stands. Without prejudicing what we can achieve with our “below-the-radar” engagement, we need to uphold the Commonwealth of Values in the public eye. Along with the process underway in CMAG, I am confident that we can do this. So, what more should we do with our good offices, remembering the important limitation that we can only act on invitation? The challenge, I believe, is to strengthen the concept of “invitation” by collective agreement, and be proactive in seeking to engage earlier in potentially problematic situations. There is a case, too, for disengaging later. So often our actions in a country are limited to the attentions we pay towards its election cycle, and are not sufficiently focused on deeper, often timeless, problems. The key, as always, will be the level of trust that others confer on us. We must continue to be seen as a partner raising a helping hand, not a wagging finger.’

Declarations, affirmations and the Charter

Focusing just on the Commonwealth’s political values, Sharma added:

“We have the Commonwealth Declarations of Singapore 1971 and Harare 1991, which set out our fundamental political values. The former was a far-sighted statement of aspiration, which was qualified by the context of the Cold War; whereas the latter declaration sought to make real those earlier aspirations. It was no coincidence that the Harare Declaration was born out of the demise of the Cold War. It, in turn, gained the apparatus with which to scrutinise our egregious failures in embodying those aspirations, with the Millbrook Declaration of 1995. Our Latimer House Principles of 2003 defined and differentiated the roles of the three branches of government: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The Aberdeen Principles of 2004 set out the cornerstones of democracy in local government – that is, democracy in depth; and, as I mentioned, all have been brought together in the 2009 Affirmation of Values and Principles, a landmark document in our association’s 60th year. All of our declarations are inherently linked to other international norms, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the various international covenants and conventions that sprang from it. All are referable: we can and do cite them. Our Charter, signed by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, on 11 March 2013, is that of a values-based rather than an issues-based organisation. Adopted by the Heads of Governments of all our member states on 14 December 2012, the Charter sets out in a single place the core values and principles of the Commonwealth, such as democracy, development, human rights, freedom of expression, protecting the environment and gender equality. Experience of what can be accomplished for the common good by working within the framework of these values and principles is what continues to inspire and motivate the modern Commonwealth. We are a pragmatic organisation constantly evolving and finding innovative ways to serve the contemporary needs of our member states and the global good.

The fact that member countries from six continents and oceans – representing such diversity in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity, political ideology and sheer scale – can come
together and agree a common set of values and principles is powerful testimony to the
enduring centrality of democratic principles across the world today, and the contribution
the Commonwealth has made to them. And the graph undeniably climbs upward:
awareness of and belief in those principles is far, far greater in 2016 than it was 50 years
ago. Taking strength from its diversity, the Commonwealth succeeds in creating common
ground on which to stand together in answering the challenges of our times. Mutual
support, with respect and understanding for the dignity and contribution of all, gives
potency to the acclaimed convening power of the Commonwealth. So, our declarations and
affirmations are an expression of our shared purpose and beliefs. The Charter of the
Commonwealth now embodies our high and shared purpose. Further, they can act as a
moral compass, and exert a form of moral pressure, as we all try to move in one direction.
For the moment at least, I think we can be satisfied that our democratic foundations are
good, in the form of our stated values. We have further to go, perhaps, in helping our
members articulate their own foundational values. We have worked with Maldives,
Swaziland, Lesotho and Tonga, for instance, in developing their national constitutions – a
long and complex task that can easily founder, even over definitions: What exactly is
“freedom of association”? The task is to move slowly if we must, but surely: continuing to
inspire trust and confidence as we go, and continuing to offer the service to those who
need it. I remember a conversation I had with Prime Minister Rudd of Australia at the Port
of Spain CHOGM in 2009. I asked him if the Commonwealth was relevant. Rudd
enthusiastically replied in the affirmative and noted that no other organisation had the
friendship, camaraderie and ability to tackle the changes of our time.'
2. ADDING GLOBAL VALUE

Upon being chosen by Commonwealth leaders gathered in the Ugandan capital of Kampala to lead the Commonwealth as its next Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma – then the High Commissioner of India in London and an old hand at Commonwealth affairs – noted in his acceptance speech at the 2007 CHOGM:

‘It is a tough job I am taking over but I do so with confidence and with enthusiasm... The Commonwealth is a great global good. I have always believed that; and it will be an honour and a privilege to serve this great international institution.’

Likewise, in one of his first interviews upon assuming office on 1 April 2008, when invited to comment on the role he envisaged for the Commonwealth in the twenty-first century, he stated candidly and succinctly:

‘It is an organisation that has added value to global life by picking on those areas that required collective attention, and it has a huge agenda and history of record of having done this. So, if you think of the three big areas in the world today where we need to make advances, one of which is called governance, which is the quality of the collective life, the way your leadership works, rights of the citizens and individual freedoms which are enjoyed by them, that is one basket. The other basket is growth, the way in which you are simply generating wealth. As far as the social agenda is concerned, that [too] is where the proof of the pudding is.’

The idea of the Commonwealth as a ‘great global good’ – an organisation that has ‘added value to global life’ – would be one of the driving forces of Sharma’s tenure as Secretary-General, culminating almost poetically in the Malta CHOGM of 2015, his last at its helm, having the theme ‘Adding Global Value’.

A few weeks before retiring from the role in March 2016, he reflected,

‘When it comes to the value proposition of the Commonwealth, what is noteworthy is not just how the Commonwealth has advanced Commonwealth values with regard to its membership, but also how the Commonwealth has added global value. Here, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, as chief executive of the Commonwealth Secretariat and protagonist for the Commonwealth, has a key role to play in ensuring the Commonwealth remains flexible, dynamic, relevant and valuable.’

The second Commonwealth Secretary-General, Shridath Ramphal, had been rightly credited with fashioning the Commonwealth into a ‘high-level global think tank’ (Ramphal 2014, p.296). As Stephen Chan, who spent some time at the Commonwealth Secretariat in the late-1970s and early-1980s and now serves as Professor of International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, remarked, ‘It was Ramphal’s Secretary-Generalship that sustained and helped develop the notion that the Commonwealth could help the world to negotiate’ (Chan 1984, pp.306–7). It was in very much a similar fashion...
that Kamalesh Sharma, the fifth Commonwealth Secretary-General, sought to ensure that the Commonwealth would not just reinvigorate its commitment to democracy, good governance, gender equality and human rights when it came to its membership, but would go beyond that to add and represent great value to the world at large. Without detracting from its role in galvanising its members to adhere to Commonwealth values, how could the Commonwealth also serve as a pioneer, thought leader and trendsetter in the world? For Sharma, the Commonwealth had always been a cutting-edge ‘thought laboratory’ where the best ideas could be tested and, if proved worthy, implemented or recommended for implementation both across and beyond the Commonwealth. It had served as a pioneering body whose long history, rich experience, innovative outlook and diverse membership enabled it to provide valuable precedents and templates for the world from its earliest days; it was such a view of the Commonwealth that influenced Sharma’s actions and contributions during his time in office.

One relatively unsung story about the Commonwealth that Sharma often recalled, and that perhaps best represented his understanding of how the Commonwealth could add global value, was the seminal contribution of the Commonwealth in the process whereby the Charter of the United Nations was drafted and adopted. It is an account recounted vivaciously and in considerable depth by Sir Peter Marshall, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General from 1983 to 1988 and Chairman of the Joint Commonwealth Societies’ Council from 1993 to 2003, in a 2001 issue of The Round Table. As Sir Peter noted, ‘The Charter of the United Nations, adopted in San Francisco in 1945, marked a new approach to international relations – a break with the concept of balance of power and the beginning of a new era of global interdependence’ (Marshall 2001, p.55). While the Charter has retained its authority over successive decades and has been embraced by the many countries that have since become members of the United Nations, what is seldom remembered is the role played by Commonwealth statesmen in the drafting of the Preamble to the UN Charter. Yet, as Sir Peter adds, ‘[The Charter]’s essence is embodied in the 200 words of the Preamble, which was incorporated largely due to the efforts of Jan Smuts, a former Prime Minister of South Africa and a pioneer of the concept of Commonwealth’ (Ibid, p.55). Indeed, the wording of the Preamble, adopted on 26 June 1945 at the end of the United Nations Conference on International Organisation convened in San Francisco and provided below, is possibly the most influential text in the history of international relations; and Commonwealth actors have good reason to revisit with curiosity and satisfaction their oft-forgotten roles in its creation (Ibid, p.56).

The text famously reads:

“We the peoples of the United Nations determined

- to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and
- to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and
- to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and
- to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends
- to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and
- to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and
- to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and
- to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.

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Accordingly, our respective governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organisation to be known as the United Nations.’

What is often forgotten is that when Commonwealth ministers met in London on the eve of the San Francisco conference to consult further about post-war problems and examine the text that emerged from the Dumbarton Oaks ‘conversations’, Smuts put forward the concept of a Preamble to the proposed Charter. Lamenting that the Dumbarton Oaks texts read as nothing more than a legalistic document that did not meet the need for a text that was universally inspiring – as it ought to have been as it was to be birthed right after one of the greatest struggles in all of human history where fundamental human rights had been at stake – he recommended a few additions. These additions, he felt, ought to have more inspiring and arousing text that would have universal appeal and touch the heart of the common man (Ibid, pp.57–8). As Sir Peter noted, Smuts sought a text that would make the common man ‘feel that he had fought to set up not simply a piece of political machinery, but something very great’ (Ibid, p.58). Accordingly, Smuts proposed a short Preamble:

‘We, the United Nations, assembled in Conference to seek a new way of life for the nations, and to prevent a recurrence of the fratricidal strife which has now twice in our generation brought untold sorrows and losses on mankind, and to establish an international organisation to that end, do hereby declare, in this Charter of the United Nations our common faith and objects, and the principles on which we seek to found an Organisation for peace, progress and the welfare of mankind.’

Smuts also recommended the addition of a new Chapter 1 – ‘The Common Faith’ – that would affirm faith in human rights and the resolve to safeguard them; belief in tolerance and the equal rights of individuals and individual nations, including the right of self-government without external interference; belief in the enlargement of freedom (including the freedom of thought, expression and religion, and freedom from want and fear) and promotion of social progress; and belief in nations living besides each other in peace and harmony, renouncing war as an instrument of policy (Ibid, p.58).

While Smuts’ draft was well received, it was not the only such draft that had been produced. UK government officials had already drafted a similar Preamble. Smuts suggested that the two drafts be compared while preparing a final version, but the Foreign Office took little interest in his draft Preamble. Nevertheless, when Smuts put forward the proposal again at the above-mentioned major Commonwealth meeting, even the Foreign Office paid greater attention to his draft; by the end of the meeting, Smuts, together with Sir Charles Webster, had already produced a syncretised draft (Ibid, p.58). While the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Peter Fraser, and the Minister of External Affairs of Australia, Dr HV Evatt, were of the opinion that the spontaneity, warmth and idealism of Smuts’ earlier draft should be retained, as should the reference to the Four Freedoms which the United States would inevitably seek, the High Commissioner of Canada, Vincent Massey, and the Member for Supply of the Viceroy’s Executive Council of India, Sir Ramawami Mudaliar, accepted the new draft with no objections. The Deputy Prime Minister of the UK, Clement Attlee, considered the promotion of social progress, to which the draft referred, as being necessarily one of the fundamental goals of the new world organisation and sought that this be clarified in the Preamble. There emerged from the Commonwealth meeting, thus, a draft for the Preamble that was agreed upon by the Commonwealth leaders present, as well as consensus that the respective delegations would support the adoption of a Preamble based on the draft at the conference in San Francisco (Ibid, p.59).
In San Francisco, Smuts proposed the notion of a Preamble soon after he arrived and presented his case to the Plenary Session of the Conference. The matter was then dealt with by the first of the four commissions established by the conference to grapple with the General Provisions, and that commission forwarded the matter to the first of the technical committees for detailed examination of the various clauses. The committee considered the South African draft and agreed by acclamation to adopt it as the basis for the Preamble. The draft underwent a few revisions – such as the inclusion of the opening phrase ‘We the Peoples of the United Nations’ – before it was adopted in the Plenary Session of the Conference on 25 June 1945 (Ibid, p.59). As Sir Peter observed:

‘The part played by the Commonwealth countries, individually and collectively, in the successful outcome of the San Francisco Conference, emerges clearly... Equally there is no doubt that the meeting in London on the eve of the Conference focused and enhanced that contribution. Unlike the other participants in the San Francisco Conference, the Commonwealth countries had been involved together from the outset of World War II. This could not but add to their weight and authority.’ (Ibid, p.61)

Present at the Commonwealth Statesmen’s Meeting held in London, 4–13 April 1945, were The Rt Hon. FM Forde, Deputy Prime Minister of Australia; The Rt Hon. Lord Cranborne, Dominion Secretary; The Rt Hon. Stanley Bruce, High Commissioner of Canada in London; Sir Ramaswami Mudaliar, Supply Member, Viceroy’s Executive Council, India; The Rt Hon. Peter Fraser, Prime Minister of New Zealand; and The Rt Hon. Field Marshall JC Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa, all serving as heads of their respective delegations. Its final communiqué, dated 13 April 1945, read:

‘On the eve of the meeting of the United Nations at San Francisco which is to consider the establishment of a new world organisation to secure and maintain peace, we, the representatives of the countries of the British Commonwealth, have met together in London.

We are convinced that only the maintenance after the war of the close co-operation between the United Nations which has brought, and is bringing, success to their arms can prevent the recurring of strife between the governments and peoples of the world. The countries of the British Commonwealth stand ready to play their full part in an international organisation for the purpose of preserving international peace and security and promoting human welfare.

We have examined, generally and in detail, the tentative proposals resulting from the Dumbarton Oaks conversations and we have had a valuable exchange of views. We are agreed that the proposals provide the basis for a charter of such an organisation, fully recognising that in certain respects they call for clarification, improvement, and expansion.

Each of the countries assembled here will be represented at the San Francisco Conference. Through their representatives, it will be the purpose of the peoples and the governments of the British Commonwealth in all the continents to work for the establishment of a world order which will be worthy of immense sacrifice made by our peoples and designed to unite the nations in assuring all men in all the lands economic and social advancement in conditions of freedom, peace, and concord.’ (PMM 1945 Communiqué)

‘Why is this relevant in a record of the tenure of Kamalesh Sharma as Commonwealth Secretary-General?’, one might understandably wonder, but there is good reason. Not only does it reflect how Sharma perceived the potential of the Commonwealth to add global value,
but also it provides some insight into the mind of the man during whose tenure possibly the most significant text in the history of the Commonwealth – the Charter of the Commonwealth – was adopted. Hitherto, as the Commonwealth lacked such a single and unifying foundational document that outlined the values it represented, it looked instead to a series of declarations and statements, such as the Singapore and Harare Declarations, which had been issued over the years to define its identity as a values-driven organisation. With the advent of the Charter, as acknowledged by the government of the UK, the Commonwealth had attained for the first time in its then 64-year history a single document that set out the core values of the organisation and the aspirations of its members, and that served as an ‘overarching summary which brings together the values and commitments of the Commonwealth that are set out in more detail in previous declarations and affirmations’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013a). The idea for the Charter did not emerge out of nowhere; here again, the UN–Commonwealth connection is of interest.

In 2009, Sharma re-established the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), a body made up of highly-regarded individuals who would act as an esteemed advisory body to, and on behalf of, the Commonwealth. This was not the first time in its history that the Commonwealth had such an EPG: the first EPG, chaired by Malcolm Fraser (Prime Minister of Australia, 1975–83), operated in 1985–86, during the tenure of Sir Shridath Ramphal as Secretary-General, with a remit ‘to examine the situation in South Africa, to determine the way forward, and within that to look at the possibilities of dialogue, of the dismantling of apartheid and of sanctions’. While that EPG had been dissolved gradually, the concept was revived by Sharma around 25 years later, indicating the importance he placed on involving the good and the great of high-level stakeholders in advising on potential reform within the Commonwealth. This second EPG had Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, as Chairperson, and comprised Dr Emmanuel Akwetey (Ghana), Ms Patricia Francis (Jamaica), Dr Asma Jahangir (Pakistan), Mr Samuel Kavuma (Uganda/Commonwealth Youth Caucus), The Hon. Michael Kirby (Australia), The Rt Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind (UK), Sir Ronald Sanders (Guyana), Senator Hugh Segal (Canada) and Sir Jeremia Tabai (Kiribati). The EPG’s aim was to ‘undertake an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth’s many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of co-operation and partnership’. Its mandate was recently undertaken at the Perth CHOGM of 2011, with its report *A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform*. The EPG had put forward as one of its key recommendations the idea of a charter ‘that would establish a Commonwealth “spirit” – one that is shared by the people of the Commonwealth and their governments’. The recommendation was taken up by the Secretary-General, who himself saw great merit in introducing such a pan-Commonwealth Charter.

After months of national and civil society consultations, the Commonwealth Secretariat produced a final draft that was adopted by Commonwealth Heads of Government in December 2012 and signed by Queen Elizabeth II at Marlborough House in March 2013. The Charter sets out in a single document the core beliefs that unite the Commonwealth and heralds a new era in the life of the Commonwealth and its Secretariat. As the UK government notes: ‘Through the Charter, Commonwealth leaders commit to upholding: democracy; human rights; peace and security; tolerance, respect and understanding; freedom of expression; separation of powers; rule of law; good governance; sustainable development; environmental protection; access to health; education, food and shelter; gender equality; and the importance of young people and civil society’ (FCO 2013). The EPG recommended that the Charter be issued on behalf of the people of the Commonwealth, rather than just the Commonwealth Heads of Government, as had been the case with previous Commonwealth declarations and affirmations. One EPG member, The Hon. Michael Kirby, noted, ‘In that way, a true affirmation of core values and principles could be adopted, lying in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the Commonwealth. If it were done, it would remove the risk that later
CHOGM meetings might feel empowered to delete basic rights that belong to the people. Or to ignore those previous values proclaimed in their name’.

Accordingly, the Commonwealth Charter had as its opening phrase: ‘We the people of the Commonwealth’. In this regard, it would seem at first that the opening wording drew inspiration from the text of the UN Charter, but as Secretary-General Sharma points out:

‘In doing so, the Commonwealth was not adopting for its Charter wording similar to that contained in the UN Charter which preceded it, but was journeying back to the Commonwealth meeting that took place on the eve of the San Francisco Conference in 1945 to drink from the very Commonwealth fount that had supplied the UN Charter with its draft Preamble. By doing so, the Commonwealth was building upon its own heritage to produce what would be the most influential text of the Commonwealth, as the UN Charter had served for the UN.’

Of course, some would argue that original source of the opening phrase ‘We the People’ might have been the Preamble of the United States Constitution, for the phrase had not appeared in the 1778 Treaty of Alliance with France, the Articles of Confederation or the 1783 Treaty of Paris which preceded it. However, here again, the phrase had not only emerged out of the interaction between the legal systems existing in the UK and developing in the newly-independent American colonies, but also its inclusion in the UN Charter came as a result of Commonwealth leaders readily incorporating the phrase in advance, both in voluntary appreciation of its significance and also in anticipation of their US counterparts’ desire for its inclusion.

The abovementioned case, for Sharma, was just one way in which the Commonwealth could add global value. Another way, exemplified in a second account Sharma would narrate, was the Commonwealth contribution to bringing about a ‘Global Zero Tolerance for Military Coups and Dictatorships’. Since the creation of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) in 1995 as the mechanism for the association to deal with serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth principles, as set out in the Harare Declaration, the Commonwealth has – in more than just principle – taken a strong stance against military coups and dictatorships. As the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) points out, the modus operandi of CMAG generally entails:

- collecting information and assessing all sides of a situation through correspondence with high-level government representatives;
- calling for written and sometimes oral presentations from experts and interested parties;
- undertaking missions to the country in difficulty, to meet officials from the military, opposition groups, community leaders and, if possible, human rights activists; and
- meeting detained leaders (such as Chief Moshood Abiola in Nigeria or Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan) and stakeholders and observing all elements of a situation, though their in-country activities being contingent on the permission of those currently in power, it is not always successful in doing so.

As already noted, while CMAG initially focused its attention on military-ruled The Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, its focus has included Pakistan, Fiji, Zimbabwe, Solomon Islands and Maldives since 1999 (Menezes 2015, pp.28–9). Likewise, the decision to suspend or readmit a member state is taken by CMAG, with five countries suspended from the Commonwealth since CMAG was established: Nigeria (1995–99), Sierra Leone (1997–98), Pakistan (1999–2004, 2007–08), Fiji (2000–01, 2006–14) and Zimbabwe (2002–03, when it withdrew from the Commonwealth) (Ibid, pp.28–9).
Furthermore, as Nicholas Bayne points out, the Commonwealth is distinctive among plurilateral organisations in that it has political and economic vocations and can examine the interaction between both (Bayne 2010, pp.103, 116). The Commonwealth has not only focused on bringing about zero tolerance for military coups and dictatorships since the 1990s, but also prioritised managing globalisation for the benefit of its poor and vulnerable members as its principal economic aim over the same period. As the Fancourt Commonwealth Declaration on Globalisation and People-Centred Development, adopted in Fancourt, South Africa, on 14 November 1999, noted:

‘The greatest challenge therefore facing us today is how to channel the forces of globalisation for the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of human beings to lead fulfilling lives. The solution does not lie in abandoning a commitment to market principles or in wishing away the powerful forces of technological change. Globalisation is a reality and can only increase in its impact. But if the benefits of globalisation are to be shared more widely, there must be greater equity for countries in global markets...’

The Fancourt Declaration called ‘on all nations fully to implement the Uruguay Round commitments to dismantle barriers to trade for the mutual benefit of all’, urged that the ‘forthcoming Ministerial Meeting of WTO to launch the next round of global negotiations on trade be one with a pronounced developmental dimension’, and recognised ‘the responsibilities of national governments to promote pro-poor policies and human development’. Additionally, the Fancourt Declaration observed that ‘good governance and economic progress are directly linked’ and, on that basis, affirmed shared ‘commitment to the pursuit of greater transparency, accountability, the rule of law and the elimination of corruption in all spheres of public life and in the private sector’.

Just as the Durban CHOGM of 1999, chaired by Thabo Mbeki, President of South Africa, served as the occasion for the adoption of the Fancourt Declaration, the Coolum CHOGM of 2002 led to the establishment of a high-level Commonwealth Expert Group on Democracy and Development to recommend ways in which Commonwealth leaders could carry forward the Fancourt Declaration. The next CHOGM, held in Abuja in 2003, was chaired by President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and led to the adoption of the Aso Rock Declaration on ‘Development and Democracy: Partnership for Peace and Prosperity’. In the Aso Rock Declaration, the Commonwealth Heads of Government emphasised:

‘We further recognise that while development and democracy are goals each in its own right, they must be mutually reinforcing, with a clear “democratic dividend”, in terms of delivering tangible benefits to people. We are convinced that broad-based prosperity creates the stability conducive to the promotion of democracy; and that strong democratic institutions better promote development.’

The declaration also held that ‘it is the strategic goal of the Commonwealth to help their pre-industrial members to transition into skilled working- and middle-class societies, recognising that their domestic policies must be conducive to such transitions’ and that ‘the Commonwealth should lead the international community in ensuring that the official development assistance target is achieved’. It also reaffirmed the commitment of the Commonwealth to ‘multilateralism, international co-operation, partnership, and productive working relationships between government and civil society organisations’ and commended the African Union ‘for taking the bold step to address development and good governance through the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)’.

Beyond these declarations and affirmations, there were many concrete practical actions that the Commonwealth took to promote equity in global outcomes, as well as its goals of
development and democracy; these shall be discussed at length in later chapters. The economic footsteps of the Commonwealth Secretariat, as suggested above, left behind particularly large footprints in Africa. The Aso Rock Declaration noted that the Commonwealth Heads of Government supported the Commonwealth Secretariat’s activities in developing a comprehensive programme of assistance to support the efforts of Commonwealth countries in Africa. It is, in particular, the Commonwealth contribution to NEPAD of which Sharma is proud. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is an African Union (AU) programme for pan-African socio-economic development, led by a Committee of Heads of State and Government that reports to the Assembly of the AU. NEPAD was born out of the efforts of African leaders to shift the focus of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) from political liberation to economic development, which led to numerous pan-African development approaches in the 1980s and 1990s, most of which were unsuccessful. There were, however, three distinct proposals – the Millennium Africa Recovery Plan (MAP) launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2001, the Omega Plan launched at the Franco-Africa Summit in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in January 2001, and the Compact for Economic Recovery in Africa adopted by the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) Conference of African Finance and Planning Ministers – which were merged to produce a single initiative in the form of NEPAD in October 2001. The ECA document integrated the MAP and the Omega Plan into what would be called the New African Initiative (NAI), which was adopted at the 39th OAU Summit of the Heads of State and Government in Lusaka, Zambia, in July 2001 and which later evolved into NEPAD.

The Commonwealth connection in this regard is apparent right from the inception. In 1998, the President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, and the leaders of 12 African states met over a special two-day summit in Kampala, Uganda, where they discussed greater regional cooperation and the possibility of Africa being designated a special development area (BBC News 1998). Over the next year, Wolfensohn encouraged a few key African leaders that such an initiative should come from African leaders themselves. Thabo Mbeki, Deputy President and then President of South Africa, played a key role in these meetings. In 2000, he presented his pan-African recovery plan to the political leadership of the developed world: Prime Minister Tony Blair of the UK; President Bill Clinton of the US; the then-Governor of Texas, George W. Bush; Nordic prime ministers; Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori of Japan; President of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Horst Kohler; UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan; and other world leaders (Nabudere 2002).

At the OAU meeting in Lomé, Togo, in July 2000, where it was agreed that there should be an African Recovery Programme, the presidents of Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa were authorised to work on the programme (Taylor 2006, p.76). Of the plans that gave rise to NEPAD, MAP, thus, was led by President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa who developed it in conjunction with President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Abduleziz Bouteflika of Algeria, resulting in MAP and NEPAD having a strong Commonwealth connection from their earliest days. Likewise, though the Omega Plan was launched by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal and at a summit of Francophone African leaders, the summit was held in Cameroon, by then a member state of both the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) and the Commonwealth, though this connection may be more incidental. Nevertheless, of the five founding member countries of NEPAD (South Africa, Nigeria, Algeria, Egypt and Senegal), two – South Africa and Nigeria – were Commonwealth member states, with President Mbeki and President Obasanjo the key drivers who pulled forward the NEPAD process.

As Kamalesh Sharma puts it:

*When one thinks about the pioneering African leaders behind NEPAD, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and President Obasanjo of Nigeria immediately spring to mind. While there may have been four leaders behind NEPAD, there were two drivers. There is
nothing surprising about this: these two big leaders had simply pulled NEPAD in a
direction that had already been taken within the Commonwealth. It would not be
uninformed speculation to suggest that when NEPAD, a historic departure for Africa, was
agreed, and when the great decisions were taken to adopt a peer review mechanism, that a
great locomotive function would have been performed, given they had, at that time, 18
members of the Commonwealth in Africa who had already done it. In other words, the
ethos of “do-ability”, which really is the highest form of software which can exist inside the
mind of a leader, was already there. If we have done it in that organisation and we have
found it eminently desirable to do so in setting out our own stall as to where we want to go
as a society, then we can do it here.’

Indeed, as Nicholas Bayne wrote:

‘Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo, in between hosting the Commonwealth CHOGMs in
1999 and 2003, launched the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). This
differed from all previous initiatives to revive the continent. It did not put the blame for
Africa’s troubles on others, but stressed that Africans must take their own responsibilities.
It contained linked political and economic components, to show how better governance
and stronger democracy provided the foundations for economic advance. This approach
was strongly backed by other Commonwealth countries in Africa. Nearly all of them agreed
to submit their economic policies and standards of governance to the African Peer Review
Mechanism (APRM) introduced under NEPAD. The NEPAD also impressed
industrialised countries and ensured that Mbeki and Obasanjo, with other African leaders,
were invited to all but one of the G8 summits from 2000 to 2008. The two Commonwealth
G8 members were the moving spirits. The 2002 Kananaskis summit, chaired by Jean
Chrétien of Canada, adopted an “Action Plan for Africa”, which promised help for all
African countries that honoured their own commitments. This was given a strong boost by
the 2005 Gleneagles summit, chaired by Tony Blair of the UK, which made precise
commitments in aid volume, debt relief and specific programmes such as healthcare and
education.’ (Bayne 2010, p.116)

As mentioned earlier, the Commonwealth served, for Secretary-General Sharma, not just as a
cutting-edge thought laboratory, but also a pioneering and influential body willing and able to
make and have a positive impact on the world within and outside its membership. He rightly
attributes this to its vast and varied membership, which allows it to build on the exchange of
ideas and views at different levels and from very different parts of the world, while enabling it
– through its members – to contribute directly to associations outside the Commonwealth
family. In his own words:

‘The point I wish to make is the influence the Commonwealth has had on regions of the
world. Just as the Commonwealth had communicated a clear message to dictators – “We’re
not going to sink lower or stand for this”, so also would regional associations established
later in Africa. For instance, dictators that come to power in a coup cannot be members of
the African Union and are, thus, denied legitimacy, following similar principles and
practices as within the Commonwealth. Even in relation to NEPAD, the two leaders,
Mbeki and Obasanjo, together with the 18- or 19-strong membership of the
Commonwealth in the 53-strong membership of Africa, prevailed over the West in setting
an African-led framework for development and democracy in Africa. Furthermore, once
Africa expressed zero tolerance for unconstitutional government, Latin America could
hardly say ‘We will stick to our coups and where we are’, so the zero-tolerance approach to
dictators – disseminating from the Commonwealth – went global in its reach, influence and
impact.’
Stressing the reach of the Commonwealth provided by its varied membership and its capacity, consequently, to be a force for good in the world, he added:

‘Once Africa had expressed total acceptance of this principle, the rest of the world – including Latin America – was compelled to do the same, and the Organization of American States showed similar developments. The rejection of unconstitutional government, thus, became the new normal, at least in principle, offering hope and encouragement for those striving to realise democratic and constitutional government in practice. Due to the vast reach of the Commonwealth and a strong Commonwealth presence within other regional associations – 12 Commonwealth members in CARICOM, 9 Commonwealth members in the Pacific Islands Forum, 5 Commonwealth members in SAARC [South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation] – the Commonwealth has been able to exercise considerable positive influence in promoting good governance and development. CARICOM, for instance, is really an overlapping organisation – it is not an accident that as a region, the most formidable records of adhering to democratic norms are in a place like the Caribbean. So, you have not only added global value through the software, but by also being a model, even if a tacit and an implicit model, for our members to do the same in their own region. The Pacific Islands Forum is another organisation where the influence of the Commonwealth in forums of regional co-operation is evident.

In the wake of the May 2000 coup d’etat in Fiji and the escalating unrest and conflict in Solomon Islands, Pacific Islands Forum leaders came together to devise a regional framework for responding to the security concerns and crises of the region. The Biketawa Declaration was agreed by all 16 Pacific Islands Forum leaders on 28 October 2000 and was adopted and announced through the Communiqué of the 31st Meeting of Pacific Islands Forum Leaders hosted in Kiribati that month. In the Biketawa Declaration, Pacific Islands Forum leaders committed themselves and their countries to a set of guiding principles and courses of action. These included “commitment to good governance”, and “belief in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief and in the individual’s inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political process in framing the society in which he or she lives”. The principles also included “upholding democratic processes and institutions which reflect national and local circumstances, including the peaceful transfer of power, the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and just and honest government”, and “recognising the importance and urgency of equitable economic, social and cultural development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the peoples of the Forum”. The declaration also put forward a number of possible mechanisms for addressing security concerns and threats, including the creation of a Ministerial Action Group, fact-finding missions, eminent persons groups, third-party mediation, the convening of a special high-level meeting of the Forum Regional Security Committee or an ad hoc meeting of Forum ministers and a ‘good offices’ role for the PIFS Secretary-General. The Biketawa Declaration had a clear Commonwealth inspiration.

A minister told me in the Pacific that when they did the Biketawa Declaration, it was really quite a simple task, because they just reached out to what they had already done as members of the Commonwealth. When the declaration had to be drafted, they just took a look at the Commonwealth document and regionalised it. The Biketawa Declaration, with the various response mechanisms it outlined, also served as the basis for the adoption of a more CMAG-like approach within the Pacific. In August 2008, in the same period as the Commonwealth was intensifying its engagement with Fiji due to concerns about its political state of affairs, the Pacific Islands Forum threatened to suspend Fiji if Bainimarama did not hold a general election by March 2009. In January 2009, at a Special Leaders’ Meeting of the Forum, Forum leaders set a deadline of 1 May 2009 by when Fiji had to fix a date for
the election before the end of the year. However, as Fiji rejected the deadline for holding an election within the stipulated timeframe, and owing to its blatant disregard for human rights, freedom and democracy, it was suspended indefinitely from participation in the Forum on 2 May 2009. The suspension of Fiji from the Pacific Islands Forum is a case in point for how the Commonwealth has served as a model for other regional associations, especially those wherein Commonwealth members are well-represented and have considerable influence. The variety in the membership of the Commonwealth ensured that the principles that the Commonwealth advocated weren’t just confined to the realm of theory, but actually translated into decisions, programmes and policies leading to greater and wider acceptance of a democratic culture and ethos.

More recently, Sharma shared, ‘The value we are adding is in institution-building, direction-shaping and target-shifting. This has tangible benefits for our member states. The Commonwealth is, consequently, rendered a powerful influence for advancing peace, democracy, good governance, human rights, gender equality and the rule of law. Seven of the ten highest-ranked countries in the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance are Commonwealth members. Likewise, according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, eight of the ten countries in Sub-Saharan Africa perceived to have the least levels of corruption are Commonwealth members. Furthermore, as per the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Index, eight of the top ten countries for gender equality in Sub-Saharan Africa are members of the Commonwealth. Such external measures only confirm that the work of the Commonwealth in promoting its values, both publicly and behind the scenes, has substantial positive impact.

What I am trying to argue is this does not happen by accident. This happens over a period of time through a process of sedimentation in our member states, through their meetings, through CHOGMs, through – starting from 1970 in Singapore, of course – a series of values-related documents that we have subscribed to, and you start imbibing it and internalising it and acting on it. Of course, most countries have a long way to go, but this is a real and ongoing story. In a world which is looking for where the human community in the twenty-first century is going to settle in terms of an understanding of what constitutes a successful society, there is no other organisation which offers a better template than the Commonwealth. Why? Because whoever you want in an organisation to make it representative, in terms of geographical location, in terms of size, stage of development, religion, people, is there in this organisation. In fact, I would go to the extent of saying it is not possible, even if it wanted to, for the Commonwealth to be parochial, given its membership. And the more it has progressed in the last 50 years, the more this has been the case. Furthermore, when a country has a problem, the Commonwealth can not only provide advice and technical assistance, but also engage the good offices of the Secretary-General in solving the problem. The Commonwealth is able to draw on its depth and breadth of connections and networks to make this possible.

It was through the use of good offices that we were able to persuade President Gayoom of Maldives, who had been in power for 30 years, to realise that he was not immortal and that he needed to usher in multi-party democracy for the country. The Commonwealth created that possibility for the people, who grabbed it. In CHOGM, I had the opportunity with the permission of Gayoom’s successor and first democratically-elected President of Maldives, Mohamed Nasheed, to cite his statement, which he made in public in CHOGM in the Port of Spain and to me. Someone walked up to him and congratulated him upon being elected the President in the first multi-party election of Maldives, and he said, ‘Why are you congratulating me? You should be congratulating the Commonwealth. The
Commonwealth has done this”. The Commonwealth did so over five years, starting with a suggestion to the then President that, “I think we need to talk”, and then there were three visits by a special envoy to talk. We took it from there, we helped them write the Constitution, helped them frame the electoral law, and this is where we got to. There is no other organisation in the world – not even in the ballpark – which can dream of drawing a breath that is so long, which can keep the culture of confidence and trust with the member state for that long, which can come up with this outcome in the way that we did. That is our biggest resource, and now that the member states have agreed to a greater degree of self-scrutiny, this is the basis on which we move forward.

A lot of people and organisations point out what is wrong with a city or the world, but how many can actually solve these problems? The Commonwealth Secretary-General can actually do something about them. If the Secretary-General makes strident calls, then he or she loses influence. When the Commonwealth Secretary-General said he wants to observe elections in Sri Lanka, President Rajapaksha accepted his request because he could not say no after the Commonwealth Secretary-General had showed respect for him during his time as Chairperson-in-Office. Even his opponents respected the Secretary-General for it. Many improvements followed in Sri Lanka as a result. The same with Guyana. The Secretary-General had a chat with President Jagdeo to say he must not do a post-mortem, but prevent the worst from happening. He advised him to hold press conferences and speak up for the people. The government found itself watched very closely; and the government now in power came for the Commonwealth Day Reception. The same foreign minister who criticised the Secretary-General went public with a letter of admiration for how the Secretary-General handled it.

Pakistan is another example. In mid-April, two weeks into my tenure, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group lifted the suspension of Pakistan, which had been applied in late-November at the time of the Kampala CHOGM in 2007. Suspension need not imply censure: we accept that all of our member states are permanently journeying towards the model of democracy. In November 2007, President Musharraf had declared a state of emergency, effectively suspending Pakistan’s Constitution by a provisional constitutional order. Alongside a news blackout on private television stations, hundreds of protestors, journalists and political opponents were arrested, and eight Supreme Court judges were dismissed and put under house arrest. Pakistan’s derogations at the time of the state of emergency were removed with parliamentary elections of February 2008. Our commitment was to walk with that country to support the government’s stated aim to make parliament the ultimate authority in Pakistan. The Commonwealth won admiration for its trouble-shooting, which is a crucial part of its role today.

Coming back to the point about good offices, it is important to keep daylight between CMAG and good offices. Now the strength which the Commonwealth has always displayed in undertaking its rule of law and human rights-related work is the complete climate of receptivity, trust, confidence and sensitivity with which it has acted. Member states work with the Commonwealth Secretary-General because of trust. Being listed by CMAG can be more awkward. It is the trust the Secretary-General enjoys that I tried to build upon to influence and effect positive change. One of my new practices was the way I framed my departure statements when leaving Sri Lanka and The Gambia. The political worlds therein couldn’t disagree or accuse the statements of being condemitory. Yet, these raised valid concerns. In other words, I want to meet legitimate points, whether or not the world fully comprehends the problem. As Secretary-General, I have to find a way in which I make clear what I am doing, while making clear that these are the strengths the Commonwealth has.”
To conclude, it is worth harking back to a lecture given by Kamalesh Sharma at the Global Strategy Forum in November 2011:

“There are two points made about the Commonwealth, which always baffle me. The first one is that it is an outmoded, obsolete organisation with older moorings, which somehow manages to survive in the modern world, whereas the truth is that it is just the opposite. In 1949, when the Commonwealth was created, it prevented itself from over-designing itself, from over-prescribing to itself, normally the instinct for most organisations... The Commonwealth flies by wire. The Heads meet every two years, they look at the world, they know where the global emergencies are, they know they are heading a global organisation and they know what to do. Nobody ever asks whether it is part of the Commonwealth mandate... So, from the very beginning, the way in which we work could not be more contemporary and could not be more modern. When challenged at a point of transition in Africa, we rose to the occasion, after the Cold War, after Harare, through the series of agreements we signed. We were so quick off the starting block when an opportunity was there. There is no organisation which has used the climate, post-Cold War, to greater advantage in many ways than the Commonwealth has done.

Secondly, the point about moving from the old Commonwealth to the new one. This is an extraordinary achievement that you can get together and you can say that we are prepared to value our association, even if in the past there were so many negative and bitter features in it. We are prepared to allow that to evaporate and prepare to distil the commonality which has arisen with our historical association and to build on it and make it into a merit of our association. Where else have you seen this happen? So modern in its thinking, so modern in its approach to work, so contemporary in every way, that I think in the future, we will have to present this organisation as one which is the archetypical or quintessential twenty-first century organisation in everything it does. So, the Commonwealth is a naturally networking organisation, an organisation of networks which moves freely at various levels, recognising that the delivery of social aims belongs to the whole of society and not simply to leaders who may be in possession of power at a particular point of time...

We will deepen and work more on all the strengths that the member states have displayed and work on how to lift them up even more globally as an organisation that is a great global good and exercising, as I said, this wisdom function... I think we are at a transition point, a point of flexing, as far as this organisation is concerned. Looking back, we have had many of these points when we have seen the Commonwealth move up the global scale, and this one is one of them. The fact that we possibly do not quite see the historic significance of it right now could be because we are very close to it, but as I said, the more you remove yourself in time, the more significant it is going to look... The world finds itself balanced between peril and promise. And this is one organisation which only goes to realising the promise.’ (Sharma 2011b)
3. **EQUITY IN GLOBAL OUTCOMES**

‘After I was selected [at the 2007 CHOGM] in Kampala... I was produced at the last session of the Executive Committee, and there I made the point that incomplete globalisation is failed globalisation...

We also have a saying in India, that there’s not much difference between uncooked food and half-cooked food: you can’t eat either. Now the point about globalisation is that the terms of globalisation have to be defined in a way in which education policy in this country was once defined, i.e. ‘no child should be left behind’. So, in globalisation, no society should be left behind. And I said in my remarks then, that with respect of our endowment, with respect of our population, or size, or any other national characteristic, it is the right of every country to have its national salvation, and its place in the sun.

It’s not enough to think of globalisation as the movement of factors of production, in which the emerging economies are the primary actors, and the others are spectators... [I]f there’s a huge train wreck, then it’s not sufficient to ask who was travelling first class. We are joined with each other in a collective destiny, and all our work is collective.’ (Sharma 2008b)

So recounted Kamalesh Sharma in his inaugural address to the staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat at Marlborough House on 1 April 2008, his first day in his new role as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. From that address, it was evident that the next four years, and possibly eight, would see the Indian diplomatic grandee, now Commonwealth chief, craft an agenda that prioritised making globalisation fairer and more equitable in its outcomes for all, nations both rich and poor alike. When the Agreed Memorandum of 1965 placed the Commonwealth Secretariat under the charge of a Secretary-General who was to serve as its chief officer, it specified that the person chosen for the role was to be ‘a man of high standing, equivalent in rank to Senior High Commissioner’. The office required an incumbent of considerable distinction and experience, who would be appointed by Commonwealth Heads of Government collectively, be granted access to the Heads, and be seen as the servant of Commonwealth countries collectively. Although never explicitly mentioned, it has always been clear that an effective Secretary-General is one who is able to strategically employ that ‘considerable distinction and experience’ to not only guide the future activities of the Commonwealth, but also shape its perceptions and contributions, both within and beyond the evolving geopolitical cartographies it has mapped out over the years. Each of his predecessors as Secretary-General – Smith, Ramphal, Anyaoku and McKinnon – had used their diplomatic or political backgrounds, as well as their unique set of interests, specialisations and networks, to define the footprint the Commonwealth would leave on the world stage. Sharma was determined to do the same.

Looking back at his early days in office, and his vision for how the Commonwealth could establish the idea of global equity in a practical context, Sharma revealed toward the end of his tenure in 2016:
‘Upon taking over as Secretary-General, I, on the economic side, wanted to strengthen the role of the Commonwealth in making a contribution to the equality of outcomes, in global multilateral relations, on which I have worked for a considerable part of my career. I was spokesperson for developing countries in the UNCTAD [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development], Geneva, on the Uruguay Round of trade talks undertaken within the framework of GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade]. In New York, I initiated and chaired the Working Group on Financing for Development, which led eventually to the Monterrey Consensus and has become an important multilateral stream. For me, promoting the idea of global equity was yet another policy area where the Commonwealth could emerge as a world leader.

i. The Commonwealth is an ideal vehicle as it is the most representative organisation in global membership – in terms of regions, with all continents represented; in size, with its member states ranging from some of the world’s biggest countries to some of its smallest; and in classification – industrialised, emerging, developing, landlocked, small economies.

ii. In my unrehearsed remarks after election at the Kampala CHOGM, I had said that the destiny of the Commonwealth could not be to become a “boutique organisation”.

iii. I had also said that the Commonwealth must always prove itself to be the “great global good” that it is. I was convinced that in order not to act on the margins, the mission statement of the Commonwealth has to be pronounced at the highest level.’

In his inaugural address to the staff at the Secretariat, Sharma went on to highlight how his involvement with the Monterrey Consensus demonstrated his longstanding commitment to promoting equity in global outcomes. Thereby, he also indicated how he intended to harness the wealth of expertise and networks that his experience had proffered in this regard to place that same aspiration at the heart of what the consensus-driven Commonwealth would seek to achieve over his tenure. He shared:

‘I did [multilateral work] not because it was a glamorous thing to do, but because I believe by instinct that humankind – the human community – must strive at all points toward convergence. It cannot be consensus, but unless you believe you can reach a platform for working on consensus, then all of us collectively are in big trouble... [W]hen I started Financing for Development which became the Monterrey Consensus, in fact I was discouraged by the many people who said that I had started a mission impossible. The environment was not very good at the time, but by the time I had finished, it was better. My approach was very simple, telling people to talk about themselves, their experience and keep it down to earth. Their national lives have to be led, they can be led better; let’s collaborate; let’s not do polemics, let’s not do economic theory, let’s do facts.

It was enormously successful, and in the end, the principle was a very simple one. The South had to accept that its resources – whether they came from inside or outside – had to be utilised with a great degree of fastidiousness, so that they can be accounted for, so that they can be transparent, so that the outputs can be measured from the inputs. Meanwhile, the North had to be able to pronounce on where these resources are going to come from, as long as they control them. Whether it was development assistance, or loans, whether from IDA [International Development Association] or other facilities, whether IFC or private flows, or whether it was writing off debt, whether it was trade and how to increase trade, these were the resources that were coming in. In the end, it was a question of will the resources flow where they were needed, and will they be used as required? And in the end (I think many of you know about the Monterrey Consensus), I was delighted that this principle had been recognised, and that we could move forward.’ (Sharma 2008b)
For Secretary-General Sharma, were equity in global outcomes ever to become a practical reality rather than remain a utopian ideal, it was crucial that the perspectives and priorities of the developing world were represented fairly at international negotiations, especially those concerning the international financial architecture. It ought to be said that with respect to his aspirations in this regard, his appointment as Commonwealth Secretary-General could not have been more timely. The reform of international institutions had been a key item on the agenda of the Kampala CHOGM in 2007, at which Sharma was selected for the office. The Kampala Communiqué clearly stated:

‘Heads of Government acknowledged the need to strengthen the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making and norm-setting and, in this regard, stressed the importance of continuing efforts to reform the international financial architecture, including the Bretton Woods institutions... Heads of Government expressed concern that the current architecture of international institutions, which was largely designed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, does not reflect the challenges in the world of the twenty-first century. This undermines the legitimacy, effectiveness and credibility of the whole international system. Heads requested the Secretary-General to establish a small representative group of their number that would build on the considerable work that has already been done to undertake advocacy and lobbying in support of wide-ranging reforms. In doing so, the group would take particular cognisance of the special needs of LDCs [least developed countries] and small states. This group would report back to the next Heads of Government Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2007a)

Suffice it to say, this was one directive that the new Secretary-General joyfully welcomed. Sharma announced to the staff on his very first day in office:

‘The Commonwealth is going to do a project on reviewing and re-doing the architecture of international institutions, of which we are one. Why do we have to do this? Because the world around us is changing with enormous rapidity. Institutions were not made like that. The IMF, for instance, was made to ensure that there’s no great depression, in the wake of the very bad experiences of global depressions, exchange rate mechanisms, balance of payments, and so on. But in the 1970s, when the exchange rates were floated, it reinvented itself, and started doing other things. The same thing with the World Bank. There’s now a suggestion that it should work on the environment as well as on poverty. Same for the WTO. All of these organisations have to see how fast they are being rendered obsolescent, and how they can reshape themselves.’ (Sharma 2008b)

Two months later, in a statement on ‘Rethinking Global Institutions’, Sharma expanded on these views:

‘These international institutions have been a preponderant presence in the post-war world, and have tried to adapt and reinvent themselves to a changing world. Their role in their area of engagement has been enormous, even if uneven and frequently questioned and controversial. They have characterised the workings of the modern age. It would not have been in their nature, however, to have succeeded in erasing the stamp of the times in which they were created. They reflect the political configuration of a bygone era, a principal feature of which was the near total absence of independent states of the developing world.

The progressive accommodation of the growth and aspirations of this world has been a principal preoccupation of these institutions. To refashion themselves to do justice to the fact and consequences of this rapidly expanded and variegated world – in terms of state actors, population, political viewpoints, social and economic aspirations, regional
compulsions and a host of existential pressures – could not be within the convenient means of these institutions. But the volume of the challenge is now compounded by its complexity and the unprogrammed energies being explosively released in the world...

A rapidly different global political economy is in formation. North and South as geographical descriptions are evaporating before our eyes. The holdings of financial reserves have shifted from the West to the East: since Bretton Woods, the US has become the world’s largest debtor nation from being the world’s largest creditor nation. Several reputable projects see a rearrangement of leading economic powers in the coming decades.

But the requirement to rethink global institutions goes much beyond the emergence of major new players. The future belongs to all members of the human community, and not just to emerging economies. The global indent in its totality has overtaken the delivery apparatus. In respect of any global institution, the mounting “to do” list is beyond the capacity of opportunistic improvisation. There is now both a capacity and orientation mismatch. The expectation of all states in the global system, irrespective of size, have equal validity. Moreover, “globalisation” as a phenomenon has released a colossal potential for wealth creation and expansion of welfare, but enlightened “globalism” is now demanded to address the imbalance in allocation of resources allied to globalisation between private goods and essential public goods...’. (Sharma 2008c)

This statement was intentionally issued just days ahead of a summit that Sharma held at Marlborough House in London on 9-10 June 2008. This meeting brought together a representative group of 11 Commonwealth Heads of Government, in the Wren Room, to ‘consider a common approach to pursuing practical institutional reform of international financial institutions, global environmental governance, and the coherence of the UN system in its support for development’ (Ibid). The discussions at the meeting were supported by papers by experts about potential improvements in the international system in the three areas (Ockenden 2009, p.1). Sharma recounted:

‘Within three months of my taking over, a mini-summit was organised on reform of international financial institutions. The title itself was a challenge to the conventional power structure of global financial institutions. I called and spoke to Heads personally, and the final representative group consisted of the following: President Bharrat Jagdeo (Guyana), Prime Minister Navinchandra Ramgoolam (Mauritius), President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (Maldives), President Mahinda Rajapaksa (Sri Lanka), Prime Minister Feleti Sevele (Tonga), Prime Minister Patrick Manning (Trinidad and Tobago), President Yoweri Museveni (Uganda), Prime Minister Gordon Brown (United Kingdom), President Jakaya Kikwete (United Republic of Tanzania), Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama (Ghana) and Deputy Prime Minister Najib bin Tun Razak (Malaysia). The key to the meeting was that it needed to be chaired by a member of the G7. When I had been involved with Financing for Development, which led to Monterrey Consensus, Gordon Brown, then the Chancellor Exchequer, was the one finance minister from the G7 who had most ardently welcomed and approved it. That is why I asked him to chair the meeting; and I was most grateful to Brown, British Prime Minister at the time, that he agreed to do it.’

Sharma attended the meeting equipped with clarity about his desired outcomes and the strategy he would take to secure it.

‘It had been my intention that the discussions at the meeting, and any consensus reached, duly considered and incorporated phrases such as “fully inclusive and equitable society” and “equal voice and fair representation” in the final statement; and I succeeded in getting
the Heads to say it. I had wanted them to put forward these phrases, so they could not then turn around and question the Secretary-General as what they say is what is happening."

The meeting led to the adoption of the Marlborough House Statement on Reform of International Institutions on 10 June 2008. Acknowledging that ‘[t]hrough collective co-operation, embodied in international institutions, the global community will foster the conditions for a fully inclusive and equitable global society’, the Heads stated:

‘We believe that reform and construction of new international institutions should be built on the following guiding principles:

- Institutions must enjoy the **legitimacy** not only of their member states but also of the wider international community in order to command confidence and commitment.
- It is essential that all countries have equal voice and **fair representation**.
- A voice for all countries is only valuable if it is listened to and is reflected in decision-making. It is essential that institutions are **responsive**, with the interests of all members, especially the smallest and poorest, being taken into account.
- The activities and governance of institutions must be **flexible**, responding to new challenges, national priorities and the specific circumstances of member states, and changing global realities.
- Institutions must have clear responsibilities and the conduct of their business must be **transparent and accountable** to the entire membership and the wider public.
- It is essential that they be **effective** and capable of addressing today’s global challenges.’

Having secured his desired outcome by getting the small group of Heads to express their commitment to reform ‘that supports a more democratic global society with greater equity and fairness’, Sharma then sought Commonwealth-wide acceptance of the statement at the highest level. Sharma shared:

‘In September 2008, I convened a meeting of all Commonwealth Heads of Government in New York to endorse as a collective body what the 11 Heads agreed on in London in June. Some Heads attended this meeting, and some who could not be present were represented by foreign ministers or ambassadors. The declaration of the mini-summit, thus, was endorsed in New York at a special meeting of the Heads during the UN session that year, and the statement was endorsed by the entire membership at the highest level. Barring a special mini-summit called in the context of the issue of South Africa, these were the only instances of a special mini-summit and summit convened in the history of the Commonwealth. The political prominence given to this intent was deliberate: to establish the Commonwealth as a participant in international discourse with a global intent. The outcome confirmed to me that I, as Commonwealth Secretary-General, should work with big institutions: it is what 53 states wanted, 53 states from different parts of the world that formed part of this voluntary association that was neither small, nor regional, but large and global.’

The conclusions of the London meeting in June 2008 – those that dealt with the Bretton Woods institutions – were also endorsed by Commonwealth finance ministers at their meeting in Saint Lucia in October 2008; and a pan-Commonwealth process of consultation was also launched later to build consensus on the specifics of reform and the plan of action (Ockenden 2009, p.5). In 2009, the Economic Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat published the paper *Reform of International Institutions: Towards a Commonwealth Agenda* as part of the Commonwealth Economic Paper Series.

The spirit of Sharma’s agenda for the Commonwealth to promote global equity also assumed form in the Commonwealth’s engagement with the G20 during his tenure. To be fair, under
McKinnon, the Commonwealth, jointly with La Francophonie, had already started to engage with the G8 on matters concerning poor and highly-indebted member countries. In May 2004, McKinnon and his counterpart at La Francophonie wrote a joint letter to the Presidents of the G8 requesting a two-year postponement of the sunset clause that would close access to the debt relief programme of the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). The HIPC Initiative, launched by the World Bank and the IMF in 1996 and enhanced in 1998, had created a comprehensive framework for all creditors (including multilateral ones) to offer debt relief to the world’s poorest and most heavily indebted countries, thereby reducing constraints on their economic growth and poverty alleviation posed by debt build-up. Even in the establishment and enhancement of the initiative, the Commonwealth had played a key role in the 1990s, in close consultation with other institutions. Then, in June 2005, the two Secretaries-General published a joint op-ed prior to the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, advocating the allocation of significant additional resources for development to eradicate poverty. This was followed by a launch, in October 2006, of a study on joint action on debt by the Commonwealth and La Francophonie at the annual meetings of the Bretton Woods institutions in Washington; and by meetings of finance ministers in support of the HIPC process, investments in development and revitalisation of NEPAD. However, it was under Sharma that the Commonwealth’s engagement with such summits – now, mainly with the G20 – grew more concrete, robust and sustained. With five G20 countries – Australia, Canada, India, South Africa and the UK – being Commonwealth member states, the Commonwealth has had considerable opportunity to add global value in what has emerged as one of the world’s most powerful global policy-making fora.

Nevertheless, the G20, constituting just 20 major economies that accounted for an overwhelming 75 per cent of world trade even in 2015, has, like the G8, attracted questions about its legitimacy since its inception, relating largely to the majority of the world not being represented around its table. In January 2009, Sharma commented in a piece for a special publication of the G20 Research Group ahead of the London G20 Summit in April:

‘The G20 has burst into the public consciousness over the past six months. With 90 per cent of global GDP and two-thirds of world trade and population, that is where it should be. It is no longer an acronym for the shadowy world of finance ministry co-operation. Rather, its emergence as a grouping involving Heads of Government is recognition of the fact that dealing with global challenges – and specifically the global financial crisis – demands a new breadth, depth and intensity of international co-operation. The new-found status is both welcome and incomplete. It is welcome because it shows that the profound political and economic changes which have affected the world over the past generation are being reflected in the structures of global governance. The post-War fault lines of North/South and East/West are being replaced by a more integrated and interdependent world... As events have shown, collective action amongst a wider group of systematically important countries is more necessary than ever before. But this advance in comprehensiveness is also incomplete. It is welcome because it shows that the profound political and economic changes which have affected the world over the past generation are being reflected in the structures of global governance. The post-War fault lines of North/South and East/West are being replaced by a more integrated and interdependent world... As events have shown, collective action amongst a wider group of systematically important countries is more necessary than ever before. But this advance in comprehensiveness is also incomplete. It is the fate of economists – as with generals – to be fighting the last war. The insight that the narrow circle of power needs to be widened – with the inclusion of the economically important and powerful emerging markets as equal partners in tackling today’s problems – is welcome and right. However, this is a necessary and not a sufficient condition for a stable, inclusive and prosperous world.’ (Sharma 2009a)

It is in offering a voice to the voiceless at the G20 that the Commonwealth, under Sharma, proved most enterprising and effective. He shared:

‘When the G20 was first created, I wrote to all 20 Heads of Government, encouraging them to consider the perspectives of small and vulnerable states. That non-Commonwealth countries such as Turkey and Argentina sent in detailed replies established in my mind the
opportunity there was in the G20 to more regular engagement with the Commonwealth. Once the Commonwealth joined efforts with the OIF in this regard, its relevance grew further. While the Commonwealth and the OIF collectively represent over 100 of the world’s poorest developing countries, six G20 members belonged to either or both of the two associations: Australia, Canada, France, India, South Africa and the UK. Consequently, developing common positions across a range of carefully selected development challenges, particularly those affecting the most vulnerable members of the Commonwealth and the OIF, was useful not only for the two associations, but also for the G20, whose membership does not include the vast majority of the membership of the two associations.’

In March 2009, ahead of the G20 London Summit in April, Sharma also wrote to the five G20 leaders whose countries were members of the Commonwealth, highlighting three issues of concern that he requested them to convey to their fellow G20 leaders and have reflected in their deliberations at, as well as in the conclusions of, the G20 leaders’ meeting:

‘The first of the three issues is the need for an urgent and unprecedentedly large global financial response to alleviate the rapid decline in economic activity in the smallest, poorest and most vulnerable countries... For the smallest and poorest countries, steps to improve governance in international financial institutions represent a second global challenge... Finally, and directly related, in the past year Commonwealth member countries have agreed on a set of common principles which can help frame the global discourse on international financial institution governance. These principles, set out in the Commonwealth’s Marlborough House Statement, include legitimacy, equal voice and fair representation, flexibility, transparency, accountability and effectiveness. We trust that “G20” leaders will consider this – or a similar set of guiding principles – as a framework to underpin deliberations on a package of governance reforms...’ (Sharma 2009b)

Following the G20 Summit, the point minister appointed for the London ‘G20’ meeting, Mark Malloch-Brown from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), called the Secretary-General on 3 April 2009 to say that he hoped the Commonwealth was satisfied that the three concerns had been reflected in the G20 Communiqué. About the exchange, Sharma revealed:

‘I said that many formulations reflected the Commonwealth positions, particularly on IFI reform and that it was more in the direction of a “T20” statement than an expanded “G7” one and we welcomed that. I hoped that a global concern will continue. Mark Malloch-Brown echoed the term “T20” with approval.’ (Office of the Secretary-General 2009)

Prior to the meeting of G20 leaders on 2 April 2009, Sharma, as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, together with Abdou Diouf, Secretary-General of La Francophonie, also issued a joint statement in *The Financial Times* and *Le Monde*, wherein he wrote:

‘Ninety per cent of global GDP will be represented at the G20 table in London on 2nd April. All that will be missing is 90 per cent of the world’s countries. The simple fact of globalisation dictates that all countries, the world over, have been affected by a tsunami of crises – of finance and food, of energy and the environment. Equally, all have an interest in what goes into the G20 meeting, and what comes out of it... It is our hope that the G20 addresses the challenges of more than its own ‘magic circle’...

G20 leaders in London can take to heart two related considerations in advance of their meeting. First, the message of the “G172” that is not invited to the London table, is that every country in the world needs a stable and vibrant global economy... The G20 has the leadership and levers to deliver – and to look out for the whole world... Second, for the “G172”, every country has an equal interest in effective international financial institutions as the engines of global co-operation. The World Bank and the IMF of today were built to
serve another age, by another – much smaller, much less representative – “international community”. They need to be re-equipped, far beyond mere tinkering, for the purposes of the twenty-first century...

Our current reality is partial globalisation; our shared goal is inclusive globalism. A new multilateralism is an imperative, not an option. The G20 can be the T20 – the Trustees of the whole world’s interests.’ (Sharma and Diouf 2009)

The premise of this message would recur in the many speeches and statements relating to the G20 flowing from Queen Mary’s former bedroom at Marlborough House, now the office of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, in the months and years to come. Ahead of the next G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, 24–25 September 2009, Sharma wrote in an essay for a G20 Research Group publication:

‘With five members in the G20 – but many more outside it – the Commonwealth has always said the same things to the group, from within and without. It is this: while 90 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) will be represented at the G20 table in Pittsburgh in September, 90 per cent of the world’s countries and their voices will be missing.

Globalisation is the essential fact that all people’s fortunes are interlocking, and that all challenges can only be met together. So the G20 countries, when they meet in the United States, should always be conscious of their place in the global “G200”. They should be aware of the unseen and unrepresented guests at their table, who bear the consequences of their decisions and actions. For the G20, the current global downturn can make them a little poorer. But for the developing world, embodied in the G172 not at the summit, the current global downturn is devastating... Turbulence in the skies of the developed world has unleashed hurricanes in the developing world...

At the G20 summit in London in April, British Prime Minister and host Gordon Brown announced the end of the Washington Consensus of open markets, privatisation and liberalisation. At the centre of the recovery exercise were resources made available primarily through the IMF. The international financial institutions – especially the World Bank and the IMF – have since led a coherent, international response to the current crisis, in the form of billions of dollars released as liquidity for finance. They are to be congratulated for this.

But the World Bank itself estimates that the financing gap for developing countries may still rise to $700 billion – and the international community does not know where that funding will come from... The G20 could...consider a new formula of economic development... The new approach can be true to the basic principles of the Washington Consensus, while considering tools such as moderate forms of government guarantees for long-term loans, partly nationalised development banks, managed exchange rates and flexibility on inflation. The G20 needs to think creatively if it is to help the developing world out of the difficulties into which it – the G20 – has plunged it... Global challenges need global rules, which need global consent.’ (Sharma 2009c)

Since 2009, the Commonwealth and La Francophonie were mandated by their leaders to pursue a strong, interactive relationship with the G20, to ensure that the perspectives, voices and suggestions of the rest, who were not members of the G20, could be taken into account. In October 2009, the Deputy Prime Minister of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta, speaking on the sidelines of the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting in Cyprus and echoing sentiments felt in many non-G20 countries, called on the five Commonwealth member states to press the cause of the rest at the G20 (The Daily Nation 2009). In June 2010, Stephen Harper, then Prime Minister of Canada, as Chair of the G20 and host of the G20 Summit in Toronto, invited for the first time
the Secretaries-General of the Commonwealth and La Francophonie to discuss issues of concern shared by both organisations and their members ahead of the G20 Toronto Summit. The Commonwealth seized the opportunity to table three papers on financing for development, climate change, and maternal and child health. With regard to trade, the Secretaries-General highlighted the challenges of both Commonwealth and Francophonie members in participating in the global trading system, including the availability of trade finance, progress with the Doha Development Round, and improving duty-free and quota-free access to a wider range of developing countries. In relation to climate change, they urged consideration of a global process to accelerate both climate finance for adaptation and mitigation to small countries, as well as mechanisms to support the development of national strategies for planning adaptation and mitigation. With respect to maternal health, they discussed the Millennium Development Goal targets for maternal health and Commonwealth/Francophonie suggestions for accelerating progress. Sharma praised Harper for the invitation and said in a press interview, ‘If we can make this into a practice – and the credit goes entirely to Canada for having started it – people will see that there’s a democratisation of the global discourse’ (People’s Daily 2010).

Another suggestion that Sharma offered to Prime Minister Harper was the need to create a working group on development and resources to achieve connectivity on problems of others at and between G20 summits. Over the next years, such joint consultations by the Secretaries-General of the Commonwealth and La Francophonie were also held with the Chairs of the successive G20 Summits, and with the G20 Development Working Group (DWG) that was initiated at the 2010 Toronto Summit. Ahead of the G20 Seoul Summit in November 2010, the Sherpas of the two Secretaries-General met with the South Korean G20 Sherpa and tabled with the DWG four papers on innovative financing, climate change, trade and the conclusion of the Doha Round, and support to women entrepreneurs in the fight against poverty. At the Seoul Summit, G20 leaders launched the G20 Multi-year Action Plan for Development and mandated the DWG to pursue it. The plan focused on nine key development challenges: i) infrastructure, ii) human resources development, iii) trade, iv) private investment and job creation, v) food security, vi) growth with resilience, vii) financial inclusion, viii) domestic resource mobilisation, and ix) knowledge sharing. The potential for the Commonwealth to add valuable input was now clearly established; and at its joint meeting with La Francophonie and the G20 in Cape Town in June 2011, it suggested key action points in three of the nine areas: promoting growth with resilience; ensuring financial inclusion; and promoting effective participation of the world’s poor countries in global trade – to create jobs and improve livelihoods (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011b). At the G20 Cape Town Summit in June 2011, the Commonwealth delegation met with representatives of the DWG and tabled four papers: on financial inclusion, growth with resilience, global trade and the development of innovative financing.

In his Statement of Results, dated 29 September 2011, to the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Sharma recollected the engagement of the Commonwealth and La Francophonie with the Chairs of the G20 as follows:

‘[W]e have sought to contribute to global advocacy in the hallways of the G20. My counterpart in La Francophonie and I had a very productive meeting with the Canadian Prime Minister – at the latter’s welcome initiative. Our message was simple: the G20 must be the T20; it must be a group of Trustees who think and act not only for the 90 per cent of global GDP represented at the table, but also the 90 per cent of countries not at the table. The high-level interaction continued with South Korea, and my Francophonie counterpart and I are to meet the French President next week as the G20 Chair, maintaining the momentum. We will be presenting papers on growth with resilience, trade, financial inclusion and innovative finance for development. Our advocacy has been backed by very strong inputs and participation by us at the policy and analysis levels too, through engagement with the G20’s Working Group on Development.’
On 5 October 2011, the two Secretaries-General met with President Nicolas Sarkozy of France to discuss priorities ahead of the Cannes G20 Summit he would chair in November (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011c). They reflected on trade, growth with resilience, and financial inclusion, which had also been discussed earlier with the DWG; as well as the need for new and innovative sources of financing for development for the world’s smallest and poorest countries. In recognition of the value added by the Commonwealth through such engagement, Australia proposed, and other Commonwealth Heads agreed, at the Perth CHOGM, 28–30 October 2011, to convene annual Commonwealth dialogues on the G20 agenda. This led to the first Annual Commonwealth Dialogue between the Commonwealth, La Francophonie and the G20 (then under Mexican Presidency) taking place in April 2012 in Washington, DC on the sidelines of the IMF and World Bank 2012 Spring Meetings. Two months earlier, in February 2012, the Commonwealth Secretariat also joined La Francophonie in the United Nations Leading Group on Innovative Financing.

In 2012, Sharma met with Mexican President Felipe Calderon in Mexico City on 14 May, ahead of the Los Cabos G20 Summit Calderon would chair in June, and outlined four priority challenges: financing for development, tackling debt, promoting green growth and food security. They also outlined the progress that had been made under the Mexican G20 Presidency in strengthening G20 outreach to many countries which had hitherto not been included in such outreach; and discussed the outcomes of the successful outreach meeting of the Commonwealth, Francophonie and the G20 earlier in the year. In Sharma’s own words, as featured in his piece ‘Giving Voice to the Voiceless’ in FIRST Magazine (2012):

‘After Mexico assumed the G20 Presidency for 2012, early in January, clearly indicating the extent to which Commonwealth–G20 relations have developed, as a pioneering step the first informal meeting of the G20 Development Working Group was held at the Commonwealth’s London Headquarters. The presence at that meeting of all G20 members further reinforced the Commonwealth Secretariat’s role as an important partner in the Group’s work. Through our political level and technical level engagement, we have added profile and relevance to the G20’s deliberations on key challenges – from debt to trade to climate change to sustainable development and economic resilience. This year, key among Mexico’s priorities is the nexus between Green Growth for poverty eradication and sustainable development. We have sought to contribute to the thinking of the Chair on the challenges and dilemmas before poor and vulnerable states.’ (Sharma 2012a, p.40)

By 2012, the engagement between the Commonwealth and the G20 had clearly become more mature and organised. Sharma observed:

‘The Commonwealth and La Francophonie are working with the G20 on two fronts. First, our consultations with incumbent G20 chairs ensure that strong political messages about the priorities of non-G20 members are taken into account. The G20 also needs to be a “T20” – acting as Trustees for the concerns and needs of the wider global community. Second, we are making practical policy contributions to the G20’s Development Working Group at the technical level, to ensure that the needs of non-G20 countries are factored into the policy options and solutions that are being developed... Our G20 efforts – political and technical – are aimed at promoting an inclusive G20 approach to developing policies for the world economy.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012b)

The sustained engagement between the Commonwealth and the G20 both benefited from and contributed to the ongoing efforts to reinvigorate the Commonwealth Secretariat’s status in the multilateral arena. In the 2013-issue of Global, Sharma added:
Early in 2012, a meeting of the G20 Development Working Group was held at Marlborough House, chaired by Mexico. The occasion reminded us of the extent to which the Commonwealth and G20 are now working together. The presence at the meeting of all G20 members reinforced further the role of the Commonwealth as an important contributor to the work of the group. This means we are increasingly able to bring to the G20 table the most pressing economic and social concerns of Commonwealth members, in particular those of our poorest, smallest and most vulnerable states. Later in the year, the United Nations High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda gathered at Marlborough House. Under its co-chairs, Prime Minister Cameron of the UK, President Sirleaf of Liberia and President Yudhoyono of Indonesia, the panel held its first set of meetings towards agreeing a new plan of global action on fighting poverty, with the aspiration of ending extreme poverty within a lifetime. Discussions ranged over food security, energy, education, jobs, healthcare, and how best to reach those excluded from traditional pathways out of poverty. December saw the OECD Development Assistance Committee convene at Marlborough House. Among those present were EU Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, and UN Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser for Post-2015 Development Planning, Amina J Mohammed, as well as the chief executives of major Commonwealth member government development agencies: Australia’s AusAid, Canada’s CIDA, New Zealand’s NZAid and the United Kingdom’s UK Aid. Meetings with Commissioner Piebalgs and with OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurria gave me the opportunity of discussing with them such issues as trade facilitation, unlocking funds for countries to mitigate the effects of climate change, green growth, development assistance and financial stability. Collaboration with global partners at an early stage offers scope for weaving Commonwealth priorities into the fabric of global co-operation on matters of such import and significance as agreeing development goals and planning international action to achieve them.’ (Sharma 2013a, p.83)

Over the next years, the relationship of the Commonwealth, La Francophonie and the G20 grew substantially stronger through the annual Commonwealth–Francophonie policy outreach meetings with the G20 presidents and chairs of the G20 DWG – with Russia in 2013, Australia in 2014 and Turkey in 2015. The St Petersburg Development Accountability Report on G20 Development Commitments (2013) noted:

‘Expanding outreach through invitations to DWG meetings and organizing collective meetings with organizations that have large developing country memberships, such as the Commonwealth and OIF, is helping the G20 to better understand the perspectives of non-G20 members and the development challenges confronting specific groups such as the smallest developing countries.’

In April 2013, during Russia’s G20 Presidency, the Commonwealth held its second Annual Commonwealth G20 Dialogue on G20 issues. The discussions focused on policy issues Commonwealth developing countries considered to be important priorities for future G20 focus: infrastructure, financial inclusion, human resource development, knowledge sharing and peer learning, and the Post-2015 Development Framework. On 21 April 2013, just after the annual dialogue, Commonwealth and La Francophonie members held an outreach meeting with Russia and several other DWG members in Washington, DC. The participants included more than 20 developing country members of the Commonwealth and Francophonie; nine G20 member countries; and several international organisations, including the World Bank, IMF, Alliance for Financial Inclusion, UNDP, OECD and the G24. The Commonwealth and Francophonie also supported the Russian G20 DWG in its initiative to assess the G20’s accountability in relation to G20 DWG development commitments by providing inputs to the accountability process and requesting and assembling the perspectives of many of the world’s poorest and smallest countries. In May 2013, the two associations also participated in a
lunchtime session of the G20’s DWG in Moscow, where the discussion focused on the increasing debt burden of small middle-income countries.

The Secretariats of the Commonwealth and La Francophonie, together with Australia as G20 President and Chair of the G20 DWG for 2014, convened the third annual Commonwealth and La Francophone dialogue with the G20 at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, DC on 7 April 2014. The meeting facilitated discussions on achieving growth with resilience; how international financial centres (IFCs) can meet the international requirements for international tax transparency and continue to generate jobs and growth; how to promote trade, growth and jobs by improving access to international regional value chains for the poor, small and vulnerable countries; and the role of the informal sectors in promoting growth, employment and sustainable development. On 29 August 2014, Sharma, together with the Finance Minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jon Patrice Kibeti, who was representing Abdou Diouf, called on Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbot at his office in Canberra in his capacity as Chair of the Australian G20 Presidency. They highlighted the importance of G20 economic policies generating economic growth which is inclusive and sustainable, the need to identify innovative alternative sources for finance for development given that official aid sources from governments are insufficient to meet global needs, the need to increase G20 focus on youth unemployment globally by building youth indicators into the post-2015 framework, and undertook to explore options for addressing the funding shortfall in investment required to meet global infrastructure needs.

On 14 April 2015, Turkey, as G20 President, along with some members of the G20 DWG convened the fifth Annual Commonwealth and La Francophone Dialogue in Washington, DC. The meeting focused on the priority development challenges of Commonwealth and La Francophonie developing countries; structural barriers faced in their integration into global value chains (GVCs); challenges in balancing the need for effective anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) regulation with the risk of hindering vital flow of remittances to developing countries; and mobilising domestic resources in low-income and developing countries. The two Secretaries-General also shared perspectives on development with the G20 group through an exchange with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey just ahead of the annual summit of G20 leaders in Antalya in November 2015.

The value added by the Commonwealth in and through such partnerships is summed up succinctly and appropriately in the 2015 Secretariat report Adding Global Value.

“The global economic and financial system fails to respond to the needs of small and developing countries because their representatives often do not participate on an equal footing in decision-making forums which shape the system. The G20, one of the world’s most powerful economic policy-making forums, takes decisions which have far-reaching global impact; yet, it lacks the perspective of smaller and developing countries. Commonwealth advocacy is required to ensure that their pressing concerns receive the hearing, and attention, they deserve. The Commonwealth has a longstanding commitment to improving financing for development, an issue which is addressed at every Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting. Our economic advocacy is focused on helping countries build an inclusive global financial architecture that allows both developing and developed countries to grow and thrive. We help ensure that the voices of our developing countries are heard in G20 talks through a joint development dialogue with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. For example, our member countries in the past have called for practical support to address debt, for remittance flows to be protected, and for more inclusive and effective international tax co-operation. Many priority policies advocated by the Commonwealth are now part of G20 discussions, including inclusive
Debt management was another area where Sharma was keen that the Commonwealth would continue to lead the way, thereby enabling debt-ridden countries to better manage their debt and achieve greater economic stability. In his address at the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management Forum convened at Marlborough House on 26 June 2008, he observed, ‘Debt burdens are crippling. They take money away from health, education and the environment: the real priorities. For example, pre-HIPC in 2000, 21 countries owed more than they produced in a year’ (Sharma 2008). In the seven years following the 2007–08 financial crisis, debt had increased by more than 40 per cent globally; by 2014, debt as a proportion of GDP had increased by eight per cent in Africa, six per cent in the Pacific and 15 per cent in the Caribbean. Some Commonwealth countries had debt-to-GDP ratios of over 100 per cent.

Debt management, nevertheless, was one area where the Commonwealth Secretariat had long excelled. As its 2015 publication, *Adding Global Value* noted:

‘The Commonwealth has been addressing sovereign debt since the 1980s. We have contributed to major initiatives including the Paris Club, which focused on solving the payment difficulties of debtor countries, and the Naples Terms, which increased the amount of debt relief to poorer countries. In the 1990s, a proposal initiated by the Commonwealth and supported by the International Monetary Fund culminated in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative to provide relief and low-interest loans to cancel or reduce the debt of the poorest countries.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.26)

As Sharma put it in his 2008 address:

‘People forget that it was the Commonwealth which led the world on debt relief. The Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting (CFMM) in Barbados in 1987 began the process of bilateral debt relief and the CFMM in Mauritius in 1996 began the process of multilateral debt relief and HIPC. Those early Commonwealth seeds have borne fruit in the form of US$106 billion of cancelled bilateral and multilateral debt for 41 countries. But debt relief doesn’t just ‘happen’. It takes time, there are pitfalls, and the devil is in the detail. The Commonwealth didn’t just have the big idea, it had the tool to make it happen: the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Management and Recording System, the CS-DRMS. This is one of the jewels in the Commonwealth’s crown – a world-leading and transforming product. DRMS has so far withstood the test of time. It was born in the early 1980s when the debt crisis erupted. Before the idea of cancelling debt, the Commonwealth led the world on quantifying debt, as few countries knew how much they owed.’

Launched by the Commonwealth Secretariat in 1985, the CS-DRMS is an integrated tool that assists countries in recording, managing and analysing their external and domestic debt. It enables countries to better track their debt, review options for restructuring, evaluate sources of borrowings and develop alternative borrowing strategies. It provides a central repository for several categories of public and privately secured external and domestic debt, including short-term debt. In 1990, a partnership between the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation and the Canadian International Development Research Centre led to the software being translated into French.

Looking back at how CS-DRMS evolved over the years, Sharma shared early in 2016:

‘Today, the Commonwealth Secretariat provides policy advice, capacity-building and advocacy support to member countries, helping them to sustainably manage their public finances. Our Debt Recording and Management System (DRMS) allows managers to access...’
and evaluate information on long-term, short-term, public and privately-secured external and domestic debt. Our DRMS manages a global portfolio of more than $2.5 trillion of public debt, ensuring that countries assume debt with a prudent degree of risk and that they can meet their payment obligations at the lowest possible cost.

Over recent years, innovations were also added to the Secretariat’s highly-regarded debt management software. Between 2008 and 2010, the Secretariat rolled out the Securities Auction System (CS-SAS), a tool which helps auctioning agencies to manage and monitor every stage of the process in the auctioning of government securities, from the day of notification until payment is received from successful bidders and allotment letters are produced electronically. In 2012, the Secretariat offered the Public Debt Analytical Tool (Horizon), an innovative software tool, successfully piloted by the National Treasury of South Africa, for countries seeking to undertake prudent sovereign debt management. A risk management and planning tool, Horizon allows public debt managers to look at future borrowings through the analysis of potential scenarios and outcomes with regard to their country’s debt and thereby formulate and implement a debt management strategy within a cost–risk management framework. More recently, the Secretariat released CS-DRMS version 2.0 in September 2014, with Service Packs 1 and 2 (SP1 and SP2) following suit in December 2014 and March 2016. The latest version includes new functions aimed at empowering debt managers to better manage the risks of their portfolios and rigorously monitor their debt flows and stocks. The Secretariat also developed a pool of debt experts to assist countries to migrate to the new version and trained over 100 debt managers in the Caribbean, Southern and East Africa, South Pacific and Asia regions.

Furthermore, both Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth users of CS-DRMS also agreed to form a permanent User Group to assess their debt management status, and provide feedback and ideas on ways to improve the software and identify its future direction. The User Group would operate at the regional and international levels, and serve as a link between the Secretariat and the wider user community. The inaugural User Group Meeting (UGM) was held at the Secretariat in London from 28 to 30 June 2006. During Sharma’s tenure, a further two UGMs were convened – one in London in March 2011, and another in Johannesburg in June 2015. At present, more than 100 agencies, ministries of finance, treasuries and central banks within and outside the Commonwealth use CS-DRMS. Indeed, when Sharma had delivered his address at the Debt Management Forum in June 2008, less than three months after assuming office, 56 countries used CS-DRMS, 12 of which were non-Commonwealth countries, such as China, Thailand and Equatorial Guinea. The two most recent applicants, Afghanistan and Liberia, were to receive it free of charge. In February 2016, less than two months before Sharma retired from office, CS-DRMS was deployed in 63 countries within and beyond the Commonwealth. The software was licensed free of charge to member states of the Commonwealth and, owing to a collaboration agreement, the OIF, while other countries could purchase the software at a modest price through Crown Agents, its official distributor outside the Commonwealth. As of February 2016, non-Commonwealth user countries included Afghanistan, Benin, Bhutan, China, Comoros, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea Conakry, Kosovo, Laos, Myanmar, Liberia, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Sao Tome, Suriname and Thailand. Associated and overseas territories such as Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Cook Islands and Montserrat also used CS-DRMS.

Other services of the debt management programme offered by the Secretariat include advocacy, policy advice, support with formulating debt management strategies and capacity building. As Sharma elaborated:

‘Its programme of assistance enables governments to manage various types of debt more effectively and to evaluate the impact of new borrowings and the projection of market
variables on sovereign debt. In Jamaica, Secretariat advice on the reform of the Debt Management Framework assisted the Ministry of Finance and public service, 2010–15, in introducing policy, institutional and legal reforms that improved the debt structure in terms of currency, interest rates and mix of maturities. Policy support from the Secretariat facilitated the establishment of a re-organised Debt Management Office and the enactment of a comprehensive Public Debt Management Act that promoted prudent debt management and governance. Secretariat support also paved the way for efficient public financial management through the establishment of a Central Treasury Management System; and its advice facilitated the completion of the market-led National Debt Exchange process, which concluded in March 2013. The debt exchange had a high participation rate of 98 per cent from domestic bond holders. Debt restructuring is expected to result in an annual cost savings of 19 million Jamaican dollars (£J$) and reduce the public debt burden by 8.5 per cent of its GDP by 2020 (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.31). The Secretariat also provided Malta with policy advice to finalise a comprehensive draft Public Debt Management Act to strengthen the governance framework for debt management. In June 2014, the Secretariat and the Government of Malta signed an agreement to enhance the capacity of small states to record, analyse and manage their debt. The initiative will see the Treasury Department of Malta supporting the Secretariat’s Debt Management Programme to provide policy advice and capacity building to Commonwealth small states, sharing the country’s best practices in the area. Many of the small states are currently facing significant debt management challenges with the growing burden of debt. This initiative will pave the way for a focused approach to deal with the specific challenges of small states.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.81)

Flicking through the pages of his 2013–15 Biennial Report as Secretary-General until he found the section of debt management, Sharma pointed out:

‘The Secretariat provided policy advice on the development of the domestic bond market to a number of countries including Swaziland (2011), Sierra Leone (2012), Sri Lanka (2013), Tonga and The Bahamas (2014). Following the policy advice, the Government of Swaziland restored access to domestic finance after a gap of nearly two years in August 2013. In Sri Lanka, efficiency of the bond market improved following the implementation of a number of reform measures recommended by the Secretariat. The country is making steady progress towards implementing the remaining recommendations including setting up a Central Counterparty arrangement and a full-scale trading platform. Tonga and The Bahamas are in the process of implementing the recommendations of the Secretariat for the development of the bond market. In 2014, the Government of Botswana was assisted with policy advice on the formulation of a medium-term debt management strategy to guide its borrowing decisions on cost and risk considerations... The Secretariat convened the third Commonwealth stakeholders’ conference on public debt management, “Public Debt Management in an Uncertain Era”, in June 2015 in Johannesburg. The conference brought together participants from more than 35 countries. Eminent speakers discussed lessons from the financial crisis.’ (Ibid, p.82)

As Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma also made sure that the Commonwealth Secretariat duly focused on issues of particular relevance to small and vulnerable states, including small middle-income states that lacked access to concessional finance available to least developed countries (LDCs). Since 1971, when the LDC category was formally established by the UN, LDCs have benefited from special treatment aimed at supporting their efforts to alleviate poverty, grow economically and graduate out of the category, with concessional finance being among the most coveted facilities. In 2013, concessional finance accounted for 72 per cent of total external financial resources supplied by OECD economies in LDCs, but only 11 per cent of total external finance in other countries
(OECD 2013b). However, although flows of concessional development finance from bilateral and multilateral sources to developing countries have expanded greatly since the 1990s, official development assistance (ODA) to small states has steadily declined, with the exception of 2009–10 when the international response to the economic crisis resulted in a temporary increase in ODA therein (The Commonwealth 2013, p.1). This was, as Sharma noted, because ‘some small states enjoy relatively high GDP per capita – giving the impression of economic strength – when in reality these economies are fragile and disproportionately affected by adverse economic shocks, natural disasters and extreme weather events’; according to the World Bank’s income classification, most Commonwealth small states are middle- and high-income countries. The use, by bilateral donors and multilateral financial institutions, of per capita income as an eligibility criterion to determine access to concessional development finance assistance has rendered several middle-income small states ineligible, despite their being equally or more acutely vulnerable to external economic and environmental shocks, limited in resources and dependent on foreign trade. Access to non-concessional resources of the IMF and the World Bank has also been limited by the relatively small quotas of small states (Ibid, pp.1, 4, 11). Consequently, Commonwealth small states have turned to commercial instruments, such as bonds, and increased their dependence on domestic debts where domestic capital markets have grown. However, this has further complicated the debt restructuring process, with their public debt becoming more heterogeneous (multilateral, bilateral and private debt) and their indebtedness to private creditors increasing (Ibid, pp.11–12).

That is why the Commonwealth Secretariat has led the way in advocating the inclusion of vulnerability indices that could supplement per capita income as eligibility criteria. First developed in 2004 in partnership with the University of Malta, and then expanded in 2014, the Commonwealth Vulnerability/Resilience Framework was designed to help countries better measure their susceptibility to shocks, including financial crises and extreme weather events, and develop targeted national policies in response. Sharma shared:

‘Since 1971, the UN has recognised as LDCs those states deemed most highly disadvantaged in the development process and at greatest risk of failing to overcome poverty. Special UN conferences have been convened every ten years since 1981 to consider global action programmes and to support development in LDCs. The Commonwealth Secretariat was closely involved in preparing for the Fourth UN Conference on the LDCs (LDC-IV), held in Istanbul in May 2011, including in the preparation of publications to enrich the debate. A major objective of the *Istanbul Plan of Action for 2011–2020 (IPoA)*, adopted at the LDC-IV Conference, is that the number of countries categorised as LDCs should be halved from 48 to 24 by 2020. The progress, however, has not been very encouraging: the number of LDCs increased from 25 in 1971 to 48 in 2016. By May 2016, only four countries – Botswana (1994), Cape Verde (2007), Maldives (2011) and Samoa (2014) – had graduated, with three – Equatorial Guinea (2017), Vanuatu (2017) and Angola (2021) on the way. One challenge is that in the transition to development, countries risked losing the facilities for which they were eligible so long as they remained LDCs. The system, paradoxically, gave LDCs incentive not to graduate. That is why I advocated the use of the Vulnerability/Resilience Framework. This framework, which was the intellectual property of the Commonwealth, was a much smarter way of looking at problems than using per capita income: “poverty” does not embrace problems as “vulnerability” does. It would also enable the introduction of vulnerability-based eligibility criteria that could facilitate gradual transition in access to development financial assistance, rather than abrupt eligibility on graduation.’

In September 2011, the Commonwealth Secretariat and seven other organisations came together to form the LDC IV Monitor to undertake independent objective assessments of the implementation of the IPoA and to support the official monitoring mechanism. In October 2013, Sharma also pooled together a high-level group of Commonwealth ministers – led by
Prime Minister Denzil Douglas of Saint Kitts and Nevis and comprising the finance ministers of Jamaica, Samoa, Seychelles and Tonga – who travelled to Washington, DC to meet the leadership of the IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. Sharma too joined the group. In Washington, the group met Christine Lagarde and Min Zhu, Managing Director and Deputy Managing Director of the IMF respectively; Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Managing Director of The World Bank; Alberto Moreno, President of the Inter-American Development Bank; and a group of IMF and World Bank executive directors. The High-Level Advocacy Mission conveyed the unique challenges faced by small states in managing and reducing their debt, including the obstacles that prevent them from accessing concessional finance; and highlighted how small states were vulnerable to crises and natural disasters. Sharma argued that international financial institutions needed to review the criteria used to determine the well-being of small states, because the existing yard sticks did not take into account their unique vulnerabilities such as remoteness, exposure to shocks, small population size and limited options for economic diversification (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013c). Yet, all of these factors resulted in disproportionately large challenges for these countries in accessing financial resources. Sharma recounted:

‘On one occasion, when I met Christine Lagarde, I asked for a meeting between the IMF and finance ministers from between five and seven Commonwealth states. She arranged for the meeting to be held at the time of the annual Fund/Bank meeting, and she called her deputy too. We spent an hour with her and introduced the Vulnerability/Resilience Framework, which was something very big but very much a Commonwealth idea. I persuaded her that the existing framework was obsolete already, and explained that the Commonwealth had a relevant paper – based not on theory, but on practice – that the IMF might find useful.’

Sharma added:

‘I reasoned that the existing framework was built on the poverty/affluence spectrum, when the poverty/affluence framework was just one element of a larger framework of vulnerability/resilience – which ought to be the basis instead. Overdependence meant that if a sub-mortgaging crisis in the suburban US can affect small states in a world of connectedness and interdependencies, then there is a double crisis, partly because small states have their own weaknesses, and because they have no cushion against exogenous shocks, whether fluctuating food or fuel prices or climate change. Who is going to safeguard them? Hence, what we need is a framework to protect vulnerable states from being in freefall. That was the compact at the heart of the Monterrey Consensus. The North is to give more support to the South, and the South is to prioritise and manage that support, and commit to using it responsibly and wisely. My first job in New York was to convince countries of the South how to use money accountably, while listening to the perfectly legitimate point the North is making, and that they cannot do North–South polemics out here. In this resilience–vulnerability framework, you have to ensure national responsibility and international responsibility as well. The Commonwealth had four solutions: counter-cyclical loans; acceptance of resilience as a solution; debt swaps; and innovative sources of finance. The Head of the IMF told me the other day that they completely believed my thesis, but needed to convince member states. Even following the meeting with the World Bank, the President assured me, “I promise that I will take these ideas back to our Board and Team and when we meet next year, I will have an answer for you. The interests and challenges of small states are issues on which I have enormous determination to address”. The President also observed that they meet a lot of organisations, but few come up with such solutions, and not just point problems. A man in the IFC said that at least on the face of it, the framework was an extraordinarily simple and beautiful idea. “Why did the IFC not get the idea?”, he asked. “Because you play with big boys; we play with smaller, weaker ones too”, I replied.’
The High-Level Advocacy Mission went to Washington equipped with a background paper prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat, in which the four policy options were outlined:

1. The introduction of debt for climate change swaps as an innovative way of resolving the debt burdens of small states, providing them with urgent and necessary debt relief, and simultaneously catalysing fast-start financing for climate change. Doing so could reduce the climate finance implementation gap by quickly increasing the disbursement of pledged funds; and debt relief could be counted as ODA, helping donors meet internationally agreed targets. Multilateral institutions could gradually write off 100 per cent of small states’ multilateral concessional debt stock on the understanding that small states, over 10–15 years, will make their annual payments of existing multilateral concessional debt into a trust fund, governed by the central bank and used to finance climate change and mitigation projects (The Commonwealth 2013, pp.26–27).

2. The addition of vulnerability to the criteria for determining the eligibility of small states to access IFI concessional resources and official development finance. It noted that the vulnerability of small states, arising from their exposure to shocks and their lack of resilience, constituted the basis for the World Bank’s ‘small island economy exception’, and the IMF’s inclusion of a small economy exception for access to its concessional resources under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT) and as a criterion to determine graduation from PRGT resources. Nevertheless, neither the World Bank nor the IMF had considered vulnerability as a criterion of eligibility to use their concessional facilities (Ibid, p.28).

3. A broad application of counter-cyclical loan (CCLs) mechanisms to reduce debt accumulation episodes and consequent growth challenges in small states.

4. The replacement of macroeconomic adjustment programmes with resilience building – which includes social, political and environmental reforms, alongside macroeconomic adjustment – as the main conditionality for small states to access IFI resources (Ibid, pp.iv–v, 31–32).

Then, as Secretary-General, Sharma recorded in his Biennial Report for 2013–15:

‘In March 2014, the Commonwealth Secretariat convened the Third Global Biennial Conference on Small States. The conference, hosted by Saint Lucia, reviewed priorities for small states in preparation for the UN Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in September 2014 in Samoa and in the context of building resilience goals into the Post-2015 Development Framework. The Saint Lucia conference drew attention to the synergies between the resilience frameworks developed by the Secretariat and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and led to agreement to collaborate to take the Vulnerability/Resilience Framework forward. The collaboration is an important step towards international recognition and adoption of “vulnerability” as a criterion and “resilience building” as a pre-condition for development finance. The conference resulted in Commonwealth consensus on:

- Strengthening resilience, as an overarching framework for development of small states
- Using vulnerability criteria for providing development financing and preferential trading terms
- Ocean governance frameworks
- Capacity-building and energy issues relating to climate change and ways to create synergies with development priorities
- Links with the G20 and regional organisations, and strengthening regional organisations.
In September 2014, the Secretariat collaborated with governments and international organisations in the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, in Samoa, with the aim of securing a sustainable future for these countries. It launched *Building the Resilience of Small States: A Revised Framework* at this meeting. (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.93)

In pursuing the overarching objective of securing greater equity in global outcomes, Sharma was more than happy for the Commonwealth family to work with other international and regional organisations. In January 2015, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, jointly with the IMF, World Bank, UNDP and the Natural Resource Governance Institute, held an inter-country seminar in Rwanda to familiarise legislators with the IMF’s work and provide a forum to exchange views on transparency and accountability in extractive industries in Africa. Twenty members of parliament from Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Kenya, Zambia, Seychelles, Cameroon and Western Australia attended the event. In July 2015, at the 36th Regular Meeting of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) held in Barbados, at which Sharma and Ban Ki-moon were both present, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), building on research undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Caribbean Development Bank, put forward a two-stage debt relief plan for the small states of CARICOM, which had some of the world's highest debt/GDP ratios. In 2013, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Jamaica, and Saint Kitts and Nevis were among the world’s 20 most heavily-indebted countries, with debt exceeding 100 per cent of GDP, while countries such as Barbados, Belize, Dominica and Saint Lucia had very high levels of debt that accounted for 70–90 per cent of GDP. In the ECLAC plan, the first stage involved a gradual write-off of multilateral and bilateral debt, and the second stage entailed contributions (equal to the multilateral debt-service payments) by beneficiary governments of the first stage to a new Caribbean Resilience Fund (CRF) over a decade. The CRF, in turn, could finance activities that promoted economic growth, poverty alleviation and environmental protection, and lend to governments at concessional rates to counter external shocks. The plan built upon the Commonwealth proposal for debt swaps for climate action and, once again, revealed how the Commonwealth offered thought leadership.

Even towards the end of his final term as Secretary-General, Sharma pressed on with leading the Commonwealth in advancing equity in global outcomes – from the Caribbean to the Pacific. In his address to the Plenary Session of the 46th Pacific Islands Forum in Port Moresby on 9 September 2015, Sharma shared:

> "The Commonwealth and the Pacific region are joined at the hip: there is a direct correlation between the growth and prosperity and advancement of political values in this region and in the wider Commonwealth family of states and peoples. It is a very special relationship between a region and a global organisation, to which I have been privileged to contribute... The Commonwealth has been a global leader in conceptualising and developing the Vulnerability/Resilience Framework, beyond per-capita income measurement, as the required matrix in an interdependent world, in which small states are prone to exogenous pressures and shocks on top of their known inherent vulnerabilities... This work has revolutionised the global perception and approach to the unique challenges of small states. The United Nations now works on creating national resilience and vulnerability profiles, acknowledging the contribution of the Commonwealth. In the next year, the Commonwealth will be rolling out a resilience project in the Pacific entitled, “Building the Resilience of Small States: A Strategic Vision for 2050” , which provides projections for small states for where they could be in 35 years and beyond... We will work closely with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and national governments on this new Commonwealth work for the region... [T]he Commonwealth [also] has a globally recognised Debt..."
Recording and Management System. This system is currently deployed across six Pacific Island countries. In 2014, the Commonwealth Debt Management Programme managed a collective public debt of US$8.75 billion in the Pacific. [We] are also assisting Pacific Island countries with developing medium-term debt strategies... [It is through new thinking, mutual support, practical assistance and harnessing opportunities in innovative and sustainable ways that we will help deliver a robust and a more resilient Pacific.’ (Sharma 2015a)

In his final Commonwealth Day Message as Secretary-General, in March 2016, the extent to which Sharma saw his personal mission of promoting equity in global outcomes as being integral and interconnected to the wider mission of the Commonwealth became amply clear:

‘The Commonwealth sets a high premium on being inclusive – our theme for the year – and on being all-embracing and leaving no one behind, whether nationally or globally... The Commonwealth provides avenues for working together that help the larger family of Commonwealth organisations, which is unique in its richness and in its contribution and diversity. We are now bound closer together in practical ways in our shared aspirations. In many different ways, and at many different levels, ideas and knowledge are shared in the Commonwealth family across the globe in a spirit of goodwill and partnership. Taking strength from its diversity, the Commonwealth succeeds in creating common ground on which to stand together in answering the challenges of our times. Mutual support, with respect and understanding for the dignity and contribution of all, gives potency to the acclaimed convening power of the Commonwealth. The Charter of the Commonwealth now embodies our high and shared purpose. Globalisation, the digital revolution and interdependence make us both a rapidly compacting but also colliding world. The strengths of the Commonwealth were never needed more to assert fairness in global outcomes and trust in the richness of our human identities.’ (Sharma 2016a)

1 http://thecommonwealth.org/project/helping-countries-manage-debt
2 http://thecommonwealth.org/project/helping-countries-manage-debt
3 Alongside the Commonwealth Secretariat, the members include the Centre for Policy Dialogue (Dhaka), Centre de Recherches Economiques Appliquées (Dakar), Economic and Social Research Foundation (Dar es Salaam), Fondation pour les Etudes et Recherches sur le Développement International (Clermont-Ferrand), Galatasaray University (Istanbul), International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (Geneva) and OECD Development Centre (Paris).
4 www.imf.org/external/np/legislators/
4. TRADE

The world economy, since the late 1990s, has seen significant economic growth and increased trade performance for developing countries. Over the past two decades, developing countries have doubled their share of the world’s gross domestic from 20 per cent to 40 per cent and increased their share in global trade from a little over 30 per cent to nearly 50 per cent (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015, p.30). The importance of trade for the economic prospects of developing countries is inherent in that it offers these countries ‘the opportunity to increase income, promote learning, increase the diffusion of technical knowledge, expand employment, improve standards of living and contribute to structural transformation’ (Commonwealth Secretariat and the Overseas Development Institute 2013, p.i). However, not all countries are able to participate in and benefit from international trade equally: many Commonwealth countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific face difficulties in enhancing their export competitiveness, diversifying their exports and participating in the world economy. Such countries require support to participate in negotiations to secure better trade deals with both developed and developing countries and to make effective use of financial and technical assistance for trade development (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015, p.30).

There is great scope for Commonwealth members to expand trade and investment within the Commonwealth and with the rest of the world. Valued at US$3.4 trillion, the combined exports of goods and services of Commonwealth members account for around 15 per cent of the world’s total exports (Razzaque et al. 2015, p.1). Intra-Commonwealth trade in goods and services alone has a value of US$687 billion and is expected to surpass $1 trillion by 2020. Between 2003 and 2013, intra-Commonwealth trade in goods and services increased from $266 billion to $592 billion, showing annual growth averaging 10 per cent (Ibid, pp.1–3). Likewise, prior to the financial crisis of 2008, intra-Commonwealth foreign direct investment (FDI) flows attained a value of $80 billion, accounting for a quarter of all such FDI flows into Commonwealth members. Major Commonwealth members hold around $716 billion in FDI stock in other Commonwealth countries (Ibid, p.1). Similarly, the value of the intra-Commonwealth flow of remittances is estimated to be $45 billion: of this, $42 billion flowed into developing countries, including $11 billion to Commonwealth Sub-Saharan Africa, $833 million to the Caribbean and $357 million to the Pacific Islands (Ibid, p.1). Furthermore, econometric analysis reveals that, controlling for various factors determining trade flows, Commonwealth members are 25 per cent more likely to trade between themselves; generate 10 per cent more FDI flows; and when both trading partners are Commonwealth members, bilateral trade in goods and services are 17 per cent and 49 per cent higher respectively, with trade costs being 19 per cent lower (Ibid, pp.1, 7–8).

The trade potential of the Commonwealth is yet gravely under-utilised and can be more effectively harnessed through a number of trade-friendly measures, such as improved and more responsive multilateral trade rules; capacity of trade policy-makers to negotiate trade agreements; improving the effectiveness and enhanced resourcing of regional and national institutions responsible for trade promotion; strengthened domestic policies, institutions, infrastructure, skills and technology; and improved access to trade finance (Commonwealth Secretariat and ODI 2013, p.i). A simulation exercise indicates that were Commonwealth
members able to achieve, individually, the same level of ‘trade facilitation’ efficiency of South Africa, the GDP of the Commonwealth would rise by $177 billion, with additional intra-
Commonwealth exports with a value of $120 billion and a further 24 million jobs generated
(Razzaque et al. 2015, p.1). Trade facilitation (especially simplifying procedures involving
customs and border-handling of goods), strengthening existing and emerging regional trading
agreements involving Commonwealth members, increasing Commonwealth participation in
global value chains (GVCs), improving supply-side capacity in Commonwealth developing
countries, and mobilising diaspora savings and remittances to leverage investment are all
measures the Trade Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, during Sharma’s tenure,
identified as having the potential to move the Commonwealth towards realising its full trade
potential (Ibid, p.1). One ought to bear in mind that the level of intra-Commonwealth trade
and investment that has emerged so far has been attained without any formal trade policy
mechanisms, so the scope for harnessing the trade potential of the Commonwealth through
concerted action is enormous (Ibid, p.1).

Understanding the shortcomings of where we currently stand is just as crucial to identifying
practical opportunities. Global trade is estimated to account for more than $18 trillion per
annum, with $14.4 to $16.2 trillion (80–90 per cent) of all trade flows underpinned by trade
finance (Commonwealth Secretariat and ODI 2013, p.1). Yet, in 2011, the value of goods
exported from Commonwealth member states to other Commonwealth member states was
$413 billion, just 16 per cent of their total exports. Furthermore, the value of such intra-
Commonwealth exports remained approximately 16–18 per cent between 2007 and 2011,
reflecting little expansion (Ibid, p.3). This is despite the various advantages that
Commonwealth members have while trading with each other, such as a shared language,
shared values, similar regulatory and legal systems, shared trade histories and access to
significant Commonwealth diasporas (Ibid, p.3). Likewise, total exports of goods and services
from Commonwealth members to all countries fell from 16.8 per cent in 2000 to 14.8 per cent
in 2013 (Razzaque et al., p.3). The exports of Commonwealth services to the world has an
estimated value of $1.3 trillion, in contrast with the total world services trade of $4.7 trillion
(Ibid, p.4). Nevertheless, the increasing attractiveness of Commonwealth developing countries
as export destinations is evident in the share of Commonwealth exports to developing
countries rising from 59 per cent in 2007 to 61 per cent in 2011 (Commonwealth Secretariat
and ODI 2013, p.4). In 2011, the total value of exports from developed and developing
countries within the Commonwealth to Commonwealth developing countries was $253
billion, equivalent to around 25 per cent of their total exports to all developing countries (both
within and outside the Commonwealth) (Ibid, p.3).

Moreover, as suggested, there is a substantial global market for trade finance, with the
estimated value of global trade finance rising from around $10 trillion in 2009 to approximately
jointly prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Overseas Development Institute
for consideration at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting in Washington, DC in
October 2013 reveals:

‘Typically, trade finance reconciles the divergent needs of exporters and importers; and
comprises trade credit and insurance/guarantees, mostly of a short-term nature which
mitigates the business risks between importers and exporters in international trade. Several
forms of trade finance are in use, including letters of credit arranged between the banks of
purchasers and sellers; cash-in-advance, for example upfront wire and credit card payments
by purchaser to seller; documentary collections, with remitting and collecting banks
exchanging documents required for the transfer of title to the goods and implementing
instructions for payment; and open account transactions, in terms of which goods are
shipped in advance of payment.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat and ODI 2013, p.5)
There are several avenues where trade finance may be accessed. These include multilateral providers such as the International Finance Corporation (IFC), which supports the Global Trade Finance Program (GTFP) that offers confirming banks partial or full guarantees to cover payment risk on banks in emerging markets for trade-related transactions and the Global Trade Liquidity Program (GTLP) that channels funds through global and regional banks to extend trade finance to importers and exporters in developing countries. The sources of trade finance also include regional development banks, such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB); the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); the African Development Bank (AfDB); and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). The market for trade finance is again evident in that the value of the transactions that ADB supported rose from only US$7 million in 2004 to US$4 billion in 2012, while those that the EBRD supported have almost doubled in value since 2008–09 to €1.5 billion (Ibid, pp.5–6). National development banks and export credit agencies also provided trade finance, with prominent examples from within the Commonwealth being Exim Bank (India), EFIC (Australia), ECGD (UK) and Export Development Corporation (Canada). Other sources of trade finance include commercial banks, such as Citigroup and JP Morgan, and emerging multilateral development banks, such as the BRICS Development Bank and the proposed ACP Investment Bank.

It is here, however, that the challenge arises. As the authors of the Commonwealth Secretariat–ODI paper observe, while ‘the largest Commonwealth members have significant, diversified national institutions for the promotion of trade...[that] provide financing for a wide range of trade financing services, to a very wide range of destinations’, ‘few of the Commonwealth’s small states have national institutional mechanisms to promote exports...For the larger group of poor, small and vulnerable developing countries...including many Commonwealth members, the benefit of these facilities was more muted’ (Ibid, pp.6–10). The 2011 report of the WTO Expert Group on Trade Finance to the G20, likewise, showed that ‘only a third of the 60 poorest countries in the world benefited regularly from the services offered under these trade finance programs’ (World Trade Organization 2013). Moreover, in the smaller Commonwealth states, the focus is almost entirely on national export promotion, with little pan-Commonwealth institutional support for trade finance to promote pan-Commonwealth trade (Commonwealth Secretariat and ODI 2013, p.7). This appears even more significant when one considers that small states are generally more dependent on trading with the Commonwealth: when it comes to merchandise export earnings, 40 members source at least 20 per cent and 10 countries source over 50 per cent from within the Commonwealth (Razzaque et al. 2015, p.4).

However, as the report prepared by the Commonwealth Secretariat and ODI in 2013 noted:

‘Access by Commonwealth members to adequate, reliable sources of trade finance at reasonable cost is an active, not passive, contributor to their prospects for growth and employment; and for the deepening of intra-Commonwealth economic relations. Adequate trade finance serves as an essential ingredient in sustaining trade flows during periods of economic volatility and downturn; offers the liquidity required to proactively expand trade in periods of growth; and is particularly crucial in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tradable goods and services sectors in the poorest, smallest and most vulnerable developing countries.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat and ODI 2013, p.i)

It also demonstrated five factors that constrain the poorest and smallest Commonwealth countries from accessing trade finance on affordable terms:

1. the large majority of Commonwealth members are small states and least developed countries, which are among the most open economies in the world;
2. the poorest and smallest Commonwealth countries suffer from low country ratings and weak banking systems;
3. export credit agencies, import–export banks and similar institutions do not exist or are poorly developed;  
4. SMEs account for a large share of the external trade in Commonwealth developing countries; and  
5. Developing countries are negatively affected by deleveraging in the financial system. (Ibid, pp.15–17)

There is considerable opportunity for the Commonwealth to address the challenges in trade finance and, thus, boost intra-Commonwealth trade and Commonwealth trade with the rest of the world. Calibrating Commonwealth responses on the basis of the information gathered about specific requirements at the country and regional levels, exploring how risk-pooling and risk mitigation in trade finance can be advanced within the Commonwealth, and enabling Commonwealth countries to access sufficient and affordable sources of trade finance would also be invaluable, as would identifying the most suitable national, regional and Commonwealth mechanisms for promoting Commonwealth initiatives to improve sources of trade finance for Commonwealth members. Such initiatives to improve access to trade finance will inevitably contribute to structural transformation as well (Ibid, pp.i–ii, 18–19).

Beyond the exploration of its options in relation to the provision of trade finance, providing advice and technical assistance to Commonwealth members seeking to strengthen trade relations or enter into formal trading agreements with other Commonwealth members or non-Commonwealth countries, especially emerging economies, would also be of great help. For instance, the number of Commonwealth members for whom trade with China accounts for at least 5 per cent of their total trade rose from 6 in 2000 to 39 in 2015 (Razzaque et al. 2015, p.5). The Commonwealth, in recent years, has also provided long-term advisory services to strengthen trade capacity in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries through the innovative Hub and Spokes Programme. Launched in 2004 jointly by the Commonwealth Secretariat, European Union, Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie and Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states, the Hub and Spokes Programme advances sustainable development, economic development and poverty reduction in ACP countries by encouraging closer regional integration and increased participation in international trade. Regional trade advisers act as hubs of knowledge and advice, providing technical assistance to key regional and national organisations, while national trade advisers are deployed to strengthen the capacity of government ministries. During the first phase of the project, 60 experts were deployed across the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.30).

In July 2012, Hub and Spokes II was launched to enhance the capacity of key stakeholders – businesses, academic institutions and civil society organisations – to more effectively design, negotiate and implement trade policies and agreements. Through the Hub and Spokes Programme, the Commonwealth continues to strengthen institutional capacity and increase trade opportunities for ACP countries. Along the way, the Commonwealth has trained more than 34,000 stakeholders from parliaments, businesses, academic institutions and civil society organisations on national, regional and international trade policy issues. It has facilitated trade integration within each region and supported national trade policies in countries such as Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Federated States of Micronesia, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Sierra Leone, and Trinidad and Tobago. It has also advanced the implementation of trade agreements and supported national efforts to reform regulatory regions. By strengthening collaboration, the Commonwealth has enhanced dialogue on trade and development and is contributing to help boost economic growth opportunities for countries around the globe (Ibid, p.30).

To return to the subject of trade finance, Sharma, as Secretary-General, also championed the idea of a new small states trade finance facility. He shared:
‘I met with the Director of the Export-Import Bank of India and asked: Is there a risk in creating a trade facility which works nationally but not internationally? We evaluated the possibility of such a facility. A working group of four Commonwealth member states – Malta, India, Sri Lanka and Mauritius – had come up with the idea of a Trade Finance Facility. We recognised that, especially in small states, if an importer/exporter goes and says “I need a letter of credit”, and “I need an advance”, the bank does not have the money. The bank goes to a larger trade bank which will not give money to a small bank unless their risk is covered – 20 per cent because the default rate is very small. In order to cover the 20 per cent risk, we suggested we go for a guaranteed fund of US$20 million subscribed to by Commonwealth members out of solidarity. The idea was that this new trade facility could provide 20 per cent of the guarantee for projects put forward by small states that are often turned down by banks, so if you propose a project with a budget of $1 million, the trade facility could cover $200,000 and, thus, enable the bank to cover the deal. The trade creation effect is 1:20. Therefore, if you have $20 million, you have effectively $1 billion.’

The Malta CHOGM of 2015 was particularly productive in this regard. As Sharma noted, ‘We went to the CHOGM in Malta with two products, the first was the Commonwealth Trade Review 2015, entitled The Commonwealth in the Unfolding Global Trade Landscape (November 2015), and the second was the proposal and Declaration of Intent to create a Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility that would be especially valuable for small and developing states’. The report, which was published prior to the CHOGM in Malta, provides a detailed assessment of Commonwealth trading patterns and prospects. Sharma observed, ‘Our flagship report offers new and valuable perspectives on Commonwealth trade in a global context. We have demonstrated that a Commonwealth connection makes a difference from a trade perspective and we have also suggested policy measures that can help members exploit the huge potential to expand their trade’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015c). The Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Deodat Maharaj added, ‘The Commonwealth advantage is real, which is clearly demonstrated by the evidence in the report. At the same time, it reveals concerns for our small and vulnerable members who are not doing as well. Our members will be able to use this report to help identify the key drivers of Commonwealth trade and the key capacity-building requirements’ (Ibid). The findings of the report, launched by Prime Minister Joseph Muscat of Malta and Kamalesh Sharma on 26 November 2015, suggested that more effective use of resources, such as foreign direct investment and greater involvement of the private sector, is needed to help capacity-constrained countries improve their trade performance, with aid for trade remaining important (Ibid).

In relation to the second item, the plan to create a Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility, the case for it has already been made above. It was at the Colombo CHOGM in 2013 that the Commonwealth Heads of Government had recommended, in the Kotte Statement on International Trade and Investment, the development of practical measures to promote trade flows to address the need to overcome constraints to trade faced by Commonwealth small states. To that end, the Secretary-General was requested, as a matter of priority, to prepare a proposal for a trade finance facility for Commonwealth small states. The Government of Malta offered to initiate a pilot mechanism among interested members to help augment trade finance for Commonwealth small states. There was also a working group, comprising representatives from leading institutions in emerging markets trade finance, formed to assess the feasibility of developing and implementing a Commonwealth Trade Finance Facility (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015d). The working group carried out a scoping exercise, which considered existing trade financing agencies and other sources of trade finance, including those offered by multilateral and regional programmes; and the findings indicated that such a fund would be both welcome and viable (Ibid). Hence, a proposal was then prepared for its implementation, which the Secretary-General supported and on the basis of which a Declaration of Intent was drafted committing to provide the initial contribution to facilitate the launch of the Facility (Ibid).
On 26 November 2015, a day before the Malta CHOGM would commence, the Commonwealth and the Government of Malta, together with the governments of Mauritius, Sri Lanka and India, announced the setting up of the new trade financing fund to help boost trade and investment flows, particularly for small and developing countries. The voluntary fund hopes to attract start-up capital of US$20 million. It will provide member countries facing trade challenges with the finance they need to increase their trade capacity. It is estimated for every dollar invested, the fund will generate $20 (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015d). Dr Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta, said, ‘We are acting as facilitators so small traders in small jurisdictions can penetrate new markets…We are very keen to create necessary trade infrastructure for ourselves and other small Commonwealth countries’ (Ibid). The Declaration of Intent was signed by Malta’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Vella; Mauritius’ Minister of Foreign Affairs, Etienne Sinatambou; Sri Lanka’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mangala Pinsiri Samaraweera and Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, VK Singh.

The Secretary-General noted on the occasion, ‘Four countries have signed the declaration as anchor investors. It is now a commercial fact. We just need to get back to the banks to make it operational’ (Ibid). The facility will be structured as a guarantee fund, cover risk for providers of trade credit in financial institutions of Commonwealth countries, endeavour to stimulate lending by major banks to smaller banks in member states and reduce risk, and be operated by commercial banks using existing trade finance instruments, payments arrangements and operating infrastructures. The Commonwealth will seek financial investment from member countries and other parties that have expressed an interest in participating; and the first phase of the fund will run over three years followed by a review. Malta will host the facility and manage its governance structure, providing oversight for contributing member countries (Ibid).
On 12 October 2009, in the wake of Iceland’s catastrophic banking collapse, which The Economist regarded as ‘the biggest, relative to the size of an economy, that any country has ever suffered’, the weekly episode of BBC Radio 4’s long-running current affairs programme ‘Analysis’ featured ‘small states’ as its focus (The Economist 2008). In that episode, Bronwen Maddox, Chief Foreign Commentator at The Times, asked eight distinguished panellists why so many small states ran into trouble. Sitting on that panel as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Kamalesh Sharma drew attention to the unique vulnerability of small states, based on Commonwealth experience:

‘If you use the criteria (which we do) of a million and a half population, then out of our 53 members, 32 are small states. Life has always been very difficult for small states. There’s a line in Anna Karenina. It begins by saying that happiness seems to be the same everywhere, but everyone is miserable in their own individual manner. These small states have shortages of manpower, shortages of opportunities. They’re very much removed from scenes of economic activity. Above all, they have deficit in attention in the world in general. This has been a constant, but what distinguishes the present stage from earlier stages is the cascading body blows that they’ve had to deal with one after another. The environmental one has become existential for many of these countries. The energy crisis, which they can hardly afford to negotiate and navigate. And now of course the mother of all crisis, which is a financial one – which you might think would not affect them so much because they’re not part of the financial system, but the consequences of collapse are first felt there because remittances decline, markets shrink, aid volumes come down, and they have no cushion and no resilience with which to counteract these features.’ (BBC Radio 4 2009)

The presence of the Commonwealth Secretary-General on that panel was hardly surprising. The Commonwealth has long been lauded as a champion of small states, and not without good reason. Two-thirds of the world’s small states are in the Commonwealth. Together, they account for more than a third of its membership. Collectively, they account for one-quarter of the votes at the United Nations General Assembly. In reflection of their importance within the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Secretariat, over the past four decades, has engaged in global advocacy and profile raising on their behalf, advocated policies and programmes that help them overcome vulnerabilities and build resilience, and provided them with technical support (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a). It was as early as 1977 that Commonwealth finance ministers, at their meeting in Barbados that year, first drew attention to the special characteristics of small states – such as dependence on trade and capital inflows, accompanied by small size and, at times, lack of a natural resources – which make them particularly vulnerable to external shocks. The ministers urged the international community to adopt a more flexible approach to the requirements of small states, as well as special measures to assist them. In response, the Commonwealth Secretariat, headed by the then-Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal, initiated a programme to enable small states to overcome the challenges posed by their small size, geographic isolation and limited resources in pursuit of their national interests and development objectives. In 1983, with the US invasion of
Grenada causing a stir, Commonwealth leaders gathered in New Delhi acknowledged that the challenges faced by small states ‘deserved consideration on a wider basis, including that of national security’, and called for a special study of the special needs of small states (including those relating to security). As Ramphal noted, ‘The upsurge in bilateralism and “spheres-of-influence” politics has been at the expense of international institutional development... for dozens of small states, the global environment into which they emerged over the past 20 years has worsened steadily through stages of bemusement, indifference, neglect and disadvantage’ (Ramphal 1985, p.v).

Subsequently, Ramphal commissioned a Commonwealth Consultative Group to consider the special needs of small states. Its members included the Hon. Justice PT Georges as Chair; Hon. Henry Forde; Hon. Fathulla Jameel; Natarajan Krishnan; Professor Elisabeth Mann Borgese; Dr Edgar Mizzi; Leban Mpotokwane; Dr Robert O’Neill; Olara Otunnu; Sir Anthony Parsons; Geoffrey Pearson; Lloyd Searwar; Ata Teatotai; and Taniela Tufui. The group, Ramphal observed, ‘made a particular point of examining the economic underpinnings of security and... stressed the link between deprivation, vulnerability and defencelessness’ (Ibid, p.vi). Its 1985 report, 

*Vulnerability: Small States in the Global Society*, was the first to note that small states are ‘inherently vulnerable to external interference’ and raised the political profile of small states issues in international forums. It outlined the characteristics of smallness, the vagaries of vulnerability, and the threat scenario, putting forward economic and foreign policy measures aimed at reducing vulnerability. (McLean, 1985)

This initiative also provided the impetus for the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States to be convened from 1993 as an avenue for ongoing discussion (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.1). At the second meeting of the ministerial group held in Auckland in 1995, ministers took note of the dramatic changes in the international context faced by small states since the end of the Cold War and concluded that the vulnerability of small states needed to be analysed more holistically so as to cover political, economic, social and environmental concerns (Anyaoku 1997, p.VII). Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the incumbent Commonwealth Secretary-General, set up a nine-member Commonwealth Advisory Group of eminent persons to revise and update the 1985 report. The nine independent experts included Dame Eugenia Charles of Dominica, Andreas Jacovides of Cyprus, Natarajan Krishnan of India, Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata’afa of Samoa, Dr Edgar Mizzi of Malta, Ken Ross of New Zealand, HE Professor Havelock Ross-Brewster of Guyana, Tim Thahane of South Africa, and Taniela Tufui of Tonga, all of whom, as with the Consultative Group, worked in their personal capacities and not as representatives of governments, organisations or countries. Their 1997 report, *A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability*, prepared with Secretariat support, provided a comprehensive analysis of the vulnerability of small states in all its dimensions (McLean, 1985)

So as to encourage multilateral agencies to review their treatment of small states in recognition of the vulnerability of these countries, Commonwealth Heads of Government, at the Edinburgh CHOGM in 1997, requested that a Task Force be established by the Commonwealth and the World Bank. In response, Anyaoku arranged for a five-member high-level mission to visit key international organisations to discuss the concerns of small states. Following the meeting of the Ministerial Mission on Small States with the President of the World Bank in July 1998, the Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank Joint Task Force on Small States was established. Its purpose was ‘to assess the case for special treatment advanced by the Commonwealth small states at the Edinburgh Heads of Government Meeting and enable the Bank to examine its instruments for assisting these countries, considering alternatives and adaptations to address their unique problems, including their vulnerability to marginalization, natural disasters, and external economic shocks’ (Commonwealth Secretariat and World Bank 2000, p.1). In addition, it was ‘to address the transitional problems associated with the changes in international trade rules that followed the implementation of Uruguay
Round agreements by the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the arrangements for a successor agreement to the European Union’s Lomé IV Convention’ (ibid, p.1). The Task Force met for the first time in October 1998; invited experts and senior officials to form an advisory board; commissioned a series of papers that were discussed at a high-level conference in Saint Lucia in February 1999; circulated draft reports and arranged rounds of consultations with multilateral organisations and small states; and drew upon discussions at a major global conference arranged by the World Bank and the Commonwealth Secretariat in February 2000. Its seminal report *Small States: Meeting Challenges in the Global Economy*, published in April 2000, highlighted the importance of domestic policy, regional co-operation, assistance from multilateral and bilateral development institutions, and improvements in the external environment, in addressing the challenges of small states. It also focused on four areas of special relevance to economic growth and development: tackling volatility, vulnerability and natural disasters; transitioning to the changing global trade regime; strengthening capacity; and benefiting from the opportunities and coping with the challenges of globalisation (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.1).

The incoming Commonwealth Secretary-General, Don McKinnon, observed of the 2000 report, ‘For the first time, it marked recognition by the wider international community of the specific economic challenges that small states face in today’s increasingly global economy’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003, p.20). In the early-2000s, when many Commonwealth small states that had set up offshore financial centres were subject to harsh criticism by the OECD over ‘harmful tax practices’, McKinnon championed their cause, using good offices to facilitate high-level consultations between the small states and the OECD. As four members of the OECD were also Commonwealth members, and as regional organisations such as CARICOM and the Pacific Islands Forum also counted several Commonwealth members in their membership, the Secretariat was also well placed in effectively promoting multilateral dialogue between OECD and non-OECD members on the OECD Harmful Tax Practices Initiative. In addition, a Joint Commonwealth–OECD Working Group was established (Vleck 2008).

At the Coolum CHOGM in 2002, Commonwealth Heads of Government approved a new agenda for work on small states, including the provision of assistance on trade issues, attracting private investment, and mitigating the economic repercussions of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Under McKinnon, the Secretariat continued to work towards integrating small states more fully into the multilateral trading system, with areas of support including the establishment of the Commonwealth Intergovernmental Organisations Trade Expert Group, and assistance to small states and regional organisations in building capacity to negotiate and implement World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements. The Secretariat also offered direct assistance to Pacific island countries with regional trade integration, and assistance in preparations for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development and ongoing review on the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003, p.21). In 2005, McKinnon also met with the Secretaries-General of CARICOM, the Indian Ocean Commission and the Pacific Islands Forum to examine ways in which they could collectively reduce the future impact of natural disasters by strengthening advance warning and response networks across international borders (McKinnon 2005). Over his final years in office, the Secretariat also helped to monitor the implementation of the 2005 Mauritius Strategy for the further implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

During the tenure of Kamallesh Sharma as Secretary-General, great priority was assigned to issues concerning small states, which cut across almost every work programme in the Secretariat. Under Sharma, financial resources allocated to small states work by the Secretariat grew steadily between 2008/09 and 2012/13. As the Secretariat notes:
At national level, technical assistance projects in small states have increased by 13.2 per cent. The total direct project expenditure under the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), excluding staff and other indirect costs, has increased from £2.742 million per annum in 2008/09 to £3.104 million per annum in 2012/13. At regional level, small states have benefited from support including £0.8 million worth of projects within the Pacific region, and £1.2 million worth of projects in the Caribbean region. At pan-Commonwealth level, small states have had access to approximately £9.3 million worth of projects annually. (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.2)

The Secretariat, under Sharma, also prioritised support for small states in its Strategic Plan for 2013/14–2016/17. Strengthened resilience of small states and vulnerable states features in the plan as one of the six Strategic Outcomes, with the Intermediate Outcomes being:

- international policies, mechanisms and rules are more responsive to small states’ development strategies and resilience needs;
- small states enabled to effectively participate in the international decision-making processes;
- improved climate financing frameworks. (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013d, p.17)

About his vision for the Commonwealth’s engagement with small states during his years in office, Sharma shared:

‘I have repeatedly emphasised that the Commonwealth has always to be driven by the conviction that all human communities have an equal right to a place in the sun irrespective of geographic size, population or endowment. The Commonwealth must always push against the international norm whereby the strong and the influential monopolise the terms of global negotiations and their outcomes. The smaller players in the global system tend progressively to be pushed to the margins, and the ‘green room phenomenon’ divides the world into decision-makers and decision-takers. I emphasised at all times that the contemporary world made this inequality both unethical and perilous. I used as illustration the fact that in climate change, the small island states that add a negligible contribution to the global carbon footprint are those facing the greatest potential cataclysm through global warming. I also said that in the management of globalisation, both civil society and uncivil society were equally active, and points of weaknesses and ruptures created on a small scale affected the entire system through the foothold it gave to the global scourges of the narcotics trade, terrorism, money laundering or disease. The Commonwealth, with its preponderant membership of all states but embracing all the variety in statehood, is perfectly positioned to be a global leader and advocate for equity in international outcomes. Commonwealth work in relation to small states has been strongest in six areas:

i) Advocacy

ii) Democracy, development and good governance

iii) Trade

iv) Environment

v) Blue economy, maritime boundaries and ocean governance

vi) Education and capacity-building.’

Hereon, the chapter shall outline Commonwealth contributions in each of these areas.

i) Advocacy

If the Commonwealth was truly the champion of small states, this was, in no small part, due to the advocacy and profile-building work that the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Secretariat engaged in on their behalf. Nowhere was this work more visible
than in the arena of multilateral negotiations. About Commonwealth contributions in this regard, Sharma recounted:

The 2009 CHOGM mandate provided for support to Commonwealth countries in multilateral trade negotiations. However, many Commonwealth small states lacked the capacity needed to participate effectively in the WTO system, with some even unable to have a diplomatic presence in Geneva where the WTO and other UN agencies are located. In January 2011, building on the model of the Commonwealth Joint Office for Small States in New York, the Secretariat opened the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva to provide permanent or temporary facilities for small states to be represented diplomatically at that multilateral hub. In doing so, it provided small states with a subsidised infrastructure for representation and increased their profile in multilateral interactions in Geneva. Consequently, the voice and interests of small states are projected in diverse areas, including human rights and trade; and their capacity to engage in collective negotiations has been bolstered. The presence of representatives of regional organisations such as the Pacific Islands Forum and Organization of East Caribbean States as tenants has been crucial in representing the interests of the membership of these regional organisations as a whole, even if all countries cannot be individually represented at the Geneva office. Small states have also benefited from the work of in-house technical experts. Two human rights experts based in the Geneva office provided advisory services and technical assistance to small states participating in discussions and decision-making processes in Geneva and facilitated dedicated briefing sessions for small states on human rights mechanisms. The CFTC expert also provided such support to member states. Following the June 2015 evaluation of the Secretariat’s assistance to small states in Geneva on multilateral trade issues, Commonwealth small states commended the initiative and noted that “there are no other funded programmes which support Small States through the provision of technical assistance in a disaggregated manner, that address the specific needs of Member States on multilateral trade issues”.

The Commonwealth also convened biennial conferences that provide an international platform to discuss a comprehensive range of development issues for small states. Messages from this forum are delivered to high-level forums such as CHOGM, the G20 and the World Bank/IMF Small States Forum. The Commonwealth Secretariat convened the first Global Biennial Conference on Small States in July 2010 at Marlborough House in London. It provided a forum for the world’s 46 small states to discuss the issues that affect them, share experiences and best practice on how to address their particular vulnerabilities, interact with institutional and national development partners, and formulate responses which can be implemented at the national, regional and international levels. The conference addressed sustainable development, private sector development, debt, international trade and regional co-operation, and building economic resilience in small states. Outcomes of this inaugural conference were endorsed by Commonwealth leaders when they met in Perth in October 2011. The Commonwealth convened the second and third Global Biennial Conferences on Small States at Marlborough House in London in September 2012 and in Saint Lucia in March 2014 respectively. The Saint Lucia conference reviewed the priorities for small states in preparation for the UN Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in September 2014 in Samoa and in the context of building resilience goals into the Post-2015 Development Framework. It drew attention to the synergies between the resilience frameworks developed by the Secretariat and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and led to agreement to collaborate to take the Vulnerability/Resilience Framework forward. The collaboration is an important step towards international recognition and adoption of “vulnerability” as a criterion and “resilience building” as a pre-condition for development finance. In September 2014, the Secretariat collaborated with governments and international organisations in the Third
International Conference on Small Island Developing States, in Samoa, with the aim of securing a sustainable future for these countries. It launched *Building the Resilience of Small States: A Revised Framework* at this meeting.’

Through its annual dialogue with the chair of the G20 and with the G20 Development Working Group, the Commonwealth established itself as the principal interlocutor of the most representative group of global economies, both at the technical and political levels, and conveyed small states’ perspectives on global economic and development themes (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.3). The Commonwealth Secretariat also participated in the annual Small States Forum held during the IMF/World Bank annual meetings and worked jointly with the World Bank on a workshop on data challenges facing small island developing states (SIDS) and other small states. The Secretariat and the World Bank commissioned studies to explore how tourism can contribute to development in small states, which were presented at the 2012 Second Global Biennial Conference on Small States and published in *Tourism and Inclusive Growth in Small Island Developing States* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013g). The two organisations also worked closely with the Small States Network for Economic Development they had jointly established, along with its six founding members: Barbados, Malta, Mauritius, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa and Vanuatu. Additionally, the Commonwealth offered many opportunities for small states to convene, engage in experience sharing, and develop policy approaches, at both the political and technical levels. These included the Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Small States held in the margins of the CHOGMs from 1993 to 2003 and in 2013, the Foreign Ministers Meeting held prior to the CHOGM since 2003, the special Commonwealth and Developing Small States Foreign Ministers Meeting in the margins of the CHOGM in 2011, and the 15-member Commonwealth Technical Working Group on Building Resilience in Small States, which held its first consultative workshop in 2013 (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, pp.12–13). Furthermore, the Secretariat supported an Open-ended Ministerial Working Group on Small States to review priority development concerns for Commonwealth advocacy. It followed a directive that came forth from the Colombo CHOGM in 2013, and its mandate was approved at its first meeting in Saint Lucia in March 2014 on the eve of the third Biennial Commonwealth Meeting on Small States. The group met for the first time at a ministerial level in Saint Lucia in March 2014; the second time, at a technical level, in New York in June 2014; the third time in New York in September 2014; and with Commonwealth leaders affirming its work at the Malta CHOGM in 2015.

The Secretariat also helped small states to identify their concerns on financing for development ahead of the UN’s Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in Addis Ababa in July 2015 and to focus on shaping the Post-2015 Development Agenda (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.92). As Sharma noted:

‘In March 2015, the Secretariat convened the Commonwealth Conference on Financing for Development in Small States in Barbados to ensure that the needs of small states are considered in the negotiations at the upcoming high-level meeting. The initiative was proposed by the Commonwealth Open-Ended Ministerial Working Group on Small States, and brought together senior officials from ministries of finance, and representatives from national, regional and international organisations, including UN agencies. The conference convened by the Secretariat agreed on four common priorities for small states that should be reflected in the final Financing for Development Framework: debt sustainability, climate change financing, international acknowledgement of the vulnerability of small states, and capacity building. The Secretariat also identified and proposed responses to the challenges that face small states, advocating for international policies and mechanisms to strengthen resilience and lessen vulnerability. It brought the concerns of Commonwealth small states to international processes through statements by the Secretary-General, such as to the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council 25th Regular Session in Geneva.
The Secretariat also supported rule of law experts from small Commonwealth countries to participate in the intergovernmental negotiations on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, held in New York in March 2015, in preparation for the UN summit in September 2015. It worked with experts from small jurisdictions to communicate the views of small states on implementing and monitoring the rule of law, both in the intergovernmental negotiations and through organising a side event meeting. It also contributed to expert working groups on the development of indicators for measuring the rule of law and access to justice as a component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its efforts helped secure the outcome of having the links between the rule of law and sustainable development well recognised by Goal 16 of the SDGs.

ii) Democracy, development and good governance

Here again, the Commonwealth contributions to small states were both multifaceted and effective. As Sharma outlined:

‘In 2009, in response to the request of the Government of Solomon Islands for technical assistance, the Commonwealth Secretariat arranged for a CFTC-funded technical adviser to support and strengthen the Internal Audit Bureau. An independent evaluation in 2014 found that the technical assistance had successfully built auditing capabilities and laid sound foundations for sustaining capacity in the future, with the training and mentoring establishing a cadre of around 30 professional internal auditors who met international auditing standards. Consequently, community and public sector recognition of auditors and their role in public financial accountability and anti-corruption has risen. In March 2010, the Secretariat set up the Commonwealth Pacific Governance Facility (CPGF) in Solomon Islands aimed at improving transparency and accountability processes. The facility was to serve as the Commonwealth’s flagship programme in the Pacific to support the implementation of the good governance pillar of the Pacific Plan and provide assistance on a request basis in four areas: democratic institutions, anti-corruption institutions, access to information, and land management. CPGF facilitated the implementation of regional projects in these areas through partnerships with donors and other development partners, including the Strengthening Political Integrity and Stability Project – aimed at strengthening democratic processes – that it helped the Secretariat begin in Solomon Islands in 2011. Other projects CPGF implemented at the national level included strengthening the role of the office of the ombudsman in Niue; assisting new members of parliament in Tonga; and developing a database to enhance the financial management of elections in Samoa.

The development of a training module for the Pacific to strengthen the interface between politicians and executives was rolled out in Tonga and Tuvalu in 2011 and 2012, with the Tuvalu initiative culminating in a partnership between the Commonwealth Secretariat and Asian Development Bank aimed at strengthening strategic planning across government. Following a recommendation from a political administrative retreat convened by the Secretariat in partnership with the Asian Development Bank in 2012, each ministry in Tuvalu drew up a corporate plan aligned with the national strategic plan. The plans clarify the roles of ministers and permanent secretaries and have improved budgeting, monitoring and evaluation. Ministries have a clearer understanding of their roles in realising national development priorities. A conference on Public Administration in Very Small States in April 2013 enabled Commonwealth small states to share experiences and good governance practices tailored to their particular challenges. As a result, the Secretariat has partnered with Malta to provide training in public administration for very small states. It has also entered into a partnership with Microsoft to improve the delivery of public services to citizens, including through cloud-based services. Following a decision at the Commonwealth Public Service Ministers Forum in October 2014, the Commonwealth
Secretariat established a Working Group on Public Administration and Governance. The working group developed eight guiding principles to advance public sector reform at its first meeting in November 2014. These guiding principles will be used by member countries to ascertain progress on their public sector reforms and the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals.'

The evolution of information and communication technology (ICT) in recent decades and its application to governance have also facilitated the transformation of government processes to being more efficient and citizen-focused, and less bureaucratic. As the Secretariat states, ICT has emerged not just as ‘a powerful tool for connectivity, knowledge access and management, partnership creation and conduct of business in an increasingly networked world’, but also ‘a potent force-multiplier for deepening governance and assisting the development objectives of the world’s smallest and most remote communities’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.9). In small states, it has facilitated widespread citizen participation in decision-making and enabled the public sector to overcome the barriers associated with small size and isolation and reach isolated communities in an effective and cost-efficient manner. The use of ICTs for the micro-governance of small states, as the Secretariat notes, improves the quality of institutions; consequently, it also improves political stability, raises the public debt threshold, decreases growth volatility and increases foreign aid and investment (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012c).

Sharma cited Seychelles as one example where the Secretariat’s e-governance work has had great impact:

‘Since 2006, the Commonwealth provided a wide-ranging package of assistance to Seychelles, covering strategy and policy development, capacity-building, and implementation, which contributed to the development of a National ICT Strategy and the implementation of internationally recognised service management processes. An e-government strategy was developed in 2010 and implemented during 2010–12. Citizens are able to obtain government services from their homes through the use of ICT. The UN Public Administration Network’s e-Government Index of 2012 ranked Seychelles as the number one e-government country in the African region. The Seychelles experience was instrumental in the application of similar strategies in Swaziland, Tonga, Tuvalu and Montserrat and used to develop the Secretariat’s e-Governance Handbook for Small States.’

As a ‘network of networks’, the Commonwealth has also harnessed ICT to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration with and between its member states, with small and remote states able to benefit greatly from pan-Commonwealth collaboration platforms such as Commonwealth Connects and the Commonwealth hubs for health and education.

Under Sharma, the Commonwealth Secretariat continued to support debt-ridden small states in addressing their debt management challenges. In October 2013, a Commonwealth High-Level Ministerial Mission on Small States Debt went to Washington, DC to meet the leadership of the IMF, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank and convey the unique challenges faced by small states in managing and reducing their debt, and accessing concessionary finance. The mission was led by Prime Minister Dr Denzil Douglas of Saint Kitts and Nevis and comprised the finance ministers of Jamaica, Mauritius, Seychelles, Samoa and Tonga, with Sharma accompanying them. The Secretariat reported:

‘They also consulted with representatives of Commonwealth member governments in Washington whose influence within the global financial governance structure is valuable for mobilising support... The visit met with a positive reception. Prime Minister Douglas reported to leaders at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in November 2013. He recommended the adoption of the mission’s recommendations supporting the establishment of a joint task force comprising the Commonwealth
Secretariat, the IMF and World Bank for further investigation into the debt reduction and financing proposals. He also proposed Commonwealth interventions on issues of financing and growth in the 2014 Small Island Developing States Summit in Samoa, as well as to the Post-2015 Development process. These recommendations were adopted. (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, pp.3–4)

In addition, the Secretariat assisted Belize in creating a more equitable contractual agreement with oil companies in the country that helped increase oil revenues and, thereby, debt repayment; supported Jamaica in successfully negotiating a bailout package through debt sustainability and debt management advice provided by in-house experts; and provided Malta with policy advice to finalise a comprehensive draft Public Debt Management Act to strengthen the governance framework for debt management (Ibid, p.15). In June 2014, the Secretariat and the Government of Malta signed an agreement to enhance the capacity of small states to record, analyse and manage their debt. In Sharma’s words, ‘The initiative was to see Malta’s Treasury Department support the Secretariat’s Debt Management Programme in providing policy advice and capacity building to Commonwealth small states, sharing the country’s best practices in the area’.

Sharma was particularly grateful to Malta for the leadership it had shown, and the support it had offered the Secretariat, in capacity building for small states. The proposed Small States Centre of Excellence was a case in point. Sharma recounted:

‘At the Colombo CHOGM in 2013, leaders welcomed Malta’s offer to establish a Small States Centre of Excellence for democracy and development. By the time of the Malta CHOGM in 2015, the Government of Malta and the Commonwealth Secretariat agreed to contribute over €400,000 in the first three years of this new project: the Government of Malta is to give €100,000 in 2016, its first year of operation, and provide premises, staffing and utilities. The Secretariat has committed to at least £100,000 a year for the first three years. The centre, which will be guided by a board of directors and chaired by the Government of Malta, will offer tailored support to small states in areas such as debt management, management of public finances, e-government projects, management of natural disasters, ocean governance, improvement of broadband connectivity, training of civil servants and diplomats, promotion of women in enterprise and trade promotion. It will work in collaboration with the other Maltese initiatives on small states. In setting up the centre, the Commonwealth was showing itself yet again as a visionary organisation. In the years to come, the establishment of the centre will be remembered as a watershed moment for the Commonwealth in the service of small states. It was a moment to show the whole world that outcomes in global discourse had to be equal for everyone, and equity should be at the heart of international relations. The initiative is a life-line for developing small states, which are constantly having to manoeuvre multiple challenges to achieve economic growth. One of the great benefits of the centre is that it provides targeted support, so that small states can get help when and where they need it.’

Election management and human rights have also been areas where the Commonwealth has engaged with small states. Small states have been represented on the steering committee of the Commonwealth Election Network (CEN) to convey their perspectives, priorities and concerns; representatives of their election management bodies (EMBs) have also participated in CEN working group meetings focused on election management issues. Started in 2010, CEN facilitates experience sharing between, and creates support mechanisms for, EMBs, driven by the philosophy that independent, capable and transparent EMBs can ensure that elections are fair, credible and transparent, with public and political confidence in them (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.10). While CEN has proved immensely valuable to small states, so has the Junior Election Professionals Initiative aimed at capacity building for election
management. Ten of the 23 states that sent in officials for the pilot training event in New Delhi in 2013 were small states, with small states also well represented in subsequent events. When it comes to election observation, small states have been both contributors and beneficiaries: the Commonwealth Secretariat has not only sent out experts from small states as election observers elsewhere, but also sent in election observers to many small states including Grenada, Lesotho, Swaziland, Maldives and Papua New Guinea in recent years (Ibid, p.10). Even with regard to human rights, the Commonwealth Secretariat, as Sharma noted, ‘continues to assist member countries, particularly small states, with the process of ratifying the nine core human rights conventions. This includes providing technical support for legislative change and policy developments in compliance with international human rights standards’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.31).

iii) Trade

Small states – on account of their inherent characteristics – have often been marginalised in the global economy. Even as the share of developing countries in global trade increases, the share of small states has continued to decline (Maharaj 2015, p.ix). Addressing the Second Global Biennial Conference on Small States at the Commonwealth Secretariat in September 2012, Sharma observed:

‘While media priority focuses on issues such as the turbulence in the Eurozone, mostly unremarked is the fact that small states continue to experience severe development challenges beyond their control – challenges associated with access to finance for development, to international trade markets, equitable participation in the global trading system, declining aid, attracting investment, particularly in infrastructure, and increasing difficulty in maintaining the existing advances towards MDG objectives. These challenges are compounded by persistent debt and, for many states, especially small island countries, high vulnerability due to their susceptibility to natural disasters. Small states were the hardest hit by the global economic and financial crisis. IMF data show that the economies of Commonwealth small states contracted by 1.2 per cent in 2009 compared with a 2.7 per cent growth rate in the previous year. The rate of decline in Commonwealth small states was greater than the average decline of the global economy, which contracted by 0.5 per cent. On the other hand, developing Asia, including China and India, grew by 6.6 per cent. Small states are among the slowest growing economies in the world. Growth in small states continues to lag behind growth in the world economy as a whole, and other developing countries. IMF figures show that small states grew by 2.1 per cent in 2010 compared with a contraction of 1.2 per cent in 2009. Recovery from the global financial and economic crisis meant that emerging and developing economies, led by China and India, grew by 7.3 per cent in 2010 while the world economy grew by 5.0 per cent in 2010 compared with a contraction of 0.5 per cent in 2009.’

A major part of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s engagement with global economic challenges, accordingly, has been tailored to the needs of small and vulnerable states. As Sharma noted, ‘It is critical that the global trading system produces fair and balanced outcomes for these countries so that they too will be able to share in expanding trade’. In line with this vision, the work of the Secretariat has entailed support for trade policy and trade negotiations, trade facilitation, export promotion, financial literacy and debt management, largely through research, publications, outreach activities and provision of specialist capacities/facilities. Sharma pointed out:

‘The Secretariat supported the trade negotiating capacity of low-income and small vulnerable economies in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries. The Hub and Spokes programme – undertaken by the Secretariat in partnership with the EU,
OIF and ACP – has been praised by individual states and regional organisations for its provision of trade negotiating capacity. Secretariat support also contributed to enhancing the process of trade policy-making, management and oversight, with immediate beneficiaries, including government officials and trade negotiators, as well as MPs, business and civil society. The Secretariat also facilitated policy dialogue, advocacy and consensus building on approaches for maximising development gains from both WTO and regional negotiations, including the ACP-EU economic partnership agreements, as well as South-South integration and cross-border supply chains. Specific analytical work has informed small states and least developed countries on ways to enhance their participation in the multilateral trading system (MTS) and face future trade-related challenges. Examples of this include consultative meetings and workshops organised in London, Geneva and Southeast Asia to support the preparatory process to the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali in December 2013 and the report Small States and the Multilateral Trading System: Overcoming Barriers to Participation published following the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in December 2015.

With regard to the December 2015 publication, which brought together a selection of recent Commonwealth research and analytical work on small states’ participation in the MTS, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, Deodat Maharaj, observed:

‘The timeliness of this publication cannot be overstated. The MTS is gaining momentum following the successful conclusion of the WTO Bali Ministerial Conference, with an agreement reached on trade facilitation and a number of decisions made on development issues, including for the least-developed countries (LDCs) and the small vulnerable economies (SVEs). Indeed, the Commonwealth is a firm supporter of a rules-based, transparent, free and fair MTS that enhances trade liberalisation and developmental objectives, while taking into account the special requirements of SVEs and LDCs. The Commonwealth is also strongly committed to working with its member countries towards successfully completing the Doha Development Round of Trade Negotiations.’ (Maharaj 2015, p.ix)

Alongside trade negotiations, the Secretariat also supported small states in multilateral frameworks relating to sustainable development. Sharma outlined:

‘Assisting small states in the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (BPOA), agreed in 1994, and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation (MSI), agreed in 2005, remains a priority. During the five-year review of the MSI (MSI+5) in 2010, the Secretariat held events and published documentation to draw international attention to important issues concerning sustainable development in small states. It has been actively involved in the Inter-Agency Consultative Group on the sustainable development of small island developing states (SIDS) and played an active role in the SIDS Rio+20 preparatory processes to identify SIDS’ concerns in the lead-up to the Rio+20 conference, held in Brazil in 2012. In December 2012, the Secretariat also published a ten-year review that compared the performance of 46 SIDS with 10 benchmark states and that revealed a “big divide” between these countries in their attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. The report highlighted aspects of the MDG system not well attuned to the interests of small states and put forward recommendations for consideration in discussions on the MDGs and successor goals.’

Sharma also stressed that ‘economic resilience remain[ed] central to the Secretariat’s policy and advocacy work on behalf of small states’ during his tenure. ‘The Secretariat’, he noted, ‘continued to strengthen policies and systems that build resilience and support inclusive economic growth and sustainable development’, adding that the Commonwealth used its
economically diverse membership to help build consensus around development concerns. In 2010, the Secretariat published a manual to assist small states policy-makers in resilience building, focusing on practical assessments of macroeconomic stability, microeconomic market efficiency, governance, social development and environmental management (Sharma 2011c, pp.29–30). Sharma added that this profiling work had also been used by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) since 2009 (Ibid, pp.29–30). He went on to cite further examples of Commonwealth support:

‘Major work was undertaken on aid for trade, trade and investment agreement negotiations, and trade competitiveness. Technical workshops were organised on trade negotiations at the regional level in the Pacific and the Caribbean. The work on trade competitiveness focused on services exports: examples include assistance to Jamaica, in developing its health and wellness sector; Barbados, in developing sports tourism to diversify its tourism sector; Uganda, in increasing access to the UK market for its organic exports; and Botswana, in improving the business environment for private sector growth. The trade adviser based in the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva also provided direct support to small states. Furthermore, the provision of a trade adviser to the Seychelles Department of Trade and a legislative drafter (trade) to the Attorney-General’s Office, alongside support from the Small States Office in Geneva, placed the country on a clear road to WTO accession. The Seychelles Department of Trade benefited from staff training and mentoring in accession negotiations, thus boosting the country’s policy and research capacity and better equipping the government to conduct international trade negotiations.’

Sharma added:

‘The Secretariat also undertook economic policy studies on small states issues, including research on migration and small states in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, and publications on social policy, monetary and fiscal policy, and the economics of HIV/AIDS. It published best practices and information on small states through its annual Small States: Economic Review and Basic Statistics, published since 1995, and its quarterly Small States Digest, which began in 2010. It also provided support to small states in identifying innovative policy responses that would assist economic diversification. Together with the World Bank, it convened experts in Malta in November 2011 to look at policy options for promoting growth and development in small states. Five topics were identified within the broad area of “growth with resilience” that might drive Commonwealth Secretariat–World Bank collaboration in this regard:

- green growth;
- tourism and inclusive growth;
- regional integration;
- migration and development; and
- practical ways to build economic resilience.

These topics also formed the basis for discussion at the Second Global Biennial Conference on Small States in September 2012. In July that year, migration and development experts from across and beyond the Commonwealth convened at a meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, organised by the Secretariat and the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services at the University of the West Indies. They discussed how best to strengthen the role of diaspora in economic growth and covered issues such as international recruitment, diaspora remittances, and investment and entrepreneurship, with presentations on The Gambia, Guyana, Jamaica, Lesotho, Samoa and Tonga. These issues were also discussed at the 2012 Global Biennial Small States Meeting. In reflection of their
increasingly close collaboration, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the World Bank also published *Tourism and Inclusive Growth in Small Island Developing States* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013g) in October 2013. The report explored how tourism can facilitate growth, create jobs and improve livelihoods in small island developing states; looked at the experiences of Jamaica, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles and other small states; and proposed recommendations for policy action.’

Furthermore, the Commonwealth, during Sharma’s tenure, made considerable progress in setting up the Commonwealth Small States Trade Finance Facility. Sharma mentioned:

‘At the Colombo CHOGM in 2013, Commonwealth Heads of Government, in the Kotte Statement on International Trade and Investment, recommended the development of practical measures to promote trade flows to address the need to overcome constraints to trade faced by Commonwealth small states. To that end, I was requested, as a matter of priority, to prepare a proposal for a trade finance facility for Commonwealth small states. The initiative considers ways for small states to integrate effectively into the global trading system. The Government of Malta offered to initiate a pilot mechanism among interested members to help augment trade finance for Commonwealth small states. There was also a working group on the Small States Trade Financing Facility, comprising representatives from leading institutions in emerging markets’ trade finance, which assessed the need for a Commonwealth trade and investment financing facility for small and developing states without access to such resources and the viability of such a facility. The working group had its preliminary meeting in Barbados in March 2014, supported by the Secretariat, and carried out a scoping exercise, which considered existing trade financing agencies and other sources of trade finance, including those offered by multilateral and regional programmes. The findings indicated that such a fund would be both welcome and viable. Hence, a proposal was then prepared for its implementation, which I supported, and on the basis of which a Declaration of Intent was drafted, committing to provide the initial contribution to facilitate the launch of the facility. (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015d)

On 26 November 2015, a day before the Malta CHOGM would commence, the Commonwealth and the Government of Malta, together with the governments of Mauritius, Sri Lanka and India, announced the setting up of the new trade financing fund to help boost trade and investment flows, particularly for small and developing countries. The voluntary fund hopes to attract start-up capital of US$20 million. It will provide member countries facing trade challenges with the finance they need to increase their trade capacity. It is estimated for every dollar invested, the fund will generate $20.’ (Ibid)

Dr Joseph Muscat, Prime Minister of Malta, said, ‘We are acting as facilitators so small traders in small jurisdictions can penetrate new markets…We are very keen to create necessary trade infrastructure for ourselves and other small Commonwealth countries’ (Ibid). The Declaration of Intent was signed by Malta’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Vella; Mauritius’ Minister of Foreign Affairs, Etienne Sinatambou; Sri Lanka’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mangala Pinsi Samaraweer and Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, VK Singh. Secretary-General Sharma noted on the occasion, ‘Four countries have signed the declaration as anchor investors. It is now a commercial fact. We just need to get back to the banks to make it operational’ (Ibid).

The facility will be structured as a guarantee fund, cover risk for providers of trade credit in financial institutions of Commonwealth countries, endeavour to stimulate lending by major banks to smaller banks in member states and reduce risk, and be operated by commercial banks using existing trade finance instruments, payments arrangements and operating infrastructures. The Commonwealth will seek financial investment from member countries
and other parties that have expressed an interest in participating; and the first phase of the fund will run over three years followed by a review. Malta will host the facility and manage its governance structure, providing oversight for contributing member countries (Ibid).

iv) Environment

The Commonwealth has had a long history of engagement with environmental concerns, which was also reflected in its work with small states. Sharma noted:

“The Commonwealth knows painfully well about climate change. It sees it in shrinking rainforests made worse by unsustainable logging practices in Asia and the Pacific, in dwindling fish stocks in the Atlantic and other oceans, in the thawing of the tundra in northern Canada, in encroaching deserts in northern Nigeria, in flooded lowlands in Bangladesh, and in rising sea levels around Tuvalu and Maldives. Climate change is an existential issue. Small states are highly exposed to the most harrowing consequences of climate change, including sea-level rises, flooding and tropical storms. Despite the challenges brought by climate change, poor and small states struggled to shape global responses to the debate. They were not seen as “part of the problem” and, perhaps because of this, their needs were not being adequately addressed. The fact that these countries had small delegations and limited resources with which to engage in the negotiations added to the problem. The Commonwealth Secretariat provided training for climate change negotiators from small states around the Commonwealth to expand their influence in multilateral negotiations. In May 2008, officials from small states met in the UK to identify gaps in technical information and agree priority outcomes for upcoming negotiations. In September 2011, the Commonwealth Secretariat organised a strategy meeting, ahead of the Climate Vulnerable Forum in Dhaka in November, which focused on the priority concerns of small states within the climate change negotiations. Its outcomes were conveyed by Bangladesh at the plenary of the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) of the UNFCCC in Durban later that year.

As part of its work to provide technical assistance to member countries, the Secretariat also funded long-term experts to help small states or their regions cope with environmental concerns. We placed two resource economists, Mark Bynoe and Aaron Bunce, in the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (5Cs) in Belize and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) in Samoa respectively to support our member states in the two regional centres of excellence in the Caribbean and the Pacific on cost–benefit analysis of adaptation in different sectors. The expert at the 5Cs worked with the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to complete a regional study on the economics of climate change. The Commonwealth Secretariat worked with 5Cs to implement the “Regional Plan for Achieving Resilience to Climate Change” and, thereby, build regional capacity in facilitating climate change adaptation and mitigation. The 5Cs and Caribbean member counties benefited from greater technical knowledge, resource mobilisation, project management and evaluation tools, and the capacity to learn from and plan for climate change and adaptation priorities. Through the establishment of the Programme Development and Management Unit headed by the senior environmental and resource economist whose work had been funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat, the centre’s capacity in project design and preparation was also strengthened.1 Likewise, the environmental resource economist placed at SPREP advised on the use of information derived from economic assessments for decision-making in climate change adaptation, and trained staff on approaches to undertaking cost–benefit analyses of adaptation options. By November 2012, seven Pacific countries had completed a cost–benefit analysis under the Pacific Adaption to Climate Change (PACC) programme.
and presented their outcomes at a meeting in Apia, with funding for the PACC Cost Benefit Analysis Conclusion workshop coming from a range of partners, including the Commonwealth Secretariat.

A meteorological and climate adviser, funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat and deployed to SPREP, facilitated the signing of a four-year Finnish-Pacific Project, aimed at improving livelihoods of Pacific island communities by delivering effective weather, climate and early warning services. The deployment also supported the Pacific Meteorology Council in improving co-ordination between National Meteorological Services in the region and resulted in the publication of SPREP’s Pacific Islands Meteorological Strategy (PIMS) 2012–2021, which is currently being implemented. At the national level, an adviser deployed to the Ministry of Economic Planning and National Development in Saint Lucia helped to deliver a detailed framework for a National Sustainable Development Strategy. A study of the country’s Public Sector Investment Plan system and a review of the Medium-Term Strategic Development Plans for core sectors have also been completed to support a strategic shift towards sustainability in national development planning. In 2011–12, the Secretariat also offered a training course tailored to small states on the International Architecture for Environment and Sustainable Development ahead of the Rio+20 conference. The course was offered to policy-makers in the Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS); Caribbean; and Pacific regions; and was offered in collaboration with the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth, the University of the West Indies, the University of the South Pacific and the University of the Seychelles. In my last years in office, the Commonwealth Secretariat was also examining the possibility of establishing response mechanisms to assist small states in dealing with the aftermath and consequences of natural disasters, such as a roster of recognised disaster experts, a visa waiver programme for disaster experts, and the development of an international agreement on temporary relaxation of import restrictions. In addition, it was working with the Commonwealth Disaster Management Agency, which had been launched in 2000, to establish a revolving fund for small states disaster preparedness and response. (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.5)

The Commonwealth Secretariat also strengthened its strategic partnership with the regional institutions of small states in the Indian Ocean, Caribbean and Pacific regions, and also supported the development of a partnership between these regional organisations, to build institutional capacities in sustainable development and climate financing. This included joint meetings to explore a common platform of action; the exchange of experts between the regions; the placement of CFTC advisers supporting cost–benefit analysis of climate change actions; and the roll out of the mentioned course ahead of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa in 2014. At the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), the Commonwealth Secretariat facilitated a side event with the Indian Ocean Commission, SPREP and 5Cs, which highlighted the special and unique challenges faced by small states. The event included an advocacy film and debate on the priority concerns of SIDS in the Rio+20 process and also witnessed the signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) between the organisations.’

According to a recent publication of the Commonwealth Secretariat, these MOUs saw a range of outputs, including:

• improved exchange of information and experiences of climate change adaptation and mitigation in the various SIDS regions through regular teleconferencing, annual meetings, and the facilitation of exchange visits between the regions and participation in relevant training workshops;
• sharing of knowledge on appropriate climate change technologies with a view to promoting the transfer and adaptation of sustainable energy and climate adaptation and mitigation technologies;
• strengthening of institutional capacities to plan and implement activities for adaptation and mitigation through joint workshops, joint planning and research, and participation in training programmes;
• improved availability of current information on the impacts of and response to climate change and sea-level rise to be shared between both institutions’ websites and climate change portals;
• exchange of professional staff between institutions, for example, on short-term attachments; and
• development of joint activities programmes and projects (Ibid, pp.4–5).

Sharma went on to outline other Commonwealth initiatives in the area:

‘In 2013, under the auspices of my good offices for the environment role as Secretary-General, I convened a Commonwealth Expert Group on Climate Finance, with the aim of revealing the challenges that small and vulnerable states face in accessing and disbursing climate finance and exploring concrete proposals for action. It was chaired by the former President of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, and brought together Dr Fatima Denton of the Africa Climate Policy Centre at the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), Dr Kenrick Leslie of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), Coral Pasisi of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), and David Pitt-Watson of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Finance Initiative as members, alongside Dr Saleemul Huq, Sean Kidney, Richard Muyungi and David Runnalls. The Expert Group examined:

• how climate financing is being accessed by, and disbursed to, small and vulnerable countries, and what more can be done to unlock existing and new sources of finance;
• options for enhancing the effectiveness of climate finance, looking at systems, capacities, mechanisms or other enabling conditions that can help increase availability and effectiveness at national and regional levels; and
• how global advocacy and political leadership can be used as a mechanism for brokering solutions and facilitating improved flows of climate finance to Commonwealth small and vulnerable states.

The group presented the report of its findings at the Colombo CHOGM in November 2013 and called for:

• improving the transparency and accountability of international climate finance by focusing on clearer definitions of what is meant by climate finance, and improving reporting mechanisms;
• taking practical action to provide skills and advice to countries and help them navigate their way through access procedures for finance; and working with climate finance providers to simplify the access arrangements for SIDS and LDCs;
• driving action on climate across all government departments, not leaving this issue to one individual ministry or agency, but integrating it fully within national development plans and budgets;
• leading international discussions on climate change and climate finance, by attending the UN Secretary-General’s Summit in 2014 and the UN Climate Change Conference in France in 2015; and through the Post-2015 Development Agenda negotiations; and
• helping to align global financial regulation to support the transition to a global low-carbon economy.
Heads of Government agreed to take forward recommendations from the group, including through consultations with existing climate finance mechanisms, in order to simplify access to existing climate finance by small island developing states and least developed countries. The Secretariat also took forward the recommendations to the UNFCCC summit in Warsaw in November 2013.'

If, over the years, the Commonwealth has established itself as a champion of small states, nowhere is this more pronounced than in its efforts to promote international awareness of their vulnerability. Sharma noted,

‘The Commonwealth has collaborated with the University of Malta since 2004 and produced a well-respected Vulnerability/Resilience Framework. This framework took note of the fact that while some small states had relatively high GDP per capita and consequently came across as economically strong, their economies were rather fragile in reality and could be disproportionately affected by shocks, including financial crises, natural disasters and extreme weather events. This practical assessment tool identifies gaps within the country’s policy environment and helps national, regional and international stakeholders agree on priority areas for developing policy and financial development assistance. The UN now works on creating national resilience and vulnerability profiles, acknowledging the contribution of the Commonwealth. Likewise, acceptance by the World Bank, IMF and others of the need to strengthen resilience, as a benchmark of sustainability and progress, is largely a Commonwealth achievement.’

In April 2012, the needs of vulnerable member countries in terms of green growth were highlighted at outreach meetings with the G20 Development Working Group. The Secretariat also commissioned eight case studies and a summary report on efforts by small states on the transformation to a green economy on Botswana, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Mauritius, Nauru, Samoa and Seychelles. In October 2012, the Secretariat disseminated the findings internationally through a presentation at a regional workshop in the Indian Ocean on the green economy organised by the Government of Mauritius, UNEP, the Indian Ocean Commission and UNDP (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b). Furthermore, in the run-up to the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 2014, the Secretariat convened a technical working group to revisit the resilience agenda, looking at both the national policy framework (going beyond indicators) and the international (including South–South) financing and capacity agenda to support resilience building, to strengthen its use for driving investments in resilience in small states. The framework was also expanded that year to capture the downsides of an unregulated or badly regulated market, environmental management, governance, social development and social cohesion factors, which are critical contributors to economic resilience.

In 2013, the Commonwealth Expert Group on Climate Finance reported that Commonwealth small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) experience difficulties in navigating the many climate funds that exist, preparing proposals, demonstrating and complying with eligibility criteria, and preparing effective long-term responses to climate change. They proposed the formation of a Climate Finance Skills Hub and Response Mechanism to assist in unlocking existing and new climate funds for urgent adaptation and mitigation, with Mauritius agreeing to host the hub, which will be linked to technical advisers across the Commonwealth. The 2013 CHOGM Communiqué noted: ‘Heads welcomed the offer by the Government of Mauritius to host a Commonwealth Climate Finance Skills Hub and requested the Commonwealth Secretary-General to work with member states to progress a full proposal for the hub for their consideration at the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2015’. Subsequently, a scoping study was undertaken in
2014 to find gaps in the current international climate finance landscape and identify a niche for the hub. Sharma shared:

‘The objective of the Climate Finance Skills Hub is to help unlock climate finance for adaptation and mitigation actions in the most vulnerable states; enhance the capacity of SIDS and LDCs to access and manage public and private climate finance flows; and facilitate inter- and intra-regional sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise. These small states are often told about money, but none of them know the number to dial. The hub would make climate finance a reality. Already, Australia has pledged $1 million to the Climate Finance Access Hub.’

v) Maritime boundaries and ocean governance

On 2 September 2015, Sharma delivered the keynote address at the Second Plenary Session of the Third Summit of the Pacific Islands Development Forum in Suva, Fiji. The theme for the session was ‘Leadership for Climate Resilient Green Blue Pacific Economies’, a subject on which, Sharma felt, it was not inappropriate for the Commonwealth to be heard. Noting that ‘more than half of Commonwealth countries are small land states as islands, but giant ocean states’, he stated:

‘As a diverse and worldwide family of nations, we are acutely aware of the impact that both wise and unwise stewardship of marine resources can have on the future wellbeing of our shared planet. We are also conscious of the contribution well-ordered ocean governance can make towards building environmentally safe, economically resilient and prosperous communities. However, the oceans, which give us life, are under mounting strain from a variety of uncontrolled uses, which create multiple environmental threats, arising from destructive fishing practices, poorly planned or unregulated coastal development, the dumping of waste, and unsustainable extraction of natural resources. Climate change and extreme environmental episodes add to these pressures. Rational use of marine resources in terms of economic growth, environmental protection, and community development are vital to our future. The Commonwealth is working alongside small island states to partner with them in managing their marine resources more holistically. This includes offering practical assistance with the delimitation of national marine boundaries, as well as sustainable management of marine and coastal resources and activities. Through better protection of key habitats, and the marine ecosystem services they provide, countries can achieve multiple goals, including strengthened resilience to the impacts of climate change, better resource protection and more sustainable utilisation of marine living resources which can help meet global food security and local livelihood challenges.’ (Sharma 2015b)

Indeed, the Commonwealth Secretariat had provided assistance on the delimitation of maritime boundaries, issues related to the law of the sea, and sustainable management of natural resources and marine space, for more than 25 years. Sharma pointed out:

‘Recent work in this area focused on assisting member countries to make submissions to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLOS) concerning extended areas of continental shelf. Many of the Commonwealth’s 47 coastal states have the potential to claim areas of extended continental shelf and thereby secure exclusive access to the potentially lucrative natural resources of the seabed in these extended areas. Since the 2009 CHOGM, the Secretariat provided legal, scientific and technical assistance to several member countries to enable them to complete and lodge submissions and also engage in maritime boundary negotiations. This resulted in high negotiated settlements for Commonwealth countries; boundary agreements between Commonwealth Pacific member states; maritime boundary negotiations between
Commonwealth Caribbean states and their non-Commonwealth neighbours; technical advice to Kenya and Ghana on boundary settlements with their respective non-Commonwealth neighbours; and successful claims for areas of continental shelf by Mauritius, Seychelles and Ghana. With support from the Secretariat, Seychelles and Mauritius signed a joint management agreement for an area of shared continental shelf covering over 400,000 square kilometres, enabling both countries to exercise sovereign rights over living and non-living natural resources on or under the seabed. The Secretariat also established a dedicated ‘Oceans Governance’ programme to provide advisory services to member countries, complementing the work on maritime boundaries and positioning member countries to develop and benefit from marine resources by better managing ocean space. Under this programme, the Secretariat supported the development of modern and effective national and regional policy frameworks for maritime and ocean governance. Following the development of an Ocean Governance Strategy in 2011, the Commonwealth led on the development and implementation of a new approach to ocean governance by co-ordinating activities in different sectors and connected zones. The new framework considers a series of actions, including moving the current debate from one focused on the costs of marine protection to one about economic growth, social and environmental goals, and the contribution that ocean goods and services can play in delivering sustainable development. The Secretariat also developed a regional oceans policy for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States that harmonises national ocean policies and laws.’

In his address in Suva, Sharma also commented on the value and relevance of the ‘blue economy’ approach, advocated by the Commonwealth, to the Pacific:

‘Many of the challenges Pacific countries face can be partly addressed by adopting a blue economy approach, based on key principles of the green economy. The blue economy is potentially of value to all Pacific countries through the opportunities it offers to create more value out of existing and new resource streams. Existing benefits and uses can include fisheries, minerals and shipping, while potential benefits include marine fish farming, renewable energy, ocean-related tourism and marine biotechnology... Key challenges to achieving a blue economy in the Pacific include lack of capacity, the short-term focus on economic gain when a long-term strategy needs to be devised, sustainable sources of finance, poor agreements negotiated by Pacific island countries for access to tuna and other key fishery resources, a lack of “ownership” among communities of the true value of marine ecosystem services, including an understanding of how they already support livelihoods, and a lack of opportunity to increase the value addition from many of the marine resources extracted in the Pacific at a local level. The Commonwealth is probably the only international organisation to have created a dedicated Oceans and Natural Resources Division, comprising highly skilled economists and legal professionals, who offer comprehensive assistance on the blue economy, including in the areas of legislation and policy framework development related to oceans and natural resource management.’ (Sharma 2015b)

More recently, in a practical step to support SIDS in benefiting from the blue economy, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Secretariat, in co-operation with the governments of Iceland and the Faroe Islands, co-financed a pilot project in The Bahamas and Seychelles that built on Commonwealth Secretariat work on the delimitation of national maritime boundaries and strategies for the sustainable management of marine and coastal resources and activities. The outcomes will present SIDS with practical ways to diversify their existing economic base (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.98).
vi) Education and capacity building

Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations have also played a leading role in identifying distinctive features of education in small states, enabling small states to meet the increasing demand for education, and improving access to education by benefiting from technological advances. Sharma pointed to the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) as one of the initiatives where the Commonwealth has added value in this regard:

‘Conceived by Commonwealth education ministers at their triennial meeting in 2000, VUSSC is a value-adding collaborative network – co-ordinated by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) based in Vancouver, Canada – aimed at strengthening and developing existing tertiary institutions in the 32 small states of the Commonwealth. Over the years, it has allowed countries to collaboratively develop, adapt and share free courses and learning materials. It has focused on developing post-secondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism and hospitality management, small business development and entrepreneurship, professional development for the education and health sectors, life skills, construction, fisheries and disaster management, and has offered e-learning courses in collaboration with national institutions and training providers. For health workers, for instance, it offers courses on Child Health, Communicable Diseases, Integrated HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care and Malaria Prevention, Control and Management. In partnership with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), it has also developed a ten-level Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) that allows existing qualifications frameworks to be compared and referenced against the TQF levels, and facilitates transfer of courses and qualifications by serving as a translation instrument. Moreover, in 2008, the small states themselves assumed the reins of the initiative through the VUSSC Management Committee and the TQF Management Committee they set up.’

The Commonwealth Secretariat has also contributed to the educational needs and priorities in small states. Sharma added:

‘At the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM), hosted in Kuala Lumpur in 2009, the ministers directed the Secretariat to advance education in small states through a variety of research and capacity-building activities. Accordingly, the Secretariat undertook regional consultations to identify small states’ needs and priorities in education, and implemented a programme to address specific needs and priorities. The Secretariat also collaborated with the Commonwealth of Learning in jointly undertaking institutional quality reviews of four universities – the University of Guyana; the National Institute of Health and Social Studies, Seychelles; Fatima Jinnah Women’s University, Pakistan; and the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka – with a focus, thus, on institutions in small and vulnerable states and in post-conflict countries. The findings revealed the different levels of effort needed to improve each institution; and the recommendations put forward are already at different stages of being implemented. These reviews will help these universities to improve their management practices, strengthen internal systems and enhance performance. In 2013, the Secretariat also finalised the Pan-Commonwealth Framework on Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders, which pulls regional experiences together into a resource that member countries can use to develop national frameworks for professional standards. The framework was the outcome of a consultative and participatory process involving member countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, and has already provided the basis for national professional standards developed and implemented in Jamaica, Maldives and Samoa. Likewise, education ministers in the Caribbean adopted a Caribbean Framework on Academic and Professional Standards, while the Secretariat collaborated with the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management to develop the School Leaders Capability Framework already being piloted in
Barbados, Namibia, Papua New Guinea and Singapore. Furthermore, the policy recommendations put forward by a Secretariat-commissioned study, which examined the reasons for underachievement of boys in the Caribbean, were adopted by Saint Lucia and Jamaica, with Saint Lucia also launching a three-year mentoring programme for boys in June 2014.’

As seen throughout this chapter, the Secretariat, under Sharma, also continued to support small states with capacity building across all the thematic areas outlined. Hence, it would be fitting to conclude this chapter with one Commonwealth initiative geared specifically towards building capacity. As the Secretariat reported in Commonwealth Secretariat Champion of Small States:

‘The Doha Declaration issued at the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in November 2001 identified trade capacity building as a critical element of the development dimension of the multilateral trading system. Since the launch of the Doha Development Round and commencement of negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the [EU], the scale of the challenge facing [ACP] countries has warranted support from the international donor community. In response, in 2004, the European Commission, Commonwealth Secretariat and [OIF] – with the support of the ACP Secretariat – launched a joint initiative titled “Building the Capacity of ACP Countries in Trade Policy Formulation, Negotiations and Implementation”. The project is structured around the experienced trade policy advisers and analysts that have been deployed across the ACP region. It is this delivery of support to regional organisations and government ministries on trade policy matters that spawned the project Hub & Spokes.

The aim of Hub & Spokes is to promote the effective participation of ACP countries – many of which are classified as small states – in international trade negotiations and to strengthen their capacity to formulate and implement trade policies. International trade is a key component of development strategies in ACP countries and the Hub & Spokes project seeks to facilitate the ACP’s gradual integration into the world economy and contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction in these countries. The Hub & Spokes project has made a real contribution to the negotiating capacity and trade policy settings in the ACP. While the focus of the project varies from region to region in the ACP, broadly speaking, it has focused on three main activities:

• training and sensitising key stakeholders in ACP countries on trade policy issues;
• supporting ACP countries in formulating, negotiating and implementing trade policies; and
• supporting ACP countries in developing national and regional consultative networks. These activities are delivered by the regional trade policy advisers (Hub) and trade policy analysts (Spokes) that have been deployed to the regional organisations and government ministries in the ACP.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014a, p.7)

1 http://thecommonwealth.org/project/support-caribbean-climate-change-adaptation
6. Environment and Climate Change

For nearly three decades now, the Commonwealth has shown itself steadfast in its commitment to the twin pillars of environmental stewardship and sustainable development. The journey has not been without the occasional hiccup, but the Commonwealth has played an instrumental role in building consensus on related issues, particularly through its ability to bring together countries from different regions of the world, from the global North and the global South, with varied trajectories of development, and with different perspectives and priorities relating to development and the environment, around the table to negotiate. In recent years, the thought leadership and practical solutions that the Commonwealth has advanced to strengthen national and international efforts to combat climate change has rightly made the Commonwealth more relevant and valuable in this regard, as it ought to be. However, what must not be forgotten is the role played by the Commonwealth – not just at the level of Commonwealth organisations, but also at the level of Commonwealth member states acting individually or collectively – in the history of the modern environmental movement. One would do well to remember that, in the late-1960s and early-1970s, while Commonwealth member states were still defining the scope of their relations with the newly-established Commonwealth Secretariat, the environmental movement was also gaining traction. In almost a poetic way, their paths of evolution criss-crossed every now and then, intertwining their histories to an extent. It would also be worth remembering the significant role Canada ended up playing in the early days of the interaction, with some of the leading figures on either aside being Canadian.

At the same time, aid had become a key pillar of Canada’s foreign policy under Lester Pearson and more so Pierre Trudeau; and the Canadian External Aid Office (EAO) had given way to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), under the leadership of Maurice Strong, in 1968. Even after Strong succeeded Herb Moran as Director-General of the EAO in September 1966, Canada retained a strong Commonwealth focus in its aid strategy. It continued directing a substantial portion of its aid budget to Asia–Pacific Commonwealth members, expanded its aid reach in the African and Caribbean Commonwealth, and supported the establishment of the Commonwealth Technical Assistance Programme (CTAP) in 1967, which evolved into the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) in 1971 (Morrison 1998, pp.57–98). However, while aid was also becoming an integral function of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Canada’s Department of External Affairs (DEA) seemed more bent on limiting the powers of the new Secretariat and Secretary-General, rather than empowering it even further. It was within this context of different outlooks underlying CIDA and the DEA that the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith, also a Canadian diplomat by background, found in Maurice Strong a solid ally. The two met several times to discuss Canadian aid to the Commonwealth, and Smith’s plan to set up CTAP received political support from Strong – who felt that such Commonwealth programmes could make Canada’s aid programmes more efficient by maximising their reach while minimising the administrative burden (Kennair 2011, pp.45–54). Likewise, during a visit to Ottawa in 1968, when Smith proposed the establishment of a Commonwealth multilateral aid fund ahead of
the London CHOGM in 1969, Strong, ‘[n]oting how effectively the Commonwealth programme was providing technical assistance to the smaller countries... offered to provide $10 million from the CIDA budget to get a multilateral Commonwealth fund started’ (Smith and Sanger 1981, p.116). Although Trudeau did not follow through with the plan in the end, Strong remained a key ally for the Commonwealth.

Meanwhile, the period also witnessed important developments in the emerging environmental movement. The resolution proposed by Sweden at the UN General Assembly in 1968 to convene a world conference on the environment led to the first UN Conference on the Human Environment being held in Stockholm in 1972. The conference was attended by 113 national delegates and two heads of government, Olaf Palme of Sweden and Indira Gandhi of India. However, even in 1970, the debates between those concerned with the environment, who saw population growth as the main issue threatening the planet, and those concerned with development, who saw environmental controls as threatening the economic growth of low-income economies, drove a deeper and wider wedge between countries. That there had been little progress in relation to the conference even in early-1970 compelled the concerned Swedish Ambassador to the UN, Sverker Astrom, to recommend Maurice Strong to the UN Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Philippe de Seynes. Subsequently, the UN Secretary-General, U Thant, invited Strong to organise and chair the 1972 conference as its Secretary-General. At a time when the developing world, which showed little interest in and more suspicion of the environmental agenda, was inclined to stay away from the conference, Thant recognised that the Conference Secretariat required a head whom many African, Asian and Latin American nations regarded as a friend and, hence, requested the British economist Barbara Ward to persuade Trudeau to release Strong from his Canadian responsibilities for that purpose. Strong travelled extensively, persuading developing countries to place greater importance on the environment. In July 1971, he convened a meeting of experts from the North and the South in Founex, Switzerland, that was chaired by Gamani Corea of Sri Lanka, with Mahbub ul Haq of Pakistan as rapporteur. He also invited Barbara Ward and René Dubos to co-author *Only One World* to influence opinion and galvanise support. Indeed, Strong was able to save the day by persuading the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, to attend the conference herself and highlight the concerns of the developing world.

The Stockholm conference led to the establishment of the first UN specialised agency dealing with the environment, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in Nairobi in June 1972, with Strong serving as its Founding Executive Director. The mutual understanding and established networks provided by the Commonwealth proved immensely valuable to initiatives and negotiations in this regard. The role played by the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC), founded by Zena Daysh in 1969, in facilitating dialogue within the Commonwealth is also noteworthy. Through its research and advocacy, CHEC raised the profile of environmental concerns on the international development agenda. The first Commonwealth Conference on Development and Human Ecology it convened in Valletta in 1970 brought together leading international organisations and scientific bodies, such as the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the British Medical Research Council and the British Government and Nature Conservancy, which devised an international plan of development for small island states and the Commonwealth (CHEC 2001). Its national case study of Malta, undertaken over five years, was presented as the central theme of the Commonwealth Conference for International Replicability; and CHEC proved to be instrumental in informing the contributions of some Commonwealth countries, such as Malta, at Stockholm (Ibid). As a 1973 report recorded:
‘The successful conference in Malta attended by delegates from 15 Commonwealth countries, was followed by another in London to discuss with Commonwealth delegates the future role of CHEC and its organisation... It was decided to set up affiliated groups throughout the Commonwealth... The London conference also prepared the way for the Stockholm conference, where Maurice Strong gave CHEC every encouragement. The Council meeting of CHEC held in Stockholm was attended by many Commonwealth delegates who found the time to break away from their official duties to take part. HE Mr Keith Johnson – Jamaica’s Permanent Representative at the UN and Rapporteur-General of Stockholm – took the chair.’ (Waller 1973, pp.226–7)

When the second Commonwealth Human Ecology Conference, which was supposed to be held in Singapore, was eventually held in Hong Kong in April 1972, both Arnold Smith and Maurice Strong backed Sir Hugh Springer in appealing against the change in the Singapore minister’s decision (New Scientist 1972, p.88).

The run-up to the Stockholm conference also saw the emergence of three major environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), all of which had some Commonwealth connection. Although Friends of the Earth was founded in San Francisco in 1969, it involved UK activists from the start, which led to its establishment in England two years later. Then, it was in 1971 that Greenpeace was founded by Canadian environmental activists. Of greatest relevance to the Commonwealth, however, is that when the American oil magnate Robert Anderson initiated the International Institute for Environment Affairs (IIEA) in the US in 1971, Strong recommended that Barbara Ward be invited to head the IIEA, an invitation that Ward accepted on the condition that international development issues be added to its concerns and its headquarters be moved to the UK (Satterthwaite 2006, p.14). By emphasising the link between the environment and development, Ward had not only prompted the renaming of the IIEA as the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), but also inadvertently indicated how the environment might feature within the Commonwealth’s development agenda.

Incidentally, the key conference publication, Only One Earth, written by Barbara Ward and René Dubos, was the first book on the environment that Shridath Ramphal, Commonwealth Secretary-General from 1975 to 1990, had read. When Ramphal published his first book One World to Share in 1979, Ward provided the Introduction (Ramphal 2014, p.524). She noted, ‘Ever since his appointment in June 1975 as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, he has seen – as too many of his ministers have not seen – what a unique influence the old threads of friendship, the networks of understanding and interest, inherited from the past could give the Commonwealth nations if they used their quiet influence for the common good’ (Ward 1979, p.xxvi). Ramphal also engaged with Ward while he was a member of the Brandt Commission on development, which had been set up in 1977 and involved a number of Commonwealth actors, such as Edward Heath (UK), Lakshmi Kant Jha (India), Joe Morris (Canada), Khatijah Ahmad (Malaysia) and Amir Jamal (Tanzania). Ramphal also offered the eulogy at the Memorial Mass for Ward at Westminster Cathedral on 11 July 1981 (The Tablet 1981, p.10).

While the rest of the 1970s and 1980s saw the development of several environmental instruments and the adoption of the World Charter for Nature by the UN General Assembly in 1982, the next major development arose when the UN General Assembly, in its Resolution 38/161 of 19 December 1983, welcomed the establishment of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The UN Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, invited the Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, to serve as its Chairman. Brundtland had formerly been a member of both the Brandt and Palme Commissions along with Ramphal; at her behest, Ramphal joined the WCED (the Brundtland Commission), as did the Canadian diplomat Maurice Strong. Ramphal was aided in his contributions by the
Economic Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and Vince Cable (later, the UK Business Secretary), and played a key role in establishing the connections between poverty alleviation, development and environmental protection. The commission’s 1987 report *Our Common Future* refined and popularised the concept of ‘sustainable development’, which it defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Ramphal 2014, p.522). Later that year, at the Vancouver CHOGM, 13–17 October 1987, President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of Maldives alerted Commonwealth Heads to the threats posed by rising sea levels in his landmark address:

‘There was growing scientific evidence that the seas of the world were rising and that they would continue to rise, probably by about one and a half to six feet in the next 100 years. What would be the global effect of such a rise in sea level?... In Bangladesh, such a rise would swamp up to 27 per cent of the total land area, displacing up to 25 million people. For Maldives, it was not necessary even to imagine a six-feet rise because that would be quite sufficient to submerge the entire country. It would be the death of a nation.’ (Ibid, p.523)

President Gayoom delivered roughly the same address at the UN later.

Gayoom’s address at the Vancouver CHOGM was not ignored. As the communiqué noted, ‘Heads of Government specifically asked the Secretary-General to convene a group of experts to examine the implications for Commonwealth countries of rises in the sea level and other natural disasters resulting from possible climate change’. This led to Ramphal establishing a ten-member-strong Commonwealth expert group under the chairmanship of Dr Martin Holdgate, Director-General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), in 1987, whose collective report *Climate Change: Meeting the Challenges*, (Holdgate, 1989) as Stuart Mole noted, ‘showed the devastating effects of climate change on Commonwealth countries as a result of the melting of the polar ice caps’ (Mole 2012, pp.74–75). The following year saw the creation of the UNEP/WMO Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and at the Kuala Lumpur CHOGM in 1989, Ramphal presented the *Holdgate Report* to the Commonwealth Heads, who subsequently issued the Langkawi Declaration on the Environment. In the Langkawi Declaration (1989), the Commonwealth Heads of Government noted that they were ‘deeply concerned at the serious deterioration in the environment and the threat this poses to the wellbeing of present and future generations’ and that ‘[a]ny delay in taking action to halt this progressive deterioration will result in permanent and irreversible damage’. They also resolved to collectively and individually support the work of the IPCC. As Stuart Mole observed:

‘The Lankgawi Declaration – and the *Holdgate Report* that was its particular inspiration – had a far-reaching effect. It provided valuable underpinning for the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Earth Summit) and it ensured Commonwealth country support for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The declaration... encouraged the formation of a small states lobby on climate and energy issues – the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)... [and] undoubtedly encouraged ratification of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. Hailed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as “perhaps the single most successful international agreement to date”, Montreal provided the template for the far more ambitious and all-encompassing Kyoto Protocol.’ (Mole 2012, pp.74–75)

At the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED; the Earth Summit) in Rio, while there was no Commonwealth caucus in a formal sense, ‘Commonwealth networking’ at the level of government delegations and key figures was evident (Bourne 1992, p.458). As Richard Bourne, who attended the summit, observed, ‘The Secretariat had provided
technical support for small and small island states in the PrepComs [Preparatory Committees] before Rio’ and stood ‘ready to aid Commonwealth delegations in whatever way they requested’; several speakers also ‘made mention of their countries’ Commonwealth membership in their speeches’ (Ibid, pp.458–9). Furthermore, Maurice Strong of Canada was the Secretary-General of the conference and Nitin Desai of India served as his deputy. In addition, while Tommy Koh of Singapore served as Chairman of the Preparatory and Main Committees, as well as the Committee of the Whole, Jamsheed Marker of Pakistan chaired the Group of 77 plus China, and Shridath Ramphal and Julius Nyere acted as ‘Eminent Advisers’ (Ibid, pp.458–9). Although Ramphal was no longer Commonwealth Secretary-General, Strong had invited Ramphal, with whom he had worked in the Brundtland Commission, to write the official book for Rio, as Ward and Dubos had done for Stockholm (Ramphal 2014, p.526). The new Commonwealth Secretary-General, Emeka Anyaoku, also attended the Earth Summit with a delegation from the Commonwealth Secretariat and addressed the plenary session. Bourne recounted:

‘Many, including his predecessor, came to congratulate Chief Anyaoku after his speech to the plenary session. The fascinating Iwokrama Programme was firmly brought to international notice when, in addition to the Secretary-General’s mention, it was referred at the summit by President Hoyte of Guyana and Prime Minister Kennedy Simmonds of Saint Kitts. (As well as being the subject of a joint press conference with President Hoyte at UNCED, it was the topic for a well-attended workshop at the [NGO] Global Forum).’ (Bourne 1992, p.459)

On the NGO front, there was a strong CHEC delegation, led by Zena Daysh, that included a substantial sub-delegation comprising members of the Rivers Chiefs Association in Nigeria, who sought to raise awareness about the degradation of the river Niger (Ibid, p.460). Thus, again, the Commonwealth connections of key players provided for effective personal networking diplomacy in the environmental movement even in its early decades.

‘The period between 1990 and 1999’, as Anyaoku remarked in his memoirs, also ‘saw the establishment of strong Commonwealth mandates and mechanisms for addressing environment and development concerns in a deeply integrated way’ (Anyaoku 2004, p.219). The Commonwealth initiated mechanisms for facilitating high-level consultations on the environment and development, including the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment that Anyaoku established in 1993 and policy dialogues for senior officials and negotiators (Ibid, p.220). Furthermore, at the Kuala Lumpur CHOGM of 1989 at which Anyaoku was selected Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Government of Guyana offered the Commonwealth 371,000 acres of the Iwokrama rainforest to demonstrate best practices in the sustainable management of forest resources. Anyaoku devoted much attention to the Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme during his years in office (Ibid, p.220). In 1996, he also took up an invitation in to serve on the independent World Commission on Forests (Ibid, p.220). At the Edinburgh CHOGM in 1997, Commonwealth Heads agreed that ‘all countries will need to play their part by pursuing policies that would result in significant reductions of greenhouse gas emissions’; and at the UN General Assembly in 1999 and the Durban CHOGM later that year, Anyaoku called for the Kyoto Protocol to enter into force as soon as possible (Anyaoku 1999).

During the tenure of Don McKinnon as Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Commonwealth retained its influence in the global dialogue on the environment and development, not least through its advocacy of small states issues. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002, which led to the adoption of the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development, Commonwealth concerns were advocated through two official background papers, McKinnon’s attendance in the high-level
At the Abuja CHOGM in 2003, Commonwealth Heads reaffirmed technical assistance to small island and other states particularly vulnerable to global warming and sea-level rise, and supported efforts under the Convention to Combat Desertification and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation to address climate and drought concerns. At the Malta CHOGM in 2005, Heads agreed on the Gozo Statement on Vulnerable Small States, which recognised the specific challenges of small states with respect to natural disasters and climate change; urged international co-operation in addressing issues relating to the transfer of affordable technologies and the management and promotion of renewable energy resources; and called for capacity-building support relating to disaster preparedness, early warning systems, risk mitigation, and post-disaster recovery and reconstruction. Subsequently, the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted consultations with Commonwealth officials and invited experts in the wings of the UNFCCC meetings in Montreal and Bonn, and explored how to integrate climate change within its existing programmes. The Commonwealth Foundation also convened a workshop that brought together civil society organisations and professional bodies to identify the role that civil society could play in adaptive strategies for climate change and disaster management (Commonwealth Secretariat 2007b). In 2007, Commonwealth leaders issued the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan, wherein they agreed to support technical assistance to small and vulnerable states to assess the implications of climate change, initiatives to strengthen the quality and participation of Commonwealth countries at international climate change negotiations, sustainable management of land and forest resources, and natural disaster management.

When Kamalesh Sharma took over as Commonwealth Secretary-General, a core element of his mission had been to give greater prominence to the environment in the Commonwealth agenda. His early contributions reflected his aim that the Commonwealth should provide thought leadership on how climate change could factor in trade and development negotiations at a time when the interface between trade and climate change was entering the high-level policy arena. The IPCC Fourth Assessment Report of 2007 had highlighted how severe the consequences of climate change would be for the developing world. Sharma was particularly concerned about the economic implications for least developed countries (LDCs), small and vulnerable economies (SVEs) and small island developing states (SIDS) whose economies – by virtue of their dependence on agriculture, fisheries, tourism and forestry – were most sensitive to climate variation. He shared:

‘One of my first initiatives was having the Commonwealth Secretariat partner with the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) in Geneva in commissioning a study that analysed the complex inter-relationship between trade, climate change and development. The study, entitled Trade, Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Key Issues for Small States, LDCs and Vulnerable Economies, involved leading experts and analysts from both the developed and the developing world and was edited by Dr Moustapha Kamal Gueye and Malena Sell of ICTSD and Janet Strachan of the Commonwealth Secretariat. It looked at the impact of climate change on key trade sectors in LDCs, SVEs and SIDS, and explored the need for access to clean, renewable sources of energy and for technologies that supported more sustainable forms of production and livelihoods. It also indicated the value of national and international trade policy approaches that facilitated economic diversification away from trade sectors sensitive to climate change, so as to enhance economic competitiveness and resilience and move towards sustainable and low-carbon development. The study was initially considered at a Multistakeholder Dialogue on Trade and Climate Change: Key Issues for Developing Countries, hosted by the Government of Mauritius in September 2008 and then launched at the UNFCCC negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009. It is still seen as a valuable addition to international understanding of these issues.’
Alongside trade, environmental negotiations was another area where Sharma, right from the start of his first term as Secretary-General, regarded the Commonwealth as having the potential to add unique value. He very much believed that the greatest strength of the association he now led was its ability to bring together diverse member states, representing different regions of the world and having varied trajectories of development, and to march forward on the basis of consensus. He wrote in an essay for *The Commonwealth Yearbook*:

‘In 2008, the Commonwealth initiated a programme of support in environmental negotiations for small states, as it has done in the area of trade for some years. Leading up to the Copenhagen Conference in December, the year 2009 will be a significant one in global environmental negotiations. Linked to them are the Commonwealth’s attempts to advance recognition of the fractured and thereby diminished impact of current instruments for ‘global’ environmental governance.’ (Sharma 2009d, p.4)

Sharma was aware that the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) to be held in Copenhagen, 7–18 December 2009, followed close on the heels of the Port of Spain CHOGM, 27–29 November 2009. This was, to him, the perfect opportunity for the Commonwealth to serve as ‘a great global good’ in negotiations seeking to secure a global agreement in reducing carbon emissions. Besides ensuring climate change was one of the main issues on the CHOGM agenda, he discussed the idea of a global fund with Gordon Brown and suggested that key players in the Copenhagen Summit be invited to address the CHOGM in Port of Spain. Subsequently, invitations were sent to Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen of Denmark, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, all of whom accepted. The Queen noted in her address, ‘On this, the eve of the UN Copenhagen summit on climate change, the Commonwealth has an opportunity to lead once more’.

At the CHOGM, Brown proposed the setting up of the US$10-billion-a-year (£6 billion) global fund, to which the UK would contribute £800 million, to kick-start the Copenhagen climate change process. Half the funds were to go to developing countries to help them reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change (*BBC News* 2009). The proposed Copenhagen Launch Fund received the support not only of the foreign leaders present, but also of the Commonwealth Heads, as evident in the *Port of Spain Climate Change Consensus: The Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration* the Commonwealth leaders adopted. The Heads sought that the fast start fund would focus on the most vulnerable countries and provide ‘immediate fast-disbursing assistance with a dedicated system for small island states and associated low-lying coastal states of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) of at least 10 per cent of the fund’. This concept of a climate fund was instrumental to the setting up of a climate fund at the Copenhagen Summit as a mechanism within the framework of the UNFCCC that assisted developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices in relation to climate change. As Sharma recounted:

‘In my very first CHOGM, taking advantage of the fact that ten days later, the Copenhagen Climate Conference would bring world leaders together to address the pressing topic of climate change, I decided that the Commonwealth should make a bold statement. We invited the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, President Rasmussen of Denmark and President Sarkozy of France to the CHOGM, the first time in the history of the biennial summits that the UN Secretary-General and Foreign Heads of Government would be present. Until this day, Ban Ki-Moon repeats that the [Climate] Fund was the only major outcome of the Copenhagen Summit, and the fund was a Commonwealth proposal.’
Between 2009 and 2011, the parameters of the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s new ‘good offices for the environment’ role were also set out. As Sharma observed, ‘These parameters focused on the role of the Secretary-General in mobilising Commonwealth institutions and professional bodies on action towards environmentally sustainable development. A role with respect to facilitating action on environmental concerns or emergencies, at the request of an affected member state, was also considered’ (Sharma 2011c). One issue with which the Commonwealth grappled throughout Sharma’s time in office was climate financing. On related developments, Sharma added:

‘In May 2010, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) considered priorities in international sustainable development governance in the run up to the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, which marks the 20th anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit. Discussions continued in February 2011, when the CCGE identified Commonwealth roles in supporting further development of a green economy, such as: providing a platform for the exchange of approaches across ministries to build mutual understanding and practical action; capacity building on access to funds and investment for a green economy; building international support in the Rio+20 process through consultations amongst member states, and building an understanding of innovative green financing mechanisms. To support the Rio+20 negotiations, the Commonwealth Secretariat produced and distributed a handbook on Sustainable Development Governance in April 2011 and will be implementing further consensus-building activities as plans for Rio+20 to proceed. (Ibid)

We have also taken forward the implementation of the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan and have focused especially on supporting small states and LDCs in financing their own strategies for adaptation and moving towards becoming carbon-neutral and climate-resilient economies. I was pleased that, in October 2010, the Commonwealth finance ministers also emphasised the need for concessional financing: such financing, they rightly noted, could support capital investments for adaptation and investments in renewable energy; reduce the cost of supplying power to poor communities, and address severe imbalances in export/import earnings that were driven by the cost of imported fuel. Such concessional financing, thus, had the potential to make small economies both more climate resilient and competitive. Three months later, in January 2011, we convened a conference on climate finance that looked into the flow of climate financing to the poorest and most vulnerable Commonwealth members. The cross-ministerial group drew on country experiences to identify existing funding opportunities, blockages that affect the flow of funding, and practical options for supporting improved and more rapid disbursement to highly vulnerable and capacity-constrained member states. In February 2011, Commonwealth environment ministers endorsed the outcomes and supported “actions to take toward recommendations on: the transfer of knowledge, experience and targeted, applied expertise; the development of mutual support to strengthen national capacities and institutions; Commonwealth work with regional associations and development banks to help build support mechanisms at the regional level; and the sharing of ideas on effective design mechanisms to suit capacity-constrained countries.” (Ibid)

As part of my good offices for the environment, I also established a Commonwealth Expert Group on Climate Finance in 2013. It was chaired by the former President of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, and tasked with identifying the challenges that small and vulnerable states face in accessing and disbursing climate finance, and exploring concrete proposals for action. In June 2013, the group issued a call for evidence on improving frameworks for climate finance, which explored questions and good practices from across the Commonwealth on unlocking and delivering results from available global climate change
funding. Apart from looking at how climate financing is accessed by, and disbursed to, small and vulnerable member states, and what options there are to tap into existing and new sources of finance and enhance the effectiveness of climate finance, the expert group also attended to how global advocacy and political leadership can be used as a mechanism for brokering solutions and facilitating improved flows of climate finance to small and vulnerable states. The Commonwealth Secretariat convened two meetings of the Commonwealth Expert Group on Climate Finance, and prepared its report, which was presented at the Colombo CHOGM in November 2013. The report called for transparency and accountability in processes and procedures for accessing climate funds and made recommendations that the Secretariat took forward to the UNFCCC Summit in Warsaw, also held in November 2013. The Secretariat also initiated the development of a proposal for a Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub to be considered at the 2015 CHOGM. At the 2013 CHOGM, Commonwealth Heads of Government welcomed Malta’s offer to establish a Small States Centre of Excellence for democracy and development and a Small States Trade Financing Facility. The preliminary meeting of the working group on the Small States Trade Financing Facility was supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat and held in Barbados in March 2014. The working group assessed the need for a Commonwealth trade and investment financing facility for small and developing states without access to such resources and the viability of such a facility.

In the run up to the Malta CHOGM in 2015, I discussed with Prime Minister Joseph Muscat of Malta the initiatives that had already been taken by the Secretariat on this front and the proposals that were still on the table. I reminded him that as the CHOGM in Malta was being held back-to-back with COP21 in Paris, there was great opportunity for the CHOGM to build consensus among the 53 member states of the Commonwealth about the desired outcomes at COP21, and also for the Commonwealth to add global value through its own products. Muscat agreed. Following the Port of Spain CHOGM in 2009 at which the Commonwealth Heads of Government had proposed the establishment of a climate fund, Ban Ki-Moon remembered that the only thing that came out of the Copenhagen Summit that followed was a fund along the lines of what the Commonwealth proposed. We wished to have a similar impact at Paris, for which the CHOGM had once again served as a timely precursor. At the CHOGM in Malta, Commonwealth leaders issued the Commonwealth Leaders’ Statement on Climate Action, which served as an expression of the strong, collective political will to secure a breakthrough at COP21 in Paris. In the statement, the Commonwealth Heads of Government informed that Commonwealth member states, as of 28 November 2015, had already submitted 50 Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs), whose mitigation components cover 17 per cent of the global emissions of greenhouse gases. They also committed to mobilising national and global efforts to hold the increase in global average temperature below 2 or 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to achieve sustainable and climate-resilient development. All of these Commonwealth efforts made a big difference in reaching a consensus at Paris, as Ban Ki-moon himself acknowledged.

At the Malta CHOGM, moreover, the Commonwealth came out with products that attracted widespread attention. On 26 November 2015, at the concluding session of the Commonwealth Business Forum that attracted 1,300 business leaders from around 80 countries (including 21 Heads of Government), the Prince of Wales proposed a new initiative – the Commonwealth Green Finance Facility – to provide cost-effective and efficient guarantees and credit enhancement for small-scale environmental projects that struggle to access finance. The next day, the Prime Minister of Malta, Joseph Muscat, announced the new US$1-billion Commonwealth Green Finance Facility (CGFF) that was to explore options for mobilising private finance to help fund sustainable infrastructure projects across the Commonwealth. The facility was to be capitalised initially through sovereign contributions and later through so-
called ‘green bonds’ and become fully operational by the end of 2016. Building on the recommendation of the 2013 Commonwealth Expert Group on Climate Finance, the Commonwealth also announced in Malta the creation of a new hub that would help least developed states and small island states have greater access to funds to tackle climate change. The Climate Finance Access Hub aims to assist in unlocking climate finance for adaptation and mitigation actions in the most vulnerable states; enhance the capacity of small states and least developed countries to access and manage public and private climate finance flows; and facilitate inter- and intra-regional sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise. The hub will be hosted by Mauritius, with regional and national nodes across the developing regions of the Commonwealth. Its co-ordinator will be supported by a management committee comprising the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Mauritius; national climate finance advisers will be placed in selected national governments; and technical support will be provided by the Economic Policy Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat. During the special session on Climate Change at the Malta CHOGM, Canada pledged $2.65 billion over five years to help developing countries address climate change; the UK pledged £21 million for disaster management and £5.5 million for the ocean-based economy; and Australia pledged $1 million to the Climate Finance Access Hub.

Another product that the Commonwealth put forward at the CHOGM in Malta was the Multilateral Debt Swap for Climate Action, which Sharma proposed at a press conference on 27 November 2015, at which the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Joseph Muscat and President Hollande of France were also present. The initiative built on the established mechanism of ‘debt-for-nature’ swaps and represented a variation with a focus on climate change and mitigation. Sharma explained:

‘The idea behind the proposed initiative is a simple one. In exchange for investments in climate adaption and mitigation projects, the more vulnerable would have the prospect of multilateral debt written off using existing sources of climate finance. This would incentivise development and enhancement of national climate change plans and actions, building institutional capacity and aiding sustainability.’

In his statement at the High-Level Segment of the 2015 COP21 in Paris, Sharma cited this proposal to assist with resource mobilisation as one of the innovative initiatives put forward by the Commonwealth at the recent CHOGM. He pointed out:

‘Many of our member states face a dual challenge. Climate finance is not flowing to those who need it most on account of capacity constraints, and many of these states also face crippling debt burdens, which adversely affect their ability to invest in adaptation and mitigation. The Commonwealth proposes a mechanism aimed at effectively addressing these two fundamental problems. Our proposal is endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General, who attended the Commonwealth Special Session on Climate Change, and the UN system has supported it as an innovative idea that offers significant benefits to the smaller and more vulnerable countries whose economies struggle both with climate adaptation and mitigation, and with debt burdens... The Commonwealth will assist in this through the Commonwealth Finance Access Hub, which was also launched in Malta. The proposal would also accelerate and increase disbursement of climate finance, allowing for adaptability according to circumstance and scale.’ (Sharma 2015c)

In his joint statement with Ban Ki-moon, published in *The Independent* in January 2016, Sharma reiterated:

‘Many vulnerable countries are so burdened by debt they simply can’t afford to address global warming. Jamaica, for example, is struggling with a public debt to GDP ratio of 140 per cent.
For Seychelles, it’s 65 per cent. Think what could happen if countries like these lowered their burden by taking action on climate change: they could expand marine protected areas, strengthen coastal defences, reform fisheries policies, promote water conservation, manage coastal zones; invest in renewable energy and create institutions to advance their plans – working their way out of debt at the same time. The Commonwealth’s proposal for a Multilateral Debt Swap for Climate Action has been recognized by the United Nations as a promising option to address the twin challenges of unsustainable debt and climate change. Swaps could be supported by the Climate Finance Access Hub that’s just been launched by the Commonwealth to help small and vulnerable countries access climate finance and build institutional capacity.’ (Ban and Sharma 2016)

Around a month later, recounting how the idea first developed in the Commonwealth context, Sharma shared:

‘Our proposal to introduce Small States Debt Swaps for Climate Action had been publicly endorsed earlier at the last Annual Meeting of the IMF and the World Bank Group. When Ban Ki-Moon spoke at the meeting, the only organisation he mentioned was the Commonwealth: many organisations, he said, came up with problems which he knew about, but the Commonwealth was the only organisation that came up with solutions. Ban Ki-moon was so supportive of the proposal throughout that he also lent his name to our statement.’

In the days of Sharma as Commonwealth Secretary-General, building resilience and securing sustainable development in small and developing states most vulnerable to climate change was another theme with which the Commonwealth engaged consistently. As Sharma noted,

‘The Commonwealth has collaborated with the University of Malta since 2004 and produced a well-respected Vulnerability/Resilience Framework. This framework took note of the fact that while some small states have relatively high GDP per capita and consequently came across as economically strong, their economies were rather fragile in reality and could be disproportionately affected by shocks, including financial crises, natural disasters and extreme weather events. This practical assessment tool identifies gaps within the country’s policy environment and helps national, regional and international stakeholders agree on priority areas for developing policy and financial development assistance. The UN now works on creating national resilience and vulnerability profiles, acknowledging the contribution of the Commonwealth.’

Over his tenure, Sharma ensured that further progress was made on this theme – as in April 2012, when the needs of vulnerable member countries on green growth were highlighted at outreach meetings with the G20 Development Working Group. The Commonwealth Secretariat also commissioned eight case studies and a summary report on efforts by small states on the transformation to a green economy on Botswana, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Mauritius, Nauru, Samoa and Seychelles. The Secretariat disseminated the findings internationally through a presentation at a regional workshop in the Indian Ocean on the green economy organised by the Government of Mauritius, UNEP, the Indian Ocean Commission and UNDP in October 2012 (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b). Furthermore, in the run up to the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 2014, the Secretariat convened a technical working group to revisit the resilience agenda, looking at both the national policy framework (going beyond indicators) and the international (including South–South) financing and capacity agenda to support resilience building, to strengthen its use for driving investments in resilience in small states. The framework was also expanded that year to capture the downsides of an unregulated or badly regulated market,
environmental management, governance, social development and social cohesion factors, which are critical contributors to economic resilience.

Sharma also placed great emphasis on strengthening strategic partnerships, especially with regional associations that involved small states. He elaborated:

‘I was convinced that the Commonwealth Secretariat, building on the Hub and Spokes model, should work through regional organisations, such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) in the Pacific, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (5Cs) in the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) in the Indian Ocean, to build institutional capacities in sustainable development and climate financing. By doing so, the Commonwealth Secretariat could help small states in developing national plans to respond effectively to climate change, rather than simply parachuting in remedies. The remedies could not be overly dependent on foreign input; they had to be national. This is where the Commonwealth could work to its strength: working together with regional organisations to enable small island developing states to access climate financing, strengthen their institutions and devise robust national plans. It was in this spirit that the Commonwealth supported the development of a Climate Resilient Islands Partnership between the Commonwealth Secretariat, SPREP, 5Cs and IOC that was created in 2011 and launched at the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012. The partnership highlighted the special and unique challenges faced by these countries through a side event and advocacy video which was widely distributed. The event also entailed signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between the regional organisations. It was in the same spirit that the Commonwealth also joined its three regional partners in calling for new partners to scale up the partnership ahead of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States held in Samoa in September 2014. Other initiatives included joint meetings to explore a common platform of action; an exchange of experts between the regions; the placement of CFTC advisers supporting cost–benefit analysis of climate change actions in the Caribbean and the Pacific; the use by the Indian Ocean Commission of the Commonwealth’s vulnerability and resilience methodology; and the provision of an online training course tailored to small states on the International Architecture for Environment and Sustainable Development.’

In terms of impact, Sharma felt the course, initially offered in 2011–12, had definitely been enough of a success to justify the introduction of a similar programme the next year. In his words:

‘This well-received course [on the International Architecture for Environment and Sustainable Development] was offered to policy-makers in small states in the AIMS (Africa, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea), Caribbean and Pacific regions in 2011–12. It was offered in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning Virtual University for Small States, the University of the West Indies, the University of the South Pacific, and the University of the Seychelles ahead of the Rio 20+ conference. The course had both residential and online components: when it came to the residential segments, the AIMS region had its residential phase in Seychelles in November 2011; the Pacific region had its own in Port Villa, Vanuatu, in December 2011; and the Caribbean region had its own in Kingston, Jamaica, in January 2012. Subsequently, given how successful the initial offering of the course had been, the Commonwealth Secretariat partnered with the Commonwealth of Learning to deliver a similar course with the Indian Ocean Commission ahead of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa in 2014. The residential component was held in Mauritius in October 2013.’
In 2010-11, the Commonwealth Secretariat had also partnered with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the World Bank Institute (WBI) in identifying the knowledge and needs of parliaments in states regarding climate change: its risks; responses to better manage these strategies for adaptation; and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation). Synergies were also developed on how parliaments can better contribute to the implementation and oversight of environmental policy in small states. The outcomes were captured in a statement and a set of materials that have been made available through the CPA’s and WBI’s online ‘Parliaments and Climate Change E-Learning Course’ (Sharma 2011c).

Sharma enlisted several other initiatives in this regard in his Biennial Report as Secretary-General:

‘At national level, an adviser deployed to the Ministry of Economic Planning and National Development in Saint Lucia helped to deliver a detailed framework for a National Sustainable Development Strategy... A full-time environmental and resource economist has been deployed to the [5Cs] since 2008. This has strengthened the centre’s capacity by supporting a review on the economics of climate change in the Caribbean, building partnerships and capacity with regional universities on climate change, and undertaking a number of studies on the impact of climate change and various mitigation techniques. Support was also given to regional negotiators at and following Rio+20 and in preparation for the UN [COP 18] in Doha. As a result of this intervention, at least 15 countries are more cognisant about the impacts of climate change on their most important sectors and economies. At least ten countries will be developing national climate change or low carbon development strategies and will climate proof their development plans and sector programmes. At least 50 per cent of countries participating in the project have budget allocations specific to climate change and extreme events. Partnerships have now been forged with major development agencies, securing funding of more than US$25 million with a further US$6 million committed... The Commonwealth Secretariat completed a financial review of the Iwokrama International Centre, and liaised with member states and specific Washington-based institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank, to support the work of the Board of Trustees in placing the IIC on a secure financial footing... The Environmentally Sustainable Development Programme has been managed by the Economic Affairs Division, which works in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary-General, the Special Advisory Services Division and the Technical Co-operation and Strategic Response Unit.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, pp.41–42)

The Climate Vulnerability Forum was another arena where the Commonwealth engaged with the theme of climate vulnerability and resilience at both the level of member states and the level of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Founded at the initiative of Maldives when 11 climate-vulnerable countries from around the world met in Malé in November 2009 to highlight their challenges just ahead of the 2009 Copenhagen Summit, the Climate Vulnerability Forum (CVF) had a strong Commonwealth presence since the start. Eight of the initial 11 members were Commonwealth member states: Maldives, Kiribati, Bangladesh, Barbados, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda (formally accepted into the Commonwealth at the CHOGM later that month) and Tanzania; the other three were Bhutan, Nepal and Vietnam. Likewise, the first three chairs of the CVF were Commonwealth member states: Maldives (2009–10), Kiribati (2010–11) and Bangladesh (2011–13). Since its inception, several more developing countries – mainly LDCs and SIDS -- joined the CVF, and it currently represents 43 developing countries vulnerable to climate change. Furthermore, in September 2011, the Commonwealth Secretariat organised a strategy meeting for the Climate Vulnerability Forum that focused on the priority concerns of small states within the ongoing climate change negotiations. This helped to facilitate a productive meeting of the Climate Vulnerability Forum in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in November 2011. The forum included ten vulnerable countries, and Bangladesh highlighted outcomes at the plenary of COP17 held in Durban in November–December 2011.
One curious development in Sharma’s tenure that appears to have gone largely unnoticed is the increasing engagement of the Commonwealth, whether directly or indirectly, with national and intergovernmental actors in the Nordic region. As can be said of Sharma in the context of the Commonwealth’s increasing engagement with the G20, here too does Sharma stand out in the lineage of Commonwealth Secretaries-General as one who, like his predecessor Ramphal, was able and willing to push the boundaries of the Commonwealth’s sphere of influence and activity by projecting its voice and making its presence felt in the world beyond. He notes in his 2011–13 Biennial Report:

‘A meteorological and climate adviser was deployed to the SPREP, who facilitated the signing of a Finnish–Pacific Project to improve national weather and climate services. This deployment also supported the Pacific Meteorology Council to improve co-ordination between National Meteorological Services in the region, and resulted in the publication of SPREP’s Pacific Island Meteorological Strategy (PIMS) 2012–2021. A partnership between SPREP and the Finnish MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] and National Meteorological Institute was established, and is helping to reduce the vulnerability of villagers’ livelihoods to the effects of climate change.’ (Ibid, p.41)

In November 2014, Sharma met with Dagfinn Høybråten, the Secretary-General of the Nordic Council of Ministers, and discussed collaboration between their two organisations on practical steps to support SIDS secure benefits from the ‘blue’ – oceans – economy. Sharma shared:

‘The blue economy offers important development opportunities to SIDS through the sustainable use of ocean resources. This co-operation could potentially benefit over half of the Commonwealth’s member countries, which because of their small size and geographic isolation are economically vulnerable. Following the meeting, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Nordic Council of Ministers’ Secretariat, in co-operation with the governments of Iceland and the Faroe Islands, co-financed a pilot project in The Bahamas and Seychelles. The pilot project drew on work being undertaken by both organisations on devising approaches to assess the development opportunities for economic diversification presented to SIDS by oceans and biological resources. It built on existing work by the Commonwealth Secretariat on the delimitation of national maritime boundaries and strategies for the sustainable management of marine and coastal resources and activities.’

The blue economy was another policy theme in which Sharma demonstrated substantial interest, especially towards the end. In the keynote address he delivered at the Second Plenary Session (‘Leadership for Climate Resilient Green Blue Pacific Economies’) at the Third Summit of the Pacific Islands Development Forum in Suva, Fiji, on 2 September 2015, Sharma stated:

‘More than half of Commonwealth countries are small land states as islands, but giant ocean states... As a diverse and worldwide family of nations, we are acutely aware of the impact that both wise and unwise stewardship of marine resources can have on the future well-being of our shared planet. We are also conscious of the contribution well-ordered ocean governance can make towards building environmentally safe, economically resilient and prosperous communities. However, the oceans, which give us life, are under mounting strain from a variety of uncontrolled uses, which create multiple environmental threats, arising from destructive fishing practices, poorly planned or unregulated coastal development, the dumping of waste and unsustainable extraction of natural resources. Climate change and extreme environmental episodes add to these pressures. Rational use of marine resources in terms of economic growth, environmental protection and community development are vital to our future.
The Commonwealth is working alongside small island states to partner them in managing their marine resources more holistically. This includes offering practical assistance with the delimitation of national maritime boundaries, as well as sustainable management of marine and coastal resources and activities. Through better protection of key habitats, and the marine ecosystem services they provide, countries can achieve multiple goals, including strengthened resilience to the impacts of climate change, better resource protection and more sustainable utilisation of marine living resources which can help meet global food security and local livelihood challenges. A constant commitment is to boost economic resilience here in the Pacific region and more widely. Many of the challenges Pacific countries face can be partly addressed by adopting a “blue economy” approach, based on key principles of the green economy. The blue economy is potentially of value to all Pacific countries through the opportunities it offers to create more value out of existing and new resource streams. Existing benefits and uses can include fisheries, minerals and shipping, while potential benefits include marine fish farming, renewable energy, ocean-related tourism and marine biotechnology. We have also worked along similar lines with Vanuatu, reporting on the potential for greater coastal habitat protection to mitigate against climate change in Vanuatu, outlined in the Management of Coastal Carbon Sinks in Vanuatu report of 2012.

Key challenges to achieving a blue economy in the Pacific include lack of capacity, the short-term focus on economic gain when a long-term strategy needs to be devised, sustainable sources of finance, poor agreements negotiated by Pacific island countries for access to tuna and other key fishery resources, a lack of “ownership” among communities of the true value of marine ecosystem services, including an understanding of how they already support livelihoods and a lack of opportunity to increase the value addition from many of the marine resources extracted in the Pacific at a local level. The Commonwealth is probably the only international organisation to have created a dedicated Oceans and Natural Resources Division, comprising highly skilled economists and legal professionals, who offer comprehensive assistance on the blue economy, including in the areas of legislation and policy framework development related to oceans and natural resource management. We are looking towards expanding this work portfolio in Pacific island countries, where we are already active.

Finally, the Commonwealth Secretariat has also provided a platform for young people to take collective action and voice their concerns within national policy debates. In October 2009, the Secretariat hosted a Youth Commonwealth Climate Change Summit, which was organised and attended by youth leaders from across the Commonwealth. The 150 youth leaders gathered at the summit initiated the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN), a youth-led network that seeks to build the capacity of Commonwealth youth and their organisations in addressing climate change and other environmental challenges. CYCN was placed under the supervision of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) and held its first working session in December 2010. CYCN analyses and translates climate change scenarios into effective policy development and improved understanding of impacts on young peoples’ health, well-being and economic success. It links actions taken by members from across the Commonwealth at the local and national levels to ensure collective impact. It also endeavours to influence climate change and environmental policy through effective advocacy in Commonwealth member countries and relevant intergovernmental forums such as the Commonwealth, UNFCCC, UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD). Although it has been around for a relatively short while, its list of pursuits is long, bold and impressive: CYCN members actively engaged in advocacy at the Commonwealth Youth Forum in Fremantle in October 2011, COP17 and the 7th Conference of Youth in Durban in November–December 2011, the
Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, and more recently at COP21 in Paris in December 2015. Ahead of COP21, a group of 14 young experts and practitioners in climate change from 11 Commonwealth member states convened under the auspices of the Commonwealth Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change to produce a set of recommendations for Heads of Government at the 2015 CHOGM and COP21. It was fitting that the Commonwealth Heads, in their Statement on Climate Action, commended ‘the commitment and contributions of this network...to the realisation of our collective aspirations and to sharing responsibility by all for securing climate stability and safety to the benefit of present and future generations’.
7. HUMAN RIGHTS

“Our shared values of peace, democracy, development, justice and human rights – which are found in our new “Commonwealth Charter” – mean that we place special emphasis on including everyone in this goal, especially those who are vulnerable.’

HM Queen Elizabeth II, Commonwealth Day Message 2013

In 1969, during the tenure of the Canadian diplomat Arnold Smith as first Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Heads of Government referred to the ‘principles of racial justice and equality and the right of all peoples to self-determination which are embodied in the United Nations Charter and in the Declaration of Human Rights’ as matters which went ‘to the heart of the Commonwealth relationship and were therefore of deep concern to all Commonwealth members’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 1987, p.141). The 1971 Singapore Declaration, while acknowledging the freedom of member states, for the first time explicitly introduced a set of common principles to be pursued by the Commonwealth. They comprised international peace and order; liberty of the individual; equal rights for all citizens and ‘their inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic processes in framing the society in which they live’; commitment to combating racial prejudice and discrimination; opposition to colonial domination and racial oppression; human dignity, equality and self-determination; commitment to overcoming poverty, ignorance and disease; free flow of internal trade on terms fair and equitable to all; and international co-operation (Commonwealth Secretariat 1971, pp.156–157). Some of these would later be elaborated in more specific statements, such as those on apartheid in sport, racism and racial prejudice (Commonwealth Secretariat 1977, pp.198–199; Commonwealth Secretariat 1979, pp.217–219). In 1981, the Commonwealth Heads of Government requested the Commonwealth Secretary-General, in the context of the establishment of a Human Rights Unit in the Secretariat, ‘to consult further with member governments on an agreed definition of human rights within the Commonwealth context’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 1981, pp.238–239). A comprehensive answer was only given in the Harare Declaration, which, after reaffirming the principles of the Singapore Declaration, formulated the following ‘fundamental political values of the Commonwealth’ which shall be protected and promoted: ‘democracy, democratic processes and institutions which reflect national circumstances, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, just and honest government;... [and] fundamental human rights, including equal rights and opportunities for all citizens regardless of race, colour, creed or political belief’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 1997a, pp.82–85).

McKinnon’s 2003 Annual Report explains that ‘[a]ssistance to member states with adhering to the Harare Commonwealth Declaration is a key component of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s work to promote just and stable government and to prevent internal conflicts’, and that ‘[t]he “good offices” role of the Secretary-General is the Commonwealth’s primary mechanism for addressing political problems and conflicts when they do arise’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003, p.10). Although Anyaoku ought to be credited for bringing
good offices to the fore, it was a little more *ad hoc* under him. Under McKinnon, by contrast, good offices grew much more regularised and came to form a central part of the activities of the Political Affairs Division (Neuhaus, 2014). At the Coolum CHOGM in March 2002, Commonwealth Heads of Government also approved the conclusions of the High-Level Review Group, which included a call for more proactive use of the good offices role; and following the CHOGM, a Good Offices Section was established in the Political Affairs Division of the Secretariat, with additional staff and a greater budget (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003, p.10). It was during McKinnon’s time in office, in January 2002, that the mandate of the Human Rights Unit within the Commonwealth Secretariat was extended to include the development of programmes to support the protection of human rights, though much of its work has remained in the realm of promotion Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI). Its mandate also included producing human rights materials from member countries, collaborating and co-operating with Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth governmental and non-governmental organisations in the field of human rights, and integrating human rights standards within all divisions of the Secretariat. The Human Rights Unit was also empowered to provide advice to the Commonwealth Secretary-General on human rights issues, including those relating to CMAG (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003, p.14). The Secretariat also focused on training youth in human rights and in supporting the establishment of national human rights institutions across the Commonwealth. In 2007, the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions was set up to facilitate dialogue and an exchange of views on how to build effective human rights.

A distinctive feature of the tenure of Kamalesh Sharma as fifth Secretary-General of the Commonwealth (2008–16) in this regard was the reform of CMAG that included both a widening of its mandate and a greater and more defined role for the Secretary-General. At the Port of Spain CHOGM in 2009, Heads of Government agreed that ‘consideration be given to strengthening the role of CMAG, in order to enable the group to deal with the full range of serious or persistent violations of the Harare Principles’, and not just the unconstitutional overthrows of constitutionally elected governments, as it had hitherto done. CMAG was also conscious of the perception of the group as a ‘punitive body’, which made constructive engagement difficult. Hence, following the 2011-report, *Strengthening the Role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group*, Commonwealth Heads of Government assembled at the Perth CHOGM in 2011 agreed to a series of reforms. Core changes included clearer guidelines and timeframes for engagement, with agreed indicators as to the types of situations and developments that might be regarded as constituting a serious or persistent violation of Commonwealth values. Among the eight situations enlisted was the systematic violation of human rights by the member government and significant restrictions on the media or civil society. The Heads of Government also agreed that the Secretary-General would speak out publicly in expression of collective disapproval of serious or persistent violations, and that CMAG would be the custodian of the 2009 *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles*. As Sharma noted in his address to the UN Human Rights Council, ‘Commonwealth leaders raised the level of expectations they have of themselves by authorising that group to become more proactively and positively engaged’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011a).

The tenure of Sharma as Secretary-General was not without its share of crises. For many Commonwealth observers, the crisis arising from the organisation of the 2013 CHOGM in Colombo may have marked ‘the lowest point in the history of the association so far’ (Sanders 2014, p.23). The UN Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka; and respected human rights watchdogs and international media outlets raised concerns about the decision to convene a CHOGM there. Three Heads of Government – those of Canada, India and Mauritius – publicly stated that they would not attend the CHOGM; and the Prime Minister of Mauritius withdrew his government’s offer to host the 2015 CHOGM on being
told by the Secretary-General that he had to be present in Colombo to be accepted as the host (Ibid, p.24). The controversy, moreover, led to Sharma being seen as the man responsible for allowing the Commonwealth to face such reputational and integrity risks.

The reality, as Sir Ronald Sanders explained, was more complex:

‘Sri Lanka had been scheduled to host the 2011 CHOGM, but before the 2009 summit... Secretary-General Sharma had recognised that Sri Lanka’s hosting of the CHOGM would pose a problem for the Commonwealth’s believability as a values-based organisation. Therefore, in mid-2009, he persuaded President Rajapaksa to opt out of his government’s offer to host the meeting, and he wrote to all leaders on behalf of Rajapaksa saying that Sri Lanka had withdrawn given its pressing post-war preoccupations... However, this did not play well among Sri Lanka’s ruling political directorate... they persuaded the president to change his mind. Thus, at the 2009 CHOGM, the Sri Lanka delegation demanded to be reinstated as a forthcoming host... and with a coterie of supporters... demanded Sharma’s resignation, linking their demand to [his] efforts to get [CMAG] to reform itself and to widen its mandate...’ (Ibid, p.29)

While the Heads of Government rejected the call for Sharma’s resignation, they came up with a new formula of announcing three CHOGM venues in advance – Australia in 2011, Sri Lanka in 2013 and Mauritius in 2015. As Sir Ronald observed:

‘Essentially... governments ducked the issue of Sri Lanka hosting a summit meeting and gave the Secretary-General a basket to carry water... It would have been quite impossible in the circumstances for Sharma again to seek to move the 2013 CHOGM from Sri Lanka in the absence of strong expressions to do so from a majority of Commonwealth governments.’ (Ibid, p.29)

The controversy did not end there. Canada, as a member of CMAG, had tried repeatedly to place Sri Lanka on the agenda, but its efforts had been in vain. Hence, when it became known that the Commonwealth Secretary-General had withheld from CMAG’s consideration opinions by two distinguished Commonwealth lawyers that indicated the unconstitutionality of the removal from office of the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka, Canada grew all the more enraged. Even after Sharma explained to its foreign minister that ‘the material was commissioned in confidence for the purposes of the Secretary-General’s good offices (in Sri Lanka)’ and that ‘any Opinion solicited by the Secretary-General can either be protected or public in nature; but not both at the same time’, the Canadian government complained that the materials should have been given to CMAG as withholding them affected its decisions on Sri Lanka. For Sir Ronald, the problem arose in no small part as the Sri Lankan president, by virtue of being host of the CHOGM, would also be the Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth for the next two years. The problem could have been avoided, he argued, if the position of Chair-in-Office – introduced in 1999 – had been abolished, as had been recommended in the report put forward by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) established by the Secretary-General in 2009 to ‘undertake an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth’s many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of co-operation and partnership’ (Ibid, p.30).

Like his predecessors, Sharma too sought to expand and establish the scope of his office in relation to the promotion and protection of Commonwealth values. However, his philosophy appears to have been that efforts by an international organisation such as the Commonwealth to promote and protect human rights can be better advanced through the private, behind-the-scenes, high-level and direct engagement of the Secretary-General with the Heads of Government or ministers. In his view, by not publicly embarrassing a Head of Government
through caustic public statements or referring them to CMAG to be placed on its agenda until the Secretary-General himself felt that all means for private engagement had been exhausted or had unsatisfactory results, a Commonwealth Secretary-General could gain greater influence with the leader so as to make positive changes through private persuasion. The right of access to the Heads of Government, together with the ability to refer a country to CMAG as a last resort, gave the Secretary-General ample scope for constructive engagement, as when there was a problem, ‘the Secretary-General can often actually do something about it’, but ‘if the Secretary-General makes strident calls, then he or she loses influence’.

Sharma shared that he very much welcomed the occasions when non-governmental bodies publicly raised concerns about human rights issues, as not only did it reflect the health of civil society, but also it drew the necessary attention to the crises, providing him with the opportunity to express his concerns to the parties concerned. However, for Sharma, even when it came to a priority area such as the promotion and protection of human rights, the Commonwealth Secretariat had to capitalise on its assets as an international organisation and allow human rights bodies, whether governmental or non-governmental, to act and build on their own respective strengths. Referring back to the controversial decision to allow Colombo to host the CHOGM, Sharma shared that when he, as Secretary-General, said to the President of Sri Lanka that he wished to observe the elections in the state, Mahinda Rajapaksa accepted his request, because he could not say no after the Secretary-General accorded him respect during his time as Chairperson-in-Office. Even his opponents respected the Secretary-General for it, and many improvements could be ushered in as a result. Sharma’s intervention in Guyana and Pakistan also had positive results.

There were also several significant developments in relation to human rights under Sharma’s tenure. The Commonwealth Heads of Government affirmed in Port of Spain in 2009 their ongoing commitment to human rights as a core value of the association and referred to the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Sen 2010a, p.8). While Sharma welcomed this reiteration of their commitment, he reminded in his Foreword to the 2010 Status Report of the Commonwealth in this regard:

‘Declarations about values and human rights are hollow if they are not backed by deeds. The Commonwealth’s clear commitment to human rights – restated by its Heads of Government in Trinidad and Tobago in November 2009 – cannot be taken to mean that all its members have achieved them and are observing them to the letter. But it does mean a determined commitment to pursue the goal.’ (Sharma 2010b, p.6)

Nevertheless, between 2008 and 2010, Bangladesh and Seychelles had established national human rights commissions; Mozambique, Papua New Guinea and Swaziland had moved significantly in that direction; and Lesotho, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles and Uganda had ratified all eight of the main human rights conventions, so there had been some progress (Ibid, p.6). Between November 2008 and October 2010, 39 Commonwealth states had participated in at least one human rights initiative delivered by the Commonwealth Secretariat; and 22 new ratifications had been made to the main human rights treaties (Sen 2010a, p.8). In December 2008, The Bahamas enacted the Domestic Violence (Protection Orders) Act 2007 in order to eliminate gender-based violence, while Barbados set up a dedicated Human Rights Unit within its Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (Sen 2010b, pp.33, 37). In November 2009, the Solomon Islands Cabinet approved a National Policy and Action Plan on gender-based violence (Ibid, p.113). In October 2010, Cameroon’s National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms launched a human rights promotion and protection sensitisation campaign, which aimed to raise awareness on themes such as HIV/AIDS, torture, persons with disabilities, rights of women and rights of detainees (Ibid, p.45).
Since the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) came into force in 2008, disability rights have also received greater consideration and commitment; and by 2010, 22 per cent (23 countries) of the 95 states that were party to CRPD were members of the Commonwealth (Ibid, pp.8, 20). In January 2009, Cyprus established a dedicated department to ensure persons with disabilities did not face social exclusion. Uganda announced a new programme which would provide grants to increase the income of persons with disabilities. In March 2010, Guyana launched a National Rehabilitation Services Strategy for persons with disabilities; and in April 2010, New Zealand reviewed the effectiveness of its Sign Language Act 2006 (Sen 2010a, p.9). In March 2010, Botswana established The Office for People with Disabilities in the Office of the President, with the mandate to develop and implement policies and programmes to create a wholesome environment which allowed persons with disabilities to maximise their potential in private and public life (Sen 2010b, p.41).

During the tenure of Sharma as Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Secretariat also ran several human rights initiatives, such as workshops on National Human Rights Action Plans for countries in the process of drafting national policies related to human rights; Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Mid-Term Review meetings and UPR seminars to provide support during all phases of the UPR process; human rights workshops to strengthen a culture of human rights in policing; and human rights training for youth leaders. Declarations by leaders at the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings provide the mandate for the strategic framework on which the Secretariat’s Human Rights Unit is based. The declarations have reaffirmed the commitment of governments to the advancement of fundamental human rights as a core political value of the Commonwealth (Ibid, p.166).

Any Commonwealth country that wishes to set up a national human rights institution can ask the Secretariat to facilitate consultations and workshops and bring expertise to support the process: for example, an Orientation Workshop for Malawi Human Rights Commission and National Consultative Conference on the Swaziland Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration. The Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI), probably the best one that exists, has also grown to facilitate collaboration and peer-to-peer learning among NHRIs; over recent years, it adopted the Kigali Declaration guiding institutions on strengthening their efforts in ending child, early and forced marriage and the St Julian Declaration on Climate Justice.

Between 2013 and 2015, the Commonwealth Secretariat, under the executive leadership of Sharma, continued to work to strengthen public institutions and processes with the aim of promoting and protecting human rights in the Commonwealth. It provided technical assistance to the Government of Jamaica for the establishment of a national human rights institution (NHRI); and it also supported the strengthening of the NHRIIs in Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Maldives.

Given how much of Sharma’s legacy has been defined in the public imagination by his tryst with Sri Lanka, his engagement with the country in relation to human rights merits greater attention. As part of the Secretary-General’s good offices engagement with Sri Lanka, the Secretariat provided technical support to the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka to strengthen its compliance with the Paris Principles. In September 2013, the Secretariat convened a Reconciliation Roundtable in Vavuniya, Northern Province, Sri Lanka, which included the participation of civil society and religious leaders. Consequently, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka had a distinct and officially recognised role in promoting national reconciliation, including taking forward the development of a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). In May 2014, the Secretariat convened a workshop to support the commission to develop the RAP for the strengthening of NHRIIs in Sri Lanka, Seychelles and Maldives. It also enabled good practices sharing between NHRIIs through capacity development and
networking opportunities; facilitated the adoption of the Kigali Declaration, providing a framework for practical action to prevent and eradicate child, early and forced marriage; enabled small island developing states to constructively engage with the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) ahead of and during reviews in Geneva; enabled the adoption of the Mahe and Pipitea Declarations by African and Pacific parliamentarians, providing a framework for the strengthened role of parliamentarians with international human rights mechanisms, such as the UPR; and enabled the development of a national action plan in Seychelles. It also enabled the development of human rights education curricula for secondary schools in Mauritius in furtherance of accepted UPR recommendations; developed and delivered a human rights education programme for youth trainers working in communities across the Commonwealth; developed and delivered a human rights education programme for law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth; developed and delivered a human rights leadership programme for permanent secretaries in Barbados; and enabled exchanges of good practices and consensus building on the essential components of national reconciliation through the Commonwealth Roundtable on Reconciliation and subsequent advocacy efforts (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.15).

Under Sharma, much more work has been undertaken on the intersection of climate change and human rights, especially in developing countries. In its discussion paper on human rights and climate change published in 2009, the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat drew attention to three key patterns of thought that have emerged in relation to people and the environment:

- The planet as victim, where the focus is on the damage being done to the planet (desertification, declining coral reefs, changing weather patterns) and which regards people as the perpetrators of harm;
- People as victims, where the focus is on the impact of climate change on people and on the sustainability of their livelihoods, and which acknowledges that people cause damage to the planet, but also that people themselves are harmed;
- Human rights approaches, where the focus is on rights and responsibilities (particularly the impact of climate change on the adherence to and protection of human rights), and where affected groups are treated as active stakeholders and critical voices. (Sen 2009, p.2)

The 2007 Malé Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change was a major step in this new thinking in its commitment to an inclusive process that ‘puts people, their prosperity, homes, survival and rights at the centre of the climate change debate ...’ (Ibid, p.2). In 2008, Maldives initiated a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council, calling for a study to be conducted on the link between climate change and human rights. The resolution was supported by 79 states, almost one-third of which were Commonwealth states (Ibid, p.2). The study was discussed at the Human Rights Council in March 2009 and is essentially a compilation of evidence and information on the rights dimensions of climate change (Sen 2010b, p.22). The human rights affected by climate change include the right to life, right to food, right to clean water, right to health and right to adequate housing (Sen 2009, p.3).

Climate change and its impact on human rights is a key Commonwealth issue, as among the 53 member states of the Commonwealth, there are 32 small states, 25 of which are also small island states. This means that many states in the Commonwealth have a particular vulnerability to climate change, not just due to their size, but also remoteness and isolation; susceptibility to natural disasters and environmental change; limited economic diversification and access to external capital; poverty; income volatility; and limited human capacity. Many of these states are already among those affected by rising sea levels, contaminated water, depleted marine resources and erosion of shorelines (Ibid, p.5). Hence, there is a natural partnership between the Commonwealth and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a coalition of small island
and low-lying coastal countries that has functioned primarily as an ad hoc lobby and negotiating voice for small island developing states (SIDS) and has engaged in the shaping of global climate policy within the UN system. Through this partnership, the Commonwealth and AOSIS are well suited to take forward rights issues and justice arguments respectively into global negotiations (Ibid, p.5).

The Commonwealth has also committed to addressing the issue through the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan 2007 and the Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles 2009. The Commonwealth is well placed to play a role in the following types of interventions: promoting a human rights approach to climate change negotiations; planning for internal and international displacement; and supporting the rights of indigenous peoples. Already the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) has identified climate change as an issue requiring urgent action, and a Working Group on Climate Change has been established (Sen 2010b, p.23).

Then, Sharma has also been outspoken on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) issues and was arguably the first Commonwealth Secretary-General to make advocacy for LGBTI rights protection and promotion a key item on his agenda. This is evident not only in the behind-the-scenes quiet diplomacy with which he was engaged, but also his many public statements and comments on the subject that reflected his determination, not just willingness, to address issues still highly sensitive and polarising in many Commonwealth member states. In May 2011, he wrote in the Nairobi’s The Star:

‘Human rights are a top priority in the Commonwealth... In [the 2009 Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles] all Heads of Government have solemnly reiterated their commitment to human rights “...for all without discrimination on any grounds...” This includes discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation...

All member governments are aware of this commitment, and have a responsibility to uphold it and reflect it in national life. It is easy to overlook how recently attitudes and legislation on homosexuality have changed even in the United Kingdom.

One only has to look back to vilification Peter Tatchell was subjected to when he stood as a candidate for the UK Parliament in the Southwark parliamentary by-election of 1983. It had been described as “the dirtiest, most violent election in Britain in the twentieth century”.

Considering that the vast majority of Commonwealth member states are less than 50 years old it is remarkable how rapidly they have adopted the values and freedoms taken for granted in countries with far longer histories of self-determination.

Some of our most important and effective work goes on behind the scenes; this sometimes leads to a perception that we are inactive or silent on certain issues. This could not be further from the truth.

My approach is to support mechanisms that bolster internal dialogue and help member states to embed their international commitments... I have consistently made it clear publicly that we deplore hate crimes of any nature and the vilification and targeting of gay and lesbian people runs counter to the fundamental values of the Commonwealth, which includes non-discrimination on any grounds.

I also recognised the Delhi High Court for its landmark decision to decriminalise homosexual acts. This addressed a legal legacy of the British colonial era that continues to
affect more than three-quarters of Commonwealth countries long after Britain itself has moved on.

I have often pointed out in public statements to legal and human rights conferences that many member countries are challenged with reconciling Commonwealth principles of dignity, equality and non-discrimination as well as the Commonwealth value of respect for fundamental human rights on one hand, with issues of unjust criminalisation found in colonial current domestic legislation in this area, on the other.

If attitudes are to change, if homophobia is to be challenged – as it should – and if laws on homosexuality are to be reformed, the best hope lies in democratic and legal processes...’ (Sharma 2011d)

Around three months later, in July 2011, in his address at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Sydney, Australia, Sharma reiterated:

‘Vilification and targeting of people on grounds of sexual orientation are at odds with the values of the Commonwealth. In my public pronouncements, I have pointed out that many member countries are challenged with reconciling Commonwealth principles of dignity, equality and discrimination, as well as the Commonwealth value of respect for fundamental human rights, on one hand, with issues of unjust criminalisation found in the colonial legacy of domestic legislation in this area, on the other.’

In October that year, he integrated that message into his opening address to the Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF) at the Perth CHOGM:

‘We recall the 2009 Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, which includes a clear commitment to tolerance, respect and understanding. This means we embrace difference, and that includes sexual identity. Discrimination and criminalisation on grounds of sexual orientation is at odds with our values and I have had occasion to refer to this in the context of our law-related conferences.’ (Peter Tatchell Foundation 2011)

This statement earned Sharma praise even from quarters such as the Peter Tatchell Foundation. Peter Tatchell, its eponymous Director, remarked:

‘Commonwealth Secretary-General made history when he voiced his support for gay rights in his keynote address at the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF) in Perth, Australia... We welcome Kamalesh Sharma’s defence of gay human rights. He has shown strong leadership by making it clear that homophobic persecution is incompatible with the Commonwealth’s values of equality, human rights and non-discrimination... This is the first time that any Commonwealth Secretary-General has ever condemned discrimination and criminalisation on the grounds of sexual identity at the CPF. It is only the second time in history that a Secretary-General has criticised homophobic persecution at a Commonwealth event. The first time was at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Sydney in July, when Mr Sharma stated that “vilification and targeting on grounds of sexual orientation is at odds with the fundamental values of the Commonwealth”.’ (Ibid)

Then, in his statement as Commonwealth Secretary-General during the High-Level Segment of UN Human Rights Council, Geneva, in February 2012, Sharma clarified the stance of the Commonwealth on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. ‘Our position’, he stressed, ‘continues to be that we oppose discrimination or stigmatisation on any grounds, including those of sexual orientation. It is for member states to address incompatibilities...’
between Commonwealth values and mostly inherited national laws in these areas’ (Sharma 2012b). A year later, while, once again, addressing the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council in February 2013, he shared:

‘With regard to sexual orientation and gender identity our position remains that, based on shared Commonwealth principles, we oppose discrimination or stigmatisation on any grounds. While it is not realistic to expect the pace of progress towards implementation to be uniform across our 54 member states, we continue to encourage constructive national debate in legislatures, and the examination of legal remedies, and to work with national human rights institutions. Work alongside member states on the Universal Periodic Review offers scope for criminal codes to be brought into conformity with Commonwealth commitments and international human rights law supporting the principles of equality and non-discrimination.’ (Sharma 2013b)

In January 2014, following recent developments in several Commonwealth member states affecting the rights of citizens based on their sexual orientation, Sharma renewed his call for Commonwealth values in this regard to be upheld:

‘In the Commonwealth Charter, the people of the Commonwealth are committed to equality and human rights for all, without discrimination on any grounds as the foundations for peaceful, just and stable societies. With regard to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, the responsibility for mutually respectful and constructive national debate is one to be shared by all parties, including parliaments, national human rights institutions and human rights defenders. Judiciaries continue to have a vital role in interpreting and applying national constitutional provisions, and consonance of national laws with international obligations.’ (Sharma 2014a)

His spokesperson reiterated his message in a media statement the next month, and in March 2014, Sharma emphasised the same message once again in his annual address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Even at the Press Conference of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group that same month (March 2014), Sharma seized the opportunity to re-state his message:

‘On the matter of sexual preferences and LGBTI there is no agreed Commonwealth position, but I want to make it absolutely clear that the Commonwealth opposes discrimination on any grounds and stands up for the principles of equality, non-discrimination, non-victimisation, non-criminalisation. However, it is for each member state to look to these principles and develop this internally as it befits them the most.

The other point I have made is that there is a legal question, if you like, of harmonising your laws with your constitution and with your other international obligations. The Commonwealth is very clear on the values that are involved in this. It is also very clear that this is a matter of the member states themselves harmonising their own national policies in order to be in consonance with Commonwealth values.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014b)

Later that year, on Human Rights Day in December, he invoked Archbishop Desmond Tutu in his public statement:

‘Discrimination has no place in the modern Commonwealth, and as the Charter affirms, we are “implacably” opposed to it in all its forms. Speaking in 2010 to a UN Panel on ending violence and criminal sanctions based on sexual orientation and gender identity,
Archbishop Desmond Tutu reminded those in attendance that those facing any kind of discrimination first look to government for leadership, for protection, and for their equal right to dignity and respect. And in words that remain as pertinent now as they were four years ago when he spoke them, Archbishop Tutu noted that “Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared paths to freedom and justice”.

In March 2015, Sharma reiterated his stance once more in his annual address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council.

‘Mr President, a 2011 report, requested by the council and prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner, documented discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, and how international human rights law can be used to end violence and related human rights violations in this area. In September last year, the council adopted a new resolution on the subject, once again expressing grave concern and requesting the High Commissioner to produce an update of the report with a view to sharing good practices and ways to overcome violence and discrimination.

We look forward to the publication of the report. We will be encouraging Commonwealth member states to reflect and act on its actionable recommendations in order to give effect to our shared commitment to dignity, equality and non-discrimination.’ (Sharma 2015d)

This statement prompted Crispin Blunt MP to remark during the House of Commons debate:

‘I commend the leadership given on that issue... by the serving Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. Only three weeks ago, Kamalesh Sharma addressed the high-level segment of the United Nations Human Rights Council in its 28th regular session in Geneva on 3 March. He represents an organisation three-quarters of whose jurisdiction outlaw people such as me in their statute books... I salute the Secretary-General for the leadership he is taking.’ (Daily Hansard 2015)

Then, on the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, 15 May 2015, Sharma noted the progress that had already been made on this front:

‘It is right to acknowledge and give due credit where there are examples of progress on LGBTI rights protection in the Commonwealth: for instance, through the Universal Periodic Review process, with some member states having accepted recommendations to combat discrimination against LGBTI persons through political, legislative and administrative measures. Others have accepted recommendations calling for the improvement of LGBTI access to healthcare and welfare, or the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination through education awareness campaigns. There have also been notable judicial decisions which signal progress and positive change. However, much more needs to be done to realise international human rights obligations and to uphold the values of the Commonwealth Charter.’ (Sharma 2015e)

Likewise, in his opening address to the Commonwealth People’s Forum at the Malta CHOGM in November 2015 and again in his public statement on Human Rights Day in December 2015, Sharma reaffirmed his message. In the run up to CHOGM, a report by the Kaleidoscope Trust noted:

‘We head into this year’s CHOGM with much to be hopeful for. For the first time ever the Commonwealth People’s Forum is hosting not one, but two sessions, devoted to examining the challenges that face LGBTI people and exploring the opportunities that the
Commonwealth offers in addressing those challenges. Outgoing Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma has consistently publicly supported the rights of LGBTI people in the Commonwealth. We are hopeful that his successor will continue this trend. The formation of the Commonwealth Equality Network has created a platform for national and regional civil society actors to translate their substantial expertise into well-informed and effective Commonwealth focused action.’ (Kaleidoscope Trust 2015)

On 2 March 2016, in his last address to the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva as Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sharma stated:

‘This year’s Commonwealth theme is “An Inclusive Commonwealth”. We decry and reject discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, gender, religious or political belief, language, and national or social origin. We acknowledge that discrimination against persons on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity remains widespread, most notably in the form of laws criminalising homosexuality. As I have previously said on many occasions, discrimination on any grounds has no place in the modern Commonwealth. Furthermore, the Commonwealth cannot be truly inclusive if criminalisation of homosexuality and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity are not addressed. This remains one of our most pressing human rights challenges and we will continue to work with our member states towards inclusiveness.’ (Sharma 2016b)

Speaking at the end of his eight years as Secretary-General, Sharma outlined his approach behind the scenes in greater detail. ‘I myself have been personally involved in some of our good offices work, especially when the sensitivity of a particular situation requires that just the Secretary-General intervene’. He shared:

‘We have built a track record in weaning member states away in the subject. Whether in Asia or Africa or the Caribbean, there were places where homophobic sentiment was very strong. My main strategy in addressing the issue was to go to the country where the problem is, whether in the Caribbean, The Gambia, Nigeria, Malawi or Uganda. I did not speak over the seas. Instead, I went to the capital, spoke to the leaders, explained to the leaders and reasoned with them, and moved away from the public debate. This proved to be a very good idea.

The example that comes to mind is the issue of the legislation threatening the further criminalisation of homosexuality in Uganda. I hoped that my behind-the-scenes work, in a spirit of transparency and respect, would contribute to the retracting of a bill that had attracted widespread international concern. In public, we uphold the position that Uganda must decide its own affairs, that its laws are sovereign, and that its parliament is indeed the place to debate them. We could – and did – explore together the relevance of the Commonwealth of Values, and its members’ collective stand against discrimination and their commitment to human rights. In private, we can talk about support, solutions and options in a climate of trust.

By the same token, our quiet engagement (respectful of their sovereignty) with the Government of Malawi over the recent release from prison of two homosexual men in fact led, I am told, to public recognition in the media in Lilongwe. In The Gambia, likewise, there was no such instance since my visit as Secretary-General. In Nigeria, vigilantism at the level of citizens is something they will not tolerate. In the Caribbean, they have gone even farther.

When the Secretary-General speaks to the UNHRC, he addresses the issue in a way that no one country feels attacked. I recognise that a balance has to be struck here
between quiet engagement and public understanding of where the Commonwealth stands. Without prejudicing what we can achieve with our “below-the-radar” engagement, we need to uphold the Commonwealth of Values in the public eye. Along with the process underway in CMAG, I am confident that we can do this.’

For the fifth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, if the Colombo CHOGM in 2013 proved to be the most troubling hour of his tenure, the issuance of the Commonwealth Charter in the same year might have signalled its happiest. The Eminent Persons Group (EPG) he had established in 2009 put forward as one of its recommendations the idea of a charter ‘that would establish a Commonwealth “spirit” – one that is shared by the people of the Commonwealth and their governments’. After months of national and civil society consultations, the Secretariat produced a final draft that was adopted by Heads of Government in December 2012 and signed by Queen Elizabeth II at Marlborough House in March 2013.

The Charter sets out in a single document the core beliefs that unite the Commonwealth and accords human rights its rightfully privileged place as one of the core values:

‘We are committed to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other relevant human rights covenants and international instruments. We are committed to equality and respect for the protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, for all without discrimination on any grounds as the foundations of peaceful, just and stable societies.

We note that these rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and cannot be implemented selectively. We are implacably opposed to all forms of discrimination, whether rooted in gender, race, colour, creed, political belief or other grounds.’
8. YOUTH

‘What sort of twenty-first century will our young people inherit? Will they know greater peace and prosperity than their parents? Will they exercise their most basic entitlements to food and education, healthcare, a vote? The Commonwealth has always had an eye on the people and the tasks of tomorrow. Now, it must be prescient again in safeguarding and promoting the guarantors of the best hopes for its future: its young people.

At the international level, the Commonwealth can argue that young people be both seen and heard at the global decision-making table, and that the planet itself must be preserved for their use. At the national level, the views of young people must be heard and acted upon in every corner of public life, and the contributions of the young should be embraced. At the community level, we should continue to instil in young people a sense of shared responsibility. At the level of individual young people, we must continue to build both skills and a sense of self-belief. These pressing tasks share the urgency of the times.’

In his Commonwealth Day Message 2009, in keeping with the theme ‘The Commonwealth @ 60: Serving a New Generation’, Kamalesh Sharma highlighted the great importance that the Commonwealth attributed to its youth. Indeed, eight years later, as Sharma came to the end of his final term as Commonwealth Secretary-General, there were more than 1.2 billion people under the age of 29 in the 53 countries of the Commonwealth. Together, they accounted for more than 60 per cent of its total population. They were making a difference in all walks of life and played a vital role in advancing development, democracy and peace, as well as Commonwealth values such as respect and understanding (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.34). Yet, as the Commonwealth Secretariat observed, ‘Young people’s contribution to society often goes unrecognised, nor are they adequately invested in or included in decision-making processes’. Then, there were also the challenges the youth faced, which had repercussions for society as a whole. The Secretariat highlighted, ‘Young people also face formidable issues of unemployment, discrimination and lack of access to education and healthcare’, which, if left unresolved, ‘will impede national development while hindering each individual’s personal potential’ (Ibid, p.34).

With youth deemed to be one of its core constituencies, youth development has understandably formed one of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s priority areas of work. The Secretariat, mainly through the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), has focused on the political, social and economic empowerment of youth across the Commonwealth for over four decades. The Secretariat explains, ‘By working with youth ministries, youth leaders, youth workers and youth development organisations, to develop enabling environments, facilitate connections, build capacity and inspire action, the Commonwealth can effect systemic, sustained and/or catalytic change that will cascade down to have a tangible impact on the lives of young people’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.56).

It was Arnold Smith who first established the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) following the Ottawa CHOGM in 1973. Though contributions to the programme were
accounted for separately from the Secretariat’s budget, CYP formed part of the Secretariat and was under the control of the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who also sat on its Committee of Management (Doxey 1989, pp.21–2). A decade later, when Shridath Ramphal established the Human Resource Development Group (HRDG) to facilitate collaboration in planning and implementing programmes without threatening the established functions and funding of separate divisions, Youth was one of the six programmes or divisions he brought together (along with Education, Fellowships and Training, Management Development, Health, and Women and Development) in the HRDG (Ibid, p.30). In 1993, when Emeka Anyaoku streamlined the structure of the Secretariat so that there would now be 12 divisions instead of 17, CYP (later, the Youth Affairs Division) was merged with the Women and Development Programme to form a Women and Youth Affairs Division, which became the Gender and Youth Affairs Division in 1995. In 2002, under Don McKinnon, CYP split from the Gender and Youth Affairs Division to serve as a separate programme, while the Gender Affairs Division was merged with the Human Resource Development Division to form the Social Transformation Programme Division.

Youth development received considerable attention during the tenure of Kamalesh Sharma. Under Sharma, youth development work was guided by the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Strategic Plan 2008/09–2011/12, Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17 and Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007–2015. The latter Strategic Plan streamlined the activities undertaken by the Secretariat, with youth constituting one of the six interrelated work areas to achieve its goals. In October 2013, as Sharma revealed:

‘[T]he Commonwealth Secretariat Board of Governors approved a major renewal of the CYP operational model, to align it with the shift in strategic focus, and establish a modern and more relevant programme. The renewal entailed a reduction in the CYP regional presence, and transfer of the operation of the CYP Centre facilities to national entities. It also entailed a larger, centralised team to allow more strategic and cohesive pan-Commonwealth programming, and sharing of innovation and good practice between countries and regions. The new structure includes research and policy roles to focus on thought leadership in youth development, and a dedicated team focused on sport for development and peace.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.57)

Sharma noted that, under the new strategy, ‘Sri Lanka and Pakistan provided extra budgetary resources for the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC); Australia, Malaysia and the United Kingdom provided funds for youth projects; and India and the UK supported the Sport for Development and Peace mandate, supplementing the allocation from the Commonwealth Youth Programme fund’ (Ibid, p.56). He added:

‘[I]n October 2014, the Secretariat launched the Young Professionals Programme as part of its ongoing commitment to youth development and empowerment, and to ensure youth perspectives are included in the work of the Secretariat in a meaningful and consistent way. A total of 27 roles were created across the Secretariat, including eight in the CYP, with each young professional being appointed into a substantive job on a two-year paid contract, with a special professional development programme along with on-the-job training. The initiative brings the technical expertise, innovation, energy and perspectives of young professionals from across the Commonwealth into the Secretariat’s core work, at the same time as creating exciting development opportunities for talented and qualified young people.’ (Ibid, p.57)
Capacity building

One area where the Commonwealth has focused its efforts in relation to youth is capacity building – for the Secretariat itself, for youth ministries, for youth programmes, for youth workers and for youth. Sharma mentioned, ‘To simply create a department for youth is a cop-out; it simply isn’t enough. The right question to ask is how much has the Secretary-General internalised and prioritised the issue, and how much has the Commonwealth achieved in relation to youth over the years?’ As of 2015, the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat provided technical assistance and capacity building related to national youth policies. It developed innovative tools that assist youth ministries in creating national youth development policies, frameworks, guidelines, programmes and services; and advocated greater investment in youth ministries and programmes. Some of the tools that the Commonwealth has devised in recent years to measure impact and progress in youth development include the Youth Ministry Assessment Tool (YMAT), the Policy Environment Assessment Score (PEAS), the Competency Standards for Youth Development Work in the Caribbean and the Youth Development Index (YDI). The YMAT serves as a guided assessment instrument with closed ended questions to assess youth ministries in five different areas of capacity – leadership, adaptive, management, operational and technical capacity). The PEAS is a set of instruments for use by national stakeholders – youth, youth organisations and institutions implementing youth policies – to support participatory evaluation of policy implementation in the area of youth development (Ibid, p.24). The Competency Standards offers a guide to assessing professional competences in youth development work, with its standards endorsed by the Council on Human and Social Development of the Caribbean Community (COHSOD) in 2012 as the Regional Competency Standards for the Caribbean (Ibid, p.24). Furthermore, in 2013, the Commonwealth launched the first-ever Youth Development Index (YDI), which offers an inter-country comparison of young people’s progress in 170 countries in five domains: education, health, employment, civic participation and political participation (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.34).

With regard to the YDI, the Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007–2015 and the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, in its 2011-report A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform, (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011e) had recommended the development of such a tool for monitoring progress on youth development in the Commonwealth. The concept of a global YDI had already been under discussion between the Commonwealth, the UN and other stakeholders for nearly a decade (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013c). In 2011, Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General, Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, commissioned a technical advisory committee to work with the Secretariat’s Youth Affairs Division to develop the framework for the YDI. In April 2013, the draft report was presented at the 8th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Papua New Guinea for feedback, before being launched at Marlborough House in London in September 2013 (Ibid). Since its launch, the YDI has been one of the main indicators to track youth development across the world (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.34). Sharma observed:

‘The Commonwealth Youth Development Index was another first for the Commonwealth in youth development. It is the first comprehensive attempt to aggregate global data on young people and was formulated to help decision-makers identify and learn from areas of success, pinpoint priority areas for investment, and track progress over time. The methodology was developed by independent academic experts from across the Commonwealth, in conjunction with the Institute for Economics and Peace. While the UNDP has now introduced its own YDI as a measure in its Human Development Reports, it was the Commonwealth that pioneered the concept and asked member states to share it. Recently, while I was visiting Fiji, I saw the positive impact of this initiative, as they said they wished to double their efforts in the area of youth development to look better in the
index. The YDI also re-energised those in youth development. As a result of the Commonwealth’s work, youth are rightly becoming a key concern. The Commonwealth Youth Council is the biggest of its kind in the world, as is the Commonwealth Students’ Association. The Commonwealth Youth Development Index and the Commonwealth Youth Awards are further examples of successful Commonwealth youth initiatives.’

Flipping through the pages of his latest Biennial Report as Secretary-General, Sharma highlighted other capacity-building initiatives in this regard:

‘In 2013, the Commonwealth Secretariat, partnered with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in delivering a capacity-building project to assist senior government officials in Pacific Commonwealth countries in devising evidence-based national economic and youth employment policies and action plans, and provided technical assistance to draft a Pacific Youth Employment Strategy. In 2013, it established a Commonwealth Youth Policy Group to promote collaboration among organisations based in London working with and for young people across the Commonwealth. It also provided national-level support for the development of national youth policies in Guyana in 2013 and Bangladesh in 2014.

In June 2014, the Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with UN agencies, convened a global Expert Group Meeting on youth indicators in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and went on to advocate for strong recognition of young people in the Sustainable Development Goals, including presenting recommendations from Commonwealth Youth Ministers at the United Nations. The Secretariat’s social media campaign – #yes2youthgoal – reached 172,000 people across the globe, with the final agreed goals including a statement about providing youth with “a nurturing environment for the full realisation of their rights and capabilities, helping our countries to reap the demographic dividend”.

In December 2014, the Commonwealth Secretariat, in collaboration with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) Division for Social Policy and Development, UN Habitat and UNESCO, held a technical workshop, on “Evidence-based Policies on Youth Development in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in Nairobi, Kenya. A similar regional workshop was delivered for the Caribbean region in Barbados in June 2015, and others are planned for the Pacific and Asia. The workshop strengthens the capacity of participants from government ministries, public institutions, and civil society and youth-led organisations to formulate, monitor and evaluate evidence-based policies on youth using quantitative approaches and localisation of internationally agreed indicators. [The Secretariat] also partnered with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to develop the Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Guide, which was launched in November 2015.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, pp.55–60)

Through the biannual Commonwealth Youth Forums that have been convened since 1997 as a precursor to the CHOGMs, the youth of the Commonwealth have also had the opportunity to convey to Commonwealth leaders their perspectives, priorities, concerns and recommendations on issues that concern them and the people of the Commonwealth. The Secretariat also convened Youth Forums at the 18th and 19th Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (18CCEM and 19CCEM) held in Mauritius in 2012 and The Bahamas in 2015 respectively. The Commonwealth Youth Forum at 18CCEM in Mauritius resulted in the formation and endorsement of the Commonwealth Students’ Association (CSA), a network – supported by the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat – that brings together and represents national student councils and other student organisations in the Commonwealth. The CSA is instrumental in the planning of the triennial Commonwealth Students Congress,
the largest gathering of students across the Commonwealth. The inaugural congress was organised during 19CECM in The Bahamas, at which the first CSA Executive was also elected.

Likewise, the Commonwealth Youth Forum at the Colombo CHOGM in 2013 saw the realisation of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), with the first CYC General Assembly and the election of the first CYC Executive. The CYC is an autonomous body that serves as the official and legitimate voice representing the 1.2 billion young people of the Commonwealth, by bringing together representatives from their national youth councils and groups and working towards youth-led development. Its first campaign, against election violence, was held in Abuja in February 2014 (Ibid, p.63). Both the Commonwealth Students’ Association and the Commonwealth Youth Council are believed to be the largest of their kind in the world. In May 2014, the World Conference on Youth, held in Sri Lanka, adopted the structure and youth-led approach used by the Commonwealth Secretariat for delivery of the biennial Commonwealth Youth Forum (Ibid, p.55). Senior officials of the UN and other agencies remarked that the conference ‘gave young people a true voice in organisation and deliberations [of such a conference] for the first time ever’ (Ibid, p.62).

In addition, the Commonwealth Secretariat convenes a four-yearly Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM), which includes a Youth Leaders Forum, to assist member states with the development of policy and the sharing of good practices. The outcomes also feed into the CHOGMs. The 8th CYMM was hosted by the Government of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby in April 2013; its outcomes included the launch of the CYC and a proposal to reserve special seats for youth in parliaments and other governance structures. Throughout 2015, the Secretariat also convened Regional Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific (Ibid, p.58). The 9th CYMM was due to be held in 2017 in Uganda. Sharma also sought to provide further opportunities for Commonwealth youth to engage with the Commonwealth. He shares:

‘At the CHOGMs, despite the pressure we have had to withstand, we introduced as a special event a breakfast where youth could engage directly with the Heads. The Heads are told what youth desired and decided, thus offering youth more ways of getting their voices heard. In 2014, we introduced the Young Professionals Programme at the Commonwealth Secretariat, reserving 10 per cent of posts for young people on equal terms, with the aim of offering qualified young people from member countries the opportunity to contribute to the Commonwealth’s work in international development and democracy. We have also worked closely with the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust to increase the contribution of young people to the Commonwealth; and the representatives gathered at the Youth Ministers Meetings now feel greater power at par with other Commonwealth ministers who attend similar meetings. The Secretariat also supported the attendance of Commonwealth youth at key regional and global events, such as the World Conference on Youth in Sri Lanka in May 2014, the UN Conference on Small Island Developing States in Samoa in September 2014, and the first UN Global Forum on Youth Policies in Azerbaijan in January 2015.’

Likewise, during his tenure, the Commonwealth introduced the Commonwealth Youth Awards for Excellence in Development Work, designed to help celebrate the role of Commonwealth youth as nation builders and partners in development.2

Youth networks

During Sharma’s tenure as Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Secretariat placed great emphasis on supporting young people to design various youth-led initiatives, and provided technical assistance and support for national, regional and global youth networks.3 In his Biennial Report for 2011–13, Sharma noted:
Youth advocacy and youth leadership networks were established and strengthened through a comprehensive programme for young people to gain increased access to decision-making processes across the Commonwealth. In the Caribbean and the Pacific, the Commonwealth Secretariat supported the establishment of regional youth networks, while at the national level, support was given to creating national youth councils in Cameroon, Lesotho and Kenya, where parliaments have endorsed bills to establish these. National Youth Councils were strengthened in Solomon Islands, Cook Islands and Vanuatu. Regional youth networks also participated in peace-building initiatives, resulting in a Pacific Youth Statement on Peace Building and Conflict Resolution, which was included in the Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting Communiqué. There has been significant work on the development of Pan-Commonwealth youth bodies, including creation of the new Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), a Commonwealth Students Association and virtual thematic youth networks (in human rights, climate change and peace building). The CYP Centres have contributed significantly to capacity building of young leaders through training, the convening of key dialogue meetings and the facilitation of interface opportunities between youth leaders and government ministries.

In CYP Africa, the online Discovering Young Leaders Programme was launched to empower young people and provide a platform for their views. In all regions, CYP convened young leaders to consult with them on the constitution of the CYC, which will be formally ratified during the first CYC General Assembly alongside the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2013.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.77)

As already discussed, the CYP was not exempt from the reform of the internal structure of the Secretariat undertaken in the later years of Sharma’s tenure. The reform included a reduction in the CYP regional presence, and transfer of the operation of the CYP Centre facilities to national entities. There would now also be a larger, centralised team to facilitate more cohesive pan-Commonwealth programming, and sharing of innovation and good practice between countries and regions. In his opening remarks at the Commonwealth Youth Forum 2015, Sharma outlined some of the developments:

‘The Commonwealth Youth Programme has recently been through a transformational period of reform and renewal – together with the Commonwealth Secretariat – as an essential part of the process of adapting and evolving to meet contemporary needs. In this context, the Young Professionals Programme is already making an immensely valuable contribution to our work. Young people from across the Commonwealth can now apply to join our Secretariat team in London for a two-year placement. Reinvigoration has also led to the revitalisation of a broad array existing Commonwealth youth networks and the formation of new ones. These range from the Commonwealth Youth Health Network to the Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs and from the Commonwealth Students Association to the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network. Others are: the Commonwealth Youth Council, the Commonwealth Youth Sport for Development & Peace Working Group, the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network, the Commonwealth Human Rights & Democracy Network, and the Commonwealth Youth Peacebuilding Network.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015e)

The Youth Division of the Secretariat supported the establishment and administration of the youth-led Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN), which aims to build the capacity of young people to address climate change and other environmental issues. As Sharma noted:
The Secretariat has provided a platform for young people to take collective action and voice their concerns within national policy debates. In October 2009, youth leaders organised a Young Commonwealth Climate Change Summit in London, which launched a youth-led network that supported actions that translate climate change programmes into effective policies that have a measurable impact on youth health, well-being and economic success. The network, which held its first working session in December 2010, also linked projects implemented by its members across the Commonwealth to develop common actions and campaigns. In June 2014, with Secretariat support, the CYCN convened a Youth Expert Group Meeting on Climate Change, which developed recommendations for Heads of Government ahead of CHOGM and the UN Conference on Climate Change (COP21) in late 2015. In September 2014, the CYCN contributed to the UN’s Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States. The UN Major Group for Children and Youth appointed the Pacific Co-ordinator of the CYCN as the Global Focal Point for Small Island Developing States from 2014–2016.

In 2011, the Secretariat, through the CYP, also launched YourCommonwealth.org, an interactive website designed by and for young people, students and emerging youth leaders from across the Commonwealth so as to enable them to engage with each other and contribute to global debates from a youth perspective. The website also hosts the activities of the ‘Commonwealth Correspondents’, a network of young and aspiring journalists and social commentators from around the world who publish their interviews and comment on issues of concern. YourCommonwealth.org was named ‘Communicator of the Year’ in the 2012 Nexus Commonwealth Awards. Sharma added:

‘Its contributors come from across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific. A hive of fresh ideas and creativity, the website is a space where people under 30 who care about things like injustice, poverty or the environment can swap experiences and viewpoints. Young people are encouraged to engage with the site either by writing a short article or creating a video. They can also comment on an article or a video already uploaded, contribute to Tweets or take part in discussions on the website’s Facebook pages. Populated with numerous postings, the website is paving the way for youth-focused citizen journalism on key issues. Examples of issues under discussion include tackling education in northern Nigeria, human trafficking in the Americas and the Caribbean, and political violence in Bangladesh.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.78)

Sports for development

Each Olympic year, the Commonwealth has brought together ministers responsible for sport for the Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting, the next of which was at the time of writing scheduled to take place in Rio de Janeiro prior to the 2016 Olympic Games. Furthermore, the Commonwealth Secretariat has provided capacity-building programmes, policy analysis and advice, and technical assistance to member governments to promote and adopt sport as a tool for development and peace, which complements its wider work in youth development and empowerment. By 2011, Sharma reported:

‘Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) has been shown to contribute significantly to Commonwealth goals of democracy, development and diversity, and the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially among children and youth. Sport can serve as a tool for tackling priority health issues, improving educational attainment, as well as developing leadership and citizenship, thereby contributing to greater social cohesion. The 7th Commonwealth Youth Ministers and 5th Commonwealth Sport Ministers Meetings, in conjunction with the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport (CABOS), agreed that the Secretariat should integrate SDP into the Commonwealth Youth
Programme (CYP). In October 2011, the first of four regional workshops was scheduled to take place in New Delhi led by officers from the CYP Asia Centre in Chandigarh. Participants in this series of workshops include members of Commonwealth regional youth caucuses and staff from the sport and youth ministries of member governments. The aim is to deepen understanding of SDP methodologies and how to apply them in the delivery of youth work programmes.’ (Sharma 2011c, pp.25–26)

Sharma added in 2013:

‘Between 2011 and 2012, the Commonwealth Secretariat developed and in 2013 published *The Commonwealth Guide for Advancing Development through Sport* (Kay and Dudfield, 2013) to assist member countries on policy and programming. Endorsed by the 6th Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting in 2012, the publication provides a framework for using sport as a development tool across multiple policy areas (gender, social inclusion, education, health, peace building etc.) and is currently being used to support creation of national Sport for Development and Peace action plans in Sri Lanka, Barbados and Rwanda. Intensive capacity building has also been delivered to officials of member governments, Commonwealth Secretariat staff and other Commonwealth organisations.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.82)

In May 2013, with the mission of putting youth at the heart of sustainable development, the Commonwealth Secretariat supported the establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Sport for Development and Peace (CYSDP) Working Group, which builds member states’ awareness and capacity to integrate sport-based approaches into development policy. CYSDP is composed of ten youth practitioners in the field of sport for development and peace who lead the working group’s vision to be the leading voice for youth in the Commonwealth by promoting best practices towards sport for development and peace in their respective societies (CYSDP 2014).

Moreover, as Sharma mentioned in his 2013-15 *Biennial Report*:

‘In the run-up to the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the Secretariat convened the biennial Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting in Glasgow. At the meeting, ministers signed bilateral sports agreements facilitated by the Secretariat between Jamaica and South Africa, and India and Lesotho. The India–Lesotho agreement provides 40 scholarships for Lesotho students in sports science, management and journalism; supports the establishment of a high-altitude training centre and sports academy; and helps Lesotho develop physical education programmes.

With support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the governments of Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Barbados developed national strategies and action plans for using sport as a development tool, using *The Commonwealth Guide to Advancing Development through Sport* and associated workbook (Kay and Dudfield, 2013). The guide sets out ways for member governments to contribute to the education, employment, health, gender equity and safety of children and young people through sport. Sri Lanka noted the impact that sport has played in sustaining peace and supporting reconciliation in former conflict areas. In Rwanda, sport improved health and helped prevent non-communicable diseases. The pilot projects demonstrate the value of the Secretariat’s promotion of multisectoral collaboration in sport to advance development and peace.

In 2014, the Secretariat published a collection of papers, *Strengthening Sport for Development and Peace: National Policies and Strategies* (Dudfield, 2014), jointly with the Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sport (CABOS). These showcased innovative approaches and examples
of effective sport for development and peace policies and strategies. [The CYSDP Working Group] also developed and launched a *Sport for Development and Peace Youth Advocacy Toolkit* (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015i) to assist young people in championing SDP. The Secretariat continued to provide support for CABOS in 2013 to 2015, including annual meetings in July 2014 in Glasgow and June 2015 in Trinidad and Tobago. CABOS is also undertaking a key piece of work on developing a Commonwealth consensus on integrity in sport.

Commonwealth Secretariat events to mark [the] International Day of Sport for Development and Peace, on 6 April 2015, included a roundtable expert group meeting to develop guidance for member governments on using sport to deliver the Post-2015 Development Agenda and goals. This work has continued through consultations with governments, regional and global sporting bodies, and other key stakeholders.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, pp.65–66)

At the Malta CHOGM in November 2015, Sharma hailed sport as ‘one of our most cherished and visible Commonwealth traditions’ that, moreover, ‘can make vital contributions to inclusive social progress’ and ‘is central in our work to advance respect and understanding’ (Commonwealth Games Federation 2015). At the 2015 CHOGM, leaders also discussed the future of the Commonwealth Games, one of the world’s great sporting events which, since 1930, has been bringing together the nations and peoples of the Commonwealth in a celebration of sport and friendship. More than 4,500 athletes from 71 nations and territories of the Commonwealth took part in the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, which was watched by more than one billion people around the world (Ibid). In addition, the leaders present in Malta discussed the future of the Commonwealth Youth Games, which, established in Edinburgh in 2000, had become an integral part of the Commonwealth sporting movement’s strategic engagement with young athletes emerging onto the global sport scene (Ibid). The newly-elected President of the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF), Louise Martin, shared with Commonwealth leaders that the Commonwealth sporting movement was committed to delivering ‘Transformation 2022’, a new strategic approach adopted by members at the CGF General Assembly in Auckland in September 2015. The approach, as CGF puts it, ‘marks a historic change in the movement’s focus from the four-year cycle of hosting Commonwealth Games to a wider role of delivering sports leadership within the Commonwealth, based on partnership, engagement and value generation’ (Ibid). This approach prioritises delivery across four key areas: innovative and inspirational games, good governance and management, strong partnerships, and developing Commonwealth Sport as a strong valued brand. Highlighting the importance and relevance of sport to Commonwealth objectives and values, Martin observed, ‘Sport can be an every-day enabler of remarkable things and beyond the spectacle of great games, our obligation at the CGF is to make the most of the truly impactful opportunities for empowerment and transformational change’ (Ibid). She also announced that The Bahamas had formally expressed interest to host the 2017 Commonwealth Youth Games, with Northern Ireland keen to host the event in 2021.

**Youth employment and enterprise**

Sharma shared, ‘The Commonwealth’s experience as a pioneer in youth development enables it to take innovative steps to optimise the youth dividend in its member countries at a time when concerns around youth employment and participatory citizenship are dominating global agendas’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.9). He placed great emphasis on youth employment and enterprise during his time in office:

‘In response to the 2009 CHOGM mandate, “Investing in Youth”, the Commonwealth Secretariat, through its Youth Programme, has helped address youth employment issues
through strategic collaborations with relevant stakeholders and through technical assistance on youth enterprise. Regional conferences on Investing in Youth Employment were held in Kenya, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu, as well as a pan-Commonwealth conference on Investing in Youth, which took place in London and considered how to respond to youth employment trends. These conferences were also a response to the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2007–2015. A Guiding Framework on Youth Enterprise was created to assist member governments to develop an integrated and holistic youth enterprise development programme.

Youth enterprise financing projects have been piloted in nine locations in India in partnership with two major Indian public sector banks. The projects help disadvantaged youth to set up micro and small businesses in agro-food processing, dairy farming, garment design and manufacture, and the service sector. An Indian public sector bank has deployed a person in the Secretariat to advance and share practical methodologies of mainstreaming youth enterprise. In addition, a Youth Enterprise Facilitation Centre was established in Asia to provide hands-on technical assistance to aspiring young entrepreneurs. The Secretariat is progressing, through the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme, in the placement of short- and long-term experts in Cameroon, Namibia, Nigeria, Solomon Islands, Swaziland and Zambia to build capacity in implementing youth enterprise programmes.’ (Sharma 2011c, pp.24–25)

Furthermore, by 2013, Sharma was pleased to note:

‘At the Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre, a Commonwealth Secretariat-initiated project, young men and women are trained in entrepreneurial and business skills, with additional support also provided for youth enterprises and life skills. Between 2010 and March 2012, the Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre provided training for 5,434 youth. The centre has become a one-stop youth information point for the district, employing up to 40 skilled professionals in different skills and youth work, and is now supported by the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID).’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.79)

Sharma also ensured the Commonwealth Secretariat convened regional consultations with key stakeholders, including central banks, on youth employment, financial inclusion of young people, and financial literacy across the Commonwealth during 2011–13. CYP Asia led several national-level consultations, and CYP Pacific secured funding to undertake a study on youth financial literacy. CYP Pacific also liaised with a group of Pacific Reserve/Central Bank Governors to influence the inclusion of youth in their work (Ibid, p.79). Sharma recounts:

‘I ensured the Commonwealth, especially through the Secretariat, would do its utmost to encourage and enable youth entrepreneurship. I asked banks whether they had created any youth credit lines, so banks, and not governments, can offer money to youth to engage in entrepreneurship. I recommended that such credit be offered on the basis of character-lending, rather than collateral-lending.’

In his 2011–13 Biennial Report, he added:

‘In 2011, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Central Bank of India (CBI) and several local NGOs entered into a partnership to enhance the ability of young people in India to secure credit for business start-ups. The project is a pioneering attempt for banks to demonstrably champion the bankability of young people as reliable and trustworthy clients for credit. The Commonwealth Secretariat has developed and is testing a model for young people’s access to bank credit that may later be replicated in different regions of the Commonwealth.
Aimed at supporting young people aged 20–29 for a period of two to three years, the project trains and guides entrepreneurs who have creativity, innovative ideas, skills and commitment to business development towards setting up micro and small business enterprises. Loan amounts currently range from £1,200 to £12,000 and are granted to both individuals and group-run businesses. To date, £780,000 has already been disbursed to 370 young entrepreneurs.’ (Ibid, p.80)

As touched upon earlier, Sharma also established networks and alliances for young entrepreneurs. He shared,

‘I consulted experts and stakeholders on how we can support young entrepreneurs to create their own alliances and, over my years as Secretary-General, I saw the establishment of three regional Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs (CAYE) networks that seek “to champion the cause of young entrepreneurs at the local, national, regional and international level, through its engagement with governments, the media, the public, and other relevant stakeholders”. The first of these, the Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs (CAYE)-Asia, was established in 2011 with the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Young Indians Group of the Confederation of Indian Industries. Since its launch, CAYE-Asia has delivered notable activities, including advocacy on an enhanced youth entrepreneurship ecosystem in many forums, a regional summit on youth enterprise, and bilateral youth entrepreneurship development programmes. In 2013, CAYE-Asia reached around 20,000 young entrepreneurs, who, between them, created 31,800 new jobs. It also presented a united voice of young entrepreneurs at the Commonwealth Business Forum at the Colombo CHOGM in 2013 and the Commonwealth Youth and Education Ministers Meetings in 2013 and 2015. The 8th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in 2013 recommended replication of CAYE-Asia in other regions of the Commonwealth as a good practice model on youth entrepreneurship. In all the three networks that emerged – CAYE-Asia, established in 2011, the Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs-Caribbean & Canada (CAYE-C&C) and the Commonwealth Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs-East Africa (CAYE-EA), both established in 2014 – it was youth discussing with and telling governments what they need, and not the other way around.’

In his 2011-13 Biennial Report, Sharma added:

‘The Commonwealth Youth Programme Africa Centre (CYP Africa) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with the Government of Zambia’s Ministry of Labour and Social Security and Ministry of Sports, Youth and Child Development, developed and delivered an international programme on “International Perspectives in Youth Entrepreneurship Training” (IPYET). IPYET is designed as an annual intensive trainer-of-trainers course, and shares experiences in youth entrepreneurship training from various countries and introduces participants to contemporary materials, techniques and approaches developed in the field. There are many different manuals, tools, models, frameworks and approaches for training young people in entrepreneurship. However, there are also many questions surrounding such training: How relevant do young people consider the training and materials? How effective and efficient are these trainings? What works, what doesn’t? What lessons are realised? Are such workshops really youth centred or are they just entrepreneurship training? These and many more questions underpin the need for such an international workshop. Participants are expected to develop action plans for enhancing current youth entrepreneurship training programmes in their countries. CYP Africa, ILO and partners also provide a six-month ongoing virtual support programme to participants for implementation of learning outcomes from this training programme.’ (Ibid, p.76)
The Secretariat also partnered with the ILO in January 2014 in delivering a capacity-strengthening workshop for senior officials in ministries of youth and labour in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Participants were provided with technical skills and tools to help them devise and implement youth employment strategies in their countries. Consequently, five countries had developed or were developing national youth employment strategies, with officials also contributing to a draft Pacific Youth Employment Strategy developed by the Secretariat and the ILO as part of the Pacific Youth Development Framework, developed in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and other regional youth stakeholders (Ibid, p.59).

In addition, the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned research on the economic disenfranchisement of young people and its association with crime, violence and conflict, and presented its research at the SPARK Conference on Youth Entrepreneurship Development in Conflict Affected Environments in November 2013 (Ibid, p.60). The Secretariat also collaborated with UNCTAD to produce a Policy Guide on Youth Entrepreneurship (UNCTAD, 2015) for governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, including development agencies. The guide, and the need for the Secretariat to provide technical assistance to develop policies to support youth entrepreneurs, was acknowledged by ministers at the Africa Region and Caribbean Region CYMMs in February and April 2015 respectively (Ibid, p.60).

**Youth development work**

The Commonwealth has also contributed significantly to the field of youth development work, whether by building the capacity of youth development workers, supporting the development of youth work as a skilled profession, or promoting greater recognition of its achievements. Sharma mentioned:

“The Commonwealth has created the global industry of youth professional work, as before the Commonwealth got involved, it was nearly impossible to get a degree in youth work. Youth Work Education and Training was one of CYP’s earliest work streams and remains a unique programme in intergovernmental and global circles. The Commonwealth Diploma in Youth Development Work had been delivered earlier through the CYP regional centres and, more recently, through over 30 universities and academic institutions. It has resulted in the graduation of a large number of qualified youth workers: in just the two years between 2011 and 2013, 80 youth workers qualified in the Pacific region, 6,079 in Africa and 385 in Asia. Many of its graduates have since held senior positions in government, where they exercise great influence over youth development policies and programmes. The Commonwealth Secretariat also collaborated with the Commonwealth of Learning to develop an e-learning course on Commonwealth values. Around 100 young people drawn from four regions of the Commonwealth participated in the ten-week pilot of the Embracing Commonwealth Values course that commenced in May 2012 and that transformed the paper-based Diploma for Youth Development into an online course available everywhere. The Commonwealth also furthered the professionalisation of youth work through the development of new Competency Standards and by working with the University of West Indies to upgrade the above-mentioned diploma to a Bachelor of Youth Development Work, now available as an open educational resource for access by universities globally. At the Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work convened in Pretoria, South Africa, in March 2016, academic institutions from across the Commonwealth agreed to form the Commonwealth Youth Work Qualifications Consortium to offer greater access to youth work education and training globally.
The Commonwealth also supported the introduction of national youth work associations in Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean. In November 2012, the Secretariat, in partnership with the UK’s National Youth Agency, piloted the first Commonwealth-wide advocacy campaign promoting youth work. Held annually since, the Commonwealth Youth Work Week has highlighted the role of front-line youth workers in supporting young people and communities across the Commonwealth. In 2013, it launched the Commonwealth Youth Worker Awards, with the winners announced during the Youth Work Week in November. In March 2013, CYP Africa convened a Commonwealth Conference on the Education and Training of Youth Workers, the first of its kind, in partnership with the Presidency of the Government of South Africa and the University of South Africa. Some 225 youth work academics and practitioners from 32 countries attended and developed a set of recommendations on the recognition of youth work as a profession. The Secretariat also partnered with two Indian youth organisations, Pravah and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan, in developing *Co-Creating Youth Spaces: A Practice Based Guide for Youth Facilitators*, (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2014e) which it launched in December 2014 as a manual to help youth professionals collaborate with young adults in developing youth clubs that enhance active participation in society and improve leadership skills and understanding of social issues. At the Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work held in Pretoria in March 2016, a new Commonwealth Alliance on Youth Work Associations was announced, which is to advocate the interests of young people and spearhead efforts to professionalise the youth work sector. The alliance is to be established ahead of the next CYMM in Uganda in 2017. A Commonwealth Code on Youth Work Ethics was also developed at the conference in Pretoria.

**Commonwealth Class**

In June 2013, the Commonwealth Secretariat partnered with the BBC and the British Council on a project aimed at encouraging students to collaborate and consider how they can be more active and responsible global citizens as part of the Commonwealth family. Commonwealth Class was a special initiative, leading up to the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014, that gave 7 to 14-year-olds the opportunity to hold fortnightly worldwide online debates and share educational resources. It was initiated to deepen knowledge of the Commonwealth, celebrate its values, and connect schools and young people in the UK and the Commonwealth on joint learning programmes, bearing in mind the established positive educational benefits for young people derived from teaching and learning together (British Council, no date).

Sharma shares:

‘I was aware that the initiative would prove to be expensive, requiring an initial investment of £0.5 million, but it was a leap I chose to take, believing that the benefits would far outweigh the costs. The expectation, after all, was that the programme would bring together 100,000 schools, 300,000 teachers and 17 million young people from across the Commonwealth in collaborative teaching and learning. I received some support from India, which was vital for creating material, and I was much encouraged in my efforts when the BBC and the British Council joined the Commonwealth Secretariat to work on the curriculum. In retrospect, as far as communicating the message of the Commonwealth and raising awareness of its work was concerned, the initiative proved to be a worthy investment. I remember receiving a letter at Durban in relation to Commonwealth Class that read: “Bless you! Bless you! Bless you!” I realised that one of the most positive outcomes of the initiative was that it communicated to Commonwealth citizens in distant villages and towns across the Commonwealth that they were not alone, or condemned just to the local community, but connected – to each other and, thus, to a world beyond. I had wished to replicate such initiatives, but the challenge has always been finding more partners. Thankfully, elements of the initiative have been revived since by the Royal Commonwealth Society, which, again, reveals how much more can be done once you create a window of opportunity.’
Democracy and human rights

As seen in other chapters, the Commonwealth’s work in relation to youth has also extended to the spheres of democracy, good governance and human rights. As Sharma reports:

‘Young people from across the Commonwealth have participated as election observers in Commonwealth Observer Groups to report on the credibility of elections. The Commonwealth Secretariat also invested in a series of youth-led peace-building interventions across all regions of the Commonwealth... A youth-led peace-building and mentorship programme in the Caribbean and a Commonwealth East Africa Youth Peace-Building Camp took place in Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Rwanda, respectively.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.77)

Another notable area of work, he observed fairly, included training youth workers to educate young people about their rights, increasing awareness among youth of national and regional human rights issues, and building the capacities of youth as advocates for strengthened rights protection and democracy, diversity and good governance in their countries (Ibid, p.5). He cited as an example:

‘In 2013–14, the Commonwealth Secretariat designed and delivered a “train-the-trainer” human rights education project for youth trainers to develop their capacity to train others in human rights. The project was delivered in partnership with Equitas – International Centre for Human Rights Education in Canada, and resulted in the development of an interactive “train-the-trainer” manual and the delivery of regional train-the-trainer workshops for youth trainers.’ (Ibid, p.23)

Between 2013 and 2015, the Secretariat also continued to support the Commonwealth Youth Human Rights and Democracy Network, and contributed to the launch event of the Royal Commonwealth Society’s Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (Ibid, p.63). In his address at the awards ceremony of the 2016 Commonwealth Youth Awards for Excellence in Development Work held at Marlborough House on 17 March 2016, Sharma said rather fittingly:

‘Recognising young people’s contributions to nation building is immensely important, and has long been a distinctive feature of our Commonwealth approach. Communities become more cohesive and inclusive, and social and economic development more sustainable and equitable, when the concerns and invaluable work of young people are integrated fully into public thinking, policy and action.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2016a)

1  http://thecommonwealth.org/youth-ministers-meetings
2  http://thecommonwealth.org/cya
3  http://thecommonwealth.org/youth-networks
4  http://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-correspondents
5  http://www.yourcommonwealth.org/about/
9. GENDER AND WOMEN

In the Foreword to the Commonwealth Secretariat’s *Gender Equality Policy* (2012), the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, wrote:

‘Gender equality is a human right and fundamental principle of the Commonwealth. It is also a critical means of contributing to the Commonwealth’s goals of eradicating poverty, building resilient societies and economies, harmonious communities and promoting sustainable development. In 2009, Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Port of Spain subscribed to an Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, which recalls and reiterates the Commonwealth’s commitment to fundamental values and principles, including to development, democracy and diversity and reaffirms gender equality and empowerment “as an essential component of human development and basic human rights”. The affirmation acknowledges the advancement of women’s rights as a critical precondition for effective and sustainable development.’ (Sharma 2012c, p.7)

Greater attention, it would be safe to say, has been directed to gender under Sharma than at any other time in the history of the Commonwealth Secretariat, with the Gender Section placed directly under the Commonwealth Secretary-General’s dutiful oversight. Yet, this was not always where Gender had had its location.

It was Ramphal’s tenure as Secretary-General that saw the establishment of a Women and Development Unit within the Secretariat in 1979 and the appointment of an Advisor for Women and Development in 1980. In 1983, when Ramphal created the Human Resource Development Group (HRDG) to facilitate collaboration in planning and implementing programmes without threatening the established functions and funding of separate divisions, the Women and Development Unit was one of the six programmes/divisions brought together alongside Youth, Education, Fellowships and Training, Management Development and Health under HRDG. In 1993, as Anyaoku streamlined the structure of the Secretariat, the Women and Development Programme was merged with the Commonwealth Youth Programme (later, the Youth Affairs Division) in favour of a Women and Youth Affairs Division, which evolved into the Gender and Youth Affairs Division in 1995. In 2002, under McKinnon, the Commonwealth Youth Programme was separated from the Gender and Youth Affairs Division, with the Gender Affairs Division merged with the Human Resource Development Division to form the Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD). When Sharma arrived on the scene as Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Social Transformation Programmes Division had under it the Health, Education and Gender Units. In reflection of the importance that he placed on gender issues, Sharma liquidated the STPD and made Health and Gender separate units, bringing Gender directly under the Secretary-General. It was only with the authority of the Secretary-General’s Office that a matter could be assigned to a Deputy Secretary-General.

As the recent Commonwealth publication, *Adding Global Value* (2015) points out:

‘The Commonwealth has taken a leading role in supporting women’s economic, political and social empowerment, for example by encouraging governments to manage spending
in a way that addresses gender equality. Gender inequality is a major barrier to social equity and sustainable development in the Commonwealth. Women continue to play a lesser role than men in leadership and businesses having limited access to, and control of, resources. Reducing gender disparity is crucial for the development of an equitable, peaceful and sustainable society. While some progress has been made to increase women’s participation, countries are still falling short of global targets to close the gender gap.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.40)

It is in this area where much of the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Gender Section is focused.

As Secretary-General Sharma added:

‘In recent years, we have seen steady incremental advance towards achieving gender equality in the Commonwealth. We have seen proactive measures such as quotas to increase women’s political representation instituted in South Africa, Mozambique, Rwanda and India. We have supported Commonwealth governments in The Gambia, Nigeria and Pakistan to implement gender-responsive budgeting; and fostered partnerships between commercial banks to promote equitable access to financing. Many countries have specific laws, national action plans and programmes including “one-stop centres” that link hospitals, police stations, shelters and the courts to strengthen women’s access to justice. But we still have a long way to go.’ (Sharma 2012c, p.7)

‘Women and girls in the Commonwealth continue to face discrimination with regard to education, employment, access to credit, property and land. In many regions, women’s access to justice and representation in the political, public and private spheres remains limited. Women continue to be subjected to different forms of violence or discrimination – physical, sexual, psychological and economic – within and outside their homes, in times of peace as well as of conflict.’ (Ibid, p.7)

‘While the Commonwealth Secretariat has often led the way in addressing the challenges of gender inequality and women’s empowerment, we recognise the need to ensure that our stated commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming – articulated in both our Secretariat Strategic Plan (2008–2012) and the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality (2005–2015) – is fully reflected in our structure, systems, policies and programmes of assistance.’ (Ibid, p.8)

The Commonwealth Secretariat’s Gender Equality Policy (GEP), launched in 2012, provides the ‘institutional, operational and reporting guidelines for a coherent and co-ordinated approach to gender mainstreaming’ towards achieving gender equality in the Secretariat’s mandates, policies, operations and programmes.¹ It is intended to strengthen and guide the collective effort of all Secretariat staff to ensure that women, men, girls and boys benefit equally from their work; and that inequalities are not perpetuated. Its ultimate goal is to support the achievement of gender equality as a means of achieving democracy, peace, sustainable development and poverty eradication in the Commonwealth (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012d, p.9). The Secretariat has identified the following key areas of focus as needing specific intervention for improved gender equality and more sustainable development: lack of access to finance for women entrepreneurs; limited access to procurement and global markets; under-representation of women on corporate boards; women’s under-representation in political systems and leadership; and violence against women (VAW).² In his Foreword, Sharma noted:

‘Its timing is also pertinent, given the 2011 Commonwealth theme “Women as Agents of Change”, which reminds us of the vast and untapped potential of women and girls to
contribute to tackling today’s contemporary challenges of finance, energy, food, trade, development and climate change. The adoption by the Secretariat of this *Gender Equality Policy* will ensure that this crucial goal is carried forward beyond 2011 and will encourage us, in partnership with member governments, to find ways to empower women and girls in conjunction with men to play their vital role in shaping our common future.’ (Sharma 2012c, p.8)

*As Adding Global Value* (2015) reports:

‘There is now broad support for tackling gender inequality through the adoption of gender-responsive budgeting. This tool can be used to analyse the impacts of spending on men, women, boys and girls to promote gender equality and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of national policy implementation and public expenditure. Some countries have successfully adopted gender budgeting, but many are lagging behind because of a lack of capacity, resources and political will... The Commonwealth has been closely associated with the promotion of gender-sensitive financial management and public spending, building on pioneering initiatives carried out in our member countries; notably Australia, Canada and South Africa. We have provided valuable resources such as the widely-cited reports *Gender Budgets Make Cents* and *Gender Budgets Make More Cents*... In 1995, we launched pilot projects in Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis, South Africa and Sri Lanka to improve government capacity to apply gender analysis to policy and budgets. A 2014 Commonwealth study into gender budgeting initiatives of four ‘early adopters’ – Australia, Bangladesh, India and Uganda – demonstrated that gender-responsive budgeting has contributed to equality and public spending in these countries. We have also provided assistance in institutionalising gender-responsive budgeting in Trinidad and Tobago, and Tanzania... Our work in this area has contributed to the integration of gender-sensitive budgeting in 25 Commonwealth member countries. Worldwide, more than 50 countries have adopted gender budgeting. Our ground-breaking work over the last 20 years has contributed to the integration of gender analysis into fiscal policies and budgets.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.40)

The Commonwealth Secretariat, chiefly through its Gender Section, also provides technical assistance to member countries to support skills training and capacity-building initiatives, monitoring, evaluation, high-level advocacy, research and knowledge generation, and lead the way for building consensus on key global gender priorities for the Commonwealth. Its work centres on key aspects of human development towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, and global commitments on gender equality and overall empowerment of women. There are three inter-linked functions to its gender work:

1. promoting women’s rights and gender equality in Commonwealth countries through advocacy, policy advice, capacity building and technical assistance;
2. hosting and convening a number of gender-based meetings, including the triennial meetings of Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministerial Meetings, annual meetings of Annual Consultations of National Women’s Machineries and the recently established Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Women’s Forum; and
3. leading and co-ordinating systems and mechanisms for effective gender mainstreaming.

Through the meetings it convenes, the Secretariat is able to connect experts and key stakeholders from across the Commonwealth, encouraging collaboration and providing the opportunity for attendees to share knowledge on the Commonwealth’s gender equality and women’s empowerment commitments (The Commonwealth, no date a).
Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministerial Meetings (WAMMs), which have been held triennially since 1985 and rotate between regions to ensure equitable opportunities for hosting, provide strategic opportunities for ministers, senior officials, civil society organisations (CSOs) and partner agencies to discuss critical issues in advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality in the Commonwealth, and to contribute to global agenda-setting processes. The meetings are used to build consensus on issues; develop a Commonwealth position or statement; informally exchange views outside of a negotiating forum; share good practices; discuss programme priorities and strategic directions; make recommendations for CHOGMs; and strengthen and forge partnerships with governments, corporate bodies, development actors and civil society. The 11th Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministers Meeting 2016 was held in the Pacific region, hosted by the Government of Samoa in Apia. WAMMs are preceded by Partners’ Forums, which provide CSOs and other partners the opportunity to discuss key issues related to the WAMM theme; the outcomes and recommendations are then strategically fed into WAMM deliberations (Ibid).

The Annual Consultations of National Women’s Machineries (NWMs) are convened in the margins of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) sessions in New York. The theme of the meeting is generally aligned with the theme of UNCSW. The meeting includes a business segment, which presents progress on the implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality and post-2015 Commonwealth gender priorities, as well as updates on the mandates of CHOGMs and WAMMs. It also includes a capacity-strengthening segment for members, which focuses on the good practices employed by member states on the key areas of concern of the Plan of Action such as women’s leadership, violence against women and girls, women’s economic empowerment and gender mainstreaming. In addition, the Commonwealth Secretariat convenes two side events to identify good practices, strategies and mechanisms aligned to the UNCSW theme and CHOGM and WAMM mandates. The annual consultation of NWMs is usually preceded by the meeting of the Commonwealth Gender Plan of Action Monitoring Group (CGPMG), which is restricted to 21 member countries and civil society organisations (CSOs) (Ibid).

When it comes to the Commonwealth Women’s Forum, the Malta CHOGM in 2015 provided the first occasion when such a forum had been convened. Hitherto, there had been only three such fora at the CHOGMs – the Civil Society Forum, the Youth Forum and the Business Forum. The new forum was launched on 6 March 2015 by Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, as part of the International Women’s Day 2015 celebrations. The first Commonwealth Women’s Forum had as its theme ‘Women Ahead: Be All That You Can Be’ and was hosted by the Government of Malta in St Julian’s from 22 to 24 November 2015, just prior to the CHOGM. It brought together government leaders, NGOs, campaigners, women’s machineries and female entrepreneurs and, as its Outcome Statement revealed, ‘reinforced amongst other things the importance of women’s economic, social and political empowerment’ and the need to ‘leave no women behind, including women with disabilities and women with different choices’. Also highlighted was ‘the need to strengthen women’s access, participation and leadership in education, health, employment, technology, political and economic decision-making and the judiciary’ (Commonwealth Women’s Forum 2015).

The Commonwealth Secretariat, under Sharma, has also forged new ground by ensuring that gender is included on the agenda of Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meetings and other high-level conferences. It has also worked in collaboration with strategic partners such as the UN, OECD and other regional bodies to advance the integration of gender budgeting in countries around the world (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.40). On 22 September 2015, only a few days before new global goals would be agreed upon at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, the Commonwealth and UN Women signed a Memorandum of
Understanding in New York to build on and strengthen the collaboration between the two organisations in advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, seen as preconditions for sustainable development. ‘We welcome this partnership’, Sharma noted. ‘Both the Commonwealth and UN Women have strong track records of championing the rights of women’. He added, ‘Together with our programmes to promote gender equality in Member States, [it] shows the strength of continuing Commonwealth commitment to empowering girls and women’ (UN Women 2015). The UN Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, likewise, said that the strengthened partnership brought together ‘not only shared values, but complementary strengths’ and would ‘accelerate momentum in crucial areas that address barriers, build and nurture capacity, as well as track and declare progress’ (Ibid). Women’s education and gender-responsive budgeting were outlined as key areas for action.

In November 2015, in recognition of his leadership on gender mainstreaming, the Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network (CBN) named Kamalesh Sharma the First Commonwealth Male Champion of Change. Sharma was described by CBN’s Executive Director, Arif Zaman, as ‘someone who has been a passionate, active and dedicated champion for women, combining advocacy with practical steps’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015f). At the award ceremony held at the Jamaican High Commission in London, Sharma shared, ‘I have made it a personal priority that in every aspect of our Commonwealth work “gender mainstreaming” should be far more than a slogan. We are committed to achieving practical change that has impact in the lives and livelihoods of women and girls in all our member states’ (Ibid). On 8 March 2016, celebrated as International Women’s Day, Sharma issued one of his last statements on gender as Commonwealth Secretary-General:

‘Let us mark this International Women’s Day throughout the Commonwealth by celebrating the achievements of women and girls and by renewing and refreshing our total commitment to work to eliminate violence against women, provide quality education for girls and women, promote women’s central and vital role in building our societies, as we strive for gender equality and full political, social and economic empowerment to women.

In the words of our Commonwealth Charter, “The advancement of women’s rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development”. The Commonwealth is home to more than one billion women and girls who are the key to our future – a future of respect, equality, peace and shared prosperity. Our Commonwealth Theme for 2016, “An Inclusive Commonwealth”, also echoes the need for gender parity in decision-making if we are to accomplish Sustainable Development Goal 5 and build societies for their full potential, that give dignity to all.

Barriers for women and girls should not exist in 2016, and yet inadequate child and maternal healthcare, harmful gender stereotypes, lack of access to education, training and employment opportunities, and discrimination resulting in the persistent gender pay and skill gaps still persist.

We work with governments, international institutions, NGOs, and women’s organisations to deepen the understanding and implementation of gender-sensitive policies, particularly strategies to achieve measurable goals for women leaders.

We collaborate with UN Women and regional bodies such as the Africa Union to build the capacity of electoral management bodies to advance the participation of women in politics, and we have worked with the World Bank on promoting women in business. Our work on women’s leadership has resulted in more political participation of women with many Commonwealth countries having attained the 30 per cent benchmark.
In many instances, women and girls are still denied ownership or inheritance rights. Our work on land rights for women in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone helps to address this, as we developed legal handbooks to help women in these countries understand their rights to land and inheritance.

We convene triennial meetings of Commonwealth ministers responsible for women’s affairs, annual meetings of Commonwealth Women’s National Machineries and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Women’s Forum, the first of which took place last November, marking a huge Commonwealth milestone towards greater inclusivity.

I am delighted that my successor, Patricia Scotland, will be the first woman to take up the position of Commonwealth Secretary-General. It is a watershed moment for the Commonwealth and a step in the direction the Commonwealth has championed. As she takes over, the Commonwealth Secretariat is already a world leader in gender balance among organisations.

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality has been a framework within which our member states collaborate to advance gender equality, building on progress, addressing emerging challenges and responding to global changes. In this new era for global sustainable development, the Commonwealth will build on gains from the Plan of Action to strengthen and align priorities on gender equality and women’s empowerment to national, regional and international targets.’ (Sharma 2016c)

1  http://thecommonwealth.org/about-us/gender-equality-policy
2  http://thecommonwealth.org/about-us/gender-equality-policy
10. INTERNAL GOVERNANCE: RENEWAL AND REVITALISATION

During Sharma’s first term in office, the Strategic Plan 2008/09-2011/12 of the Commonwealth Secretariat provided the overall strategic direction and priorities of the organisation for the four-year period that included two CHOGMs. The Strategic Plan also outlined the two interlinked goals that reflected the Commonwealth’s prioritisation of democracy and development, the eight programme areas through which the Secretariat would endeavour to achieve these two goals, and the results against which the Secretariat would seek to deliver in each programme area in the member countries concerned (Commonwealth Secretariat 2009a, p.81).

**Goal 1: Peace and Democracy**
1. Good Offices for Peace
2. Democracy and Consensus Building
3. Rule of Law
4. Human Rights

**Goal 2: Pro-Poor Growth and Sustainable Development**
5. Public Sector Development
6. Economic Development
7. Environmentally Sustainable Development
8. Human Development

The Strategic Plan also set out the three main ways in which the Secretariat would deliver its programmes of work:

- Policy Development and Consensus Building
- Technical Assistance
- Advisory Services

Furthermore, the Commonwealth Secretariat adopted a results-based approach to management, whereby it could shift from measuring inputs and outputs in relation to its work to evaluating its results – that is, its impact and outcomes. For the 2009/10 financial year, the Secretariat developed a planning and budgeting tool that allowed it to introduce results-based budgeting, which made it possible to reallocate resources from lower-priority areas to higher-priority areas of work and invest in those areas with proven results. In 2011, a steering committee was established to support monitoring and reporting through the Activity Results Tracking and Expenditure Management Information System (ARTEMIS). In 2012, the Secretariat introduced a Secretariat-developed, organisation-wide capacity-building programme on results-based management (RBM) that involved participants engaging with the UK Department for International Development and the Canadian International Development
Agency to share and understand the practical challenges arising from incorporating RBM within their programmes and projects. In addition, the Secretariat now focused on thematic and regional reviews which proved more cost-effective, rather than the country-focused small project evaluations it had formerly carried out. These forward-looking reviews generally included recommendations for future activity that greatly improved the Secretariat’s work. For instance, the Gender Policy of the Secretariat and its Project Design Guidelines on Gender Mainstreaming came out of the recommendations put forward in the Performance Audit of the Secretariat’s Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (Ibid, pp.81–2).

Likewise, so as to improve the quality of its general purpose financial reporting, attain higher standards in transparency and accountability, and have better informed assessments of resource allocation decisions, the Secretariat embedded International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) in its policies, procedures and systems. The 2008/09 financial year served as the first year that its accounts were audited under IPSAS; in May 2012, its first budget prepared on an IPSAS basis was presented to the Board of Governors. Moreover, in order to make its communication systems more efficient and cost-effective, the Secretariat turned to web conferencing, Skype, an electronic filing system, an upgraded internal telephone system, a revamped in-house printing system and similar modernisations. Even in human resource management, the period saw the Commonwealth Secretariat draft a first version of a Human Resource Management Strategy, continue drafting an Employee Handbook, review the terms and conditions of service for internationally-recruited staff at the Commonwealth Youth Centres, and upgrade the roster of consultants for CFTC programmes (Ibid, p.83).

Between 2011 and 2013, following a CHOGM directive that the Commonwealth Secretary-General should prepare a more focused Strategic Plan that reflected the resources available to the Commonwealth Secretariat, a new Strategic Plan for the four-year period 2013/14-2016/17 was drawn up and approved. The process of drawing up the new plan was greatly informed by the recommendations put forward in the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) report A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform. The Secretary-General appointed a taskforce of ministers to review the outstanding recommendations and to report to the ministers of foreign affairs. The Strategic Plan was also informed by the findings and recommendations from the evaluations on the Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative, the Public-Private Partnership Programme and the Criminal Law Programme. The Strategic Plan 2013/14–2016/17 reflected the shared priorities of member governments, and maintained a balance in the allocation of effort between the two key pillars of the Secretariat’s work – democracy and development. It identified three longer-term goals to be pursued over the next eight to ten years, and six strategic outcomes for the next four years:

The three goals were:
1. Strong democracy, rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and respect for diversity
2. Inclusive growth and sustainable development
3. A well-connected and networked Commonwealth

The six strategic outcomes were:
1. Democracy – greater adherence to Commonwealth political values and principles
2. Public institutions – more effective, efficient and equitable public governance
3. Social development – enhanced positive impact of social development
4. Youth – youth more integrated and valued in political and development processes
5. Development: pan-Commonwealth – more effective frameworks for inclusive economic growth and social and sustainable development
6. Development: small states and vulnerable states – strengthened resilience of small states and vulnerable states
The Strategic Plan was based on a Strategic Results Framework (SRF), which provided intermediate outcomes and indicators to support the six strategic outcomes. The SRF also had three enabling outcomes, which are those results that underpin the intermediate outcomes, and four internal result areas, which would ensure an efficiently run organisation that promotes the delivery of the enabling and intermediate results. The plan also provided indicators against which the impact of the Secretariat’s work can be measured. The plan directed that the Secretariat should continue operating under a results-based management (RBM) approach. Sharma noted,

‘Over the current strategic period, the quality assurance function of the Commonwealth Secretariat has been further strengthened through the implementation of a robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (ME&R) Framework that complements the SRF and is tightly focused on achieving results. ARTEMIS has also been further developed to link project design with the new Strategic Plan, divisional work plans, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms, which is key to delivering RBM. A systematic approach has been taken to help ensure that the Secretariat is both “doing the right things” and “doing them right” at each stage of the project and programme cycles through gender-sensitive planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation. A four-year strategy aims to build capacity for RBM through training, improved systems, processes and tools. The improved design of the Project Management Information System supports managers to embed RBM principles in planning and implementing results-focused projects that deliver on the mandates of the Strategic Plan – as well as ensure that results are documented and shared across the organisation. The annual planning and budgeting process has also been refined to ensure investment is in line with results.’

Over the period, the ARTEMIS Support Team grew in size, with links forged between ARTEMIS and the Commonwealth Secretariat’s financial management system, CODA. CODA was also rolled out to Commonwealth Youth Programme regional centres (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.91). By 2015, the Strategic Plan clearly reflected the Secretariat’s commitment to results-based management (RBM). Sharma added:

‘Staff from across the Secretariat at every level have been trained in RBM, and ongoing technical support and advice is available to programme divisions across the Secretariat in order to systematise good practice RBM tools and processes. Revised formats for the six-monthly progress reports and the annual results reports were also introduced to reflect RBM principles. These efforts and the resulting increased technical capacity within the organisation are evidenced in the improved quality of results-driven projects as well as reporting through the six-monthly and annual results reports (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.110). The Secretariat regularly conducts and commissions evaluations and impact studies in accordance with the priorities of the Strategic Results Framework. Special attention is given to understanding the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the Secretariat’s work. These evaluations are an important part of organisational learning and draw out lessons on how the Secretariat can demonstrate better results. From 2013/14 to 2014/15, the Secretariat conducted six programme evaluations, four country evaluations and three impact assessments, with recommendations shared with relevant stakeholders across the organisation and taken on board to improve future programming. The recent Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Plan included fine-tuning indicators in line with the Strategic Plan outcomes to ensure all new projects have measurable baselines and targets, which inform the project design, assessment and review of progress against planned outcomes. This will further improve the Secretariat’s ability to understand the results that have been achieved, and to harness and use learning to improve programme effectiveness. (Ibid, p.111)"
Crucially, the Strategic Plan envisaged a reduction in the number of activities currently undertaken by the Secretariat. It also envisaged a number of fundamental changes in the way that the Secretariat delivers its work, including greater use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), strategic partnerships, promotion of collaboration between member states and brokerage of assistance from elsewhere when the Secretariat itself is unable to provide this. This approach led to the consolidation of 377 projects into 50, focused on delivering the strategic outcomes. Fewer projects reduced the administrative load of designing and approving projects and freed time for implementing, monitoring and assessing activities. The new projects are larger in scope and are designed for the life of the Strategic Plan. The Secretariat also adopted ISO 31000 “Risk management – Principles and guidelines” in 2014, with its related policies and procedures covering all planning, strategies, decisions, operations and project, as well as general management.’ (Ibid, p.112)

Sharma’s second term as Commonwealth Secretary-General also saw significant improvements in human resource management within the Commonwealth Secretariat. The appointment of a new director of human resources, who commenced work in September 2012, translated as the Human Resources Section assuming the status of a full division; and the skills, competencies and structure of the new division being brought in line with the strategic aims of the Secretariat. Over this period, the Secretariat also revised the Corporate Induction Programme and the Terms and Conditions of Service (TACOS), the latter with a view to enhance competitiveness and bring the TACOS more in alignment with international norms. The new competency framework, which provided competency-based individual work plans that clarify annual performance objectives for staff and which linked the overall Strategic Plan with the individual work plans and the annual division plans, also improved performance monitoring within the RBM framework.

The period between 2013 and 2015 witnessed further changes introduced in the structure and the staffing of the Secretariat (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.93). On 30 June 2013, the Commonwealth Secretariat had 380 employees, 87.11 per cent of whom were permanent staff members on established contracts, while the rest – 12.89 per cent – temporary staff. In addition, the period between 2011 and 2013 saw 532 CFTC contracts issued, comprising 33 contracts for long-term experts, 49 agreement letters and 450 short-term consultancy contracts (Ibid, p.93). In July 2014, the Secretariat introduced a new organisational structure that led to the creation of 164 posts, including 27 new Young Professional Programme posts, with a view to facilitate delivery on the Strategic Plan. By June that year, 56 staff left under a voluntary exit scheme, another 23 staff were made redundant and 13 staff were redeployed. The four Commonwealth Youth Programme regional centres were also shut down, as a result of which 96 staff became redundant; and a revitalised Commonwealth Youth Programme took its place. By the end of 2014/15, up to 79 per cent of the 164 vacant positions had been filled. The improvements in recruitment methods, brought about through the greater use of digital networks for placing recruitment advertisements and the introduction of an electronic recruitment system, as well as the use of Skype for interviews, led to a reduction in costs of recruiting, a reduction by an average of six weeks in the time taken to recruit and gains in terms of candidate experience. Even in terms of gender and national diversity, the 2014/15 recruitment drive proved exemplary, with around 59 per cent of all new recruits being female, and with 36 Commonwealth countries now being represented among the staff, marking a rise of 8 per cent (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.112).

Towards the end of his second term as Secretary-General, Sharma shared:

‘It became clear to me that both to win the respect of the Governors and to be a self-respecting organisation, it was crucial that significant internal reform be undertaken. This had various components. The essential feature of it had to be the quality and the degree of
sustained attention being given to corporate reforms. Realising that part-time solutions could not truly drive the Secretariat forward and, in fact, could only lead to approaches which were half measures and cause neglect of unattended areas, I created the position of Assistant Secretary-General (not used for many years) for Corporate Affairs within the senior management. This innovation served the institution well, but it soon became clear that the position had to be upgraded to Deputy Secretary-General (Corporate Affairs). I, therefore, left the organisation with three Commonwealth Deputy Secretaries-General, when I had inherited just two, with one focusing entirely on strengthening the internal working and functioning of the Secretariat.

The benefits of this upgrade became progressively clear. The auditors for the first time stopped making reservations and in fact complimented the organisation. The handbook, which governed administrative rules and practices, was completely revised, and that too with participation of the staff. The travel policy of a widely-networked organisation was made more fit for purpose against clear benchmarks. The relationship with the Staff Association had often been problematic in past years. The agenda was made methodical and transparent, and many gains to improve the team spirit of the organisation were made and with a continuity of process. This became a crucial asset during the period of far-reaching consequences for the staff. Internal electronic communication and information-sharing were introduced to create a truly joined up organisation.

When I started, the ratio between support or administrative staff and the executive or delivery staff was half-to-half, which made for a bottom-heavy and immobile organisation. By the time the reforms were through, the ratio had changed to one-third support staff and two-thirds delivery staff. I remained convinced that the ratio could be taken to a quarter support staff and three-quarters delivery staff. With the Secretariat staff, many forms of rationalisation of benefits were introduced, but the one I took immense satisfaction from was the introduction of a private health insurance scheme, with no contribution from staff, in addition to the NHS.

By the time of the last CHOGM in Malta in 2015, I was able to bank this considerable array of improvements to argue that it was for the leaders now to lift the level of remuneration for the establishment in a highly-competitive global field for quality talent. The organisation has always been remarkable for its accomplishments in relation to its budgetary and staffing resources, but in an evolving and demanding environment, it needed to be taken much higher.

Sharma went on to comment at length about what he referred to as ‘the nervous system for the Commonwealth’:

‘I sometimes observed that whereas the Commonwealth had a sound bone structure in the connective world, it needed urgently to develop a healthy nervous system. By this, I meant that the modes of interaction in the Commonwealth were largely physical, with the CHOGM summit of leaders every two years at the apex, and the ministerial meetings at a high political level, and the Committee of the Whole preceding CHOGMs and the Board and Executive Committees at senior official levels. The ICT revolution made it possible to revolutionise this into a mood of connectedness, data dissemination, knowledge sharing of experience and best practices, which would take the Commonwealth convening power, understood hitherto in physical terms, into the unrecognisable dimension of possibility and opportunity. Since 2000, following a decision by Commonwealth Heads of Government, the Commonwealth Secretariat has promoted exchanges of information and collaboration between various Commonwealth agencies in areas that promote ICTs for development in member countries and that contribute towards strengthening the Commonwealth’s values
and goals. In 2005, these efforts were given further impetus with the establishment of a “Commonwealth Connects” Special Fund and Steering Committee representing key Commonwealth agencies active in the ICT sphere, as well as several member governments.

Even as a Governor and High Commissioner, I was mindful of the potential when I persuaded my government to donate £1 million (which generosity I profusely acknowledge again) into the ICT initiative at the Malta CHOGM in 2005 in which I participated. This potential was not fully realised as the use of the budget became atomised in different projects with partner organisations, but as Commonwealth Secretary-General, we converted a working group into the Commonwealth Connects digital platform, for which we obtained the endorsements of the Heads at the CHOGM in Port of Spain in 2009.

The Commonwealth Connects Special Fund has now been exhausted and the Steering Committee decided at its last meeting, in January 2014, to sunset itself and its work. Nevertheless, the work of the Steering Committee in drawing together ministers and officials from member states to pool and disseminate ideas and experience, and to identify needs and resources, can now be carried forward in a broader and more open-ended way by this forum. Strengthening partnerships with Commonwealth organisations and other collaborative projects is the way forward. This experiment to create the platform had already started with an Indian company, Tata Consultancy Services, and other methodologies were explored in the Secretariat until we settled on the cloud-based huddle web platform. The success of the platform quickly demonstrated that this was an idea whose time had come. Within a year of its introduction, more than a hundred communities of practice in the Commonwealth had logged on. Our communications with the Board of Governors became paperless and entirely through electronic means. The electronic internal communication channel intranet (COMSHARE and ARTEMIS) became the channel for internal joined-up information sharing.

ICT provides transformative tools that create game-changing digital pathways for inclusive social progress, equitable economic growth, participatory democracy and responsive governance. The explosive growth of the internet has revolutionised global access to knowledge, networks, business opportunities, expanding markets, transcending national boundaries. Widespread access to social media brings new immediacy to politics and governance, with elevated expectations of transparency and accountability. Ways in which public services can be delivered are changing beyond recognition. This includes instant and remote access to diagnostic tools for health, and educational opportunities not limited by location or infrastructure. The Commonwealth Connects platform enabled me to launch three of the most ambitious interactive web spaces that I wanted to create in the areas of democracy and social development:

i) Commonwealth Electoral Network
ii) Commonwealth Education Hub
iii) Commonwealth Health Hub

These have the potential to become among the largest interactive professional networks in the world, and offer massive opportunities for collaboration, best practices, information, and sharing of resources in secure workspaces designed to answer the needs of specialist practitioners and administrators alike.

i) Commonwealth Electoral Network

Within the Commonwealth, we place a high priority on continually seeking to raise electoral standards. We recognise that the quality of a country’s election is, to a large extent, dependent upon the quality of its election management body (EMB). Where an EMB is
independent, capable and transparent, it can play a crucial role in ensuring the integrity and
credibility of an election, and public and political confidence in it. Our aim is to ensure they
are a force for good, upholders of the highest Commonwealth “gold standard” in electoral
management. Hence, one of my first initiatives as Secretary-General was to create a hub of
election commissioners and heads of election agencies, so they could strengthen each
other's work. It was with this in mind that we established the Commonwealth Electoral
Network (CEN), bringing together national election management bodies of the
Commonwealth. The initiative was endorsed by Heads of Government at the 2009
CHOGM, and the network was officially launched at a pan-Commonwealth conference of
election officials in Accra, Ghana, in May 2010. Our aim through the network has been to
bring together professionals from our EMBs to share experiences and technical knowledge,
provide mutual solidarity, create support mechanisms, and promote good practices through
knowledge and action in the field of election management. We remain confident that the
network can share best practice in areas like voter registration, use of technology in
elections, universal mobilisation of electorates, polling practices, security oversight, media
policy, use of public funds in election processes, accountability of campaign funding and
expenditure, electoral complaints and petitions, and all other aspects of creating a fair and
level playing field. Shared inheritances mean there is much in common when it comes to
institutional arrangements and legal frameworks. This offers special opportunities in the
case of elections for working together. The benefit derived is all the greater because of the
rich diversity encompassed within our 53 member states.

The CEN’s flagship activity is a biennial conference, and it has held three conferences so
far: in Accra in 2010, Toronto in 2012 and Nairobi in 2014. These gatherings bring together
the most senior officials in our EMBs for a series of in-depth discussions on international
best practice, tied to an overarching theme. The Toronto Conference had as its theme
“Twenty-first Century Elections: Technology and Integrity”, while the theme for the
Nairobi Conference was “Managing Elections in the Twenty-first Century: Strengthening
Institutional Capacity and Electoral Integrity”. Besides the biennial conferences, the CEN
has a Steering Committee, which has met annually since 2010, and working groups, which
have looked into various aspects of electioneering, such as voters’ education, voter
registration, vote counting and tabulation, independence of EMBs and the impact of new
media. In July 2013, the Commonwealth Junior Election Professionals (JEP) Initiative was
launched as part of the CEN to train the next generation of electoral administrators. The
CEN itself has been designed, delivered and managed using the advantages conferred by
contemporary technologies. At the Toronto Conference, I launched the Commonwealth’s
first online collaborative workspace, with the CEN securing dedicated online meeting space
on our new secure web-based platform Commonwealth Connects. The Commonwealth
Connects workspace allows electoral commissions in all our member countries to be in
constant contact, to stay informed and to develop gold standards of best practice together.
The secure workspace is accessible to invited members; and it provides an international
resource centre designed to support best practice and develop expert knowledge for use by
the CEN. The workspace allows the CEN to continue developing concepts and strategic
proposals beyond and between the biennial meetings. It is intuitive to use and can be
accessed through mobile devices. The CEN is now one of more than 100 accredited
professional networks and partner organisations that manage projects, share knowledge
and co-ordinate events using Commonwealth Connects.

ii) Commonwealth Education Hub

The Commonwealth Education Hub (formerly CommonKnowledge) offers a knowledge-
sharing platform for education professionals and policy-makers from across the
Commonwealth to develop effective policy-making, improve practice and help countries
achieve their education goals. The aim is to create a collaborative approach to tackling challenges in the education sector by allowing members to look up information, discuss timely and critical issues, share solutions and best practices, identify expertise, explore and initiate partnerships, develop projects and learn about latest developments. The Commonwealth Education Hub ("the Hub") is governed by two primary features:

I. A Community of Practice, which is a moderated virtual peer-to-peer network that Commonwealth educational professionals can join as members by subscribing to a moderated mail group and participate thereon via email. It is moderated by a two-person Facilitation Team with education experience and expertise, and can provide desk research support.

II. A website, which serves as the virtual home and online presence for the Community of Practice and contains information, documented knowledge and other curated resources that are relevant to education professionals across the Commonwealth and that focus on issues critical for a high performing education system. These include quality, teaching and learning, teacher development and performance, skills and pathways, global qualification standards, ICT integration in education and training, and opportunities for economic growth and investment.

The high level of participation in online discussions on issues such as financing quality education and supporting the Sustainable Development Goals shows that knowledge and information can be exchanged globally at a minimal cost. The discussion on the use of ICT in learning, for instance, received contributions from Canada, Saint Lucia, Kenya, Samoa, India, the UK, Rwanda, and Antigua and Barbuda. The Hub also plays an important role in connecting experts from other key international institutions, such as UNESCO. It serves as a space to keep participants of the triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEMs) connected between and beyond meetings, with its discussions, thus, also reflecting CCEM priorities. At some point, members will also be able to access the Education Hub’s Expert Referral Service.

The Hub was launched by the Commonwealth Secretariat at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in The Bahamas in June 2015. Membership of the Education Hub is free and open to all Commonwealth education stakeholders. It currently includes policy-makers at central, regional and local levels; researchers and academics; officials of foundations and donor funding agencies; professionals in NGOs and advocacy groups; private sector professionals in the education field; and education administrators and teachers’ groups. The Hub provides support through four key services:

I. Connection service: The Hub links together over 650 education policy-makers and professionals from across 53 Commonwealth countries through the Community of Practice mail group. Beyond being connected virtually, members have the opportunity to interact in person during periodic meetings organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

II. Consultation service: Once linked through the mail group, members can consult their peers for knowledge resources, best practices, comment on draft research or policy papers, programmes and projects, and participate in virtual discussions or debates. Contributions are synthesised by the Facilitation Team, with additional desk research, into a knowledge product called a “Discussion Summary” that is searchable and accessible through the Community Discussion page.

III. Collection service: The Hub also offers access to a curated collection of digital knowledge resources that include good practices, select publications, research, tools and guides, special reports, country report cards, as well as “Discussion Summaries”.

IV. Collaboration service: Additionally, the Hub supports collaboration by sharing information; creating networks; linking people for research, resources and innovation; and commissioning special joint initiatives. It offers tools for team collaboration, such
as access to a secure online team workspace, via the Secretariat’s Commonwealth Connects platform, with the password-protected space enabling group members to store and edit version-controlled documents, and use other collaborative tools such as whiteboards, discussion boards, calendars and member profiles. This service is primarily available to members who wish to form smaller groups to collaborate on joint initiatives.

The Commonwealth Education Hub will provide support and engagement throughout the policy cycle: advocacy, assessment, development and implementation.

iii) Commonwealth Health Hub

The Commonwealth Health Hub (formerly CommonHealth) is a secure cloud-based platform that endeavours to provide an authoritative source of health information – a virtual “one-stop-shop” – and facilitate networking, communication, collaboration and learning best practices for healthcare professionals from across the Commonwealth. It links together Commonwealth communities of healthcare professionals and policy-makers, and allows members to access online communities, look up information, discuss timely and critical issues, share solutions and best practices, identify expertise, explore potential partnerships, create expert groups, develop projects and learn about latest developments.

The Commonwealth Health Hub (“the Hub”) is governed by two primary features:

I. A Community of Practice, which is a moderated virtual peer-to-peer network that Commonwealth health professionals can join as members by subscribing to a moderated mail group and participate thereon via email. It is moderated by a two-person Facilitation Team with health experience and expertise, and can provide desk research support.

II. A website, which serves as the virtual home and online presence for the Community of Practice and contains information, documented knowledge and other curated resources that are relevant to health professionals across the Commonwealth and that focus on issues critical for a high-performing health system. These include universal health coverage (UHC) and, in particular, non-communicable diseases.

The Community of Practice will also enable participants of the annual Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) to remain connected between meetings and continue conversations beyond and between them, resulting in the discussions of the community, thus, often being aligned with CHMM priorities. At some point, members will also be able to access the Health Hub’s Expert Referral Service.

The Commonwealth Health Hub provides support through four key services – Connection, Consultation, Collaboration and Collection – available via the Service Centre of the website. These services shall entail:

I. Connection service: The Hub links together over 450 health professionals and policy-makers from across the Commonwealth through the Community of Practice mail group. Members are not just connected virtually, but also have the opportunity to interact in person during periodic meetings organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

II. Consultation service: Once linked through the mail group, members can consult their peers for knowledge resources, best practices, comment on draft research or policy papers, programmes and projects, and participate in virtual discussions or debates. Contributions are synthesised by the Facilitation Team, with additional desk research, into a knowledge product called a “Discussion Summary” that is searchable and accessible through the Community Discussion page.
III. Collection service: The Hub also offers access to a curated collection of digital knowledge resources that include good practices, select publications, research, tools and guides, special reports, country health profiles, as well as “Discussion Summaries”.

IV. Collaboration service: Additionally, the Hub supports collaboration by sharing information, linking people, commissioning special joint initiatives and offering the tool for team collaborations. This service is available to members who wish to form smaller groups to collaborate on joint initiatives. It provides access to a secure online team workspace through the Commonwealth Secretariat’s “Commonwealth Connects” platform, with the password-protected space enabling group members to store and edit version-controlled documents, and use other collaborative tools such as whiteboards, discussion boards, calendars and member profiles.

The strengths of the Commonwealth Secretariat in internal governance did not go unrecognised. Most notably, it was ranked first in the Internal Justice Systems of International Organisations Legitimacy Index in 2015. The index was launched in 2014 by an International Chambers of Barristers, Bretton Woods Law, and has been published by the International Administrative Law Centre of Excellence. The COE-IJS Legitimacy Index describes itself as ‘an innovative quantitative assessment tool designed to offer a comprehensive picture of the internal justice systems of international organisations around the world’. It ‘scores and ranks international organisations based on how compliant their internal justice systems are with the criteria set by customary international human rights law... [and it also] examines the law applicable to the employment related disputes of an international organisation and the law relating to the internal justice system of such an organisation...’ (International Administrative Law Centre of Excellence 2015, p.6). The 2015 Index ranked 28 international organisations, including the EU, WHO, World Bank, IMF, UN, UNESCO and the European Organisation for Nuclear Research. It used four weighted indicators to reveal the extent to which international principles are being observed:
1. Structure of the internal justice system
2. Applicable law and clarity thereof
3. First instance of litigation
4. Second instance of litigation

In the individual factor rankings, the Commonwealth Secretariat was ranked first along with the EU, OECD and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) when it came to Factor 1 (structure of the internal justice system). When it came to Factor 2 (applicable law and clarity thereof), the Commonwealth Secretariat was again ranked first, but this time alongside the IMF. In the case of Factor 3 (first instance of litigation), the Commonwealth shared the first place with the EU, while in the case of Factor 4 (second instance of litigation), it attained the second place behind only the World Bank. In the overall rankings, the Commonwealth Secretariat – as previously noted – was ranked first.

The Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General Gary Dunn put forward the following statement:

‘It is imperative that international organisations provide their employees with the right of access to justice that complies with international standards; a right that is implicitly contained in both international administrative law and international human rights law. The result of the Index is extremely positive for the Secretariat and displays its strong commitment to providing its employees with an effective internal justice mechanism.’

(Commonwealth Secretariat 2013f)
Kamlesh Sharma echoed the same sentiments. Driven by the philosophy that ‘you have to respect yourself, for if you don’t, nobody will respect you’, an emphasis on internal governance had always been vital for Sharma as Commonwealth Secretary-General. ‘There is not a single case’, he reiterated, ‘where you don’t respect yourself, but others respect you, and ensuring the highest standards in internal governance is key to unlocking one’s capacity to respect oneself and, thus, also be respected by others’. When asked about Sharma’s legacy in this regard, Amitav Banerji, the recently retired Political Director of the Commonwealth Secretariat, noted, ‘Kamlesh Sharma can take credit for the struggle to approve the new Strategic Plan and for the scientifically-based managerial approach to management now in place’ (Banerji 2015).
11. CONVENING POWER

‘As Commonwealth Secretary-General, it has been my privilege in the past eight years to visit every one of our 53 member states. I have seen the attraction of the Commonwealth connection: the exceptional regard that it enjoys, and the sense of kinship and affinity that informs it. There is a bond within the Commonwealth that sets us apart...

The Commonwealth provides avenues for working together that help the larger family of Commonwealth organisations, which is unique in its richness and in its contribution and diversity... In many different ways, and at many different levels, ideas and knowledge are shared in the Commonwealth family across the globe in a spirit of goodwill and partnership.

Taking strength from its diversity, the Commonwealth succeeds in creating common ground on which to stand together in answering the challenges of our times. Mutual support, with respect and understanding for the dignity and contribution of all, gives potency to the acclaimed convening power of the Commonwealth.’

So shared Kamalesh Sharma in his address on Commonwealth Day in March 2016, his final Commonwealth Day Message as Commonwealth Secretary-General. The Commonwealth, as he often pointed out, was a modest organisation, but distinctive in its being a microcosm of the world, with member states drawn from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Pacific. ‘The deeds of the Commonwealth, thus, often served as the prototype’, he often said. ‘Anything the Commonwealth agrees on is valuable as a global product’. Its greatest strength lay not simply in its diversity, but in its convening power – which enabled it to harness that diversity to emerge as a force for global good.

CHOGMs

Nowhere did this convening power manifest more grandly than in the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), held once every two years since 1971, that emerged out of the biennial Commonwealth Prime Ministers’ Conferences held since 1944. Since the first CHOGM held in Singapore in January 1971, CHOGMs have been convened across the Commonwealth, from Canada and Jamaica to India and Australia, and from the United Kingdom and Malta to Uganda and South Africa. During a session on the Office of the Secretary General at the seminar ‘The heartbeat of a modern Commonwealth? The Commonwealth Secretariat 1965–2013’ convened at Marlborough House in London in June 2013, Stuart Mole pointed out that while consultation is the lifeblood of the Commonwealth, the biennial CHOGM is the heartbeat of that consultation (Office of the Secretary-General 2013). Likewise, in 2014, Sir Ronald Sanders, currently the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary for Antigua and Barbuda to the United States and formerly Antigua’s High Commissioner in London and a member and rapporteur of the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, described the CHOGM as ‘the Commonwealth’s very special mechanism that set it apart from any other multilateral or international grouping...
the essence of the Commonwealth’s cohesion and the substance of inter-governmental cooperation’ (Sanders 2014, p.38).

The biennial CHOGM presented Commonwealth Heads of Government and the Commonwealth Secretary-General with the opportunity to build deeper relationships with one another, discuss issues of national and international concern, and explore how they could collectively address these issues. While CHOGMs continue to be held every two years, much has changed about their structure since the first CHOGM was convened in Singapore. The duration of the CHOGM has reduced from around two weeks to two-and-a-half days. The Retreat is no longer the occasion, as envisaged by Pierre Trudeau at the time of its introduction in 1973, when Heads gathered at the CHOGM were taken to a different venue so they could build relationships and engage in discussions among themselves without officials lurking around; instead, as Amitav Banerji observed, it was now the major part of the meeting (Commonwealth Secretariat 2009b, p.27). Furthermore, the addition of the Commonwealth People’s Forum, the Commonwealth Youth Forum and the Commonwealth Business Forum since the Edinburgh CHOGM in 1997, and that of the Commonwealth Women’s Forum at the Malta CHOGM of 2005, testify to the role of the CHOGM in enabling not just Heads of Government, but various constituencies of stakeholders – including governments, civil society organisations, private sector organisations and youth – to network.

Today, the CHOGM remains the heartbeat of the Commonwealth; and the relationship between the Commonwealth Secretary-General and the Commonwealth Heads of Government, as Stuart Mole emphasised, is still crucially important for its success (Office of the Secretary-General 2013). It is this delicate relationship to which Sharma paid particular attention, both at and beyond the CHOGMs (Ibid). It was this relationship, after all, that often determined how productive a CHOGM – or for that matter, how wide the mandate of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Secretary-General – might be. Speaking of his role as Secretary-General at the Centenary Conference of The Round Table in 2010, Sharma stated that his immediate duty was to the then 54 Heads of Commonwealth Governments and, more generally, to the wider Commonwealth family, especially the many who lived on less than US$1 a day (Commonwealth Secretariat 2009b, p.17). On a later occasion, he explained:

‘The CHOGMs were unique in the degree of trust the Heads of Government placed in the Secretary-General, and it is the duty of the Secretary-General to prove himself or herself worthy of that trust. The Heads generally laid no markers, don’t circumscribe you and give you freedom. One principle to which I adhered was that if you have a big idea, you ought to take it to the Heads first, as speaking to my predecessors, I figured that if some ideas did not work, it was because the ideas came from the Secretary-General himself, rather than involving the Heads as active participants. I found that it proved more efficient the other way around, where the Secretary-General asks the Heads if they want this, that or the other done, following which the Secretary-General does it in keeping with the Heads’ request.’

That, to Sharma, did not mean shirking initiative or responsibility by subscribing to a code of perpetual obsequiousness, as it might seem. Rather, it meant recognising that often the most effective way of securing certain ends as Secretary-General was to find a way of having the Heads ask you to work towards the same outcomes, which you had sought to work towards in the first place. Consequently, the request, coming from the Heads themselves, is less likely to face rejection or obstruction from the Heads, ministers or senior officials. Thus, this modus operandi – which might be misconstrued as a deference cultivated over a long career in the Indian Foreign Service – may actually have been more of a calculated goal-oriented tactic that Sharma honed over his many years negotiating in the multilateral arena. It was also a tactic that Sharma appeared to have found useful in the context of the consensus-based, rather than
vote-driven, Commonwealth, where the convening of diverse state actors, with various interests, required that the Secretary-General be effective at cultivating trust within all quarters and building consensus between them to achieve desired outcomes. Accordingly, this tactic would often be used by Sharma as part of his CHOGM strategy: to instigate an idea ahead of the CHOGM, with the objective of it being brought up and considered favourably by the Heads at the CHOGM and assigned to his mandate thereafter for execution over the next years. A quick overview of the CHOGMs that marked Sharma’s tenure will offer further insights, both into Sharma’s role and into the convening power of the Commonwealth represented at each summit.

It was at the Kampala CHOGM of 2007, hosted by President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, that Sharma was selected as Commonwealth Secretary-General. The CHOGM was attended by representatives of 48 of the 53 Commonwealth member states, with 36 countries represented by their Head of State or Head of Government. In his acceptance speech, Sharma said somewhat candidly, ‘The Commonwealth is a great global good. I have always believed that, and it will be an honour and a privilege to serve this great international institution’. The next CHOGM was held in Port of Spain in 2009 and was hosted by Prime Minister Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago. There were representatives of 49 countries at this meeting, with 34 represented by their Head of State or Government. It was at this CHOGM that Heads accepted Rwanda as a member; reinstated Pakistan in the Councils of the Commonwealth; endorsed the Commonwealth Partnership Platform Portal (CP3); and discussed the political situation in Zimbabwe and Fiji, the territorial issues of Belize, Cyprus and Guyana, and other issues such as terrorism, piracy, corruption, human trafficking, climate change, international financial centres and reform of international institutions. It was the first CHOGM to be held since Sharma assumed office in 2008 and the first at which the abovementioned tactic was evidently put to work.

When it came to Zimbabwe, the Commonwealth Heads of Government did not wish to discuss the issue, so, prior to the CHOGM, Sharma went to South Africa to advocate the inclusion of Zimbabwe in the discussions. The Secretariat had already maintained ties with the Zimbabwean government, and Sharma felt that if the country was keen on reapplying for membership at a suitable point, its readmission would be welcomed. Similarly, at the Port of Spain CHOGM, the Heads welcomed the Marlborough House Statement on the Reform of International Institutions that had already been agreed upon in advance by the group of 11 Commonwealth leaders established by Sharma as one of his first initiatives less than three months after assuming office in April 2008. A seasoned diplomat, Sharma was also aware that the proximity of the CHOGM in Port of Spain, 27–29 November 2009, to the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen, 7–18 December 2009 (‘the Copenhagen Summit’), opened up the possibility for the Commonwealth to serve as ‘a great global good’ in the climate change negotiations seeking to secure a global agreement in reducing carbon emissions.

For Sharma, if the Commonwealth could harness its convening power and consensus-building potential to steer its members to work towards a successful outcome at Copenhagen, it would render the CHOGM a strategically important platform for the key players of the Copenhagen Summit. Besides ensuring climate change was one of the main issues on the CHOGM agenda, Sharma discussed the idea of a global fund with Gordon Brown and suggested that key players of the Copenhagen Summit be invited to address the biennial Commonwealth summit. Thereafter, Brown invited Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen of Denmark and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France to address Commonwealth leaders, an invitation both accepted. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon also accepted the invitation to address the CHOGM. ‘It could be a springboard for a successful Copenhagen’, Brown remarked. ‘It will prove the worth of the Commonwealth, that we can bring together countries to work together
for a common solution’ (Porter 2009). Likewise, the host of the summit, Prime Minister Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago, observed, ‘In this way, the Commonwealth in Port of Spain in November could ensure success for the UN in Copenhagen in December’. This message was also sent out by Her Majesty The Queen, who said: ‘On this, the eve of the UN Copenhagen summit on climate change, the Commonwealth has an opportunity to lead once more’.

At the CHOGM, Brown proposed the setting up of the US$10-billion global fund, to which the UK would contribute £800 million, to kick start the Copenhagen climate change process. Half the funds were to go to developing countries to help them reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change (BBC News 2009). The proposed Copenhagen Launch Fund received the support not only of the foreign leaders present, but also of the Commonwealth Heads, as was evident in the ‘Port of Spain Climate Change Consensus: The Commonwealth Climate Change Declaration’ that the Commonwealth leaders adopted. The Heads sought that the fast-start fund focus on the most vulnerable countries and provide immediate fast-disbursing assistance with a dedicated system for small island states and associated low-lying coastal states of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) of at least 10 per cent of the fund’. This concept of a Climate Fund was instrumental to the setting up of the Green Climate Fund (GCF) at the Copenhagen Summit as a mechanism within the framework of the UNFCCC, which assisted developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices in relation to climate change. As Sharma recounted:

‘In my very first CHOGM, taking advantage of the fact that ten days later, the Copenhagen Climate Conference would bring world leaders together to address the pressing topic of climate change, I decided that the Commonwealth should make a bold statement. We invited the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, President Rasmussen of Denmark and President Sarkozy of France to the CHOGM, the first time in the history of the biennial summits that the UN Secretary-General and Foreign Heads of Government would be present. Until this day, Ban Ki-Moon repeats that the [Green Climate] Fund was the only major outcome of the Copenhagen Summit, and the fund was a Commonwealth proposal.’

Another major outcome of the Port of Spain CHOGM in 2009 was that the Heads of Government adopted the Trinidad and Tobago ‘Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles’. They also agreed that there should be greater consideration of how the role of CMAG could be strengthened, so as to enable the group to deal with the full range of serious or persistent violations of the Harare Principles. They took into account the decision of CMAG ‘to constitute a working group of its own member states to look into how its work may be further refined and elaborated to make it more effective, in consultation with other member states, and make proposals on this matter to the wider membership’. They also agreed that this examination would only deal with matters falling under CMAG’s existing mandate, and that any proposals for going further than that mandate would be referred to Heads (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012a). Sharma worked on nine minutes, mainly situations which would constitute a serious or persistent violation of Commonwealth values, and took them to the CHOGM, whereafter they were discussed by the foreign ministers within CMAG.

All of these instances demonstrate how a Commonwealth Secretary-General could harness the convening power of the Commonwealth, both to address difficult internal or critical issues and to amplify the voice and influence of the Commonwealth in the world at large. What a review of CHOGMs also reveals is the points of mutual or shared concern that could be identified among and by Commonwealth member states that the Commonwealth, through its convening power, was able to get leaders from different regions of the world – with different political and economic backgrounds, priorities and challenges – to come together and discuss.
This led not only to an astonishingly wide array of issues receiving high-level attention at a collective level within the Commonwealth, but also to the Commonwealth’s ability to elicit statements of shared values and plans for collective action from its very diverse members. At the Perth CHOGM in 2011, hosted by Prime Minister Julia Gillard of Australia and Sharma’s second CHOGM as Commonwealth Secretary-General, Commonwealth Heads considered the 106 recommendations put forward by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) in their report *A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform*, including recommendations relating to the adoption of a Commonwealth Charter outlining the association’s core values and the appointment of a commissioner for democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Of the remaining recommendations, Heads agreed to adopting 30 recommendations without reservation, and 12 further recommendations, subject to consideration of financial implications, and asking the Task Force of Ministers for more detailed advice on 43 other recommendations as a basis for further decision; 11 were deemed inappropriate for adoption (Commonwealth Secretariat 2011d). At this CHOGM, Heads discussed at length issues as diverse as small states, climate change, aid effectiveness, democracy, good governance, sustainable management of natural resources, human rights, youth empowerment, gender equality, migration, human trafficking, piracy and cyber crime. They agreed on the Perth Declaration of Food Security Principles; strengthened the Commonwealth Network of Election Management Bodies; and welcomed the Commonwealth Connects portal (Sharma 2011a). It was at the Perth CHOGM that Heads also adopted the report by CMAG that proposed how the role of CMAG and the Commonwealth Secretary-General might be strengthened regarding upholding Commonwealth values (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012a).

In his Foreword to the CMAG report, Sharma noted:

‘Commonwealth Heads of Government established [CMAG] in 1995 to act as the custodian of the Commonwealth’s fundamental political values, addressing country situations where serious or persistent violations of Commonwealth values have occurred. Leaders agreed on a series of measures that the group should take in response to such violations, aimed at the swift restoration of democracy and constitutional rule. As such, CMAG has supported the strengthening of democracy in member countries and has enhanced the Commonwealth’s profile on the international stage. By 2009, Commonwealth leaders recognised that the bar needed to be raised further – both in defining the Commonwealth’s core values and in achieving adherence to them. At the CHOGM in 2009 in Trinidad and Tobago, leaders adopted the *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles* as our new template, for which CMAG is now the guardian. Leaders also recognised in 2009 that CMAG needed to play a more constructive and proactive role in assisting member countries to uphold our shared political values, and thus that the mandate and working practices of the group would require review and further elaboration. The adoption by Heads of Government at the 2011 Perth CHOGM of CMAG’s recommendations on strengthening its role was a critical and timely step forward for the Commonwealth in its promotion of the values of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. CMAG’s review has also demonstrated that Commonwealth governments have listened carefully to the voices of those Commonwealth citizens who have called for a more effective and engaged CMAG... CMAG, 16 years on from its inception, is now a stronger and potentially more effective body...’ (Ibid)

The next CHOGM, held in Colombo in 2013, proved to be the most testing hour of Sharma’s tenure. For many Commonwealth observers, the related crisis may have marked ‘the lowest point in the history of the association so far’ (Sanders 2014, p.23). The UN Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about the human rights situation in Sri Lanka. Respected human rights watchdogs and international media outlets raised concerns about the decision to convene a CHOGM there. Three Heads
of Government – those of Canada, India and Mauritius – publicly stated that they would not attend the CHOGM. The Prime Minister of Mauritius withdrew his government’s offer to host the 2015 CHOGM on being told by the Secretary-General that he had to be present in Colombo to be accepted as the host (Ibid, p.24). The controversy, moreover, led to Sharma being seen as the man responsible for allowing the Commonwealth to face such reputational and integrity risks.

The reality, as Sir Ronald Sanders explained, was more complex:

‘Sri Lanka had been scheduled to host the 2011 CHOGM, but before the 2009 Summit... Secretary-General Sharma had recognised that Sri Lanka’s hosting of the CHOGM would pose a problem for the Commonwealth’s believability as a values-based organisation. Therefore, in mid-2009, he persuaded President Rajapaksa to opt out of his government’s offer to host the meeting, and he wrote to all leaders on behalf of Rajapaksha saying that Sri Lanka had withdrawn given its pressing post-war preoccupations... However, this did not play well among Sri Lanka’s ruling political directorate... they persuaded the president to change his mind. Thus, at the 2009 CHOGM, the Sri Lanka delegation demanded to be reinstated as a forthcoming host... [and] with a coterie of supporters... demanded Sharma’s resignation, linking their demand to [his] efforts to get [CMAG] to reform itself and to widen its mandate...’ (Ibid, p.29)

While the Heads of Government rejected the call for Sharma’s resignation, they came up with a new formula of announcing three CHOGM venues in advance – Australia in 2011, Sri Lanka in 2013 and Mauritius in 2015. As Sir Ronald observed:

‘Essentially... governments ducked the issue of Sri Lanka hosting a summit meeting and gave the Secretary-General a basket to carry water... It would have been quite impossible in the circumstances for Sharma again to seek to move the 2013 CHOGM from Sri Lanka in the absence of strong expressions so to do from a majority of Commonwealth governments.’ (Ibid, p.29)

The controversy did not end there. Canada, as a member of CMAG, had tried repeatedly to place Sri Lanka on the CMAG agenda, but its efforts had been in vain. Hence, when it became known that the Secretary-General had withheld from CMAG’s consideration opinions by two distinguished Commonwealth lawyers that indicated the unconstitutionality of the removal from office of the Chief Justice of Sri Lanka, Canada grew all the more agitated. Even after the Secretary-General explained to its foreign minister that ‘the material was commissioned in confidence for the purposes of the Secretary-General’s good offices (in Sri Lanka)’ and that ‘any opinion solicited by the Secretary-General can either be protected or public in nature; but not both at the same time’, the Canadian government complained that the materials should have been given to CMAG, as withholding them affected its decisions on Sri Lanka.

For Sir Ronald, the problem arose in no small part as the Sri Lankan president, by virtue of being host of the CHOGM, would also be the Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth for the next two years. The problem could have been avoided, he argued, if the position of Chair-in-Office – introduced in 1999 – had been abolished, as had been recommended in the report put forward by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) established by the Secretary-General in 2009 to ‘undertake an examination of options for reform in order to bring the Commonwealth’s many institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of cooperation and partnership’ (Ibid, p.30).

Like his predecessors, Sharma too sought to expand and establish the scope of his office in relation to the promotion and protection of Commonwealth values. However, his logic
appears to have been that efforts by an international organisation such as the Commonwealth to promote and protect human rights can be better advanced through the private, behind-the-scenes, high-level and direct engagement of the Secretary-General with the Heads of Government or ministers, rather than the more aggressive and confrontational public reprimands that some might have wished to hear. In his view, by not publicly embarrassing a Head of Government through caustic public statements or referring them to CMAG to be placed on its agenda until the Secretary-General himself felt that all means for private engagement had been exhausted or had unsatisfactory results, a Commonwealth Secretary-General could gain greater influence with the leader so as to make positive changes through private persuasion. The right of access to the Heads of Government, together with the ability to refer a country to CMAG as a last resort, gave the Secretary-General ample scope for constructive engagement, as when there was a problem, ‘the Secretary-General can often actually do something about it’, but ‘if the Secretary-General makes strident calls, then he or she loses influence’.

Sharma shared that he very much welcomed the occasions when non-governmental bodies publicly raised concerns about human rights issues, as not only did it reflect the health of civil society, but also it drew the necessary attention to the crises, providing him with the opportunity to express his concerns to the parties concerned. However, for Sharma, even when it came to a priority area such as the promotion and protection of human rights, the Commonwealth Secretariat had to capitalise on its assets as an international organisation and allow human rights bodies, whether governmental or non-governmental, to act and build on their own respective strengths. Referring back to the controversial decision to allow Colombo to host the CHOGM, Sharma shared that when he, as Secretary-General, said to the President of Sri Lanka that he wished to observe the elections in the state, Mahinda Rajapaksa accepted his request, because he could not say no after the Secretary-General accorded him respect during his time as Chairperson-in-Office. Even his opponents respected the Secretary-General for it, and many improvements could be ushered in as a result. Sharma’s intervention in Guyana and Pakistan also had positive results.

The final CHOGM of Sharma’s tenure was the Malta CHOGM of 2015, at which the position of Commonwealth Chair-in-Office passed to Prime Minister Joseph Muscat of Malta and where Baroness Scotland of Asthal would be selected as Sharma’s successor as Commonwealth Secretary-General. With groups such as ISIL and Al-Qaeda still presenting grave threats to international peace and security, and with the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris commencing right after the CHOGM, countering violent extremism and terrorism and combating climate change understandably emerged as two key points of discussion. Similarly, other topical issues, such as migration, human trafficking and sustainable development, also received collective attention. Sharma himself went to the CHOGM equipped with final proposals that had grown out of the initial ideas approved in Colombo and that he had already presented to the Heads prior. He mentioned:

‘Whether it came to the Small States Trade Finance Facility, or the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub, or the Commonwealth Centre of Excellence for Small States, all of the plans and proposals had already been sent to the Heads, and they had said, “Alright”. All of these were accordingly going forward at the Malta CHOGM at the Heads’ request; therefore, none were foreseen to be put on the shelf, so no time wasted.’

The outcomes of the Malta CHOGM have already been discussed in great detail in other chapters, so there is little need for them to be reproduced here. Suffice it to say, the proposals met with success, with pledges of financial backing as well. What might be worth pointing out here is the slight reform of the CHOGM that was ushered in at Malta. In the words of Sharma:
'There was widespread concern among many Heads that the CHOGM may have been losing its way and needs to be tightened up. I myself felt that with due attention paid to the usefulness of association, there should be a reform of the CHOGM. I met Prime Minister Muscat and presented our conclusions, advising that the size of the communiqué be shortened this year to half the size of the previous communiqué. I wanted it to be even shorter, but with 53 countries sitting around and wanting to have their points heard, that was going to be more difficult. A second important reform was the tightening of the Retreat to Heads only or the cabinet ministers with power to take decisions on behalf of the Heads. This was also done. A third change was that the Retreat be tightened to one day, as the spill over to the next Sunday morning generally dissipated the impact of the Saturday meeting.'

**Ministerial meetings**

Apart from the CHOGMs, the Commonwealth also convenes ministerial meetings of education, health, law, foreign, finance, women’s affairs, youth, sport and tourism ministers. The triennial Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEMs) are the second largest meetings of ministers in the Commonwealth calendar, following the CHOGMs. It was in 1959 that Commonwealth Education Ministers first met in Oxford, where they inaugurated the Commonwealth Scholarship & Fellowship Plan (CSFP) – an intra-Commonwealth network of postgraduate study opportunities that counts more than 25,000 Commonwealth citizens, including Heads of Government, as its alumni. Commonwealth education ministers have met every three years since, often with the Commonwealth Secretary-General also present.

Sharma’s first CCEM as Commonwealth Secretary-General was the 17th CCEM, which was hosted by the Government of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur in June 2009. Over 1500 delegates from 40 Commonwealth member states, with 37 delegations led by their education ministers, attended the meeting, which had as its theme ‘Making Connections and Building Partnerships: Towards and Beyond Global Goals and Targets’. Discussing its outcomes in his 2011 message, Sharma observed,

‘When our programme for the 2009–12 triennium was set by Commonwealth education ministers at the Kuala Lumpur meeting in 2009, it defined girls’ access to education and completion as one of our focus areas. Comprehensive provision of quality education for girls in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa is a priority in our work at the Commonwealth Secretariat. Gender-related work in schools also encompasses initiatives to tackle boys’ underachievement... One of the comparative advantages enjoyed by the Commonwealth Secretariat lies in our ability to cross-connect and open doors to facilitate access. In the course of my travels, in addition to meeting ministers and senior government officials, I often spend time with bankers and the business community. Being able to link them to youth training and empowerment schemes where they can mobilise skills from the private sector to support mentoring and employment training is a key contribution to the economy and society.’ (Sharma 2011e)

Sharma attended and addressed the 18th CCEM that was held in Pailles, Mauritius, in August 2012. The conference was attended by delegations from 39 countries, 34 of which were led by education ministers. The Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius, Dr Ahmed Rashid Beebeejaun, opened the meeting; the Mauritian Minister of Education and Human Resources, Dr Vasant K Bunwaree, served as its chair as host minister; and the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, Dr Kenny D Anthony, presented the keynote address on the theme ‘Not Money but Education – Valuing Human Development in the Face of Financial Crisis’. In a 2013-address, Sharma shared, ‘In their communiqué, ministers went on to note that, ‘unless robust advocacy for the pivotal role of education post-2015 – in the economy, for society, for democracy and for development – is made, there is a risk that it might lose its place in the global priorities’. He added:
‘It was therefore with a great sense of urgency and collective responsibility that a Ministerial Working Group was established, with representation from all regions of the Commonwealth, to define Commonwealth priorities for education within the global development framework that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) targets post-2015. Following a process of consultation, and a meeting at Marlborough House in December 2012, the group’s recommendations concerning education on behalf of the Commonwealth were advanced through UK Prime Minister, David Cameron, Co-Chair of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel advising on the global development framework beyond 2015. We received clear confirmation that this Commonwealth contribution helped practically to shape the global discourse on the post-2015 world we want.’ (Sharma 2013c)

The 19th CCEM was convened in Nassau, The Bahamas, in June 2015, with the theme ‘Quality Education for Equitable Development: Performance, Paths and Productivity – 3Ps’. Prime Minister Perry Christie of The Bahamas opened the conference; the host minister, Jerome K Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology, chaired it, and Secretary-General Sharma delivered his address during the opening ceremony. Ministers noted that the Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group had contributed significantly to the education component of the SDGs, considered within the national context of each country; and they also endorsed the Incheon Declaration, emphasising the key role of Education for Sustainable Development and noting that greater contributions could still be made to the process of finalising the SDGs in New York in September 2015. The conference also saw the official inclusion of a specific forum for small states (The Commonwealth 2015). Sharma also launched the Education Hub at this meeting, which he described as a ‘virtual one-stop-shop knowledge service for education professionals and planners’.

The annual Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) is convened in Geneva, Switzerland, generally on the eve of the annual World Health Assembly. Commonwealth health ministers review case studies and consult health experts from across the Commonwealth to address ways to improve access to quality, affordable healthcare. The CHMMs provided, in Sharma’s own words, ‘an annual opportunity for our member states to share perspectives, develop partnerships, and share practical experience to strengthen public health systems and healthcare for citizens’. Commonwealth ministers first met in Edinburgh in 1965 for the inaugural Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting and the Commonwealth Medical Conference. In subsequent years, CHMMs were convened on a triennial basis, with meetings in Uganda in 1968, Mauritius in 1971, Sri Lanka in 1974, New Zealand in 1977, Tanzania in 1980, Canada in 1983, The Bahamas in 1986, Australia in 1989, Cyprus in 1992, South Africa in 1995, Barbados in 1998 and New Zealand in 2001. They also met annually in Geneva on the eve of the annual World Health Assembly. From 2003, the triennial meetings gave way to annual CHMMs in Geneva. The power to convene ministers, experts and other stakeholders annually to address a wide range of important and timely issues relating to health was yet another – often unsung – strength of the Commonwealth.

The various themes of the CHMMs under Sharma included:
2008: E-Health
2009: Health and Climate Change
2010: The Commonwealth and the Health MDGs by 2015
2011: Non-Communicable Diseases – A Priority for the Commonwealth
2012: Linking Non-Communicable and Communicable Diseases
2013: Mental Health, Towards Economic and Social Inclusion
2014: Post 2015-Health Agenda: Strengthening Health Policies and Systems
2015: Universal Health Coverage
For Sharma, as he observed during the course of the 23rd CHMM in 2011, ‘The Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings are the Commonwealth at its best. They bring together talent and expertise that can make all the difference as to how we move forward on topics that will make life better for the poor and marginalised’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015g).

Then, there are the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meetings (CLMMs) that are convened triennially. In recent decades, CLMMs have been held in Kuala Lumpur in 1996, Port of Spain in 1999, Kingstown in 2002, Accra in 2005 and, during Sharma’s tenure, in Edinburgh in 2008, Sydney in 2011 and Gaborone in 2014. As Sharma observed, ‘The Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting is unique in the legal calendar. It is the only high-level event on the international stage that facilitates information sharing, best practice and collaboration among law ministers and attorneys-general from both developing and developed countries from every continent in the world who share a common legal tradition’.

It was at the Sydney CLMM that Sharma signed the Memorandum of Understanding formalising the strategic partnership between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the International Criminal Court, which has existed in some form since the court was set up in 2002 (Sharma 2011f). Addressing the Gaborone CLMM, Sharma noted, ‘We can rightly feel a sense of achievement when we reflect on the innovative work and co-operation between our member states on so many crucial aspects of justice, jurisprudence and the rule of law – and above all on the separation of powers, which is central to our Commonwealth understanding of how democracy, development and respect for diversity are protected and advanced’. While the CLMMs were instrumental, Sharma observed how there was ‘extensive contact at many levels in the field of law within the Commonwealth; shared affiliations spread wide and common traditions run deep’. He added: ‘The practical impact of this was exemplified in the way in which four Commonwealth civil society organisations working together – the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, Commonwealth Legal Education Association, Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association – were instrumental in giving us the Latimer House Principles.’ (Sharma 2014b)

In addition, there are the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meetings held every year since 1965 and before the annual meetings of the IMF/World Bank since 2010; Foreign Ministers Meetings held once in Colombo in 1950 and then annually alongside the UN General Assembly in New York since 2002; Women’s Affairs Ministers Meetings held triennially since 1985; Youth Ministers Meetings held quadrennially since 1992; and Sports Ministers Meetings held biennially in the margins of the Commonwealth or Olympic Games since 2002.

There are also meetings of senior officials, the Board of Governors and other stakeholders. These meetings weave an intricate web that, by his own admission, never ceased to fascinate Sharma, though it did impress upon him the desire to sustain that connectedness beyond and between those meetings, and to extend it also to the wider Commonwealth family. Sharma shared,

‘When I came to Marlborough House, it was not clear to me how Commonwealth actors could meet or communicate outside those meetings. We worked on each ministers’ meeting individually, but found that once we have finished a ministerial, there was no solid methodology for carry over. That is why I put down the digitalisation of the Commonwealth as one of my top priorities.

The introduction of the cloud-based web platform “Commonwealth Connects” has helped redefine Commonwealth convening power through digital networking, with more than 100
Commonwealth entities already on it. It has allowed us to develop a Commonwealth gold standard on election management, on education and on health, through the Commonwealth Electoral Network, the Commonwealth Education Hub and the Commonwealth Health Hub, that could provide the necessary connectivity. It has transformed the way we communicate with member states and governors. Over the last few years, the Commonwealth – in this sense – is being connected round the clock; it has grown more ICT-minded, gained a new-look website, increased its credibility with citizens and especially young people, become more active on social media (via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram), and is now very much a tech-savvy organisation. Thus, as Secretary-General, I have sought to contribute to making the Commonwealth a more networked family and harness its convening power by networking the diversity we have.'
12. RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

In November 2015, as Commonwealth Heads of Government convened in Valletta for their biennial meeting, there were at least two items that were prioritised in most of their agendas. With the CHOGM being held just days before the COP21 in Paris, climate was definitely going to be a focal point of the discussions. Likewise, with extremist outfits such as the Islamic State, Al Qaeda, the Taliban and Boko Haram still committing atrocities against civilians in their regional strongholds and inflicting acts of terror overseas, and with Commonwealth countries such as Pakistan and Nigeria facing the full weight of the threat, violent extremism was bound to be another key topic of discussion. That the ghastly attack in Paris which tragically claimed so many innocent lives preceded the Commonwealth summit by just two weeks, only rendered the issue more poignant and inescapable. Extremism, it was clear, may have been a global threat, but it was also one that was felt by the Commonwealth rather acutely. Furthermore, within the Commonwealth, it was not just the violent extremism that led to terrorism that aroused grave concern, but also the climate of distrust, antipathy and intolerance among some state and non-state actors that provided the radical and radicalising milieu in which violent extremism, suppression of civil liberties, restrictions on press freedom, harsh legislation targeting certain groups and social hostilities could thrive. It was not surprising, thus, that Commonwealth Heads of Government placed great emphasis on the need to counter radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism.

As noted in the CHOGM Communiqué:

‘2 Heads affirmed that radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in all its forms and ramifications are serious threats to the whole world, including the Commonwealth and its peoples, undermining its values and aspirations; international peace and security; social harmony; and economic and social development. Heads condemned terrorism and abhorrent violence by extremist groups, including in many Commonwealth countries, which often target vulnerable groups as well as women and children. They noted with deep concern the growing trend of extremism and radicalisation globally and that foreign fighters, including from Commonwealth countries, continue to join terrorist and other extremist groups. They also agreed that it is imperative to counter the use of the internet by extremist groups to radicalise and recruit.

3 Heads underlined that such threats, which should not be associated with any particular religion, race, nationality or ethnicity, must be countered through strong national, regional and international action and co-operation. This could include partnerships between governments and civil society, the business community and others. They called upon all member governments to implement in full their obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014).

4 Heads reaffirmed the relevance of Commonwealth solutions, including recommendations in the Commonwealth report, Civil Paths to Peace, on ways of addressing,
through education and the media, the conditions conducive to grievance and alienation, with a particular focus on women and young people. Heads renewed their commitment to implement national strategies to counter radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, and agreed to support each other, including by developing effective counter-narratives and by sharing practical prevention and criminal justice best practice. They encouraged the implementation of the Civil Paths to Peace report’s recommendations, and undertook to explore new options, including the creation of dedicated Commonwealth capacity, and to harness the assets and potential of the full family of Commonwealth governments and organisations in a co-ordinated way.

5 Heads recognised in this context that young people, who comprise 60 per cent of the Commonwealth’s population, have an important role in building stable, secure and prosperous societies, and that Commonwealth programmes can help raise awareness of the risk of radicalisation and prevent young people from embracing violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism in all its forms and ramifications. They undertook to promote youth participation in national development and peace building, and to encourage partnership activity with Commonwealth youth networks to help counter the appeal of violent extremism.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015h, p.1)

So great was the concern faced by some countries, such as the United Kingdom, that the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, pledged funding of £1 million per annum for five years towards the establishment of a new Commonwealth counter-extremism unit, with an additional £200,000 to go towards expanding a European counter-radicalisation youth programme to include the Commonwealth. The Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, also offered 2.5 million Australian dollars (AUD) over five years towards this initiative. While only two countries had come forward with an initial contribution, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Kamalesh Sharma, indicated that these pledges sent out a strong hint to other member states about the importance of making such financial contributions towards countering a problem that was likely to affect them for a long time to come. The matter was one which Sharma himself had prioritised so much that, as Secretary-General, he ensured it featured as the first item in the CHOGM agenda. As Sharma shared:

‘Not only did I make countering extremism Item #1 on the CHOGM agenda, I was also determined to use the Retreat to get the assembled Heads to confront the harder issues, such as radicalisation, migration and climate change displacement. I asked at the Retreat what value were we adding as 31 Heads sitting there on these issues, and that is how the idea of a unit came up. And we did it in a way that we created a lot of different avenues through which the theme could now travel – from science and technology to youth and also women. Focusing both on this range of potential avenues, as well as the existing strengths and capacities of the Secretariat, I asked: “How can we inject and use all of them to contribute to this work? How can we use our strengths to support external organisations who do not have the resources and look to an intergovernmental association that does freewheeling work?” I was keen to launch the unit before I left office, and the Heads offered me the green signal: “You go forward with it, Secretary-General; we will finance it”.

Although the Malta CHOGM of 2015 may have cast this difficult task of finding effective ways to counter extremism on the laps of its attending Commonwealth Heads and senior officials, the issue itself was not a new topic that the Commonwealth had not confronted in years past. In fact, the Commonwealth had grappled with the issue since the turn of the millennium, and it did so on at least two fronts: countering terrorism, and promoting respect and understanding. On the one hand, the Commonwealth sought to facilitate action against
the scourge of terrorism. As Sharma recounted in the biennial memorandum by the Secretary-General that was presented to the Committee of the Whole in 2011:

‘It will be recalled that, in 2002, and following the events of 11 September 2001, Commonwealth Heads of Government emphasised the need for members to work collectively and in partnership with the Secretariat to combat terrorism and established a Commonwealth Committee on Terrorism (CCT). *A Plan of Action on Terrorism (CPAT)* was developed, which was reviewed by the CCT in 2009 and subsequently adopted by foreign ministers as the Ministerial Meeting on Terrorism in New York, USA, in September 2009. The Secretariat has continued to work on building the capacity of law enforcement agencies and prosecutors, as well as providing member states with the necessary legislative framework to combat terrorism and its financing.’

The Secretariat developed implementation kits for the execution of international counter-terrorism conventions, and also the model legislative provisions contained in the *Commonwealth – Model Legislative Provisions on Measures to Combat Terrorism*, which it has revised since to include requirements relating to extradition, mutual legal assistance, human rights and due process. Moreover, it developed a *Commonwealth Manual on Counter-Terrorism Practice and Procedure* in 2006, which it has since updated to accommodate background material on new conventions, UN Security Council resolutions and amending protocols agreed. It also included a more holistic criminal justice system training programme that involved investigators, prosecutors and judges, and incorporated cross-cutting criminal justice tools, such as international cooperation, prosecution disclosure and victims/witness protection, in its capacity-building programmes (Sharma 2011c).

On the other hand, the Commonwealth actively sought to promote respect and understanding. In 2005, during the tenure of Don McKinnon as Secretary-General, a Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding was established at the behest of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. The commission was chaired by the Nobel laureate and economist, Amartya Sen, and included the Rt Hon. Lord Alderdice of the UK, Professor Kwame Anthony Appiah of Ghana, the Rt Hon. Adrienne Clarkson of Canada, Dr Noeleen Heyzer of Singapore, Dr Kamal Hossain of Bangladesh, Elaine Sihoatani Howard of Tonga, Professor Wangari Muta Maathai of Kenya, the Hon. Ralston Milton Nettleford of Jamaica, HE Joan Rwabyomere of Uganda and Lucy Turnbull of Australia. Its mandate was to explore ‘initiatives to promote mutual understanding and respect among all faiths and communities in the Commonwealth’; its report, *Civil Paths to Peace*, was launched on 9 November 2007 at Marlborough House in London. (Commonwealth 2008b)

The report looked into the causes of conflict, extremism and violence in Commonwealth countries and advocated, in Sharma’s words, ‘value-driven responses to conflict that are rooted in the Commonwealth’s collectively agreed principles. These include steadfast commitment to upholding human rights, a continual raising of expectations of adherence to them, and practical steps towards realising economic and social justice for all citizens’ (Sharma 2014c). The gist of the report is that when individuals define themselves by only one identity, whether their religion or their nationality, the chances of a conflict erupting between them are higher, but when individuals come together having embraced multiple identities, they are likelier to respect and understand each other and not resort to violence. An education that opens new horizons, builds bridges between groups, and inculcates respect and understanding was, hence, key to reducing conflict, extremism and violence, according to the 2007 report. An updated version of the report, entitled *Peace and Democratic Society*, was published in 2011. (Sen 2011)
In addition, as Sharma noted:

‘The commission laid emphasis on the significant role that can be played by the Commonwealth and made recommendations to promote civil engagement in achieving post-conflict reconciliation. These include the use of dialogue and multilateralism; a commitment to civil rather than military paths to peace; addressing grievances and humiliation; political participation and inclusion; women’s political participation; the role of young people; contributions by the media and communication; and education.’ (Sharma 2014c)

At the Kampala CHOGM of 2007, the Commonwealth Heads of Government commended the work of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding and endorsed the report *Civil Paths to Peace*, coming up with the *Munonyo Statement on Respect and Understanding*. Two years later, at the Port of Spain CHOGM of 2009, Commonwealth Heads of Government, in the Trinidad and Tobago *Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles*, solemnly reiterated their commitment to the Commonwealth’s core values, including:

‘Tolerance, respect and understanding: recognising that tolerance, respect and understanding strengthen democracy and development; recognising also that respect for the dignity of all human beings is critical to promoting peace and prosperity.’

Likewise, the Charter of the Commonwealth that was adopted in December 2012 and officially signed by the Head of the Commonwealth in March 2013 also incorporated a section on ‘Tolerance, Respect and Understanding’. On behalf of the people of the Commonwealth, it stated:

‘We emphasise the need to promote tolerance, respect, understanding, moderation and religious freedom which are essential to the development of free and democratic societies, and recall that respect for the dignity of all human beings is critical to promoting peace and prosperity.

We accept that diversity and understanding the richness of our multiple identities are fundamental to the Commonwealth’s principles and approach.’

Among the practical initiatives that have arisen since the launch of the 2007 report are training materials on understanding terrorism and violence; feasibility studies to establish ‘Youth Dialogue and Action Forums’; training programmes for journalists on issues such as responsible reporting of conflicts, skills for developing multiple narratives, and the role of media in confidence building; and events and seminars focused on experience sharing by post-conflict Commonwealth member states.

In November 2011, the Commonwealth Secretariat partnered with the London-based Foreign Press Association in organising an international symposium on ‘Women as Agents of Change’, with a view to discuss the portrayal of women in the media, political participation by women, and the contribution that women and the media can make in countering violence and in peace building. Furthermore, the new Strategic Plan, as Sharma noted, also emphasised ‘the Secretariat’s role as a trusted partner creating a neutral space for promoting best practice and developing innovative solutions to political challenges’ (Sharma 2013d, p.29). Then, in May 2013, the Human Rights Unit of the Commonwealth Secretariat convened a high-level Commonwealth Roundtable on Reconciliation in London to further the work of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding. The roundtable considered lessons learnt by member states in their efforts to realise the outcomes put forward in *Civil Paths to Peace*, and brought together expert practitioners; state representatives; and national human rights institutions and civil society organisations from Commonwealth countries that had known conflict in their recent histories (Ibid, p.1). As Sharma recounted in his remarks at
the first of a series of commemorations to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide on 7 January 2014,

‘In May 2013... we convened a Commonwealth Roundtable on Reconciliation here at Marlborough House. Among member states represented were Kenya, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Uganda and the United Kingdom. The Roundtable sought to draw together wisdom and insights gained from past experience within the Commonwealth. Recognition was given to the important processes of accountability, truth-seeking, reparation, guarantees of non-recurrence and institutional reform. A strong theme arising from the discussion on national reconciliation and transitional justice was the role of memorialisation.’ (Sharma 2014c)

Memorialisation was also the focus in December 2013 when the Commonwealth marked Human Rights Day on 10 December and looked at memorialisation as a mechanism for national reconciliation. For the Commonwealth, ‘Memorialisation provides governments, civil society actors and post-conflict populations a starting point with which to address past human rights violations through non-judicial means, as well as providing lessons learned for future efforts aimed at sustainable reconciliation and guarantees of non-recurrence’.1 On Human Rights Day itself, the Commonwealth Secretariat hosted an expert panel discussion on ‘Memorialisation as a mechanism of national reconciliation in the Commonwealth’, which provided a forum for member countries to engage constructively on the issue and pursue the recommendations outlined in Civil Paths to Peace for achieving post-conflict reconciliation.2 In January 2014, at the abovementioned Rwanda genocide commemoration hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat in partnership with the Rwandan High Commission, Sharma shared in his address:

‘Bitter lessons learnt in Rwanda, and in other Commonwealth nations, teach us that hope can be regained through a collective seeking for truth and reconciliation. This painful but vital process lays the foundation on which communities that have been torn by armed conflict or political violence can begin to heal and to build peace. It is by finding harmony that we establish the kind of societies – inclusive and democratic – in which Commonwealth values of respect, tolerance and inclusiveness are cherished and upheld.

Our gathering today is part of a series of events and seminars enabling us to share the post-conflict experiences of our member states. Within the Commonwealth context of trust and mutual support, we have, over recent months and years, pursued a range of initiatives to encourage governments and communities towards the implementation of locally driven processes aimed at bringing about justice and reconciliation.

We strive to learn lessons and gain wisdom from one another. We seek together to avoid the recurrence of conflict and tragedy, and to build peaceful and stable communities in which all can share equitably in social progress and economic prosperity.’ (Sharma 2014c)

Thus, the seed that was sown by McKinnon and nurtured by Sharma over eight years finally took root in the winter of the latter’s tenure in time to bear fruit in Scotland’s spring. Like a faithful gardener toiling until the last hour in a garden he diligently cultivated over many years to be the embodiment of the ideals he held dearest, Sharma embraced what was arguably his final mandate, bound and determined to make it a success. As a foreword to the recommendations he penned for his successor and staff, he wrote:

‘The mandate received from the Heads at the Malta CHOGM 2015 for the Secretariat to work against radicalisation and violent extremism is something on which the Commonwealth can add global value with enormous credibility, firstly because of its
diversity which embraces most regions of the world affected by this phenomenon and, secondly, because in its prescient way the Commonwealth has already signalled this as a global challenge at the Kampala CHOGM 2007 in endorsing the report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding and therefore has a consensus approach and a distillation of its collective wisdom on the subject to work with.’

Even in his final address to the High-Level Segment of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2016, Sharma noted,

‘[W]e recognise the urgent need to collectively and effectively address the ever-increasing global occurrence of violent extremism. The lack of inclusion, economic opportunity and education; the stifling of voice; discrimination and marginalisation of minorities are some elements which have perpetuated a tragically violent narrative of our times. This is why Commonwealth leaders made provision at their summit in Malta last November for the establishment of a unit dedicated to making a contribution towards countering radicalisation and violent extremism. This unit will strengthen the Commonwealth’s national, regional and global approaches to prevent violent extremism and promote peaceful societies through civil society networks, education and empowering young people as positive actors. Commonwealth peace-building work also continues to be guided by the report... Civil Paths to Peace, which provides practical direction on preventing violence, dismantling grievances and building safer and more inclusive societies with a special focus on women, youth, education and media.’ (Sharma 2016b)

1 http://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-charter-section/tolerance-respect-and-understanding
2 http://thecommonwealth.org/enhancing-respect-and-understanding
13. ELECTION MANAGEMENT

Late in 2015, Kamalesh Sharma wrote in an essay for *The Parliamentarian*:

‘Democracy, development and respect for diversity are at the heart of the Commonwealth’s core values. The Commonwealth attaches the highest importance to the conduct of credible and peaceful elections as a means of giving citizens an opportunity to choose their leaders and to hold them accountable. Parliaments, local government and other forms of local representation are all integral to democratic and accountable governance. Our Commonwealth conviction is that governments, political parties and civil society share responsibility for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices. Although elections are not the singular mark of a democracy, the management and credibility of the process are the crucial index in assessing the health of a country’s democracy. Elections can often be tense and fraught affairs, and the electoral period is a moment when the credibility of institutions and fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, are tested. As a result, election observation – be it international or domestic – has progressively become an important component of the process. The presence of observers can help to shine a light on shortcomings and identify lapses in the process. It can also enhance accountability and transparency and thereby confidence in the process. But the mere presence of observers does not legitimise or make an election credible. Only an independent, capable and transparent electoral management body, supported by observers, can ensure the credibility of an election and increase public and political confidence in it. Observing elections, and making recommendations as to how electoral processes can be improved, has long been a distinctive brand strength of the Commonwealth and is greatly valued by our membership... This includes observing whether systems for electoral administration are neutral and robust, whether there is freedom of movement and expression with peaceful, open dialogue and a free flow of information, including through a free, vibrant and professional media, and whether public service broadcasters are independent.’ (Sharma 2015f, p.150)

Election observation, since it began in 1980, has been one of the greatest success stories of the Commonwealth. An integral feature of the Lusaka Accord reached in August 1979 and the Lancaster House Agreement signed in December 1979 was the decision to hold free and fair elections in Southern Rhodesia. The general elections, held in February 1980, were to be supervised under the authority of the British Government and by Commonwealth observers. Pursuant to these agreements, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Shridath Ramphal, constituted the first Commonwealth Observer Group – chaired by Rajeshwar Dayal of India – to ‘observe and report to Commonwealth Heads of Government on all relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the elections in Southern Rhodesia’ (Commonwealth Observer Group 1980, p.1). It was only a decade later that election observation was revived as a Commonwealth activity, with the new Secretary-General, Emeka Anyaoku, constituting the second Commonwealth Observer Group to monitor the general elections in Malaysia in 1990. The Kuala Lumpur CHOGM of 1989, at which Anyaoku was elected, had set up a High-Level Appraisal Group (HLAG) of ten Heads of Government that was assisted by a Working
Group of Senior Officials that put forward recommendations for their consideration. The senior officials recommended a draft Commonwealth Declaration and, after Anyaoku highlighted the invaluable role the Commonwealth could play in fostering confidence in the electoral process as a key to democratic governance, a draft Guidelines for the Establishment of Commonwealth Groups to Observe Elections in Member Countries. When the HLAG reconvened just prior to the Harare CHOGM in 1991, the ten Heads agreed on a statement that all Commonwealth leaders adopted during their retreat at the Victoria Falls. For Anyaoku, the Harare Declaration authorised the Secretary-General to make the pursuit of democracy and good governance key priorities in his agenda, bolstering his role as champion of Commonwealth values (Anyaoku 2004, p.130). It also allowed him, as Secretary-General, to more actively encourage Heads of Governments to request Commonwealth election observer groups (Ibid, pp.130–3).

It was mainly from 1990, once Anyaoku assumed office, that election observation, on request by national election commissions, was revived to form a much more visible and valued aspect of the Secretariat’s work in democracy building (Ibid, p.134). The practice continued under his successors as Secretary-General, Don McKinnon and Kamalesh Sharma. The publication, Adding Global Value, issued by the Secretariat for the most recent CHOGM, hosted by Malta in November 2015, succinctly described Commonwealth action in election observation:

‘What began as a trial endeavour in 1980 has today become a core part of the Commonwealth’s work. To date, we have observed more than 130 elections in 36 countries. Each Commonwealth Observer Group is constituted by the Commonwealth Secretary-General upon the invitation of a country’s election commission or government. Composed of eminent persons – from former Heads of Government and ministers, to serving and former election commissioners, parliamentarians, and representatives of civil society, human rights bodies and the media – our Observer Groups are renowned for their independence and impartiality. Every Commonwealth election deployment – from larger Observer Groups to mid-size Observer Missions to smaller Observer Teams – not only makes an independent assessment of an electoral process; it also results in recommendations for practical action to strengthen the quality of future elections. Our work in elections observation supplements the long-term assistance we provide to national electoral commissions, including support for the Commonwealth Electoral Network and training for junior election professionals. The Commonwealth has set a global standard for elections observation, with our election observers contributing to the entrenchment of democratic practices across the world. Many regional and intergovernmental organisations now observe elections, with more international and domestic election observer teams worldwide than ever before. A large proportion of these groups have drawn on the Commonwealth’s success and approach of providing an objective judgement backed by recommendations. Thanks to the presence of election observers, voters can have confidence that an independent, impartial and public view will be taken on the integrity of an electoral process, and that the culture of democracy in their country will be strengthened as a result.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015a, p.6)

For Kamalesh Sharma, the Commonwealth’s work in election management ought to be seen within the context of its commitment to democracy and good governance. In his address at the 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Nairobi in September 2010, he noted:

‘The need to proclaim and demonstrate democracy as our chosen path has not gone away with what some perceived as the great global contest with communism having gone in democracy’s favour. This proved not to be “the end of history”, but certainly a historic surge, and an opening of the prospect before us... All of you will know that the Latimer House Principles of 2003 – drafted with the CPA’s help and also that of the
Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association – are an integral part of the body of belief which the Commonwealth espouses. They affirm, of course, that the three branches of government may be mutually dependent – but so, too, that they are independent. And when countries have flouted them, they have flouted our most cherished values, and faced consequences. For instance, when Pakistan was suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth in November 2007, this was done in part because the executive’s dismissal of the judiciary in that country was a clear breach of the Latimer House Principles. Soon after I became Secretary-General, it was my great pleasure to see Pakistan reverse this, and to welcome it back to our councils. Likewise, the full suspension of Fiji in September 2009 was closely related with the dismissal of the judiciary, along with the jettisoning of the constitution. And when we see creative tension between the three branches – as, for instance, we currently do in Maldives, now a vibrant multi-party democracy – we must at least welcome the fact that we are seeing evidence of boundaries being drawn and defended... The culture of parliamentary democracy defines this Commonwealth, and at every turn we reaffirm it. We are tenacious in defending it, but so too are we affirmative in supporting our members’ efforts to strengthen it, and indeed sometimes to return to the democratic path when they have strayed from it.’ (Sharma 2010c)

When Sharma assumed office in April 2008, electoral matters featured prominently on the Commonwealth agenda. In Kenya, after Mwai Kibaki was announced as the winner of the presidential election held on 27 December 2007, supporters of his opponent, Raila Odinga, voiced concerns about electoral manipulation, with international observers confirming that both sides were guilty of corruption that included vote buying and selling, ‘ballot stuffing’ and intimidation (Kanina 2008). The violent clashes that ensued resulted in at least 1,300 people killed and 600,000 displaced. While the seven-member Independent Review Commission did not find any evidence that the Electoral Commission of Kenya had rigged the results, the latter body was found to be inept and inefficient, with 1.2 million dead people reported to have been on the voters roll (Ibid). The final report of the Commonwealth Observer Group – headed by Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the former President of Sierra Leone – sent in by Don McKinnon to observe the 2007 general elections, also stated that the ‘Electoral Commission of Kenya has not succeeded in establishing the integrity of the tallying process, thereby bringing the validity of the election results into question’ (COG 2013a, p.4). The violent aftermath saw the role of the Commonwealth Observer Group chairman switch from election observation to good offices engagement, with Kabbah being the first to engage all stakeholders to promote dialogue, reconciliation and healing (Ibid, pp.4–5). The early years of Sharma as Secretary-General, thus, entailed following closely the delicate situation in Kenya and the introduction of reforms. Later, when a constitutional referendum was held on 4 August 2010, a three-person team from the Commonwealth Secretariat was present at the request of the Interim Independent Electoral Commission. It reported that the commission acted in a professional, effective and efficient manner and was perceived by the public as independent and impartial, signalling improvement (Ibid, p.7).

While the 2007–08 crisis in Kenya steered attention towards election management, not every election story in those early years of Sharma’s tenure as Secretary-General was equally bleak. Looking back at the Commonwealth in 2008, Sharma recounted in an essay penned for The Commonwealth Yearbook 2009:

‘Meanwhile a year that began with violence and unrest in the wake of Kenyan elections ended with collapse and disease in a former Commonwealth member, Zimbabwe. In Kenya, we played a part both in observing elections and offering practical support to the rebuilding of democratic institutions, above all the electoral and human rights commissions. In Zimbabwe, we have been vocal in expressing support and solidarity with the people of that country, and with African efforts to bring about democratic and economic stability.'
The year saw Pakistan readmitted to the councils of the Commonwealth after successful elections in February, while Fiji Islands remains suspended from those councils and on the agenda of CMAG. The Commonwealth has played important roles in other elections, too, and most notably in Bangladesh, Ghana and Maldives. Having helped introduce a new national constitution in Maldives, the Commonwealth observed elections there that saw the peaceful transfer of power after two closely and fairly contested rounds of voting...’ (Sharma 2009d, p.3)

Even in the case of Kenya, there was light that shone at the end of the tunnel. Sharma added in his September 2010 address:

‘The realisations – in the appalling aftermath of violence at the last presidential elections in this country – were that division was quite literally deadly, and that unity was the only hope... The parliament has been integral to the rebuilding of Kenya, and the realisation of its democracy and development dreams... It brokered the work on drafting the historic new Kenyan constitution which was voted in just a few weeks ago... It saw partnership as the key to Kenyan success – an all-embracing coalition of the willing. I am pleased to add that “the willing” very much includes the Commonwealth, which will provide legislative drafters to develop aspects of the new constitution... We will also use our existing networks of both national election commissions and national human rights commissions, to support those two new bodies in this country.’ (Sharma 2010c)

Besides Kenya, the 2008-elections in Ghana also caught the Commonwealth’s attention, with President John Kufuor stepping down after serving two terms. The elections of 7 December 2008 in Ghana were the fifth since the country’s return to multi-party democracy and the second time there had been a handover of power from one democratically elected leader to another (COG 2013b, p.6). Owing to the determination of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to form the government after eight years in opposition, and the likelihood that the winner could be the first leader to benefit from the offshore discovery of oil reserves estimated at 1.8 billion barrels, it was widely expected that the elections would see cut-throat competition and knife-edge results. As Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sharma constituted a seven-member Commonwealth Observer Group – led by Baroness Valerie Amos, former leader of the UK House of Lords – to ‘determine in its own judgment whether the elections have been conducted according to the standards for democratic elections to which Ghana has committed itself’. As did most stakeholders, the group expressed concern about the bloated voter register and questionable competence of the Electoral Commission (Ibid, p.6). Despite these problems, the group considered the elections, overall, to be credible, having been conducted in an open, transparent and inclusive manner. Bearing in mind the expected difficulties, the group concluded that ‘the conduct of the 2008 elections widely confirmed the view that Ghana’s maturing democracy had become a good reference point for the African continent and the Commonwealth as a whole’ (Ibid, p.7). However, the process was not without hiccups. While the parliamentary elections – declared at the constituency level – saw a successful conclusion to the results collation process, the results of the presidential elections – announced by the Chairman of the Electoral Commission – were less straightforward. Neither of the two leading contenders had secured more than 50 per cent of the votes: out of a total valid vote of 8,465,834, Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) polled 4,159,439 (49.13%) and John Atta Mills of the NDC polled 4,056,634 (47.92%) (Ibid, p.7). In the absence of a clear winner, a second round of voting for a presidential run-off was scheduled for 28 December 2008. Between the first and second rounds of voting, the Commonwealth Observer Group continued to follow developments in Ghana closely and was reconstituted as a four-person group, also led by Amos, for the presidential run-off. Over this period, the situation in the
country grew more delicate. While the build-up to the first round of voting had been largely issues based, the campaign leading up to the second round was found to focus more on personality politics and party loyalty, with ethnicity too becoming a divisive feature (Ibid, p.7). Yet, though such tension loomed over some areas, and some election-related problems – such as the uneven allocation of voters to polling stations – did persist, the group reported that the overall efficiency of the process did not seem to be affected. The campaign was deemed to have been generally orderly and encouraging, owing to improvements in the provision and management of polling materials and a relatively high voter turnout (Ibid, p.7). Nonetheless, while voting took place in 229 of the 230 constituencies on 28 December, with the results announced on 30 December, the delay in the arrival of electoral materials meant that voting in the final constituency of Tain was pushed to 2 January 2009. The delay heightened tension across the country: following the voting on 28 December, Mills led by a slight margin, prompting hundreds of opposition NDC supporters to descend on the Electoral Commission headquarters in Accra demanding that he be declared the winner (BBC News 2008). However, as the election results could be determined by the final constituency, the Electoral Commission announced that it would not declare a winner until all the votes were cast. Stakeholders urged restraint, while the results were awaited. The run-off was narrowly won by Mills who secured 4,521,032 votes (50.23 per cent), as against the 4,480,446 (49.77 per cent) obtained by Akufo-Addo (COG 2013b, p.8). In its report, the Commonwealth Observer Group welcomed the initiatives taken by the Electoral Commission between 7 and 28 December 2008 to improve the efficiency of the electoral procedures, which helped to ensure the electoral process was robust, credible and met the benchmarks for democratic elections to which Ghana committed itself (Ibid, p.8).

Towards the end of his second term, Sharma shared:

‘The 2008 elections in Ghana were a big success story for the Commonwealth. The victor had won by a relatively small margin. It was heartening to see that such a close election could be carried off without challenge. Valerie Amos called me to say that everyone wanted to know what the Commonwealth was saying. Whether the election-monitoring teams of the Carter Center, the Electoral Institute of South Africa (EISA), the European Union or the African Union, there was interest shown in the opinion of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth was in Ghana pursuing values, but without any axe to grind and in the spirit of goodwill. Although the Commonwealth Observer Group is an independent group, the recommendations they make provide a valuable roadmap moving forward. We will observe elections based on the understanding that whatever deficits exist must be addressed, raising the threshold with each election. Our philosophy is that if the election is not free or fair, then it does not have the trust and confidence of the citizens. Its credibility gets affected, and it lacks legitimacy.’

Even in July 2010, when Sharma presented the 2010 Nelson Mandela Africa Lecture at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London, he noted:

‘So where, then, does the ledger stand on democracy in Commonwealth Africa?... Perhaps two Commonwealth examples – of Rwanda and Ghana – will illustrate the case that the positive and the hopeful can prevail. Ghana’s presidential elections in 2008 went down to the wire, with no more than [120,000] votes separating the two candidates after the first round of voting. Tensions ran dangerously high. The Commonwealth election observer team, led by Baroness Valerie Amos, was much in evidence in the media, and much in liaison with the Election Commission. Sense and reason prevailed; the second round went smoothly; power changed hands peacefully; Ghanaian and African democracy emerged triumphant; and it has been very publicly acknowledged that the Commonwealth was crucial to this outcome.’ (RUSI 2010)
Welcomed into the Commonwealth as recently as the 2009 CHOGM, Rwanda was another rather positive case. In his lecture at RUSI in July 2010, Sharma said:

‘Meanwhile Rwanda, as we know, came to the very edge of the abyss in 1994. But when that country resubmitted a formal application to join the Commonwealth in 2007, our Heads of Government considered all the things that had happened in the years following... For instance, they took into account Rwanda’s new constitution of 2003 – based on power-sharing and consensus, and a commitment to multiparty democracy. They looked at Rwanda’s judiciary, and at the various institutional structures and policy commitments of good governance, and of human rights. And they also saw what we inherently believe – that democracy breeds development, with a steady rise in national output. That is why leaders demonstrated their political will and affirmation in welcoming Rwanda into the Commonwealth as its 54th and latest member, in November 2009. We now await a presidential election in Rwanda on 9th August, which will be witnessed by Commonwealth observers led by the former Tanzanian Prime Minister, Dr Salim Ahmed Salim. We hear the news as well as anyone, and are more than conscious of the challenges facing a young democracy... And such is the nature of the Commonwealth role: if we have to, we raise our concerns – but whatever happens, we raise a helping hand, rather than a wagging finger.’ (Ibid)

In September 2010, Sharma observed in his address at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference:

‘Rwanda, “the land of a thousand hills”, has climbed remarkably since its darkest days in 1994, not least in leading the world in the women in its parliament. By the same token, it and the Commonwealth knew then and know now that it has many more hills to climb, and the Commonwealth walks with it. Just as the independent observer group raised significant concerns about the lead-up to the country’s presidential elections in August, it recognised the peaceful and purposeful way in which they unfolded on polling day. The Commonwealth stands ready to partner Rwanda in strengthening its electoral practice and culture.’ (Sharma 2010c)

In the later years of his first term, Sharma also sent in Commonwealth Observer Groups, missions or expert teams to Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, Seychelles, Zambia, Cameroon, The Gambia and Guyana, among others. In the first two years of his second term, such groups were deployed to Lesotho, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Kenya, Pakistan, Grenada, Rwanda, Swaziland, Sri Lanka, Cameroon and Maldives. As in Ghana or Kenya, Commonwealth interest in the electoral process, in an observing capacity, was generally sustained over the long term. At the request of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, Sharma constituted a Commonwealth Observer Group – led by Dr Pakalitha Mosisili, former Prime Minister of Lesotho – to observe relevant aspects of the organisation and conduct of the presidential and parliamentary elections in Ghana on 7 December 2012. The observer group comprised 13 persons and was supported by a five-member team from the Commonwealth Secretariat. Likewise, at the request of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya, Sharma sent in a Commonwealth Observer Group – led by Festus Mogae, former President of Botswana – to observe the general elections of 4 March 2013, the first to be held in Kenya under the new constitution (COG 2013a, pp.1–2). In both countries, the observer groups met with election officials, political party representatives, civil society groups, Commonwealth High Commissions, media, security agencies, and other national and international observers. In Sharma’s final years in office, there were Commonwealth Observer Groups sent to Maldives, South Africa, Malawi, Antigua and Barbuda, Botswana, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Lesotho, Nigeria, Guyana, Sri Lanka,
Trinidad and Tobago, Tanzania, Seychelles, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Vanuatu and Uganda. On some occasions, the Commonwealth deliberately did not send in an observer group. For instance, Commonwealth observers were not present at the 5 January 2014 elections in Bangladesh, after an initial assessment showed that conditions were not compatible with Commonwealth election observation guidelines (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014c). On other occasions, the situation – as in Maldives or Sri Lanka – warranted an observer group being deployed more than once within a relatively short time span. In January 2014, the Commonwealth joined the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) in organising a training programme in Durban in February 2014 that brought together senior officials from several election management bodies in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean to explore ways of preventing, managing and resolving election-related disputes.

At the Port of Spain CHOGM in 2009, Commonwealth Heads of Government also endorsed the Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles, wherein they affirmed their support of the proposed Commonwealth Network of National Election Management Bodies (Commonwealth Secretariat 2009c). Sharma outlined:

“Within the Commonwealth and our member states, a high priority is continually seeking to raise electoral standards. We strongly believe that if the heart of democracy beats in parliament, with the will of the people expressed through elections providing the fresh blood it needs, then it has to be the elections – and how well those are conducted – which provide the legitimacy and the credibility to that parliament and ensures the heart really beats. The quality of a country’s election is, to a large extent, dependent upon the quality of its election management body (EMB). Where an EMB is independent, capable and transparent, it can play a crucial role in ensuring the integrity and credibility of an election, and public and political confidence in it. Our aim is to ensure they are a force for good, upholders of the highest Commonwealth “gold standard” in electoral management. Hence, one of my first ideas when I got here as Secretary-General was to create a hub of all the election commissioners and heads of election agencies, so they could strengthen each other’s work. It was with this in mind that we established the Commonwealth Electoral Network (CEN), bringing together national election management bodies of the Commonwealth. The initiative to create the CEN was endorsed by Heads of Government at the 2009 CHOGM, and the network was officially launched at a pan-Commonwealth conference of election officials in Accra, Ghana, in May 2010. In effect, the Heads were endorsing a form of comprehensive peer support to each other in conducting elections which will win the trust of all citizens: a giant step forward for the Commonwealth.

Our aim through the network has been to bring together professionals from our electoral management bodies to share experiences and technical knowledge, provide mutual solidarity, create support mechanisms, and promote good practices through knowledge and action in the field of election management. We were confident that the network could share best practice in areas like voter registration, the use of technology in elections, universal mobilisation of electorates, polling practices, security oversight, media policy, the use of public funds in election processes, accountability of campaign funding and expenditure, electoral complaints and petitions, and all other aspects of creating a fair and level playing field. Shared inheritances mean there is much in common when it comes to institutional arrangements and legal frameworks. This offers special opportunities in the case of elections for working together. The benefit derived is all the greater because of the rich diversity encompassed within our 53 member states. We hoped that the network would help create the gold standard for electoral best practice. In fact, by the early days, we had already begun to see mutual peer support, with Ghana exporting its electoral expertise to Malawi and Kenya. More recently, after Nigeria introduced permanent voter identification cards and card reader devices for the presidential, national and state elections in March
2015 to cut the risk of voter fraud, one election official from the Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria testified to the valuable role the CEN played in facilitating the sharing of international best practice. “We learned from Ghana, which already uses a card reader, and Kenya, which has also used technology to verify their registered voters”, Ms Amina Zakari revealed. “Other countries may wish to learn from Nigeria’s example. With more interactions among CEN members, countries will be able to further improve their elections”. The CEN has indeed proved to be an effective means for strengthening the independence of EMBs and promoting greater professionalisation; and its contribution can only grow with time.

The CEN’s flagship activity is a biennial conference, and it has held three conferences so far: the first in Accra in 2010; the second in Toronto in 2012; and the third in Nairobi in 2014. These gatherings bring together the most senior officials in our EMBs for a series of in-depth discussions on international best practice tied to an overarching theme. Around 60 electoral officials from approximately 45 countries across the Commonwealth, along with delegates from the OIF and the UN, attended the CEN Conference in Toronto, which had as its theme “Twenty-first Century Elections: Technology and Integrity”. The Nairobi CEN Conference brought together 59 electoral officials from 36 Commonwealth countries under the theme “Managing Elections in the Twenty-first Century: Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Electoral Integrity”. The CEN itself has been designed, delivered and managed using the advantages conferred by contemporary technologies. At the Toronto conference in June 2012, I launched the Commonwealth’s first online collaborative workspace, with the CEN securing dedicated online meeting space on our new secure web-based platform Commonwealth Connects. The Commonwealth Connects workspace allows electoral commissions in all our member countries to be in constant contact, to be informed, and to develop gold standards of best practice together. The secure workspace is accessible to invited members; it provides an international resource centre designed to support best practice and develop expert knowledge for use by the CEN. The CEN meets every two years, and this workspace allows them to continue developing concepts and strategic proposals beyond the biennial meetings. It is intuitive to use and can be accessed through mobile devices. Commonwealth Connects is the new way for all Commonwealth networks to be able to meet and add practical value nationally and globally in future. The CEN is now one of more than 100 accredited professional networks and partner organisations that manage projects, share knowledge and co-ordinate events using Commonwealth Connects.

Besides the biennial conferences, the CEN has a steering committee and working groups that look into various aspects of electioneering: How do we prepare credible electoral rolls? What are the principles of boundary delimitation? How do we get a level playing field for the media, and for all political forces in the country, including the opposition? What are the best practices in these areas? Do you use transparent ballot boxes? Do you pin up results Where are they announced? What should be the time elapsing between counting and announcement? It is a very complex business, but it is a very important one. The Steering Committee has met annually since 2010 and been chaired by Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan of Ghana from 2010 to 2012; Marc Mayrand of Canada from 2012 to 2014; and Ahmed Issack Hassan of Kenya from 2014. In addition, several working group meetings have been convened: on “Voter’s Education and Electoral Participation” (in New Delhi in 2011); “Voter Registration” (in Dhaka in 2011); “Vote Counting, Tabulation and Dissemination of Results” (in Canberra in 2011); “Independence of Election Management Bodies” (in Kingston in 2012); “Managing the Power of Incumbency” (in Cape Town in 2012); and “Political Party Expenditure and Campaign Financing” (in London in 2013). More recently, a working group meeting in Suva in December 2015 focused on “The Impact of New Media on Elections”. Officials working in one EMB often find that they are dealing with
scenarios and challenges that are strikingly similar to those of their counterparts in other countries. These working groups have already proved instrumental in encouraging peer-to-peer learning and helping countries to adopt good practices. Mohamed Hussun, Commissioner for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission of Kenya, shared that it was thanks to a CEN workshop on campaign finance that he and his colleagues were able to talk about campaign finance with authority and persuade colleagues and Kenyan parliamentarians that a draft law on campaign finance, which had previously failed to garner support, in fact met international standards. When Kenya’s landmark Election Campaign Financing Act was subsequently passed in 2013, he added: ‘For me, that was a good takeaway from the Commonwealth Electoral Network.’

In July 2013, the Commonwealth Junior Election Professionals (JEP) Initiative was launched as part of the CEN to train the next generation of electoral administrators. The Initiative is generously supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and was designed in direct response to a request from CEN members for a capacity-building programme for junior electoral professionals. I am pleased to note the swift and encouraging progress achieved thus far. It has organised five training events:

- a pan-Commonwealth workshop, held in New Delhi in October 2013 and co-hosted by the Election Commission of India;
- a Commonwealth Pacific regional workshop, held in Canberra in March 2014 and organised in partnership with the Australian Electoral Commission;
- a Commonwealth Caribbean and Americas regional workshop, held in Kingston in September 2014 and organised in partnership with the Electoral Commission of Jamaica;
- a Commonwealth Asia regional workshop, held in New Delhi in March 2015 and organised in partnership with the Election Commission of India; and
- a Commonwealth Africa regional workshop, hosted in Gaborone in August 2015 and organised in partnership with the Independent Electoral Commission of Botswana.

Through these workshops, the initiative would have trained over 90 junior election professionals from 41 Commonwealth member states in electoral best practice, bringing them together to examine a range of issues such as voter registration, boundary delimitation, the power of incumbency and working with political parties. The initiative promises to make an important contribution to advancing our shared goal of forging stronger links within the family of Commonwealth election management bodies, and to nurturing the next generation of Commonwealth electoral administrators in their work of organising fair, credible and inclusive elections. In the long run, this direct assistance will benefit not only junior officials, but also other permanent employees, as well as temporary election officials, as best practices are shared among all electoral commission employees. It is also contributing to the greater professionalisation of election officials.’

For Sharma, his aspiration to develop in the Commonwealth a gold standard for election management was inherently tied to his overall vision of steering the Commonwealth to serve as a beacon of democracy. He noted in his Africa Lecture at RUSI in July 2010:

‘The Commonwealth may have observed some 52 African elections since 1990, but it is the first to say that an election is merely the most visible form of democracy. For it is the dividends of democracy, and the institutions that guarantee its services, which count the most. That is why our practical Commonwealth support for national human rights institutions, independent election commissions, anti-corruption agencies, offices of auditors-general and parliamentary commissions has been so vital. In general, we have supported and strengthened such bodies which already existed. But in Cameroon, for instance, we helped to create both election and human rights bodies – from scratch...’ (RUSI 2010)
It would be fitting to point out that the Commonwealth Charter, signed by HM The Queen in March 2013, also enshrined democracy – including free and fair elections – as a core value and principle of the Commonwealth:

‘We recognise the inalienable right of individuals to participate in democratic processes, in particular through free and fair elections in shaping the society in which they live. Governments, political parties and civil society are responsible for upholding and promoting democratic culture and practices and are accountable to the public in this regard. Parliaments and representative local governments and other forms of local governance are essential elements in the exercise of democratic governance.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013a)

Even when Sharma spoke to the Kenyan Citizen Television’s ‘Power Breakfast Show’ in June 2014, he reiterated:

‘We work for every citizen in the country. Every citizen in the Commonwealth has the right that when they go to vote, it is not a sham. So I like to think that we can develop in the Commonwealth a gold standard in election management. We are responding to something that all member countries want. This is because all over the world, the culture of democracy has caught on.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2014d)
14. CORRUPTION

The Framework for Commonwealth Principles on Promoting Good Governance and Combating Corruption, endorsed at the Durban CHOGM in 1999, started with the following words:

‘Good governance is not a luxury but a basic requirement for development. Corruption, which undermines development, is generally an outcome and a symptom of poor governance. It has reached global proportions and needs to be attacked directly and explicitly.

Corruption is always a two-way transaction with a supply and a demand side. It occurs in poor, emerging and developed nations, regardless of the level of social and economic development and in countries with varying forms of government ranging from dictatorships to established democracies.

Corruption, which is multidimensional, generally occurs at the nexus between the public and private sectors, with actors in the private sphere interacting with holders of offices of trust in the public sector. Some aspects of corruption, such as fraud and the misappropriation of assets or funds, can occur entirely within the private or public sectors. However, with increasing privatisation of public utilities and services, the distinction between the public and private sectors is becoming less relevant in some areas.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2000, p.5)

The framework advocated the policy of ‘zero tolerance’ to all types of corruption, building on a three-pronged approach: prevent corruption, enforce laws against it and mobilise public opinion against corrupt behaviour (Ibid, pp.1–2, 6). It recommended that all Commonwealth countries should have or develop their own national strategies to promote good governance and eliminate corruption that enjoy ‘strong political will at the highest levels of government’, are ‘internally driven’ and ‘domestically owned’, and cover both active and passive actors engaged in corruption (Ibid, p.6). It also recommended that the Commonwealth adopt a Declaration that committed itself to specific principles, standards and goals, and support ‘the development of a truly global compact against corruption that would fill gaps in existing instruments and be universal in its scope, thus creating a level playing field for all countries (Ibid, p.18).

Corruption, after all, was not a problem that could be tackled only at the national level. As Akbar Khan, former Director of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division at the Commonwealth Secretariat, observed, ‘With globalisation, the menace of corruption emerged as a global policy problem, one that could no longer be addressed purely through domestic means’ (Khan 2010, p.5). The international reach of corruption required that states co-operate in the fight against it. Indeed, with the increasing globalisation of corruption, several international fora, including the UN, OECD, IMF, World Bank, OAS, EU, Council of Europe and International Chamber of Commerce, came up with international initiatives to improve governance and combat corruption (Commonwealth Secretariat 2000, p.13). In 1996, the UN
General Assembly adopted a resolution on corruption, as well as a Code of Conduct for Public Officials, to guide member states in their actions against corruption. By 1999, the year when the Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed the abovementioned framework, there were already three international legally binding conventions against corruption:

i) the 1996 Inter-American Convention against Corruption, a regional OAS initiative;

ii) the 1997 OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions; and


However, though the battle against cross-border corruption required the joint efforts of developed and developing countries, all of these initiatives – with the exception of the OAS Convention – had been promoted primarily by developed countries and did not reflect fully the needs of developing countries (Ibid, p.14). As Khan noted, ‘A truly international response came with the adoption of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) by the United Nations General Assembly on 31 October 2003’ (Khan 2010, p.5). UNCAC, which was opened for signature on 9 December 2003 and entered into force on 14 December 2005, is regarded as the ‘first truly global anti-corruption instrument’ and addressed ‘a wide range of preventive, detection and enforcement provisions and, for the first time in the international arena, [set] out comprehensive provisions on asset recovery’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2008, p.151).

How then did the Commonwealth contribute to this noble fight? In several different ways. When Commonwealth law ministers met in Kuala Lumpur from 15 to 19 April 1996, during the tenure of Emeka Anyaoku as Commonwealth Secretary-General, they acknowledged ‘the existence of corruption as a serious multidimensional national and international problem which inhibits development, creates poverty and undermines good government’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 1997b, p.102). The ministers recognised that addressing the threat posed by corruption was necessary for the goals set out in the Harare Declaration and elaborated in the Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme to be achieved. ‘At their meeting in Edinburgh in 1997’, Anyaoku recounted, ‘Commonwealth Heads of Government underscored the importance of good governance, including increased openness in economic decision-making, and eliminating corruption through greater transparency, accountability and the application of the rule of law’. He added, ‘At their request, I established a small group of eminent experts, representative of the Commonwealth’s diversity, to undertake a study on these issues and recommend ways in which the Commonwealth could promote good governance and fight corruption’ (Anyaoku 2000, p.1). The Commonwealth Expert Group on Good Governance and the Elimination of Corruption was initially chaired by Dr Mahbub ul Haq, a former Finance Minister of Pakistan, but, following his tragic death, the chairmanship was assumed by Dr Kwesi Botchwey, a former Finance Minister of Ghana. The group also included Ruth Hubbard (Canada), Shahid Husain (Pakistan), HE Dr Lal Jayawardena (Sri Lanka), Lim Siong Guan (Singapore), The Hon. Justice Barry SJ O’Keefe AM (Australia), Dr K Rattray (Jamaica), Bertrand de Speville (UK), Brian Tyler (New Zealand) and J Warioba (Tanzania) as members. The expert group met three times in 1998–99 and furnished a report, alongside with the Framework for Commonwealth Principles on Promoting Good Governance and Combating Corruption, that was in line with the principles and strategies outlined in UNCAC. In endorsing the framework at the 1999 CHOGM in Durban, Commonwealth leaders, Anyaoku noted, ‘underscored that the Commonwealth’s commitment and work in promoting good governance and preventing corruption must be credible, tangible and visible’ (Ibid, p.1).

One possibility that the expert group explored was for the Commonwealth to have its own legally binding instrument or convention on governance and corruption that would reflect the Commonwealth’s specific concerns, values and aspirations and give ‘teeth’ to the Commonwealth’s commitment in the fight against corruption. However, it recognised that
such a legally binding instrument would signify a radical departure from the Commonwealth’s tradition of articulating collective commitments through morally, but not legally, binding declarations adopted by consensus and, hence, be met with some resistance (Commonwealth Secretariat 2000, p.43). Indeed, at the Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 1999, the ministers affirmed their unwillingness to see such a departure and felt that Commonwealth measures could include instead supporting the further development of current initiatives, encouraging access to existing conventions and/or promoting initiatives within the UN for a global convention against corruption (Ibid, p.44). At the Abuja CHOGM in 2003 and Malta CHOGM in 2005, now with Don McKinnon as Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Commonwealth Heads of Government reiterated the need for Commonwealth states to sign, ratify and implement UNCAC and to adopt principles and policies that emphasise good governance, accountability and transparency. In the Aso Rock Declaration (2003), they also pledged ‘maximum co-operation and assistance amongst [their] governments to recover assets of illicit origin and repatriate them to their countries of origin’, and requested that the Secretary-General establish a Commonwealth working group to advance effective action in this area. Subsequently, McKinnon constituted a working group of experts from 11 Commonwealth governments, and other independent experts and observers, which met at Marlborough House on four occasions in 2004 and 2005 and produced a report that was considered by Heads at the 2005 CHOGM. Another outcome was ‘a report which... made recommendations on the content of model legislative provisions that could be used to implement measures set out in UNCAC in the domestic setting’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2010b, pp.4–5). The Commonwealth Updated Legislative and Technical Guide was presented to the Meeting of Senior Officials of Law Ministries in 2007 and endorsed and approved at Commonwealth Law Ministers Meeting in Edinburgh in 2008. Its updated 2010 version was endorsed and approved by Commonwealth law ministers and attorneys-general at their meeting in Sydney in 2011 (Ibid, pp.4–5).

When Sharma took over as Commonwealth Secretary-General, his early years saw ministers adopt the revised Commonwealth Updated Legislative and Technical Guide that provided, in the words of Akbar Khan, ‘a comprehensive point of reference not only for states grappling with the implementation of UNCAC, but also for states that have proceeded with implementation and seek to review and update their legislation and/or practices’ (Khan 2010, p.6). Ministers also agreed that the Secretariat should conduct capacity-building activities on anti-corruption in member states (Sharma 2011c, p.32). As Sharma observed in his 2013 report as Commonwealth Secretary-General:

‘The Commonwealth Secretariat has developed legal tools for practitioners and training for police, prosecutors and judges on anti-corruption measures, money laundering, terrorism and other transnational crimes. The Commonwealth Secretariat has also facilitated inter-country training placements for prosecutors on the recovery of stolen assets, which removes the profit that motivates corruption. In addition, Commonwealth member countries have benefited from skills development and legal tools on international co-operation to combat transnational corruption and related offences. An example of this is the model legislation based on the Harare Scheme that can be used as a basis to develop national law.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.24)

The Secretariat’s work in relation to the model legislation as well as the recovery of stolen assets was lauded by several Commonwealth member states. As Mr Satyajit Boolell, Director of Public Prosecutions, Mauritius, commented in 2012:

‘The setting up of the Asset Recovery Unit is another example of the fruitful engagement between my office and that of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Asset Recovery Act was enacted last year leading to the creation of an Enforcement Authority vested with powers
to forfeit proceeds of crime. We are now working with other countries in the Africa region to share experience and assist in establishing their own units. This is a remarkable achievement, which is largely due to the assistance received from the Secretariat which guided us thorough this uncharted territory.’ (Ibid, p.24)

At the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division (which has been the Rule of Law Division since July 2014) partnered with the Public Sector Development programme on the long-term placements of justice sector officials. Sharma outlined:

‘An example is the Commonwealth’s work in providing legislative drafters and placing judges and prosecutors. These interventions build on the Commonwealth Secretariat’s comparative advantage at several levels, including its “trusted partner” relationship with its member states. They also deliver longstanding expertise through training at the national level, and foster South–South relationships and peer exchange. A combination of theoretical and practical experience is also used to reach beneficiaries, including through online courses, toolkits, mentoring, placement referrals and workshops. A typical training programme is a strategic combination of theoretical knowledge and practical sessions by way of group work on a case scenario and moot trials. Programming has been implemented with key strategic partnerships, such as the Offices of Directors of Public Prosecutions and anti-corruption agencies of member countries. This ensures ownership and sustainability. The Commonwealth Secretariat collaborates with international organisations, such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the International Monetary Fund, to ensure that best practice in the implementation of international conventions and protocols is disseminated to member countries. Commonwealth partner organisations such as the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute and the Commonwealth Magistrates’ and Judges’ Association are also integral to the Commonwealth Secretariat’s work on rule of law... In Lesotho, CFTC-funded legal expertise has led to greater confidence by investors and an increased sense of trust in the country’s leadership. This follows inputs to strengthen the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Offences, including the amendment of Lesotho’s Prevention of Corruption Bill. In Nigeria, technical assistance to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Academy resulted in a sharper, more effective and diversified use of the latest anti-fraud and anti-corruption measures, with particular focus on intelligence-driven investigation... In-country anti-corruption projects began in the Commonwealth African countries of Botswana, The Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zambia. It has since expanded to the Caribbean region to include Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.’ (Ibid, pp.27, 39)

The Commonwealth Secretariat also facilitated networking among justice sector officials and agencies (Ibid, p.24). Sharma noted in his 2011 memorandum:

‘The Secretariat is establishing or revitalising networks or regional communities of practice for South–South collaboration and learning, to enable poverty reduction and attainment of development outcomes. These include networks of Commonwealth anti-corruption agencies, audit institutions, public procurement bodies, ombudsmen and revenue authorities. These networks offer potential for cross-cutting linkages between agencies to make a major contribution to anti-corruption and good governance in the Commonwealth. The Secretariat is working to establish these networks on a sustainable basis on the Commonwealth Connects portal.’ (Sharma 2011c, p.32)

Pursuant to a proposal put forward by the Attorney-General of Samoa at the 27th Pacific Islands Law Officers’ Network (PILON) meeting in 2008, an inaugural Pacific Prosecutors
Conference was convened in Brisbane in July 2009, with funding from the Commonwealth Secretariat and other partners. Prosecutors from Papua New Guinea, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Zealand, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa and Australia attended the conference, which led to the establishment of the Pacific Prosecutors’ Association. Four years later, Sharma recorded in his 2013 memorandum, ‘The Pacific Prosecutors’ Association, which resulted from the Commonwealth Secretariat’s initial pilot in the Asia-Pacific region, is now a self-sustaining body that has become a significant convening partner providing a network for prosecutors to discuss challenges faced by their criminal justice systems’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.23). Furthermore, in 2010, the Secretariat launched the Commonwealth Pacific Governance Facility in Solomon Islands to support the implementation of the good governance pillar of the Pacific Plan. The facility provided assistance on a request basis in four areas, which included democratic institutions and anti-corruption institutions, and developed regional projects in these areas (Sharma 2011c, p.33).

Following the success of the 2009 pilot in the Asia-Pacific region, the Commonwealth Secretariat expanded its focus in this regard to the Caribbean and Africa. As Sharma added:

‘The Commonwealth Secretariat supported the creation in 2011 of the Caribbean Prosecutors Association and helped establish the Pacific Prosecutors Association in 2009. These associations complement other networks that are designed specifically to create contact points on international co-operation in each jurisdiction, such as the Commonwealth Network of Contact Persons.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.24)

The Secretariat also introduced a prosecution and police training programme for the East Africa region. Sharma reported:

‘Between 2011 and 2013, the Commonwealth Secretariat has developed an innovative programme to equip investigators and prosecutors with the skills needed for dealing with transnational crimes, particularly those relating to corruption... It was developed in three components: The first component is an online collaborative component with relevant agencies and experts to produce training modules in specialist skills for prosecutors and investigators; the second component is a face-to-face workshop for participants and experts, who deliver a joint outcome plan and national action plans; and the third are in-country national mentoring programmes. These programmes took place in Mauritius, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Public prosecution directors in each jurisdiction led the national mentoring programmes. They provided the opportunity to cement the training and roll it out to more officials than was possible in the initial programme. Over 180 prosecutors and police officers have benefited from this.’ (Ibid, p.23)

Sharma went on to enlist other Commonwealth anti-corruption initiatives in Africa, such as the first Conference of Heads of Commonwealth African Anti-Corruption Agencies, which was held in May 2011 ‘to address corruption, exchange good practice and improve working relations with key domestic and international partners.’ (Sharma 2011c, p.32)

He explained:

‘The Commonwealth Secretariat recognised that it could add value to Commonwealth efforts in anti-corruption by drawing on its convening power to establish a network through which the anti-corruption agencies could learn from and support each other. In 2011, the Secretariat brought together all heads of anti-corruption agencies in Commonwealth Africa. The heads of these agencies established the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa, a community of practice. The network has two aims: first, to promote South-South collaboration and learning by brokering the exchange of ideas and
good practices among Commonwealth African countries and, second, to share experience in areas of comparative advantage. The annual meeting of the heads of anti-corruption agencies acts as a forum for South–South co-operation and peer learning. At the meetings, held in Mauritius in 2013 and in Ghana in 2014, heads peer-reviewed country anti-corruption reports and shared transferable experiences. In May 2015, the meeting was held in Tanzania. The association facilitated enhanced co-operation that enabled exchanges between counterparts in anti-corruption agencies. A Secretariat-brokered agreement between Ghana and Nigeria for mutual assistance in cross-border criminal investigations led to significant results in West Africa.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.36)

The Secretariat elaborated:

‘The agency heads from 18 countries peer review anti-corruption initiatives, benchmark their performance and exchange best practices. Bilateral agreements that have resulted include a mutual assistance agreement between Ghana and Nigeria to combat trans-border crimes in West Africa. In a similar mould, Caribbean countries came together in 2015 to establish the Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The new association, composed of agencies from 12 countries, supports cross-border co-operation and knowledge exchange. Under its auspices, Jamaica’s Office of the Contractor General is now sharing its investigative tools, compliance systems and procedures with Grenada’s Integrity Commission.’ (The Commonwealth, no date b)

In February 2013, the Commonwealth Secretariat, in partnership with the Government of Botswana’s Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime and the Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies in Commonwealth Africa, formally established the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre (CAACC) in Gaborone, Botswana. Speaking at its launch, Dr Ponatsheo HK Kedikilwe, MP, Vice-President of Botswana, remarked:

‘Our continent has and is still suffering from the deadly disease of corruption. For us as a Commonwealth, the countries of Africa have a special responsibility to take the fight against corruption to another level... It is imperative that our countries unite to fight this common enemy. No country can singularly fight corruption and succeed. Strength will be found collectively in the prestigious CAACC we are gathered here to launch.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p.39)

In his 2013–15 Biennial Report, Sharma outlined the work of CAACC:

‘The Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Government of Botswana makes provision for Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation funding of up to £250,000 per year from 2013 to 2017. After 2017, the expectation is that member governments and development partners will fund the centre. The centre is a tangible demonstration of the Secretariat’s commitment to support anti-corruption efforts by its members. The establishment of the centre at the request of members is also a sign that Africa and the wider Commonwealth are committed to rooting out corruption. The centre provides training, undertakes research and encourages political initiatives on issues such as investigations, public education and prevention, forensics, prosecution and asset tracking. Since its launch in 2013, 150 heads of anti-corruption agencies, department heads and officers of anti-corruption agencies have benefited from the centre’s innovative professional training and capacity development programmes. At the behest of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) of Mauritius, the Secretariat provided bespoke practical training to the prosecutors and investigators of the commission in April 2015. Eighty-four participants from ICAC, the police and the Attorney-General’s Office attended the three-day programme on investigating and prosecuting corruption-related cases.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015b, p.36)
Did the efforts of the Commonwealth – both at the level of the Commonwealth Secretariat and at the level of the member states working individually or in partnership – bear some fruit in the fight against corruption? Given the plethora of initiatives in this regard, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely how much impact the Commonwealth initiatives had. Yet, when one considers that seven of the top ten countries in the 2015 Ibrahim Index of African Governance – which measures rule of law, human rights, participation, human development and sustainable economic opportunity – are Commonwealth members, one could not be faulted for believing that the impact has been significant (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2015). Mauritius leads the pack, followed by Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Seychelles, Ghana and Lesotho. Likewise, according to the 2015 Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International, eight of the top ten countries perceived to have the lowest levels of corruption in Africa are Commonwealth members (Transparency International 2015). Botswana ranks at the top, followed by Seychelles in the third place, and then Rwanda, Mauritius, Namibia, Ghana, Lesotho and South Africa. Sharma also pointed out:

‘Over the past few years, Sierra Leone has made impressive progress in the fight against corruption through efforts such as the Open Government Initiative, as well as the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission, both of which benefited from the Commonwealth Secretariat’s expertise and assistance. This progress is demonstrated by the steady improvement to the country’s Transparency International anti-corruption score (from 1.99 in 2008 to 2.5 in 2011), and its rise on Ibrahim Index of African Governance (from 49th to 30th place).’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, pp.40–1)

In terms of ranking, Sierra Leone rose in the Corruption Perception Index from 158 in 2008 to 134 in 2011 and 119 in 2015. Likewise, Lesotho rose from 92 in 2008 to 77 in 2011 and 61 in 2015. The rise of Rwanda was even more dramatic: 121 in 2006 to 102 in 2008 to 49 in 2011 and 44 in 2015.

To conclude, it would be worth remembering Sharma’s response to a question about Commonwealth initiatives against corruption put forward by a young Ayodeji from Nigeria, while answering questions from young people for Commonwealth Day 2014:

‘In the end, it is the transparency, the integrity and the highest governance standards in our public life that the citizens of any country are looking for. In Africa, we have taken a particular interest in this. We now have, as a great pioneering step which was recognised all over the world, an Anti-Corruption Centre for Africa which was created in Botswana. The purpose of the centre is that people, practitioners, officials, those engaged in the field from all over Africa can meet in the centre, exchange their experiences and best practices, and go back home with a roadmap which is even more effective. Concretely, what we try and do is strengthen anti-corruption commissions. Of course, our philosophy is that any member state would want to do it for themselves. If they want to do it for themselves, then we are ready to be a partner with them, and we are working with some of them. The other is legislation, because you must have legislation which is right and respond to the expectations of the citizens that the rule of law encompasses and embraces all forms of corruption. And lastly what we try and do is to help member states who have natural resources, [and] want natural resource development – as you know, in the field of energy and mining, there are very big projects that involve unfortunately a lot of potential for wrongdoing and for corruption. So what we do is to develop a model law that if you want to exploit this form of natural resource, then we suggest that this will be a model law which will take care of the handling of the revenue in a transparent way, in a way in which the most fastidious audit authority can applaud you. These are some of the ways in which we are absolutely serious in helping our member states have corruption-free societies.’ (The Commonwealth 2014)
15. COMMONWEALTH FAMILY AND PARTNERSHIPS

‘The Commonwealth is a unique institution. I can think of no other international organisation that can so readily draw upon a range of civil society and intergovernmental organisations that work on different levels and on such diverse subject matters – at the local government level to parliamentary level, and from anti-corruption to human ecology. The Commonwealth is very lucky to be able to draw upon the expertise and enthusiasm that its accredited organisations provide. The range of expertise in this room is a true testament to the diversity of the Commonwealth.’

The date was 28 January 2016; the venue, Marlborough House in London. The occasion was a luncheon, hosted by Kamalesh Sharma, that was, in his own words, ‘to my knowledge at least, the first of its kind bringing together the Accreditation Committee, the accredited organisations and senior Secretariat staff members – a true Commonwealth family event’. Indeed, although three intergovernmental organisations – the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning – may have been at the heart of the Commonwealth family, that family included more than 80 civil society and professional organisations that were accredited to the Commonwealth and had their ‘fingers on the pulse’ in specialist areas as wide ranging as education, mental health and fostering Commonwealth friendship. Several of these organisations were founded long before the Commonwealth Secretariat came into being, with some also predating the London Declaration (1949) and even the Statute of Westminster (1931). The Royal Commonwealth Society, which was anything but marginal to the Commonwealth story, traced its origins to 1868. The Commonwealth Education Trust, although established in 2007, emerged as the successor to the Commonwealth Institute (formerly, the Imperial Institute) that was founded in 1886. The Victoria League for Commonwealth Friendship and the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation dated back to 1901; the Royal Over-Seas League and The Round Table, to 1910; the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 1911; the list goes on.

The unique richness and diversity of the Commonwealth family network (rather, ‘network of networks’) today would provide a fine litany. In education, the family includes bodies such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities (1913), Institute of Commonwealth Studies (1949), Council for Education in the Commonwealth (1959) and the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (2001). In health, it includes the Commonwealth Medical Association (1962), Commonwealth Pharmacists Association (1970), Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation (1973) and so on. In the law, there is the Commonwealth Magistrates’ and Judges’ Association (1970), Commonwealth Lawyers Association (1983) and the Commonwealth Association of Law Reform Agencies (2003). Even among other professions, there were Commonwealth-affiliated bodies ranging from the Association of International Accountants (1928), Commonwealth Engineers Council (1946) and Commonwealth Association of Architects (1965) to the Conference of Commonwealth Meteorologists (1929), Commonwealth Journalists Association (1978) and Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Record
Managers (1984). Those in trade could turn to the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (2014) and Commonwealth Business Women’s Network (2015); likewise, those involved with trade unions could look to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (1949) and Commonwealth Trade Union Group (1980). The family also includes organisations such as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (1917), Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (1969), Commonwealth Association of Museums (1974), Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (1987) and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (1995), which continue to make a positive difference in their respective areas, adding value to the Commonwealth and enhancing the ability of the Commonwealth to add value. Prominent NGOs such as World Vision International UK, Transparency International, Rotary International, Sightsavers International and Sound Seekers are also accredited members of the Commonwealth family.

Since their inception, one question that has loomed over both the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation is their relationship with these accredited organisations in terms of status, activities and funding. It would be useful at this point to clarify the nature and functions of each of the three categories into which Commonwealth organisations have been grouped:

- **Intergovernmental organisations:**
  There are three intergovernmental organisations at the heart of the Commonwealth family: the Commonwealth Secretariat, founded in 1965 and headquartered at Marlborough House in London; the Commonwealth Foundation, established in 1966 and also operating out of Marlborough House; and the Commonwealth of Learning, formed in 1988 and headquartered in Vancouver. Of these, the Commonwealth Secretariat is the principal intergovernmental agency and central institution of the Commonwealth, while the Commonwealth Foundation initially sought to network civil associations across the Commonwealth, but gradually came to provide support to wider civil society and facilitate engagement with the Secretariat. The youngest of the three, the Commonwealth of Learning, is the world’s only intergovernmental organisation solely concerned with the promotion and development of distance education and open learning. While the Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning count many Commonwealth governments as members, the Commonwealth Secretariat is the only one of the three whose membership and governance includes all 53 Commonwealth governments.

- **Associated organisations:**
  There are nine organisations within the Commonwealth family that have origins or characteristics of a quasi-governmental nature and are accredited by Commonwealth member governments as ‘associated organisations’. These include the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators, Conference of Commonwealth Postal Administrators, Conference of Commonwealth Meteorologists, Commonwealth Games Federation, Commonwealth Education Trust, Commonwealth Local Government Forum, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation.

- **Civil society organisations:**
  There are around 70 other professional associations, interest groups and charities within the Commonwealth family that are accredited by Commonwealth member governments as ‘civil society organisations’. These include the Royal Commonwealth Society, Royal Over-Seas League, Commonwealth Consortium for Education, Commonwealth Medical Association, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Commonwealth Journalists Association and many other bodies mentioned earlier in the chapter.
Together, the associated organisations and the civil society organisations are generally referred to as ‘accredited organisations’, having been granted special recognition and status within the Commonwealth by the Board of Governors of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The board introduced the accreditation process in 2003, with a view to strengthen oversight of those organisations using the Commonwealth’s name and indicating belonging within the Commonwealth family of organisations, so as to ensure all actors understood and accepted their rights and responsibilities. As far as the accreditation process is concerned, it is a lot less arbitrary and obscure than one might imagine. An Accreditation Committee, comprising a rotating group of representatives of eight member governments, considers applications by organisations, and makes recommendations to the board for accreditation. The Accreditation Committee also works closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat in finding ways to strengthen the oversight and value of accreditation, including by identifying possible changes to the categorisation of accredited organisations.

Both the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation, which see their roles as distinct, engage with civil society, but in different ways. As noted in the 2015 report Civil Society and The Commonwealth: Reaching for Partnership of the International Advisory Commission of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI):

‘The foundation, beyond supporting civil society’s networking and capacity building, has strived to increase civil society input and participation in the Commonwealth’s periodic ministerial meetings... and at the biennial meeting of its heads. However, government officials have dictated the depth of interaction, and some meetings have been more open than others. The Secretariat’s encounters with civil society vary across its divisions and thus far have tended to focus primarily on accredited organisations. Several of the Secretariat’s divisions do have frequent interactions with other organisations, especially those based in London. Other interactions are focused on individuals, tapping their expertise or getting perspective and advice in designing or resourcing programmes. The picture of engagement between civil society and the Commonwealth is as varied as its participants.’ (CHRI 2015, p.4)

When Sharma took over as Commonwealth Secretary-General, the need to build closer relations with Commonwealth organisations was clear in the directives issued by the Heads. The Trinidad and Tobago Affirmation of Commonwealth Values and Principles adopted at the Port of Spain CHOGM in 2009 made clear the importance that the Heads placed on Commonwealth organisations working coherently:

‘We underscore the importance of coherence in order to protect the Commonwealth’s image and credibility. We urge all Commonwealth organisations to subscribe and adhere to Commonwealth values and principles in every possible way.

We are committed to securing a greater level of co-ordination and collaboration between all Commonwealth contributors and stakeholders, particularly including governments, civil society, business, the diversity of Commonwealth professional and other associations that bring together our citizens, academia and others.

We also underline the importance we attach to the Secretariat intensifying the Secretariat’s commitment to strategic partnerships with other international organisations and partners in order to advance Commonwealth values and principles.’

Furthermore, the Eminent Persons Group, which was established following the 2009 CHOGM, recommended in its report A Commonwealth of the People: Time for Urgent Reform, presented at the Perth CHOGM in 2011, that the Secretariat should strengthen its functional co-operation, information exchange and co-ordination with other Commonwealth
organisations, especially associated organisations. The Secretary-General, the group also recommended, should continue to have primary responsibility for maintaining the linkages between civil society and member governments. At the Perth CHOGM, Heads also requested that the Commonwealth Foundation re-orient itself to ‘more effectively deliver the objectives of strengthening and mobilising civil society in support of Commonwealth principles and priorities’ (Krishnarayan 2013, pp.297–8).

Subsequently, both the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Secretariat embarked on processes of reform and revitalisation, and came up with new strategic plans. As Vijay Krishnarayan, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, discussed in The Round Table in 2013, the Commonwealth Foundation, at the time of its founding, was seen as a mechanism to support the organisations that networked professional associations across the Commonwealth – ‘a response to the need to build a professional class in nascent independent nations’ (Ibid, p.297). Such support was provided through grants and lasted well past 1981, when the widening of the foundation’s mandate meant that it could work with both accredited and non-accredited non-governmental organisations in the Commonwealth. In 2003, the foundation commissioned Professor Stephen Matlin to review its relationship with Commonwealth organisations; this led to provision in its policy for a ring-fenced grant fund catering to accredited organisations exclusively. This facility, which amounted to around £250,000 per annum between 2008 and 2013, was much valued by Commonwealth organisations, partly because it could not be accessed by civil society at large, and also because it could be used to cover core operating costs, such as office rent and staffing (Ibid, pp.297–8).

The directive issued at the Perth CHOGM in 2011 – that the foundation should strengthen and mobilise civil society in support of Commonwealth principles and priorities – instigated the preparation and adoption of a new strategic plan, which, building on a results-based management approach, also required that all resources – including grant funds – be redirected towards the pursuit of new corporate outcomes. As the 2015 CHRI report observed:

‘The Foundation’s Strategic Plan for 2012–2016 broadens its focus from professional associations and accredited organisations to support for wider civil society, i.e. non-accredited organisations. In order to increase the effectiveness of civil society’s participation in governance in member states, it pledges to empower and engage, build capacity and provide support for an enabling environment in which civil society can function.’ (CHRI 2015, p.5)

The report added that ‘opening up civil society space at ministerial meetings and at the iconic CHOGM has long been a priority for the Foundation, but also a frustration’, and the ‘new Civil Society Engagement Strategy has therefore opted for “a more selective approach to working with and accessing” spaces for civil society at Commonwealth forums’ (Ibid, p.5).

For the foundation, facilitating engagement with the Secretariat and official meetings was clearly one of many ways in which it could fulfil its objectives (Ibid, p.5). As Krishnarayan explained,

‘The Foundation’s new direction called for a change in the nature of the relationship between the organisation and the Commonwealth Family. This stemmed from the conversion of the Foundation from an organisation with a mission to be supportive and responsive to the agendas of others in the family, to an organisation with a responsibility to animate participatory governance and in turn Commonwealth principles and priorities.’ (Krishnarayan 2013, p.298)
This re-orientation also meant that the foundation would now deploy its resources towards building partnerships with those organisations that shared its new mission. No longer would there be a dedicated stream of funding to accredited organisations, and all organisations would now ‘compete on an equal basis three times a year for grants that advance the practice of participatory governance’ (Ibid, p.298). The change, announced before the foundation was relaunched on 1 November 2012, led to some accredited organisations accusing the foundation of abandoning its commitment to civil society and even questioning the value of accreditation itself, as one of the recently added, but much-valued, benefits of accreditation was access to ring-fenced funding. The foundation clarified that it had not turned its back on that commitment, but simply sought, as Krishnarayan pointed out, ‘to change its relationship with Commonwealth-accredited organisations from a transactional, funding focus to a more strategic, programme orientation’ (Ibid, p.298). The foundation hoped to develop a transition programme to assist accredited organisations adjust to the changes, and to establish a fund to support initiatives – such as strategic planning and fundraising training – by targeted organisations that sought to make themselves more sustainable (Ibid, p.297).

On the other hand, as the CHRI report observed, ‘The Secretariat’s Strategic Plan covers the period 2013–2017 and lists “facilitat[ing] the work of the Commonwealth family of organisations” as one of the Secretariat’s core responsibilities. It has been informed by input from Commonwealth organisations, particularly those in the health and education sectors, and influenced by the EPG Report, which itself drew on more than 300 submissions by organisations’ (CHRI 2015, p.6). At the behest of Secretary-General Sharma, the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Strategic Plan for 2013/14–2016/17 also included a separate chapter in the plan that discussed collaboration with Commonwealth organisations. The chapter, provided below, is taken from the Revised Strategic Plan.

‘5. Collaboration with Commonwealth organisations

91. The Secretariat has continued in recent years to consolidate a closer working relationship with the accredited Commonwealth organisations, in order to give greater relevance and substance to accreditation itself, as well as to promote more effective partnerships in delivering the Secretariat’s work programme. This approach was given a further impetus by the EPG recommendations that the Secretariat should strengthen its relationship with the Commonwealth Foundation (Recommendation 81); co-ordinate its work with associated Commonwealth institutions in order to draw on their expertise (Recommendation 87); and strengthen its linkages and functional co-operation with Commonwealth agencies in the field (Recommendation 89).

92. The Secretariat will establish institutionalised mechanisms of liaison and collaboration with other intergovernmental and accredited Commonwealth organisations. The Secretariat will propose, for the approval of the Board of Governors, a framework of consultations with accredited Commonwealth organisations.

93. The Secretary-General will meet at least once every year with the heads of intergovernmental organisations and attend consultative meetings with accredited organisations. The Secretary-General, as well as other members of the senior management, will continue to promote Commonwealth organisations in member states. The ongoing consultations with accredited organisations will be made strategic and meaningful, with an emphasis on promoting more qualitative, knowledge-sharing and results-oriented dialogue. The Accreditation Guidelines have been revised, and the Secretariat will develop a framework for the accreditation review process to ensure that these organisations uphold Commonwealth values and principles.’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2016b, p.29)
It is against this backdrop that Sharma’s motivations and contributions in this regard may be
best understood. Sharma recounted:

“The Commonwealth Foundation underwent a big reform drive at the same time as the
Commonwealth Secretariat did. When the new Strategic Plan was devised, it took a couple
of years for the process to be completed, as it had to be done through the Governors and
the Board. I had sought very much for the importance of Commonwealth organisations to
our work to be emphasised, and I proposed that a section be incorporated into the Strategic
Plan that clearly set out a commitment to introducing and strengthening mechanisms of
liaison, collaboration, consultation and co-ordination. Hence, I was very pleased that the
Strategic Plan, for the first time, included a new and entire chapter – Chapter 5 – dedicated
to the Commonwealth Family.

When I proposed such a chapter, I was clear about one thing: when we talk of reform, that
is fine, but we cannot talk just of the Secretariat without also mentioning its relationships.
When we talk about relationships, moreover, we cannot ignore the implications that reform
within other Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations could have on accredited
organisations, with which the Secretariat had relationships, and on the Secretariat’s
relationships with them. The Commonwealth Foundation used to give budgetary support
to accredited organisations, but part of the foundational reform of that organisation was to
return to the vision behind its creation, which was to strengthen civil society, not become
a means of giving subsidy to Commonwealth organisations. The Commonwealth
Foundation has gone back to its original intent in 1966 – that is, rise in its involvement with
civil society. It stopped funding the accredited organisations.

Subsequently, we told the Commonwealth Family that we are prepared to do projects with
them. We cannot give budgetary support as the Commonwealth Foundation used to do,
but we made clear that the Commonwealth Secretariat was willing to consider joint projects
which it would finance, but which must be aligned with its Strategic Plan. The message sent
out was clear and simple: “You will have to become part of the same discipline to which
we ourselves had subscribed at the Secretariat. We cannot do joint projects with all of the
family, but we can and will do so with those whose proposed activities fit especially well
with the priorities identified in the Strategic Plan”. Chapter 5 (see above) and Annex III:
Revised Strategic Results Framework (see below) of the Strategic Plan offered further
details about what these priorities were. In that way, the Commonwealth Family could be
integrated in our own work at the Secretariat.

I also decided to prepare a paper in which I lay down the new ground rules in relation to
the frameworks for collaboration and consultation. At the CHOGM, the Heads said that
this should be a high-level review, so it would be advisable to have a paper which the Heads
could agree on. So, we developed a paper that has still to be formally approved by the
Board, but wherein I have proposed a regular form of interaction with the other
organisations. The paper made clear:

“The Secretariat remains committed to continued and stronger collaboration with
accredited and other organisations in order to advance Commonwealth values and
principles, and specifically to advance the outcomes of the Strategic Plan approved by the
Board. There are a number of Commonwealth-accredited organisations which are working
to meet similar objectives to those mandated by member governments in the
Commonwealth Secretariat’s Strategic Plan. Collaboration with these organisations is a key
feature of the new ways of working in order to implement the Strategic Plan, and the
Secretariat has welcomed the Board’s ensuing endorsement and encouragement. Such
collaboration is being advanced where there is coherence and alignment of effort to advance
the Secretariat’s Strategic Plan, and where the Secretariat’s results-based management standards and other governance standards can be met by the partner concerned.”

There were a number of ways in which I sought to advance stronger practical collaboration, over and beyond existing patterns of collaboration, and without requiring any additional resources or reallocation of existing resources. At my suggestion, the Secretariat created within its staff establishment a two-person “Partnerships” team dedicated to bolstering our relationship with accredited organisations and other external partners. The team is based in the Secretary-General’s Office and focuses *inter alia* on strengthening information exchanges and liaison in general, and promoting practical collaboration between accredited Commonwealth organisations and individual divisions of the Secretariat. Emma Kerr has been appointed as Partnerships Support Officer, providing accredited organisations with a main point of contact in the Secretariat, while Michael Mapstone has been appointed Strategic Partnerships Adviser, overlooking all external relationships. The Partnerships Support Officer held introductory meetings with all of the accredited organisations that were available to meet over six months in her first year in the post.

The Partnerships team also organised a number of capacity-building activities for the accredited organisations. We worked with the accredited organisations on RBM (results-based management), saying that if you want to do projects with us, we have to have the same methodology to test the impact. We also had sessions with them on how to raise money for themselves, so they would not depend just on joint projects with the Commonwealth Secretariat which would be limited to our Strategic Plan. The activities include a workshop on fundraising that took place in August 2015 and another on results-based management in October 2015, with the aim of helping the accredited organisations become more independent, self-sustaining and aligned with the Secretariat in its approach. Both of the mentioned workshops were very well-received by the organisations. I understand that the next workshop is to discuss how best to ensure diversity in governance boards and membership, in line with 2016’s Commonwealth theme of inclusivity. Such meetings will now be a regular feature in the Commonwealth diary.

A “horizon scan” of the objectives of the accredited organisations and their mutual areas of interest with the Secretariat has also been developed; in addition, the Partnerships team has already initiated a number of conversations with individual organisations and the appropriate divisions within the Secretariat about potential areas of mutual collaboration. My last few months in office were, thus, an exciting time – a time in which we were revitalising old friendships and making new ones, and I am very pleased that the Commonwealth family is a part of that.’

In the last year of Sharma’s tenure as Secretary-General, the Secretariat also made several advances in its consultations with accredited organisations. On 14 May 2015, the Secretariat brought together representatives of Commonwealth-accredited organisations at Marlborough House for a consultation with the Secretary-General and senior officials of the Secretariat. While the Secretariat staff shared their workplans, they also sought feedback from the participants. As Sharma remarked:

‘This meeting was the first under the new configuration which brought responsibility for liaising with Commonwealth civil society and strategic partnerships into the Secretary-General’s Office. I discussed, in my opening remarks, how civil society organisations, especially those accredited to the Commonwealth, played an indispensable and invaluable role in strengthening the networks of the Commonwealth and reinforcing the sense of kinship and affinity that are a distinctive feature of Commonwealth connection. I spoke of how the unique convening power of the Commonwealth will be seen at the associated
People’s, Business, Youth, and Women’s Forums at the upcoming CHOGM in Malta, in each of which Commonwealth-accredited organisations played a central role. I also made mention of how these forums would serve as the channels whereby the accredited organisations would convey the concerns of Commonwealth citizens in all 53 member states to the Heads of Government. The Secretariat also conveyed its intention to hold two such consultations annually. There were over 60 of the organisations in attendance at the consultation, participating either in person or via Skype.

In June 2015, ahead of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development in Addis Ababa, the Secretariat hosted another consultative meeting with accredited organisations. There, they heard from Sam Attridge, Head of Finance and Development Policy in the Secretariat’s Economic Policy Division about the Secretariat’s plans for engagement at the conference, and provided their input and feedback. Furthermore, the Health and Education Unit of the Secretariat invited the accredited organisations to a feedback session after the 19th CCEM held in The Bahamas from 22 to 26 June 2015. The purpose was to consult the accredited organisations regarding their plans for interaction with senior officials at the Committee of the Whole (CoW) later that year. The CoW comprised High Commissioners or Heads of Mission from all Commonwealth countries, and it was due to meet on 20 October 2015. The consultation sought to strengthen the relevance of the contributions made by accredited organisations before the CHOGM Communiqué was developed through intergovernmental discussion. The 71 accredited ‘civil society organisations’ met and decided that, rather than making individual submissions as in the past, they would develop four short thematic papers collectively. These were:

- Finding Commonwealth Solutions: Climate Change and the Blue Economy;
- Freedom of Expression in the Commonwealth: Rights and Responsibilities;
- CHOGM 2015: Civil Society Statement on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Economic and Social Values; and,
- Civil Society: Adding Value in the Commonwealth.

Furthermore, the nine ‘associated organisations’ also prepared a separate document that was circulated and introduced separately during the meeting (CoW 2015, p.1).

Sharma also included representatives from the Commonwealth’s other intergovernmental organisations and associated organisations in the Secretary-General’s official delegation to special intergovernmental meetings organised by the UN. He explains:

‘I started something absolutely novel: I sought to make the accredited organisations feel that they are part of the same enterprise by including them as members of my delegations. This occurred in the case of the third UN SIDS summit in Samoa in September 2014, as well as the third UN Financing for Development conference held in Addis Ababa in July 2015. In relation to the latter, I encouraged Deputy Secretary-General, Deodat Maharaj, to include associated organisations in his delegation, and we also held a workshop with other accredited organisations at which we discussed the Commonwealth’s advocacy goals at the conference. If I had to summarise my philosophy in this regard, it would be: Co-creation of Value. Many believe that the world around you is gripped in metamorphosis so rapid that you can only make a difference if you create your values and match them to that of the rest of the world. Instead, I felt you should co-create value with stakeholders. Indirectly, I said to the accredited organisations that I will make you integral to the Strategic Plan by engaging with you in the co-creation of value. I ought to also mention that, thanks to the brokerage of the Partnerships team, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum was invited by the UN Office for South–South Co-operation to participate in a high-level multi-stakeholder forum as part of its World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty.’
Sharma added:

‘We made other changes to increase our engagement with accredited organisations and to build their capacity. We created a Commonwealth Connects platform for the sole use of the accredited organisations to enable information sharing and discussion of relevant Commonwealth themes. The platform is also used on a regular basis to communicate with the accredited organisations, to provide updates on the Secretariat’s work and to facilitate meetings with our partners.’

As the CHRI report described it:

‘The interactive digital platform for collaboration and information sharing provides a space for posting ideas, planning initiatives, co-editing documents and keeping organisations informed of Commonwealth events. Along with practical information about using facilities at Marlborough House, a well laid out library of documents is being assembled. This includes extensive minutes and audio recordings of meetings – a major step towards transparency. Recent efforts to popularise the site has increased its user base; every active accredited organisation now has a representative with an account. Making some parts of the site accessible to the public would go towards increasing visibility for the Commonwealth. If it comes to be widely used, Connects has the potential to attract greater engagement with the Secretariat and improve networking among civil society organisations.’ (CHRI 2015, p.6)

According to the Secretariat, there are numerous discussions taking place on Commonwealth Connects, which is monitored regularly. The Secretariat also gathered feedback from the organisations on the accreditation guidelines and presented it to the Accreditation Committee at meeting on 16 September 2015. The Accreditation Committee agreed that a representative from the organisations could be present at its next meeting to provide feedback from the organisations to the committee.

Furthermore, when it came to increasing the engagement with and participation of civil society, the Malta CHOGM in November 2015 was a significant success. Sharma pointed out a little over a month later:

‘I was very pleased to see such high levels of engagement between all members of the Commonwealth family (the three intergovernmental organisations, the accredited organisations and the member governments) throughout the CHOGM process, from the contributions at the Committee of the Whole to the interactions at the Foreign Ministers’ Roundtable in Malta. One of our biggest successes has been the increased involvement of civil society organisations. When senior officials came to London ahead of the CHOGM, it was a good opportunity for accredited organisations to convey their views on how best the engagement with civil society could be taken forward, as well as to influence the agenda setting for the CHOGM. The feedback from member governments was very positive. Towards the end of October 2015, the Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, Vijay Krishnarayan, and the foundation’s Deputy Director, Myn Garcia, also met with Malta’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, George Valla, and agreed that the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers’ Roundtable with Civil Society that was to be convened during the CHOGM and that Valla was to chair should serve not only as an important forum that provided exposure to civil society organisations from across the Commonwealth, but also a platform for civil society representatives to present their ideas and views to the foreign ministers. The Commonwealth People’s Forum (CPF), held over three days in the run-up to the CHOGM, was also a great success: there were nearly 350 delegates from 44 countries participating in
19 sessions and engaging with the theme “What Makes Societies resilient?” The CPF also included for the first time ever a dialogue between the three Commonwealth Secretary-General candidates and civil society representatives, which was hosted and chaired by the Speaker of the Maltese House of Representatives in the Maltese Parliament.

It is a true asset to the Commonwealth that it has so many diverse and passionate voices that regularly speak on its behalf at these meetings. At the CHOGM itself, the Roundtable with Foreign Ministers was much appreciated by the civil organisations taking part, as also the foreign ministers themselves. For ever so long, the foreign ministers had been sidelined at the CHOGMs, trailing behind their respective Heads of Government. However, this had changed in recent years, with meetings of foreign ministers introduced at the biennial CHOGMs, alongside the annual meetings of foreign ministers held in the wings of the UN General Assembly in New York every September. Moreover, at the 2005 CHOGM in Malta, the Government of Malta had introduced the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers’ Roundtable with Civil Society, which gave the foreign ministers a new role as the key point of contact between member governments and Commonwealth and civil society organisations. At the 2015 CHOGM in Malta, this roundtable, held on 28 November, was a huge success. The associated organisations opened the morning session, following which the civil society organisations shared their views, with the meeting concluding with a session with the three Commonwealth intergovernmental organisations. The meeting was deliberately organised on a Saturday, as that is when the Heads of Government were away at the Retreat, leaving the foreign ministers with some time on their hands that the Roundtable could put to good use. As Chair of the Roundtable, the Foreign Minister of Malta remarked that this meeting was one of the most interesting meetings at the CHOGM, as the foreign ministers too were very engaged. The Foreign Minister, Dr Valla, also said to me that that this roundtable was the only time he had learnt something. The meeting was the most successful of the roundtables, and it ran longer than planned by an hour and a half. Even some veteran Commonwealth observers regarded it as the most productive Commonwealth meeting for civil society.’

There were also advances made when it came to relationships outside the Commonwealth family, aided in no small part by the newly-established Partnerships team. As Sharma outlined some of these advances, it was clear that he took considerable pride in the contributions of his team in this regard:

‘To return to the topic of the Partnerships team, while the work of the partnerships support officer was consultative and collaborative, the task before the strategic partnerships adviser was to give coherence to the various partnerships, especially those dealing with the non-Commonwealth (and potential Commonwealth) family and external partnerships. Hence, Michael Mapstone, the Strategic Partnerships Adviser, has been looking at organisations outside the Commonwealth family and devising a strategy for such partnerships. With respect to external partners, the Secretariat has since commenced high-level discussions and is exploring practical collaboration with the African Union Commission, with UN Women and with UNESCO. [Michael] has, for instance, been speaking to UNESCO about counter-radicalisation, as well as coming up with a more defined MoU that reflects engagement on issues such as education, health, youth empowerment and countering violent extremism. While the MoU with UN Women has been signed, the MoU with UNESCO will be going through the Executive Board of UNESCO.

Michael has also been engaging closely with all of the other UN specialised agencies, and looking at building, widening or strengthening partnerships with the main instruments of international development, such as the African Union and African Development Bank.
Much of his role is to look at such external partnerships strategically and support Commonwealth organisations in identifying potential partners, especially in emerging trends. The Commonwealth is also developing a strategic partnership with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation: it has been observed – not least in the Ibrahim Index of African Governance – that several Commonwealth countries outperform others. In the 2015 Ibrahim Index, seven of the top ten countries were Commonwealth members – Mauritius, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, Seychelles, Ghana and Lesotho. The Commonwealth will be working with the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to see why that is. It will also establish dialogue with countries via their High Commissions. The Commonwealth is also working with Transparency International and the UK Government in anti-corruption.

The OECD E-Library is one example of how the Commonwealth has sought to engage with another international organisation. As part of this partnership, the year 2014 saw Commonwealth Secretariat books published online for the first time in partnership with the OECD. The Commonwealth iLibrary was launched in September 2014 with 171 full-text titles available for any user to read for free online. To complete the online collection, over 700 print titles were digitised. The digitisation was completed in April 2015. By September 2015, the Secretariat’s entire collection of prized books, over 900 titles, will be available to view, share and read for free via this platform. The Secretariat’s library and archives contain books, periodicals, conference reports, discussion and working papers, government publications and official Commonwealth publications. Some collections are available online. Archives are held as physical document collections at Marlborough House in London. Between July 2014 and June 2015, there were approximately 4,269 visits to the library and archives online public access catalogue found on the Secretariat website.¹

Over recent years, the number of international observances recognised by the United Nations and its specialised agencies has grown to more than a hundred. The popularity of such observances is tied to the opportunity they provide in our diverse and ever-evolving world to have certain days, weeks, years or even decades endowed with greater visibility, permanence and significance so as to serve as flag poles in our calendars for specific themes or topics. International days, the most common of such observances, have proved to be especially invaluable for intergovernmental organisations seeking to mark anniversaries or key events, or raise public awareness and mobilise towards action on certain issues. While many of the most widely recognised international days commemorated today were designated as such by the UN and its specialised agencies, the Commonwealth is no stranger to the concept.

Held on the second Monday in March every year, Commonwealth Day has long provided an opportunity for individuals, communities, organisations and nations across the Commonwealth and beyond to celebrate the unique association’s rich history and diversity and promote the values that lie at its heart. While this annual celebration may trace its origins to Empire Day, which had been introduced by Clementina Trenholme in Canada in 1898 and by Lord Meath in the UK in 1904 before it was extended throughout the Commonwealth, it was given a new lease of life as Commonwealth Day in 1958 as the Empire itself gradually gave way to the new multi-racial, post-colonial, values-driven Commonwealth. Then, it was in 1977 that Commonwealth Heads of Government agreed that Commonwealth Day should be celebrated annually on the second Monday of March. Each year has a theme chosen for Commonwealth Day, and the theme guides the activities and events of Commonwealth organisations through the year. Many are the activities and celebrations that are organised globally to mark Commonwealth Day itself, with perhaps the most prominent and enduring tradition being the multi-faith service at Westminster Abbey, which Her Majesty The Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, faithfully attends, along with the Commonwealth Secretary-General and Commonwealth High Commissioners.

One advantage such international observances provide to intergovernmental organisations is the opportunity for important messages on the theme to be delivered to a wide audience attracted by the convening power of the cause itself. Commonwealth Day, for instance, has provided the Head of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Secretary-General the opportunity to address the Commonwealth at large about themes such as inclusiveness, diversity, tolerance, freedom, and the importance of communication, education, enterprise, environment, health, science and technology, sport, and partnerships. Several Commonwealth Heads of Government have also taken the opportunity to address their nations on the values and ideals that undergird the Commonwealth. For Sharma, there was such clear value in delivering the Secretary-General’s Message on Commonwealth Day that, towards the end of his second term, he came to see in international observances more generally the potential for the Commonwealth Secretary-General to make the voice of the Commonwealth heard on wide-ranging issues through public statements of a similar kind. Thus, as Sharma entered the last two years of his tenure as Secretary-General, the number of international days on which he issued public statements dramatically – and consciously, one ought to add – increased. As Sharma acknowledged:
‘I tried consciously to say more than in the past, not least by saying something when there is a global day of XYZ – be it old age or wealth or women. For example, I issued a strong public statement on LGBT issues on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. International Days, thus, served as pegs on which I hung my public statements. Towards the end, I simply started to say more by issuing statements on a greater number of world days and, consequently, by issuing more public statements.’

Hereon, this chapter will provide key excerpts from most of the public statements that appear to have been issued by Sharma on international days over the last years of his tenure, starting with the most recent and then journeying backwards. In doing so, it is hoped that this chapter will not only serve as a compilation of highlights in this regard, but also indicate the evolution in Sharma’s approach to international observances and – one might add – communications strategy. Most importantly, of course, the hope is that this chapter, hereafter, lets Sharma’s voice come forth on issues that were clearly of much importance to him and that he saw as relevant to his role as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

**International Women’s Day, 8 March 2016**

‘Barriers for women and girls should not exist in 2016, and yet inadequate child and maternal healthcare, harmful gender stereotypes, lack of access to education, training and employment opportunities, and discrimination resulting in the persistent gender pay and skill gaps still persist. We work with governments, international institutions, NGOs and women’s organisations to deepen the understanding and implementation of gender-sensitive policies, particularly strategies to achieve measurable goals for women leaders. We collaborate with UN Women and regional bodies such as the African Union to build the capacity of electoral management bodies to advance the participation of women in politics, and we have worked with the World Bank on promoting women in business. Our work on women’s leadership has resulted in more political participation of women, with many Commonwealth countries having attained the 30 per cent benchmark.

In many instances, women and girls are still denied ownership or inheritance rights. Our work on land rights for women in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria and Sierra Leone helps to address this, as we developed legal handbooks to help women in these countries understand their rights to land and inheritance. We convene triennial meetings of Commonwealth ministers responsible for Women’s Affairs, annual meetings of Commonwealth Women’s National Machineries and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting Women’s Forum, the first of which took place last November, marking a huge Commonwealth milestone towards greater inclusivity. I am delighted that my successor, Patricia Scotland, will be the first woman to take up the position of Commonwealth Secretary-General. It is a watershed moment for the Commonwealth and a step in the direction the Commonwealth has championed.’

**Human Rights Day, 10 December 2015**

‘Human rights are not just the embodiment of aspirational intentions – they are tangible norms that offer real promise to each and every individual, promise of respect and of a more meaningful and secure life. These rights are all inter-related, interdependent and indivisible. One right cannot be fully enjoyed without the promotion and protection of the others. The Commonwealth Charter reaffirms human rights as core values and principles of the Commonwealth. Indeed, the development of human rights and the rule of law has been a cornerstone of the liberty and democracy we enjoy and central to the work of the Commonwealth. The Charter notably affirms that we are “implacably” opposed to discrimination in all its forms. Discrimination undermines the dignity, equality and rights
of individuals and groups, and as has been emphatically affirmed, discrimination has no place in the Commonwealth, and we should work to uproot it wherever it may find itself.\textsuperscript{2}

\textbf{World Food Day, 16 October 2015}

‘Food insecurity is one of the most pressing and difficult global challenges of our time, most keenly felt by the world’s poor and vulnerable, and a profound concern for the Commonwealth... It is the most vulnerable countries in the developing world, including some Commonwealth member states, that feel most keenly the scourgé of food deprivation... In the “Perth Declaration on Food Security Principles” issued from the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, our leaders reaffirmed the right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food, particularly in the context of national food security... Our Commonwealth family is well placed to work collaboratively to ensure greater food and water security through shared technical and practical solutions. The Royal Commonwealth Society, for example, uses its extensive network to promote greater dissemination of best-practice farming techniques and to help co-ordinate emergency assistance where a famine occurs. In addressing food security, we must also recognise the need for sustainable management of oceans for livelihoods, particularly for our small islands member states in the Commonwealth... For as long as there are factors creating an environment where people go hungry, the Commonwealth will be a voice for the vulnerable, assisting member governments with policy and technical assistance to develop sustainable economies and livelihoods.’\textsuperscript{3}

\textbf{International Day of Rural Women, 14 October 2015 (for 15 October 2015)}

‘International Day of Rural Women on 15 October is a time to celebrate and applaud the role of women in rural development, food production and poverty eradication... Rural women support their households and communities in providing food and water and balanced nutrition, generating income, improving rural livelihoods and overall well-being. This day is also a time to recognise the immense challenges they face. Rural women and girls are disproportionately affected by lack of education, poor amenities, pressures of underdevelopment, and, for many, human rights violations such as child, early and forced marriage, as well as unequal access to land ownership. Anchored by the Kigali Declaration and the 2013 CHOGM mandate to address the issue of child, early and forced marriage, we commenced a programme of work which includes engaging with traditional leaders and structures in Commonwealth countries to prevent and eradicate child marriage in rural areas. This work focuses on mobilising traditional leadership and governance structures as custodians of traditional customs and cultures to do more to address harmful traditional practices. The Commonwealth recognises that rural women are mainstays of local and hence national and global economies, and it is critical they are accorded their rightful place as active participants in the efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.’\textsuperscript{4}

\textbf{International Day of the Girl Child, 7 October 2015}

‘The Commonwealth recognises that girls have the right to a safe, educated and healthy life, not only during the critical formative years of childhood and youth, but also as they mature into women. As we observe International Day of the Girl Child, we emphasise again the importance of social, economic and political investment in girls as fundamental human solutions to breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty, violence and exclusion and addressing the unique challenges girls face around the world. Girls and young women are pivotal to helping us achieving truly inclusive, equitable and sustainable development societies.’\textsuperscript{5}
World Teachers’ Day, 5 October 2015

‘In marking World Teachers Day, the Commonwealth recognises that teachers are a national professional treasure and key to quality education and learning in our societies... The Commonwealth Secretariat continues to support teacher development programmes as we understand our social goals hinge on qualified, motivated and professionally supported teachers. We have developed professional standards for teachers and school leaders to guide countries in defining requirements in technical knowledge, teaching skills and personal attributes that education professionals must demonstrate to achieve their objectives... At the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in June, ministers acknowledged the central role of teachers in quality education. Ministers were committed to raising the status of teaching as a profession in supporting professional development and conditions of service to ensure teachers are motivated and supported in the classroom. Ministers also reaffirmed the importance of effective governance of teaching to promote accountability and transparency. I salute all teachers for their work in mentoring and shaping our future generations.’

International Day of Peace, 18 September 2015

‘Peace building is fundamental to the work of the Commonwealth. In its opening words, our Commonwealth Charter recalls that as a voluntary association of independent and equal sovereign states, we consult and co-operate “in the common interests of our peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace...” As a diverse community of nations, built on inclusiveness, equity, justice and international law, the Commonwealth aims to lead by example in fostering partnerships and pathways for peace... We try to engage early to open doors, remove obstacles and promote dialogue that can help ease tensions before they turn into conflict.

The 2007 Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding, *Civil Paths to Peace*, made a seminal contribution towards defining our Commonwealth approach to building peaceful societies... Indeed, civil or societal mechanisms for driving peace have always been – and undoubtedly remain today – the simplest ways for successfully confronting violence and terrorism. The inspiring work of youth workers across our 53 Commonwealth countries is one such mechanism. I commend their work in supporting young people to deal constructively with social exclusion, ethnic or religious prejudice and related violence or tensions. In recognition of their enduring positive impact on young people for peace building and social cohesion, the 2015 Commonwealth Youth Work Week theme is “Youth Workers Creating Paths to Peace”.

Sport can also be a valuable dialogue facilitation tool and plays a role in promoting co-operation and the sharing of experience that transcends political, social and economic boundaries. Young practitioners in the Commonwealth’s Sport for Development and Peace working group are great advocates in this regard.’

International Day of Democracy, 14 September 2015

‘International Day of Democracy 2015 is an occasion for the Commonwealth to celebrate an uplifting statistic: within the past 12 months, democratic elections have been held in more than one-third of our 53 member states. This signifies progress towards achieving a world in which all individuals are able freely and regularly to express their choice as to who should represent and lead them, and about decisions affecting the future of their lives and livelihoods. For many of these elections, the Commonwealth deployed observer missions to assist in achieving the Commonwealth gold standard of free, fair and credible elections
that win the confidence of the people... This is a vitally important part of the Commonwealth’s work; it gives citizens reassurance that the quality of the elections in which they participate is scrutinised and assessed, and helps continually raise standards of electoral conduct...

Responsible and professional reporting, and free and independent media, give meaning to freedom of expression, and are a prerequisite for a robust and responsive democracy. Tragically, many journalists and reporters around the world must still put their lives at risk to express this independence. We... remember with profound respect and honour those who have paid the ultimate price in defence of this democratic right... Through their activities, civil society organisations have helped strengthen some of the most fundamental rights and freedoms necessary to build stronger and better democratic societies. Undertaking these activities has not been without cost. In some instances, members of civil society have been harassed, persecuted, imprisoned and lost their lives because of their commitment to democracy and its principles of inclusion, equality and justice. The Commonwealth... pays tribute to civil society organisations in protecting and promoting democracy.

We will continue to celebrate and encourage the voice of civil society and freedom of expression at the heart of healthy and flourishing democracies serving their people. The Commonwealth continues to be a champion of the values of democratic values and of a stronger democratic culture as societies grow.’

**United Nations Day for South–South Cooperation, 11 September 2015**

‘A distinctive Commonwealth contribution within international development is our Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), which provides funding for experts recruited from developing Commonwealth member states to be deployed to other Commonwealth countries requiring technical assistance on a variety of development projects...

The Commonwealth specialises in mobilising South–South patterns of co-operation and we are able to use our unique multi-regional experiences to address in innovative ways the challenges faced by small and vulnerable states, including in the areas of local governance, public finance, anticorruption, judicial support and e-governance. Commonwealth cooperation has seen constitutional implementation experts from Uganda deployed in Kenya; public procurement expertise from Nigeria shared with Sierra Leone; and High Court judges from Ghana, Nigeria, Solomon Islands and Uganda helping in various Commonwealth jurisdictions to clear case backlogs and improve efficiency within penal systems. We have also supported member countries in their long-term planning and development, including deploying an expert from India to support Saint Lucia’s national development strategy...

Within the Commonwealth, South–South trade has flourished, advancing relations between developing countries. In 2013, 65 per cent of developing countries’ merchandise exports were destined for other developing countries – an increase of almost 50 per cent since the turn of the millennium. The Commonwealth is working with the Government of India to identify new opportunities for least developed countries (LDCs) to tap into global value chains and trading links in the Asia region.’

**International Literacy Day, 7 September 2015**

‘This year’s theme for International Literacy Day 2015, “Literacy and Sustainable Societies”, draws together vitally important Commonwealth priorities: social and economic inclusion through education, and sustainability...
While globally the number of children out of school remains unacceptably high, encouraging progress has been made in some regions. Out of school rates for children in Commonwealth countries in sub-Saharan Africa are estimated to have dropped from 16.8 million in 2000 to 11.8 million in 2015 – a positive step towards meeting global sustainable development goals. A South Asia regional study by UNICEF reported that 27 million children between the ages 5 to 13 are out of school in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Yet Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have made remarkable progress in youth literacy, with an average rise in literacy levels of about 18 per cent since the mid-1990s. Considering this region is home to the largest number of young people in the world, it is vital this generation is equipped with skills that will see them into work life... At the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in June 2015 in The Bahamas, ministers committed to support the continued development of the continuum of lifelong learning...

The Commonwealth will remain vigilant in advocating continuing improvement in the quality, access and relevance of education for all Commonwealth citizens, with the advancement of literacy rates as a critical need in this work."10

**World Humanitarian Day, 19 August 2015**

“World Humanitarian Day is both a celebration and a call to action. It reminds us that while the demands of humanitarian service can be great, the rewards are also immense, and the spirit that moves us to help those most in need has never been more necessary than in today’s compacting world. Within the Commonwealth family, we recognise and honour all those individuals who work tirelessly to advance the Commonwealth Charter principles of democracy, human rights, international peace and security, tolerance and understanding, and sustainable development... Collectively we strive to be an influence for good, helping to mobilise the relief efforts of our member states following natural disasters, advancing universal access to quality healthcare provision, providing inclusive and equitable opportunities for youth engagement and education, and promoting adherence to international humanitarian law.”11

**International Youth Day 2015: Youth Civic Engagement, 12 August 2015**

“It is 15 years since August 12 was designated as International Youth Day, and it has now become a widely observed annual celebration of young people as partners in development... This year’s theme of “Youth Civic Engagement” is apt, and highly relevant in a world that is increasingly coming to appreciate the important role that young people can play as agents of change and drivers of development... The Commonwealth has long recognised and emphasised this, and is a pioneering advocate for investment in young people as vital assets to national development. With more than 60 per cent of the population of our 53 member countries being under 30 years old, no other approach would make sense... The Commonwealth theme for 2015, “A Young Commonwealth”, celebrates the capacity, contribution and potential of young people, who play a vital role at the heart of sustainable development and democracy... The Commonwealth will continue to work for the inclusion of young people at the centre of development, so that their voice is heard, their views respected, and their contribution more fully recognised.”12

**World Day against Trafficking in Persons, 30 July 2015**

“Trafficking in persons is an abomination and deep affront to Commonwealth values and a corrosive threat to the realisation of the goals set out in the Commonwealth Charter of respect for human dignity and freedom. On World Day against Trafficking in Persons, we
reaffirm our Commonwealth commitment to work for the eradication of this global scourge, and encourage concerted international efforts by all countries to implement strategies that respect individual rights and gender equality, and that fight against condemnable exploitation of the vulnerability of women.

Trafficking continues to rise globally, including in and between regions of the Commonwealth, yet the number of traffickers prosecuted remains low... Urgent ways need to be found for increased access by survivors to justice and support services, and to secure their rights and social inclusion. The Commonwealth Expert Group on Strategies for combating the Trafficking of Women and Children called for strategies to be developed aimed both at prevention, and at providing greater assistance to victims. It emphasised the need for such responses to be rights-based and gender-responsive, and for them to be informed by detailed research and data... The Commonwealth Secretariat seeks to provide support for all our member states towards the implementation of anti-trafficking strategies. We encourage durable and strengthened efforts by our membership to combat trafficking through prosecution, protection and prevention.”

**International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 24 June 2015**

“There can be no true enjoyment of human rights, which are so fundamental to what it means to be a Commonwealth citizen, where torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment are condoned or permitted.

The prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment is absolute; the use of torture is illegal under any circumstances, without exception. The prohibition entails the obligation to investigate and prosecute allegations of ill-treatment, and to punish those responsible. States must also provide victims with rights to reparation and rehabilitation, as reflected in Article 14 of the Convention against Torture...

International Day in Support of Victims of Torture is an opportunity to reinforce our Commonwealth understanding that torture is an assault on humanity and human dignity. It is a time to recognise the trauma and suffering of victims and their families and honour their courage. In practical terms, it is an opportunity for all states that are yet to ratify the Convention against Torture to consider doing so, and... in particular to implement effectively and durably the right to rehabilitation.”

**World Oceans Day, 8 June 2015**

“Healthy Oceans, Healthy Planet”, the theme for World Oceans Day 2015, conveys important Commonwealth messages. As a diverse and worldwide family of nations, we are acutely aware of the impact that both wise and unwise stewardship of marine resources can have on the future well-being of our shared planet. We are also conscious of the contribution well-ordered ocean governance can make towards building environmentally safe, economically resilient and prosperous communities.

Coastal states, in particular small island developing states, depend on the wealth of resources provided by oceans. Commonwealth members have jurisdiction over vast ocean areas, with many having rights and responsibilities for marine areas that are vastly larger than their land areas... For small island developing states, the structure of their economies often presents challenges to exploiting ocean resources and services for sustainable development more fully. The Commonwealth has therefore been working with them to formulate national strategies to harness opportunities presented by a more diversified ocean-based economy. This includes
practical assistance with the delimitation of national maritime boundaries, as well as sustainable management of marine and coastal resources and activities.

It is through fresh thinking, mutual support and practical assistance that innovative Commonwealth contributions become a reality, and will help to deliver healthier oceans and a healthier planet for all our citizens and the wider world.15


“Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development” could easily be chosen as a slogan for the Commonwealth. We often refer to the three “Ds” of the Commonwealth – democracy, development and respect for diversity – and of course democracy is simply an inclusive and formalised system of dialogue, of “government by discussion...” Through dialogue, and by working together in practical ways, we are able to bring immense benefit to our own citizens, and to offer thought leadership and innovative solutions to the wider international community. There is no better reflection of this than the report *Civil Paths to Peace*... Today and every day, as we celebrate our cultural diversity, and the rich variety of development, size, population, faith, ethnicities and geographical location represented among Commonwealth member states, let us seek and grasp new opportunities for dialogue at every level, and work together in a spirit of respect and understanding to advance social progress and lasting economic prosperity in which all can share.16

**International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, 15 May 2015**

“[LGBTI] Commonwealth citizens remain victims of stigma and discrimination in many of our communities. Appalling persecution and violence are suffered merely because of innate sexual orientation and gender identity. Such abuse is unacceptable: it robs millions of our fellow citizens of the right to live lives of dignity, undermining their mental and physical health, and sense of well-being. It leads to social estrangement, ostracism and isolation, and economic marginalisation. It flies in the face of our core values of equality and non-discrimination. I have previously stated that ‘discrimination has no place in the modern Commonwealth’... As a values-based organisation, our Commonwealth attitude must always be of respect and understanding... This International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, is an opportunity to celebrate this diversity, and to build on the progress we have already made. Let us find ways of working together to strengthen universal rights, so that all our citizens are able to enjoy what should be their Commonwealth birth right.”17

**World Press Freedom Day, 30 April 2015**

“We mark World Press Freedom Day 2015 by renewing our commitment vigorously to defend freedom of expression, and by reaffirming our acknowledgment of the media’s vital role in advancing Commonwealth values... A vibrant press, together with other media for free expression, provides the foundations for social harmony and safe communities, and makes a vital contribution towards the strengthening of civil paths to peace...

Practical actions include offering technical assistance and mutual support through the Universal Periodic Review process to protect the safety of journalists, and to uphold the right of everyone “to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” without interference – as set out in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We must be vigilant in our collective striving to ensure the highest degree of protection for journalists, in seeking to create safe and enabling environments for them to perform their
work independently and without undue interference, and in combating impunity for crimes and violence against them. We therefore encourage all Commonwealth member states to advance the operative recommendations of the UN Human Rights Council resolution on the safety of journalists adopted by consensus in September 2014.\(^{18}\)

**World Day of Social Justice, 20 February 2015**

“The focus of World Day of Social Justice is on principles that are at the heart of the Commonwealth approach to advancing democracy, development and respect for diversity. The Commonwealth Charter sets out the collective commitment of Commonwealth member states to principles of consensus and common action, mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy and responsiveness... Member states... work together offering mutual support in a spirit of respect and understanding towards removing wide disparities and unequal living standards, as guided by internationally agreed development goals, to build economic resilience and to promote social equity. We are united in our determination to continue doing so.”\(^{19}\)

**International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, 6 February 2015**

“Female genital mutilation and cutting are shameful to humanity, and bring untold suffering and harm to those upon whom they are inflicted. The Commonwealth joins in observing International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, and adds its voice in calling for renewed efforts by governments, civil society organisations, human rights defenders and intergovernmental organisations collectively to end these practices. The practices violate rights to health, to security and to physical integrity; the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; and the right to life when the procedure results in death. We take encouragement that in some Commonwealth member states, the incidence... has shown a significant decline over the past 30 years. However, the numbers of girls still at risk compels us to renew our determination and efforts to eradicate this extreme form of discrimination against women...

In order to be effective in hastening [its] end... efforts towards elimination need to be focused on multi-sectoral and rights-based approaches inclusive of the voices of girls, young women, boys, young men, parents, schools, traditional leaders and local authorities. To be durable and comprehensive, solutions must be embedded in local communities and be driven by ever-deeper respect for the needs and dignity of girls and women. The Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to work in partnership and alongside all who are committed to hastening the end of female genital mutilation and cutting...”\(^{20}\)

**Human Rights Day, 10 December 2014**

“This day 10 December, was chosen and dedicated as Human Rights Day by the UN General Assembly in 1950. The intent was and remains to bring to the attention “of the peoples of the world” the Universal Declaration of Human Rights “as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations”. The Commonwealth collectively shares in that objective and understanding, and it is right that we should join together each year in solidarity to observe Human Rights Day and renew our pledge and commitment to upholding the Universal Declaration... In marking Human Rights Day 2014, we have chosen to focus particularly on early and forced marriage, sexual violence in conflict and the right to education... Friends and colleagues, human rights must be more than mere aspirations, and declarations cannot simply be slogans. Nor are they discretionary, they are fundamental... Human rights must be at the core of all that we do, and advancing them is our collective responsibility.”\(^{21}\)
World AIDS Day Statement, 1 December 2014

‘Commonwealth countries are still disproportionately affected by HIV. Two of our regions, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, suffer from the highest rates of prevalence globally... The Commonwealth Secretariat is focused on building national health capabilities and advocating for the needs of our member countries as they seek to deliver universal healthcare. This means ensuring enough nurses and doctors are recruited and that they get adequate training. It means establishing healthcare services where they are needed: from urban centres to remote rural areas. It also means that health priorities are reflected in the post-2015 global development framework...

As we mark World AIDS Day 2014, we are reminded afresh that mutual support and collaborative practical action are imperative in our responses to the scourge of HIV/AIDS... The Commonwealth of Learning... is working to encourage the development of open learning and distance education, and particularly with marginalised communities in Southern and East Africa to increase health literacy about HIV and AIDS using locally appropriate technologies such as community radio and mobile telephony... The Commonwealth Foundation Grants Programme is contributing to the empowerment of civil society in some of our most affected member states. This enables citizens and their communities to work for changed attitudes towards people living with HIV and AIDS...and to become involved with framing responsive policies and accountable governance systems, enhanced access to health services and strengthened public education.’

International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 24 November 2014

‘The Commonwealth is committed to supporting conflict-affected states in strengthening their capacity to prevent and respond to sexual violence in armed conflict. We seek to ensure that all relevant programmes in the fields of international peace and security, rule of law, gender equality, human rights and the role of civil society address these issues and take into full consideration the needs and rights of women and children. We continue to encourage strengthening partnerships with governments, parliaments, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons and judiciaries. In Bangkok this week, the Secretariat is convening a regional consultation with UN Women and Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada to end impunity for violence against women and girls.’

International Day of the Girl Child, 10 October 2014 (for 11 October 2014)

‘International Day of the Girl Child is a reminder of our collective commitment in the Commonwealth Charter to recognise gender equality and women’s empowerment as components of human development and basic human rights. This embodies the rights of the girl child, too... Our Commonwealth words are being followed up by practical action through support to our member states on legislative reform, prevention strategies and redress to end child, early and forced marriage. This includes a Commonwealth submission to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for her report to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2014; as well as upcoming work on the reform of laws, including customary laws, to combat female genital mutilation... Commonwealth civil society too can play a crucial role in advancing awareness and practical action to eliminate the scourge of violence against women and girls... As agents of change, they can mobilise to alter attitudes and advance practical action to end violence against women and girls.’
International Day of Reflection on the 20th anniversary of the Genocide in Rwanda, 7 April 2014

“The Commonwealth joins all the people of Rwanda in solemn remembrance of the genocide of 1994 and the horrific events that took place. As we reflect on that terrible time and its aftermath, we acknowledge the courageous ways in which the people of Rwanda have sought to find healing and move forward. Bitter lessons learnt in Rwanda, and in other Commonwealth countries, teach us that hope can be regained through truth and reconciliation. This painful but vital process lays the foundation on which communities that have been torn by armed conflict or political violence can reach healing and begin to build true peace. It is by congruence that we establish the inclusive and democratic societies in which Commonwealth values of respect, understanding, tolerance and inclusiveness can thrive.”

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 21 March 2014

“As we observe International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination we recall the commitment of Commonwealth member states collectively to promoting respect and understanding and to the development of free and democratic societies with respect for the dignity of all human beings... Acceptance of diversity, and understanding the richness of multiple identities, is fundamental to our Commonwealth principles and approach. Together we offer one another mutual support and work in practical ways towards ever more inclusive societies in which all are able to share equitably in social progress and economic prosperity.”

International Women’s Day, 7 March 2014

“On occasions such as this we celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women and renew our commitment to removing the many obstacles that impede full and equal participation by women at so many levels. Within the Commonwealth, we are particularly aware of women’s contributions to advancing the cause of democracy, development and respect for diversity. In most of our societies it is women who bear the brunt of economic vulnerability, just as it is very often women who do most to build resilience. Our theme today reminds us that women and girls continue to be subjected to grievous vulnerabilities... Degrading treatment of women is disturbingly persistent and pervasive in Commonwealth countries – as it is in so many parts of the world. Apart from the affront of such behaviour to the dignity and decency of both victim and perpetrator, it has multiple repercussions on health, social inclusion and cohesiveness, and economically on productivity and growth... Enactment and implementation of specific legislation addressing violence against women is an important step. However, cultural norms, customary practices and gender stereotyping in judicial processes often impede women’s access to justice. Through judicial creativity and gender-responsive interpretation of national laws, judges and magistrates – together with policy-makers and parliamentarians – can advance the protection of women and other vulnerable groups. There is a lot to be done, and the subject of our meeting here today points to one possibility: inter-generational dialogue... The cycles and habits of violence must be broken.”

International Women’s Day, 8 March 2013

“This is the first International Women’s Day since the new Charter of the Commonwealth was adopted by our Heads of Government. Let me quote what the Charter says under the heading of Gender Equality: “We recognise that gender equality and women’s empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights.
The advancement of women’s rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development”. The Commonwealth Women’s Affairs Ministers Meeting, which takes place in Bangladesh in June, has a special role in addressing issues of equality and opportunity for women. For the gender agenda to continue gaining momentum in the Commonwealth, it is also necessary to consider these topics at other Commonwealth ministerial meetings whenever possible and to integrate awareness of them into all our Secretariat programmes. An example of this was when Commonwealth finance ministers discussed gender-sensitive budgeting. That is the meaning of “mainstreaming” of gender issues in the Commonwealth... International Women’s Day draws our attention to the rights, respect and opportunities women must possess as half of humanity, to their being integral to the welfare and resilience of all our communities. With this at the forefront of our minds, and with renewed consciousness of the limitless potential to be unlocked, the Commonwealth is committed to lifting its contribution, to gaining momentum for the gender agenda.”

World AIDS Day, 29 November 2012

“It is a sobering fact that although the Commonwealth accounts for one-third of the world’s population, two-thirds of the people living with HIV/AIDS globally are Commonwealth citizens. Many of the countries most affected are members of the Commonwealth in Sub-Saharan Africa, which remains the epicentre of the epidemic. There have been notable successes in some of the Commonwealth countries of that region, with universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care services having been achieved in some instances. But our goal is that all who need treatment should have access to it. By the end of 2011, taken globally, only just over half of all those who were eligible for treatment were actually receiving anti-retroviral therapy... Our aspiration, of dramatically reducing AIDS-related deaths and new HIV infections through greater access to such treatment, and to good quality healthcare, is expressed in this year’s World AIDS Day theme: “Getting to Zero: Zero new HIV infections, Zero discrimination, Zero AIDS related deaths”.”

World AIDS Day, 30 November 2011

“World AIDS Day provides an opportunity to refocus our attention and efforts on the need to press ahead, ensuring access to available technology and tools to combat HIV and intensifying efforts towards the eradication of this scourge. “Getting to Zero”, the theme for World AIDS Day 2011, sets an ambitious, but not an impossible goal... The 2010 UNAIDS Global Report on HIV, indicating that the epidemic is halting and being reversed in many regions of the world, makes elimination seem a possibility. With renewed global commitment, we can make progress towards achieving the 2015 Millennium Development Goal targets on HIV/AIDS. In June this year, at the UN High-Level Meeting, Commonwealth member countries, and we at the Commonwealth Secretariat, reaffirmed our commitment to working towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care. Our commitment includes upholding the rights of all Commonwealth citizens to live free from prejudice or discrimination. Commonwealth countries bear a disproportionate part of the HIV burden... Our Commonwealth approach is to see our work on HIV through the lens of our work on human rights and gender, as well as through that of our work on health and social welfare.”

Thus, while it is evident that the release of public statements on international days grew more frequent with time, it is also apparent that the greater regularity with which some days – such as those relating to human rights, women’s welfare and AIDS – featured in his annual calendars reflected the extent to which he prioritised these issues from earlier on. The one observance
at which he delivered a public address most regularly was, of course, Commonwealth Day. Sharma explained in his 2012 Commonwealth Day Message:

‘On Commonwealth Day, we seek to find practical opportunities to connect and to recall our shared commitment to the young in our societies: the second Monday in March each year is Commonwealth Day because it is a day when every school in the Commonwealth is open. Each year on Commonwealth Day, we launch a new theme as a focus for thinking and practical action to pull us together and to strengthen us worldwide.’

Indeed, in his message each Commonwealth Day, Sharma generally expounded the chosen theme for the year and illustrated the strengths, virtues and relevance of the association, of which he was chief steward, in that regard.

In his first Commonwealth Day message as Secretary-General, delivered in 2009, the year that marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Commonwealth and appropriately had as its theme ‘The Commonwealth@60 – Serving a New Generation’, he pointed out:

‘The Commonwealth has stood the test of time. It stands tall as an organisation of shared values, dedicated to protecting and advancing its principles. It has been flexible and dynamic in meeting the changing challenges of its times, and sensitive to the needs of its smaller and weaker members. It has always been a part of the wider global community. As a champion of democracy, development and diversity, the Commonwealth has a powerful story to tell. It is bonded together as a community both of governments and of peoples.

The London Declaration of 1949, which brought us into being, saw the far-sightedness of eight countries constituting themselves anew. In so doing, they made the Commonwealth the first real example of an international community representing a collective, consultative, mutually respectful approach to international relations. Nehru put it this way: “if you approach another country in a friendly way, with goodwill and generosity, you will be paid back in the same coin, and probably in even larger measure”. Of such vision was the Commonwealth born. Yet our greater task this year is to look straight ahead – and ask how we can continue serving a new generation in 2009 and beyond.’

The next year, his statement on Commonwealth Day focused on the theme for 2010: ‘Science, Technology & Society’:

‘In the Commonwealth and the world over, our use of science and technology – in the causes of society and development – has been largely for the good. Recent medical advances have allowed us to understand and tackle the world’s greatest health challenges... Technological progress has changed the way that we provide information and education, and conduct business. Other advances have allowed us to improve both the quality and the quantity of the food that we have available... It is clear that one of the biggest services that science and technology can render to humanity will be in providing the environmental solutions which the world so actively seeks... The consequences of our progress, however, have not always been fully realised at the time that new technologies were introduced. Some have later presented safety and environmental concerns, while others have raised moral and ethical questions...

In finding a way forward, each of us as Commonwealth citizens in democratic societies needs to be informed, to understand and to exchange opinions about the possibilities of science and technology. The discussion needs to be held as much in universities, laboratories and government offices, as in homes, schools and in the media. Society will benefit fully where all people, including the vulnerable and those on the margins, are
involved in public discussion and its outcomes. In the Commonwealth, we place great emphasis on ensuring that progress embraces all. We build and maintain partnerships and networks, so that people can come together to learn from and share with each other, and profit from this collectively... Science and technology only fulfil their promise when they serve society.’

On Commonwealth Day 2011, his message built upon the theme for the year: ‘Women as Agents of Change’:

‘Most schoolchildren know their fractions, and a simple one is this: one-half of the world’s population may be made up of women and girls; yet women and girls bear two-thirds of the world’s problems. Two-thirds of those out of school worldwide are girls; and two-thirds of those who are illiterate, or out of work, or living with HIV/AIDS, are women. Girls should have the chance to grow up and become healthy, educated women who can make a positive difference to their own lives and to the lives of others. Women are the barometers of society: they are an indication of its internal pressure levels, and their fortunes can be the clearest forecasts of good or bad things to come. Where women prosper, societies prosper; and where women suffer, so too do the societies in which they live. By investing in women and girls, we have seen that we can accelerate social, economic and political progress. The evidence is clear.

The Commonwealth has given practical help to women in entrepreneurship; it has supported the role of women in peace keeping, and in local and national politics; and it has argued the case for empowering women – from putting young girls through school, to ensuring that women have access to trained midwives. We have pioneered amongst our member governments a gender consideration to every aspect of national life, and hence a need for policies and funds to match.’

The next Commonwealth Day, which fell on 12 March 2012, had as its theme, ‘Connecting Cultures’. In his message that year, Sharma stated:

‘This is our opportunity to celebrate the rich cultural diversity of the Commonwealth and what this enrichment means to us as individuals. Our various cultures and the ways we express them are what set us apart: we proudly use music, dance, literature, art and other means to express our cultural identities as individuals and communities. “Connecting Cultures” is about appreciating and celebrating these ways in which others live their lives and express themselves. And it is about much more than that too. It is about exploring how we can bring cultures together, how we can connect them in order to learn, to deepen the appreciation we have of one another. “Connecting Cultures” encourages us to explore how we can use culture to build bridges of exchange and understanding. We want these links to be strengthened in new and special ways in 2012.

“Connecting Cultures” also gives us an insight into the richness that makes up each individual Commonwealth citizen. By overcoming the limited way of seeing people only in terms of ethnicity, gender, faith or some other single strand of their identity, we find common bonds that expand the sense of our identity in all its complexity and wonderful variety... As Commonwealth citizens, we can all find strength in our diversity as well as our commonality; we can draw on mutual support and gain from shared experience by working together in a variety of ways to multiply the collective and beneficial influence of “Connecting Cultures”.

In 2013, ‘Opportunity through Enterprise’ served as the year’s Commonwealth theme, and this also flavoured the Secretary-General’s message:
‘Commitment to common goals brings collective gain. By creating opportunities together, and using the talents of all, we achieve mutual benefit. The potency of individual drive, allied to team spirit, and the possibilities offered through the connections of our worldwide network, are what we seek to express in our 2013 Commonwealth theme: “Opportunity through Enterprise”. This theme is of course addressed to all in the Commonwealth, but particularly to the young... It challenges us all to harness the vast and distinctive potential of youth as nation builders, and to encourage them to grasp opportunity through personal creativity, energy and enterprise... On Commonwealth Day 2013, let us think of how, using the power of Commonwealth connections and our own personal contributions, we can multiply the opportunities and work together dynamically to build a future that is more equitable and inclusive.’

Commonwealth Day 2013 also marked the occasion when the Commonwealth Charter would be signed by the Queen; and Sharma did not fail to make note of this:

‘Commonwealth Day 2013 is a very special day in our history. On behalf of the two billion citizens of the Commonwealth – a third of the population of the world – Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Head of the Commonwealth, will sign the new Charter of the Commonwealth at Marlborough House in London on Monday, 11 March. Adopted by the Heads of Government of all our member states on 14 December 2012, the Charter sets out the core values and principles of the Commonwealth. They include democracy, development, human rights, freedom of expression, protecting the environment and gender equality.’

The theme for Commonwealth Day 2014 was ‘Team Commonwealth’, and Sharma’s message on that occasion built on this:

‘The Commonwealth stands out globally, both for the remarkable diversity of our membership and for the way in which we co-operate on the basis of our shared values and goals, advancing democracy and development for all. There is a shared conviction that we belong together and want the best for each other. Multiple levels of connection exist, and an exceptional sense of being bound together as individuals, as communities and as countries. The essence of a team is that – like the Commonwealth – its members know the advantage of working together and the strength of mutual support. The essence of a team also is that – like the Commonwealth – it has shared aspirations and a sense of common purpose, and relies on the range of contributions and different strengths of each of its members. The essence of a successful team – such as the Commonwealth – is that together it achieves more than the sum of its parts. We connect, communicate and are committed to supporting one another.

Spread across six continents and five oceans, the populations of our member states range from 10,000 to over a billion. As with the best of sports teams, there are lively discussions about tactics, and the occasional difference, but always shared goodwill and the prospect of collective progress. Commonwealth Day offers time for each of us to reflect on how, as members of “Team Commonwealth”, we can turn its goodwill and potential for practical action to positive effect.’

In acknowledgement of the fact that 60 per cent of the population of the Commonwealth was under the age of 30, the theme for Commonwealth Day 2015 was ‘A Young Commonwealth’. In his Commonwealth Day Message, Sharma noted:

‘Inclusiveness and youthfulness are distinctive characteristics of the Commonwealth. It is through freshness of thought, readiness to test new ideas, and openness to new approaches that our worldwide family continues to fulfil its purpose as a great global good. We continue
to grow and flourish thanks to our pioneering spirit and our strong sense of connection – which is a product of that other distinguishing Commonwealth feature: our convening power... Together, the diversity and youth of the Commonwealth open up unrivalled opportunities, enabling our citizens to learn from the experiences of others, and to share new ideas developed in a wide range of contexts...

Commonwealth connection, particularly between the young people of our member states, encourages the respect and understanding that are so much needed in our world today. This in turn can strengthen community cohesion and contributes to nation-building; it extends financial inclusion and promotes job creation to create economies that are stronger, more sustainable and resilient. Commonwealth Day is a good time for each of us to reflect on how, as members of “A Young Commonwealth”, we can draw on its vast reservoirs of goodwill and realise its immense potential. It is by working together that we achieve greatest impact and maximise the beneficial effect of each practical action, turning the dreams and aspirations of our youth into reality.’

On 13 March 2016, Sharma attended his last Commonwealth Day as Commonwealth Secretary-General, before passing the baton to Patricia Scotland at the end of the month. In his final Commonwealth Day Message, he praised the association, saying its creation marked ‘one of the greatest acts of statesmanship and collective faith of the twentieth century’, and that it ‘has justified this faith by the wisdom and contribution it has brought to the world we share’. His message also focused on the theme for the year: ‘An Inclusive Commonwealth’. He shared:

‘I have seen the attraction of the Commonwealth connection: the exceptional regard that it enjoys, and the sense of kinship and affinity that informs it. There is a bond within the Commonwealth that sets us apart... The Commonwealth sets a high premium on being inclusive – our theme for the year – and on being all-embracing and leaving no one behind, whether nationally or globally... The Commonwealth provides avenues for working together that help the larger family of Commonwealth organisations, which is unique in its richness and in its contribution and diversity. We are now bound closer together in practical ways in our shared aspirations. In many different ways, and at many different levels, ideas and knowledge are shared in the Commonwealth family across the globe in a spirit of goodwill and partnership.

Taking strength from its diversity, the Commonwealth succeeds in creating common ground on which to stand together in answering the challenges of our times. Mutual support, with respect and understanding for the dignity and contribution of all, gives potency to the acclaimed convening power of the Commonwealth. The Charter of the Commonwealth now embodies our high and shared purpose. Globalisation, the digital revolution and interdependence make us both a rapidly compacting but also colliding world. The strengths of the Commonwealth were never needed more to assert fairness in global outcomes and trust in the richness of our human identities.’

Rather colourfully, Sharma concluded his final Commonwealth Day Message with the following observation, which succinctly summarised the underlying philosophy he regarded as lying at the heart of the Commonwealth, while also revealing the kind of Secretary-General the Commonwealth had at its helm for the past eight years:

‘Above all, the core conviction of the Commonwealth is that the human community is indivisible and all societies, irrespective of size and endowment, have an equal right to a place in the sun. The eagle, to soar, needs all its feathers.’
Some might argue that what the Commonwealth needed at this juncture in its history was a warrior as Secretary-General, but Sharma was no warrior. Nor was he really a Pied Piper that could lure the media and the public to dance to the Commonwealth tune, as some might have hoped and wished that the Secretary-General would do. What the Commonwealth did have in Sharma beyond just a master diplomat was, as even his fiercest critics would admit, a philosopher, a gentleman and a scholar as its Secretary-General. Therein, the analysts and commentators of today might find the most deep-rooted explanations for the achievements and the shortcomings they might attribute to him in the role, and the historians of tomorrow might discover possibly the best lens through which his motivations, decisions and contributions as Secretary-General might be interpreted, evaluated and recorded for the annals of Commonwealth history.
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