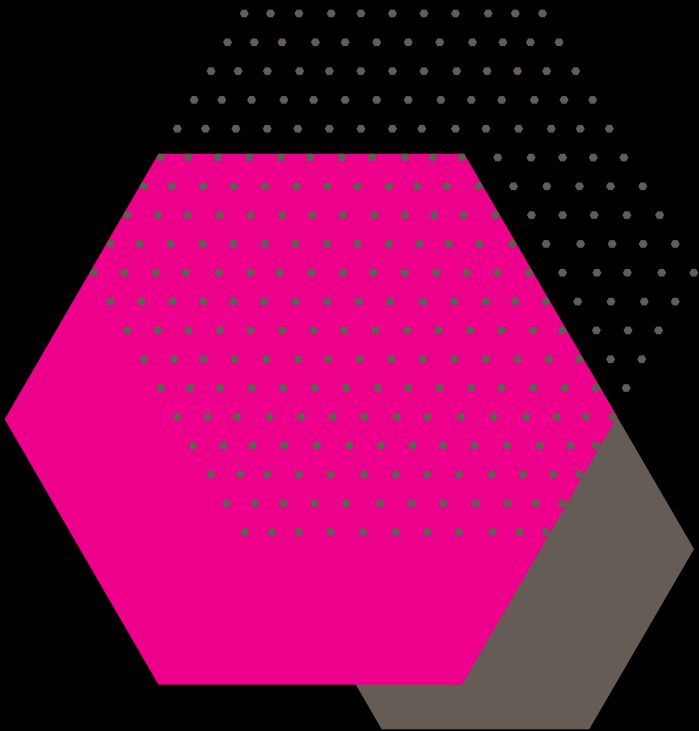


# The Commonwealth: A Network for Now




Essays from Around the World

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# The Commonwealth: A Network for Now

Essays from Around the World

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# FOREWORD

# MOSES ANIBABA

## British Council Regional Director, Sub-Saharan Africa

The Commonwealth is a distinctive set of government-to-government, institution-to-institution, and people-to-people networks spanning the world. As the UK re-evaluates its place in the world, the Commonwealth offers a unique opportunity to connect with friends old and new, and develop lasting relationships.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the region in which I work – and which includes 19 Commonwealth countries, from founder member South Africa to newest members Mozambique and Rwanda – 77 per cent of the population is under 35. Globally, one third of the world's young people live in the Commonwealth.

Her Majesty the Queen has referred to the Commonwealth as 'the original world wide web'. It's a web of a huge number of networks between people and organisations across the Commonwealth's family of nations – from Parliamentarians, to universities, to lawyers, to museums, to planners and architects and many, many more sectors and professional disciplines. No other international body has such a depth of independent networks and connections underpinning its role. All this is held together by the things all Commonwealth countries share: the English language, similar legal and parliamentary systems, free speech and the rule of law, as well as a legacy of intertwined histories and frequently peoples too. These shared values provide a basis for finding common approaches, and above all they encourage conversations, one of the biggest of which took place at the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), hosted in 2018 in London.

Inspired by this meeting and the UK's role as Chair of the Commonwealth from 2018–20, the British Council asked emerging leaders from each of the Commonwealth regions to reflect on the big challenges facing young people – and their countries – and how the connecting power of the Commonwealth and other international organisations might help to find future solutions. The resulting essays cover a wide range of topics, from indigenous rights to climate change, to the position of women in society. The writing is full of hope, ambition – and sometimes anger at the slow pace of change. What all the writers have in common is a belief that the best way to address their challenges is through collective action and inspiration across borders.

Because the big challenges facing future generations are all international or global in nature, international organisations like the Commonwealth and the British Council, based on common values and shared interests, have a huge role to play in shaping, and sharing, solutions.

If we want to ensure that all the opportunity and possibility of the 21st Century is available to everyone, wherever they live, then the Commonwealth and its independent networks and organisations is well placed to be one of the key institutions for making it happen: truly, a network for now.

The CHOGM 2018 communiqué asserted a desire to move 'towards a common future', a sentiment shared by our essay writers. As the UK embarks on its UK's two-year term chairing the Commonwealth Heads of Government I hope they can provide a starting point for conversations and connections, to help make that dream a reality.

Nairobi, Kenya, June 2018

INDIA

Searching for  
Sustainability



# AARDRA CHANDRA MOULI

## Biotech engineer and entrepreneur

*The search for technological solutions for sustainable development is essential to creating a sustainable future for India. Cooperation and collaboration across borders are at the heart of this agenda.*

Humans, like all animals, need air, water and food to survive. We need to sleep, and we need to be safe.

*Today, like most other nations, India finds itself looking to innovative technology for solutions that will help it navigate the decades ahead in a sustainable manner.*

These fundamental requirements form the basis for the biggest challenges faced by humankind, such as pollution, food scarcity, and lack of access to clean water and resources; and the goals aspired to by us, which include health and well-being, sustainable development, good governance, peace, equality and equity.

With its wealth of human, natural and cultural resources, the Indian nation has experienced many changes in recent decades: the opening up of the economy, the advent of globalisation, the resulting acceleration in development, industrial advancement, digitisation, and of course the connectivity brought to us by technology and the Internet. Today, like most other nations, India finds itself looking to innovative technology for solutions that will help it navigate the decades ahead in a sustainable manner.

From the mid-2000s, much attention has been focused on sustainable development as a means to achieve progress, poverty alleviation, food security, and natural resource conservation. India is listed as a Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) partner of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The SDGs are defined by the UNDP as a 'universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity'.

Throughout history, the global community has experienced periods of cooperative or inter-reliant growth, followed by periods of self-dependence. From the earliest trade relations between West and East, to more modern, formalised associations such as the Commonwealth and the United Nations, cooperation and collaboration have often held

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*If real, sustainable positive transformation is to be achieved, initiatives should be framed with dual local and global perspectives in mind.*

the key to continuous and effective progress. Today, with global issues such as climate change, pollution, ecological imbalance, and the possibility of acute natural resource depletion posing very real threats to human existence and development, it is more vital than ever for countries, economies and

communities to work together to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change.

The most fundamental characteristic of the natural environment is interdependence. For instance, small changes in one link of a particular food chain can have far-reaching consequences for the whole ecosystem. Similarly, local and national policies for sustainability and positive environmental change can have an impact on a global scale. So if real, sustainable positive transformation is to be achieved, initiatives should be framed with dual local and global perspectives in mind. This is especially true in the case of the industrial sector, which is of course one of the major drivers of the economy.

### **INDUSTRIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

India has a large and expanding industrial sector. A study conducted by researchers at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, in 2015 found that India was spending 4.9% of its Gross Domestic Product – approximately \$100 billion – on adaptation to the effects of climate change; and that, assuming a continued average economic growth rate of 8%, this figure would increase to an estimated \$360 billion, or 5.4% of GDP, by 2030.

So innovations in processes, materials, inputs, effluent treatment and allied areas are essential if industries are to optimise their growth. An increased adoption of environmentally positive technologies and processes in infrastructure and industry, and a higher rate of promotion of – and investment in – research, innovation and entrepreneurship in related areas will have a substantial positive impact on both national and global development indices.

### **THE ROLE OF THE INDIVIDUAL**

India is the second most populous country in the world. If we look at industrial sustainability alone, in isolation from the ecosystem in which the industry exists, it is possible to achieve positive change through the implementation of industry-specific regulations and guidelines. But for successful, pervasive change to be brought into effect, one cannot ignore the role of each citizen and the individual choices that can make

or break sustainability. In other words, the access of each Indian to greener alternatives in daily life could prove vital to industrial, economic and developmental sustainability.

### **WOMEN AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Women and girls, around half the world's population, are often disproportionately affected by poverty, climate change, food insecurity, lack of healthcare, and global economic crises, as highlighted by the findings of organisations such as UN Women.

Yet women have long been considered as the most effective agents of change at a grassroots level. According to a 2015 study by the McKinsey Global Institute, it has been estimated that India could increase its 2025 GDP, estimated at \$4.83 trillion, by 16% to 60% if we increased women's labour force participation by 10%. It also estimates that participation by women globally could add up to \$28 trillion, or 26%, to the world's GDP by 2025.

Bringing more women into industry, and encouraging the return of women who have taken career breaks, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, research, and entrepreneurship, would help achieve development while generating employment opportunities for the often 'invisible' workforce that drives societal and national development.

Schemes such as the 'returnship' programmes employed by companies like Mahindra Satyam and Goldman Sachs, the Rekindle initiative of Amazon India, Intel India's H2O (Home To Office) programme, Paypal India's Recharge, and Accenture India's Career Reboot can be adopted across industries to facilitate the return of those women who have needed to take time off from their careers, and help them get back into the workforce.

### **YOUTH, TECHNOLOGY, EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP**

With technology playing an increasingly significant role in development, access to quality education and technological learning is also vital to long-term growth. With about half its current population under the age of 25, India is a young nation. Equipping this young population with education and practical skills can help create jobs, alleviate poverty, increase income, increase the strength of the employable or skilled workforce, and drive the economy towards further growth. Here too, the importance of technology in gender equality comes into play – access to technology has given women the tools to enter the workforce in new domains, and given them the flexibility to work remotely if required, to access opportunities barred to them until recently, and to become global citizens. It has empowered girls, young women, homemakers and professionals to contribute substantially to their household income, and to the Indian economy.

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*Access to technology has given women the tools to enter the workforce in new domains, and given them the flexibility to work remotely if required, to access opportunities barred to them until recently, and to become global citizens.*

and programmes by each citizen, thereby causing a comprehensive conversion from an older, perhaps obsolete way of doing things, to new processes and strategies that tackle current challenges.

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*A global future such as this also needs strong, co-operative, multilateral ties – such as the Commonwealth – between the nations of the world.*

global challenges we need to deploy multi-layered, multi-tiered, multi-faceted approaches that work in unison.

This brings us to the role of good leadership in international development. Training and skilling young leaders from different areas of expertise holds as much value for global peace and progress as equity and education do. Young, talented, focused individuals, such as peace activists, lawyers, social workers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and engineers can lead the transformation processes necessary in their own spheres of influence when empowered to effect change.

In a country such as India, where a significant portion of the population still faces limited access to basic facilities such as running water or uninterrupted electricity, trying to implement environmental regulations before working towards fair distribution of resources would be a massive oversight. Policy implementation has time and again been more successful when it takes into account the adoption of new policies, plans

Like the Ouroboros, swallowing its own tail and thus becoming infinitely cyclical, the most significant impediments on the path to global development also feed off each other, leading to a pattern of eternal return. This would hold true endlessly if we attempt to tackle these issues in an isolated manner. Instead, to address interlinked

In recent years, sustainability, ethical leadership, science, technology, entrepreneurship, equitable growth and development have become areas of focus promising a future of global prosperity. A global future such as this also needs strong, co-operative, multilateral ties – such as the Commonwealth – between the nations of the world.

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*As with every generation before us, it is in our best interests ... to remember that we are one single world, though we may choose to divide ourselves in a thousand different ways.*

Educational policy reforms and the development of one of the largest education systems in the world have helped equip young India with some of the tools for growth and economic progress. Efforts on the part the current state and central governments to promote entrepreneurship and job creation have laid the foundation for employment generation in

the coming decade. Against such a backdrop, there can be little doubt that international ties such as the Commonwealth, which can help promote research partnerships, trade relations, technology-licensing opportunities, process development and transfer, and the very vital maintenance of future-oriented leadership dialogue do indeed hold the key to a healthier, cleaner, safer, more inclusive tomorrow.

We live in a time of intense upheaval. With some boundaries being blurred, others being redrawn – often using violence – and the power to be heard being made available to every individual, dialogue must take place between every stratum: civil society, thought leaders, administrators, change-makers, implementers, doers, industrialists and influencers. As with every generation before us, it is in our best interests, if not our duty, to remember that we are one single world, though we may choose to divide ourselves in a thousand different ways. More than ever, we need cooperation, collaboration, and a united worldview, to achieve goals that will benefit not just one particular section of the global society, but every single member of it.

PAKISTAN

Where are the Women?

# KHADIJA MALIK

## Writer and entrepreneur

*There is a world of difference between 't-shirt feminism' and real change-making for women. International networks can offer examples and build connections for change.*

Every day on my way to work, which is a short commute of less than two kilometres on the same stretch of road, I pass three schools, one telecom headquarters, and a spa. The schools are not all the same. The first school, newly elitist, makes way for the second, middle class, leading to the third, slightly lower-middle class campus. Accordingly, the presence of women recedes along the stretch of road. At campus one there are many mothers present for the school drop-off, stepping out of private cars and walking their children to the gate. At campus two there are fewer women, and more car-pools with drivers assisting children in the morning. Campus three sees children step out of public vans and buses entering school on their own. The drivers at campuses two and three are exclusively male.

Past the driveway of the telecom headquarters, where women make up approximately 20 per cent of the workforce (and a smaller percentage accounts for female leadership within the company), it is common to see men gather in corners for smoke and tea breaks throughout the day. Women are only visible as they enter and exit the building when they clock in and out of work. Even outside the spa, a largely female space, with female management and leadership, women are generally invisible. Men can be seen walking to the entrance from the gate, but all cars transporting women will make their way inside the premises for a more private drop off.

This is every day. I enter my own office at the end of this ride and walk into yet another male space. I am the only representative of my gender here. And I'm the one in charge. This, in a nutshell, is the experience of gender in middle and upper-class Lahore. It is not the experience of the lower classes because they live in a different world. Any way I look at it, gender in Pakistan is a class based issue.

Here is the reality: women in my section of Lahore are found on catwalks, in the offices of plastic surgeons, and in clothing stores. Often, while they hide themselves from physical public spaces, they model, unpaid, for friends' clothing brands and show up as free social media (and sometimes print media) adverts. The irony is not lost on me. This, they say, builds their social capital – a currency that is perceived as priceless within the bubble. A social conscience is not entirely absent. Nods and lip service are paid to championing the cause of gender by

participation in public shows of defiance – often, again, on catwalks. Restricted audiences feel satisfied that the softer image of the country prevails.

Side by side with this are demonstrations such as the Aurat March (Women's March) recently held to commemorate Women's Day across three cities in Pakistan. Women and men (middle class and upwardly mobile) joined human rights activists to advocate what can be called 't-shirt feminism'. Fashionable to attend, a place to be seen, a place to feel girl power coursing through one's veins, while fathers and husbands pay bills to support this brand of 'independence'.

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*These women are outliers. They are not the norm. And they often live their lives under constant threat of one form or another.*

Gender doesn't stand a chance of being tackled as a real issue if those it affects and defines do not open their own eyes and accept that they themselves feed the imbalance. It doesn't stand a chance till women who speak of equal rights will also come forward and assume equal

responsibility. It takes only one person to smash a glass ceiling. And I acknowledge that women who do this do exist in my country. They fight for the fundamental rights of the vulnerable, and stand for their own in the process. But these women are outliers. They are not the norm. And they often live their lives under constant threat of one form or another. When they go, there is often no one else to carry the mantle they bore by themselves. That is the first thing that needs to change.

The beauty of feminism used to be choice. A woman could choose to enter the workforce if she pleased, or be a homemaker unpaid but provided for. If she chose to enter the workforce, its beauty was in seeking equality of opportunity. In standing up and demanding equal pay for equal work. Fair wages. A level playing field. It was as simple as that. But somehow the idea of feminism lost its way in our educated classes.

At a literary festival organized by a local school, with an impressive standard of discourse, a social sector worker from France spoke about her intervention with gender studies in Pakistan. She prefaced her talk with a question to the audience, primarily 'A' Level students, mostly women, 'How many of you call yourselves feminists?' Only about 30 percent of the audience raised their hands. This was despite her articulating the definition that feminism meant equal rights and equal opportunities for women. Nothing more. No calls to bra burning. No calls to man hating. Just the right to be treated the same way. There were few takers.



At the same event, a local poet of some fame narrated an anecdote. She had been invited back to her alma mater – a women’s college – where she engaged with the student body and of interest to her was how these women wished to make their mark once they graduated. Their answer was disappointingly unanimous. The women studied hard at their English skills as they hoped they would land husbands who would be able to afford holidays abroad. The better their skills, the better their chances.

But let’s take a look at our outliers. We recently lost Asma Jehangir, famed human rights lawyer and activist. She lived from threat to threat but never backed down from standing up for the disenfranchised. Malala Yusufzai, equally loved and hated in Pakistan, was a mere child who was attacked for wanting an education. Given one, and a chance to compete at school on merit, she became a Nobel Prize winner. Mukhtaran Mai, rape victim, stood up for justice. In a flawed, slow, legal system, she systematically persisted. She was named Glamour magazine’s Woman of the Year in 2005 for her courage against the odds; she penned an autobiography that was listed as an all-time number three best-selling title in France; she was called an inspiration by Laura Bush. And yet, she is unable to lead the very change she stands for from Pakistan. Qandeel Baloch, a social media star, famously scorned by people during her lifetime, was murdered by her own brother in the name of honour. Overnight, those who laughed at her started to view her as a symbol of feminism. Pathos followed as we learned that she was her family’s sole provider. And yet, this was no match for society crying shame in her brother’s eyes.

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*We need to start supporting our outliers. We need to appreciate that they bust norms and set the way forward for generations after them. We need to celebrate them and their victories by shouting them from the rooftops.*

So how do we hope for a gender revolution in Pakistan? First, it has to come from within. We need to start supporting our outliers. We need to appreciate that they bust norms and set the way forward for generations after them. We need to celebrate them and their victories by shouting them from the rooftops. Instead of feeling pride over the softer image, we need to champion the women who put their lives on the line. So someone is there

to carry the mantle. So the outlier doesn’t die and become myth and legend. So she remains an example of what the right thing is and how one is supposed to reach for it.

Second, we need help from women's networks from the outside to bolster and support our women. The Commonwealth can help us with this by showing the power of education, and the power of women's networks. It can do this by setting up and running charitable schools – not by merely donating the money, because that risks being diverted; and not necessarily by allowing locals to run the school, as they have little concept of governance. Equality starts when there are no exceptions made for the wealthy or for those of a different class or gender.

It can help by celebrating the bravery of women who stand up to imbalances and change attitudes that are backward and unacceptable. It can influence the softer image loving classes of Pakistan to take their positions of privilege and work to affect change. Small initiatives exist in and around our urban spaces to claim back power. A group of women have made it their cause to be seen at dhabas (roadside eateries) to reclaim female visibility in the public domain. To have men accustomed to their presence so it no longer feels like an oddity. The Commonwealth can back such initiatives and help make them the norm.

Finally, media shapes our worldview, and we spend an increasing amount of time engaging with programmes made for public consumption. Most of the programming we follow comes from international media networks. The more this challenges gender norms the more likely we are to take our cue from these and give our women a voice, while giving our men the understanding required to support women in the very human quest for feminism.

It's sad that we in Pakistan have to look outwards for the answers. What was our freedom for if this is what we have done with it? It's the oldest story in the world, the one that talks of women and shame. And we need to change the conversation. We need to bring gender to the forefront as an issue in its own right, divesting it of its appropriation by class. As a nation we are relatively young and need help with understanding how to implement real gender change. And the Commonwealth network can help us with that.

NEW ZEALAND/PACIFIC  
Holding Back the Ocean  
with a Bucket

# TEANAU TUIONO

## Activist and organiser

*In a changing world, Pacific island people's values of community and environment offer a model for new thinking on belonging, nationality, and where responsibility lies.*

*'We sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood.' – Teresia Teaiwa*

Like many Cook Islanders I was born in Aotearoa/New Zealand. But I was fortunate enough to spend some of my childhood in the Cook Islands. So I have warm memories of working in the banana plantation, fishing off the reef and watching kung fu movies at the local cinema. Wandering on the back road 'Te Ara-nui-a-Toi' and wondering what it would be like to be the first Polynesian Bruce Lee or Jedi, depending what movie we had seen. Island life from the perspective of my 10 year old self was pretty relaxed. It was the 1980s, the weather was predictable and the climate stable.

Although we have strong communities in Porirua, Tokoroa and South Auckland, like many Cook Islanders I try and visit the homeland when I can. Thirty years later the environmental issues before communities throughout the Pacific are increasingly urgent. Coral bleaching, sea level rise and once-in-a-century storms that seem to be happening every other year are the signs of a warming planet.

One of my cousins is the Principal of the school on the island of Tongareva (Penrhyn) in the Cook Islands, just this side of the Kiribati border. This roughly circular coral atoll has a maximum elevation of less than five metres. When said cousin steps out of her house in the morning, the sea is right there at her doorstep. Now, if you've ever been off the coast of some of our small island atolls you might not notice that there is an island there at all. To the untrained eye the sea touches the sky with nothing in between. That is how low lying some of the islands of the Pacific are. Yet our people found these islands hundreds of years before Christopher Columbus got lost in the Caribbean (he thought he was in India). The skill of the old navigators was based on knowledge of the stars, seamarks, and how to read the waves and clouds to determine currents and predict weather.

I like to think that as the descendants of those early navigators we can draw on their prowess as we ourselves navigate the global politics of climate change. Adrift in a sea of political turbulence and corporate self-interest it sometimes feels like we are trying to hold back the ocean with a bucket.

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*Today unseen lines  
criss-cross the Pacific.  
They determine who  
can go where and  
when and for how long.*

Today unseen lines criss-cross the ocean, carving up the Pacific. They determine who can go where and when and for how long; who gets NZ passports and who does not; who needs a visa to play rugby or be a low wage fruit picker and who does not. And

despite the UN Refugee Convention not recognising it yet, they also decide who will be a climate refugee and who will not.

The urgency of issues like climate change forces us to question not only the usefulness but also the appropriateness of those dividing lines. Whose purpose do they serve and for what reason? How do they hinder our cooperation as communities dispersed across the Pacific?

In 2005 Oscar Te Maru the then President of French Polynesia visited New Zealand and floated the idea of a common travel document. This would leave people's citizenship intact, but enable them to live and work in whichever Pacific nation they chose. Such an arrangement already exists between Australia, New Zealand, the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue. The idea didn't fly with the then New Zealand government. Capital flows easily across these lines due in no small part to the neo-liberal economic policy pioneered by countries like New Zealand; but the enthusiasm to apply this to actual people seems rather less.

The author Milan Kundera once said that 'The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'. As it was in his novel, so could it be in the Pacific.

For us to truly understand the Pacific we have to remember the history of those dividing lines. They tell us how German Samoa split into American Samoa and Western Samoa during World War One; and how young men from the Cook Islands and Niue were recruited for that same War; how Tahiti is French and so nuclear testing at Moruroa atoll is technically in France's backyard; how the Hawaiian Kingdom of Queen Lili'uokalani' was overthrown in 1893 and became American; and how Rapanui (Easter Island) became Chilean via a treaty.

The establishment of these lines continues to ripple into our present times, and if we are to struggle against the power of those lines we have to remember also the time when there were no lines at all. When there were other ways that defined the relationships between our geographically disparate pacific communities. If lines are about dividing and separating then surely the opposite of that is connection. How did

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*Whakapapa is not just how we are genealogically connected but also how our struggles are connected. How we see ourselves reflected in other people helps to build solidarity between us.*

those relationships work and how are they working now? What are the values that underpin and drive those relationships?

In Aotearoa this is encapsulated in the idea of 'whakapapa', which encompasses ideas of genealogy and descent. Reciting whakapapa is an important skill, reflecting the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of

leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions, and pervasive throughout Polynesia. Whakapapa is not just how we are genealogically connected but also how our struggles are connected. How we see ourselves reflected in other people helps to build solidarity between us. It acknowledges the rich tapestry of Pacific history that has been woven over centuries of interactions. Interactions that cannot be confined by lines and borders but share linguistic, ancestral and cultural roots. With Raiatea in French Polynesia at the centre, Rekohu (Chatham Islands) and Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the south, with Hawai'i to the north and reaching out to Rapanui to the east. It is a cliché to say 'that there is more that unites us than divides us', but I think a thousand years of interaction is as good a place to start as any.

In a climatically changing world in which Pacific communities have contributed among the least to the causes, particularly when viewed through this lens of historical connection, we need to see a freer movement of Pacific peoples.

In 2015 the world reached an agreement to begin the difficult task of reining in climate change. This agreement, negotiated within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) deals with mitigation and adaptation to greenhouse gas emissions. It aims to respond to the global climate change threat by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Will we do it? To the extent as prescribed, it's unlikely. But we should still be as ambitious as possible with our intentions. And pushing for greater regional collaboration on this issue and all associated issues is in the best interests of the wider Pacific community.

The New Zealand government is currently throwing around the idea of a humanitarian visa, because people who have been displaced by environmental conditions like rising seas and climate change aren't counted under the UN Convention on Refugees. Helping Pacific communities to migrate with dignity should be a critical part of any discussion in New Zealand, and would firmly position us as a Pacific country. This is one step among many that should be taken to break the confines of those lines and affirm our Pacific identity.

The history of the Commonwealth in the Pacific is about lines and borders separating 'Us' from 'Them'. The urgent issues of today insist that instead we see 'Them' as 'Us' – and call for greater Commonwealth collaboration to support the freer movement of Pacific peoples in our region.

When a cyclone sweeps across the Pacific it doesn't care about the imaginary lines we've drawn on a map – and neither should we.

NIGERIA

Population is not Power  
for Nigeria's Youth



## TOYOSI AKERELE-OGUNSIJI

### Social entrepreneur; founder, Rise Networks and Passnownow.com

*Internationally-connected civil society organisations are the key to organising young Nigerians – to ensure the country's huge natural and human resources are employed for the good of all generations.*

We have wailed and hailed. We've even been mocked as a collective with the tags of 'Wailing Wailers' or 'Hailing Hailers' by our political class.

The first truth to accept is the sad fact that the 'Nigerian Problem' is a carefully tended pet of the powers that be. Nigeria works for Them. Nigeria does not work for the rest of Us. My experiences have trained me to look at the aftermath of a storm from the realistic prism of 'What now?' rather than to wail endlessly at the devastation. Our political class have for too long used our strengths – our resilience, our patriotism, our courage, our faith, our vigour, our creative smarts, our stoic bent to conciliation and our penchant for industry – against us.

I am of the opinion that Nigeria urgently needs a leadership that upholds policies that empower our citizens – allowing them to demand accountability from our leaders and to eliminate functional overlaps of public institutions. Nigeria has to leverage the collective capabilities of all stakeholders in the public, private and social sectors, and find nationally-appropriate solutions instead of depending on the methods of other countries and continents, whose realities differ from ours.

It is tomfoolery for a country of almost 200 million people to depend solely on imports, pussyfoot around expanding our agricultural yields – and short-change ourselves of the potential of huge earnings from exporting our local produce.

We must urgently kick-start sustainable long-term investment in our human capital and rally our youth to take leadership in the public sector. With this generation's entrepreneurship, innovation and improved civic understanding, our increased influence will not just have an impact on Nigeria's present, it will actually determine its future.

Rather than depend on foreign aid, this new leadership will ensure that our internal resources, our smartest citizens and our values coalesce to deliver improved livelihoods, safer communities and equal opportunities to the masses of Nigeria.

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*With this generation's entrepreneurship, innovation and improved civic understanding, our increased influence will not just have an impact on Nigeria's present, it will actually determine its future.*

We have to do a better job at becoming a nation that embraces consequences. Our rewards and compensation mechanisms do not favour the most industrious, sacrificial and professional among us – rather the reverse.

The right kind of leadership will only evolve in Nigeria when we start building a sociocultural policy of voting in the right candidates: when public servants are not career

politicians, whose sustenance depend on exploiting the system, but are first and foremost professionals and experts with jobs and vocations. This will stem the tide of monumental, widespread corruption.

I am totally in favour of young people running for office, but our victories will depend on consistent and targeted organising, infiltrating the large establishment political parties, painstaking strategic planning and grassroots mobilization over an extended period of time. Without such deliberate action, many would-be politicians will find their ambitions frustrated, with a dwindling support base, no changes effected, and no disruptions in the political system. Because our aspirations must exist within the ambit of reason. While development is universal, our sense of community as a people stems from our proclivities and inclinations. We can learn the basic logic of the politics of other countries, but not their cultures.

The microeconomics of specialisation suggests that, like crocodiles, we must dig our teeth into the social, cultural and political fabric of Nigeria and replicate the successes we've achieved in tech, arts, literature, entrepreneurship and so on, in political life. We cannot outsource our critical thinking on the need to reposition Nigeria to God, foreign donors, and multi-lateral agencies – and still expect to get a real bang for our buck.

We have to start placing our focus on new models in public leadership, framing our narratives in a way that can inspire our people to change from being onlookers and spectators with an entitlement mentality to real, active citizens with palpable political consciousness and an intolerance for corrupt, repressive governments at all levels.

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*We have to start placing our focus on new models in public leadership, framing our narratives in a way that can inspire our people to change from being onlookers and spectators with an entitlement mentality to real, active citizens with palpable political consciousness.*

Civil society organizations and institutions need to deepen their education of citizens about issues of human rights and the dangers of voter apathy. It is also part of their responsibility to make government less attractive to those who wish to line their own pockets, by reducing emoluments and allowances. Only in this way will people with the heart and commitment for public service vie for political positions.

The Nigerian story is not one of unrelieved gloom. Every foreign citizen who's ever set foot in our country can

tell of the resilient, warm, hardworking and persevering spirit of our people – a rich and diverse asset that we are yet to fully harness. We are also endowed with an array of natural resources, probably more than any nation on Earth. The single greatest factor impeding Nigeria's development is leadership.

Two other Commonwealth countries offer revealing comparisons. Rwanda has experienced a remarkable turn-around since the 1994 genocide in which at least 800,000 Rwandans were hacked down by their fellow compatriots in one of the bloodiest ethnic conflicts ever recorded. This devastation of her humanity notwithstanding, Rwanda's war-ravaged economy between 1994 and 2014 grew by an annual average rate of 9.5 percent, the sixth highest globally. Poverty rates decreased from 45% in 2011 to 39% in 2014, while extreme poverty fell from 24% to 16% during the same period. The United Nations has just declared Rwanda's capital Kigali as the most beautiful city in Africa, and the third greenest city in the world.

Or there is the example of Singapore. Under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore made an impressive commitment to Research and Development with a huge focus on life sciences. The country has the best universities in Asia – their philosophy captured by computer scientist John Gustafson who wrote that in Singapore they: *'treat education the way they would treat a manufacturing process; use quality control; measure everything; fix problems as soon as they are discovered;*

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*Every foreign citizen who's ever set foot in our country can tell of the resilient, warm, hardworking and persevering spirit of our people – a rich and diverse asset that we are yet to fully harness.*

*please the customer; show zero tolerance for lousy teaching; treat course descriptions as a legally binding contract for what will be learned by those who take the course and apply themselves'.*

I often divide Nigeria's youth population into two major blocs: the first set, the minority, are educated, privileged, and somewhat self-sufficient; the second set

– hungry, deprived and illiterate – are larger in number, enough to make up the population of a new country.

If you are 30 in Nigeria today, you have only a few election cycles to influence the political process. Only a handful of elections to decide whether your children will be raised among criminals and hoodlums; and whether you're going to earn a decent enough living to give them the quality of education that will prepare them for the jobs of the future. All that before you turn 50.

However, our efforts should not be aimed at simply replacing old people with younger ones. Our collective desire must be to usher in a generation of prepared leaders who embody and epitomise character, competence and capacity; and who are equipped with the skills, maturity and political sagacity that will help them outperform their predecessors. It's not enough just to be young. Youth is a state of pending responsibility, and what we achieve with the power of our networked minds, the energies in our loins and our access to social media is what history will remember as our legacies.

Equal opportunities, jobs, housing, healthcare, education and security must become accessible for the children of both rich and poor. Our revolution must begin with the intellectual and economic empowerment of that second category of youth. They are held hostage by their needs, and their beliefs are deeply entrenched in a culture of *Baba Sope*, which means 'Father said so' in the Yoruba Language (spoken predominantly in south west Nigeria). *Baba Sope* makes it an almost criminal action to stand up to the elders who have failed us – yet genuflecting and cowering have never been a winning strategy for any generation.

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*'Baba Sope' makes it an almost criminal action to stand up to the elders who have failed us – yet genuflecting and cowering have never been a winning strategy for any generation.*

Over 60% of the cumulative population of all the 52 Commonwealth countries are young people under the age of 30. Poor education and lack of economic opportunities have hitherto hindered their progress. The gender imbalance amongst these youth also puts girls at high risk in their homes and within larger society.

However, there seem to have

been recent paradigm shifts by the governments of some countries to even things out by mobilizing local and international investment in order to brighten their chances and support them towards more economic viability, through the creation of more decent jobs delivered via innovation and industrialization, dependent on functioning infrastructure.

The primary role of the Commonwealth as a global unifying force is to continually demonstrate its commitment to strengthening the independence and freedom of the nation states that used to be under British colonial rule. Furthermore, it should also continually advocate that no youth should be left behind in terms of access to education and employment. The stronger and more self-sufficient nations can effectively hand-hold and support the smaller countries with less resources and this can guarantee prosperity and eliminate poverty. Specifically, in Northern Nigeria, the socio-cultural and structural challenges that impede the enrolment, retention and completion rates of the girl child in primary and post-primary schools have to be addressed, to ensure that the potential possibilities of women leading successful careers in the future are not limited. Unity, cohesion and national security are at the epicentre of facilitating and fast-tracking our growth as a nation and as such, the insurgency debacle spearheaded by Boko Haram against citizens of Nigeria and neighbouring states must not be allowed to fester. The multiple human trafficking tragedies happening between the West Coast and Liberia must be nipped in the bud before it degenerates into another full bloom intractable global crisis.

In conclusion, we have things to learn about relying on Nigeria's large oil reserves and failing to diversify our economy. There's also our inability to acknowledge the strong connection between educating girls, women in leadership positions, and how they have aided competitive growth in many countries.

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*We have the talent and tenacity. We must now use it to mend the cracks in the walls of Nigeria.*

biggest investment in any start-up ever, \$24 million, is in a company, Andela, co-founded by a Nigerian). We have won literary prizes that have placed our country positively on the global map through Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; the youngest film maker in the world is a Nigerian girl, Zuriel Oduwole; our entertainers in the music and movie industry are trailblazers in Africa and the world. So, we have the talent and tenacity. We must now use it to mend the cracks in the walls of Nigeria.

If readers find the tone and language in which I shared my thoughts unsettling, please be assured that this is a needful discomfiture. It is what it is: hard, stark truth.

But even so, by ourselves, with unreliable electricity and education that has diminished in quality over the decades, we have still managed to attract foreign investment to Nigeria (Mark's Zuckerberg's

CANADA

From Refugees  
to Service

## KEVIN VUONG

Social entrepreneur and military officer; leader of the Agency for Public + Social Innovation

*Lessons from Canada's approach to creating a diverse and welcoming society: a challenging task, but when successful the result is an openness to others and to the world.*

Today, the world knows Canada as a nation that celebrates its multiculturalism, but that has not always been the case and it bears remembering that diversity and inclusion require constant practice. The nation became acutely aware of its checkered history last year as we celebrated our Sesquicentennial and 150 years of Confederation. As Canada moves into its 151st year as a nation, there are best practices and lessons learned in equity, engagement and governance that could be of value to our Commonwealth peers, as well as the Commonwealth more broadly as an institution and a leader of the international community.

Canada 150 was a moment of reflection across the country as the nation examined its past and contemplated the future. It was a year when Canadians became more conscious of the dissonance between who we thought we were, and who we are as reflected by the policies, laws, and institutions that govern Canadian society.

*Diversity and inclusion is not just giving someone a seat at the table, it is working with them to set the table.*

Because diversity and inclusion is not just giving someone a seat at the table, it is working with them to set the table. This is the difference between inequality and inequity. Focusing on inequality ignores the fact that people have different starting

points. Not all communities have the same access to knowledge and resources, nor do the systems currently in place treat all communities the same.

As the proud son of refugees from the Vietnam War and the first of my family to be born and raised in Canada, I know first-hand what the difference looks like. Combating inequality meant ensuring that I, along



with everyone else, could access the community centre to learn how to swim; but it overlooked the fact that our working-class family could not afford swimming lessons. I was only able to take part because of the community centre's commitment to providing programming regardless of one's ability to afford it.

In practice, an equity-focused community program could take the form of a discount or subsidy for low-income families. In the City of Toronto, we provide a financial support via a program called the 'Welcome Subsidy' – because everyone is welcome. Cost should not be a barrier to someone taking part in any programme. Instead, if they are not in the programme, it should be because they decided not to participate. There is more demand than there is funding for the Welcome Subsidy, but it is a programme that I am proud that our city provides.

This awareness of different starting points is crucial in ensuring that engagement with our marginalised communities is productive and meaningful, not tokenistic. Let's look at policy-making as an example. How accessible is the engagement? Are you using jargon or language that inhibits full engagement?

Look also at sequence. When are you engaging a community in the process? Is it at the beginning when you are first crafting the policy – or at the end when the policy is already drafted and changes are minor or difficult to make? To relate it back to the metaphor I used earlier, are you merely inviting people to the table, or are you working together to set the table?

The apathy that young people (but not only young people) are criticised for is not because they don't care, but because they are often engaged only at the end of a process. They recognise that their responses and efforts can only have a small effect on the outcome – so they see little reason to bother.

And so a 'solution' that is often proposed in response to this criticism is the creation of advisory bodies for the group that raised the concern about poor or disingenuous engagement. However, unless these advisory bodies are accompanied by proper reporting mechanisms to listen and respond to various recommendations, questions, or concerns from these groups, they can do more harm than good in perpetuating the perception that their voices have no impact. Likewise for 'observer', non-voting status, or similar tokenistic positions on a board or governing body.

Consider instead what the Toronto Public Library, the largest library system in North America, has done for their Board of Trustees. Recognizing that their users are predominantly young people, they

not only gave young candidates an equal chance of consideration, but even went a step further to prefer candidates with a youthful perspective. Because who better to help guide the institution than those who use it most?

It is important to acknowledge that this approach may not be applicable to institutions and agencies that require advanced technical knowledge or expertise, but there are many organisations where this approach could be applicable. The focus here is on ensuring that the governance reflects the constituency of an organisation.

So what is the point of doing all of this? Why does any of this matter? And what is the impact of a more equitable and engaged nation and Commonwealth, where everyone from refugees to the native-born start on a level playing field?

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*Slowly but surely, the gap between our global reputation and the national reality is narrowing.*

Well, it is why this proud son of refugees from the Vietnam War became the first in his family to attend and graduate from university. It is why this proud son of refugees left banking and capital markets to dedicate his career to his city and community. And it is

why this proud son of Canada joined the Canadian Armed Forces as an Officer in Her Majesty's Royal Canadian Navy to serve the country that welcomed his parents, when so many had neither the conviction nor the courage to do so.

Canada remains on a journey towards reconciliation for the nation's terrible treatment of its Indigenous Peoples, and continues to work on eliminating systemic racism in its various institutions, laws, and policies; but there is an acknowledgement and keen awareness that has evolved into action. Slowly but surely, the gap between our global reputation and the national reality is narrowing.

It is a point of personal pride to see the strong position that Canada has taken in this era of conflict around the globe. Because our world is again at another crossroads on what to do in the face of massive population

displacement from war, famine, and tragedy – just like the terrible Vietnam War that saw my parents escaping from their country. And again, Canada has chosen to take the harder path with respect to the Syrian refugee crisis – it is a journey that we have taken before.

In fact, some Canadians have criticised the federal government. Not for accepting refugees, but for being too slow and not welcoming more. This is not to say that everyone feels similarly. As in the 1970s, there are dissenting voices questioning the decision we made. Just like then, it will take hard work. And just like then, it will not be easy; but we know from experience that our country will be better for it.

Half a decade from now at the 2068 Commonwealth Summit, an essay like this could very well be written by one of the children of the 40,000 Syrian refugees we welcomed to Canada last year. On behalf of my 78-year-old self, I can tell you that I cannot wait to read it.

UNITED KINGDOM  
Engaging for Democracy

## GRACE BLAKELEY

Researcher at the Institute  
for Public Policy Research;  
political organiser

*The 'democratic deficit' in the United Kingdom and in the international organisations that make so many of the world's decisions must be tackled. International social movements, led by young people, are the answer.*

At the heart of the UK's political and economic institutions lies a democratic deficit that is the source of the UK's main challenges – from Brexit, to the housing crisis, to our general economic malaise. A vibrant, internationally-minded social movement led by young people could challenge this democratic deficit, and allow us to work together to shape our collective destiny.

The vote to leave the European Union sent shockwaves around the country, and indeed the world. Very few people within the political establishment correctly predicted the outcome of the referendum, which exposed divides between classes, age-groups, communities and regions in the UK.

According to many in what has been termed the 'metropolitan liberal elite', Brexit represents an outburst of xenophobic nationalism – a culture war that will result in the erosion of the liberal freedoms won over the past century.

Far-right groups have existed on the fringes of the political scene for most of the past century. They have never managed to make their way into the mainstream because their dystopian vision of turning back the clock to an era of supposed ethnic homogeneity and moral purity never resonated with the vast majority of the British public. One lesson we can take from history is that the only times that these groups have been successful is when they have channelled wider social, political, and economic discontent into radical movements mobilised against the establishment.

Today, one does not have to look far to find evidence of social, political, or economic discontent in the UK. Household debt now stands at over 140% of disposable incomes, to compensate for a decade of wage stagnation. This economic malaise has intersected with existing divisions. England is, for example, the most regionally unequal nation in Europe, with a capital city that is highly integrated into the global

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*The only way to tackle the root causes of the vote to leave the European Union is to democratise our economic and political institutions – many of which are run by unelected technocrats.*

economy surrounded by regions still marked by the scars of deindustrialisation. Spiralling house prices have left many young people priced out of the housing market altogether. Home ownership is now declining for the first time in decades.

These issues have been exacerbated by the austerity programme implemented in the wake of the 2008 financial

crisis. Our healthcare, education, and criminal justice systems have suffered almost a decade of cuts, which have seen public spending decline from 45% of GDP in 2009/10 to 40% today. It has not been hard for extremists to channel the deep sense of anger that many people feel at the failure of the UK's economy and public services against the most vulnerable in British society.

The vast majority of our politicians, journalists, and civil servants are white, male, from middle class backgrounds, and educated at elite universities. Less than a third of MPs in the UK are women, 8% are non-white, and almost half attended independent or selective schools. In fact, many of them attended the same university and received the same degree. In 2015, the Prime Minister, Chancellor, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Chancellor, BBC political editor, BBC economics editor, Channel 4 news editor, and so many more had all studied for the same degree – Politics, Philosophy and Economics – at the University of Oxford.

In the absence of any other democratic outlet, many people used the EU referendum to express their frustration with an aloof political class that has taken the people of this country for granted for far too long. I would argue that the only way to tackle the root causes of the vote to leave the European Union is to democratise our economic and political institutions – many of which are run by unelected technocrats.

Economist Dani Rodrik has written about the rise of 'undemocratic liberalism'. Rodrik describes undemocratic liberalism as a politics in which:

*[R]ulers are insulated from democratic accountability by a panoply of restraints that limit the range of policies they can deliver. Bureaucratic bodies, autonomous regulators, and independent courts set policies, or they are imposed from outside by the rules of the global economy.*

As Rodrik rightly points out, the European Union is the paradigmatic example of an undemocratic liberal institution. Votes in the European Parliament, the only quasi-democratic institution in the European Union, are easily ignored by the European Commission, which acts as the EU's executive. Even when they aren't, low turn-out in European elections across the EU ensures that MEPs are rarely held responsible for the decisions that are enacted. Meanwhile, the European Central Bank and the European Court of Justice, which have been responsible for decisions that have had profound impacts on the lives of all European citizens, are completely insulated from popular pressure.

Things are not much better in the UK, one of the most politically centralised countries in Europe (devolution notwithstanding). Until very recently there were no democratic political or economic institutions at a regional level outside London to provide a counterweight to the concentration of political and economic power in the capital.

Insulation from democratic oversight has prevented many of our political and economic institutions from fully considering the distributional consequences of their actions – whether on different income groups, genders, or regions. This has led to many people feeling voiceless, powerless, and ultimately resentful of a political class that has presided over the longest period of wage stagnation since the 1860s.

These issues are by no means unique to the UK or the EU. Decisions taken by international economic institutions like the IMF, the WTO, and the World Bank are made by technocrats who aren't held accountable to the populations whose economic future they help to determine. The absence of popular voice within these institutions has had profound consequences for people's living standards over the last thirty years. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Global South, where many still live with the consequences of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by technocratic institutions on a number of democratically-elected governments in the 1990s.

Today, around the world, it is young people who are working together to build social movements that aim to hold these institutions to account.

The problems that our generation will need to address when we come to power will not be confined within national borders. Any anti-austerity agenda will have to confront the increasing ease with which wealthy individuals and corporations are able to avoid taxation altogether by hiding their money in offshore jurisdictions. Any attempt to tackle climate change will require national governments to cooperate on strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, generally mediated by some form of international institution.

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*The Commonwealth can play a central role in bridging gaps between ... social movements, allowing them to learn from each other.*

If we are to combat these problems, we need to continue to build up domestic social movements and forge links between them. There have been many recent examples of young people working together across borders to take on the undemocratic decisions

imposed upon them by the global elite. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), for example, threatened to drive down European regulatory standards and expose European states to arbitration via antidemocratic mechanisms such as Investor-State Dispute Settlements. The defeat of this trade deal would not have been possible were it not for the mobilisation of large groups of young people via platforms such as 38 degrees.

The Commonwealth can play a central role in bridging gaps between such social movements, allowing them to learn from each another. Organising in the UK, Canada, or Australia is likely to look very different than in Pakistan, Mozambique, or Nigeria. Activists can learn a great deal about what an effective social movement looks like by seeing how such movements have developed and achieved their aims in a variety of contexts. I learnt a great deal about organising and influence from my time on the British Council's Future Leaders Connect Programme with fellow young activists from 12 Commonwealth states.

It is also critical that young activists are able to gain a global perspective on the problems they are seeking to tackle. Climate change, for example, will affect parts of the Global South much more than the Global North. Commonwealth states like Bangladesh are particularly at risk from rising sea levels. The Commonwealth can play a critical role in bringing together environmental organisers from across its 53 nation states to determine where the problems created by climate change are most acute, and how best to tackle them. The same goes for problems in the global economy, such as tackling tax avoidance, curbing the power of multinational corporations, and dealing with the impact of technological change.



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*The challenges of tomorrow – from climate change, to economic stagnation, to automation – will require ordinary people to work together across borders in order to solve common problems.*

A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Commonwealth should be an organisation that supports young people to work together to tackle the world's common problems, even if that means fighting against entrenched interests at the national or international level. The challenges of tomorrow – from climate change, to economic stagnation, to automation – will require ordinary people to work together across borders in order to solve common

problems. Governments must be sure that, as their populations develop a sense of international consciousness, they do not sever their links with the democratic citizenry that provides them with their legitimacy. Doing so will require the development of strong, internationally-minded social movements that hold national governments to account.

# AFTERWORD

# ALASDAIR DONALDSON

## Senior Policy Analyst and Editor, British Council

*The Commonwealth is a network connecting many of the fastest growing nations on Earth, with strong ties of language, culture, values, and mutual appreciation. Research for the British Council suggests it will be even more important in the future.*

In April 2018 the UK hosted the biannual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. To mark the occasion, the British Council asked young leaders from each of the Commonwealth regions to reflect on the really big challenges facing young people – and their countries – and how the connecting power of the Commonwealth might help to find solutions. As the world gets smaller and more connected, and power diffuses across it, there is every reason to believe that the Commonwealth will have an increased relevance.

### **OLD FRIENDS, NEW PARTNERS**

According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, the combined GDP of Commonwealth countries is likely to reach \$13 trillion by 2020, overtaking that of the Eurozone. Its population – which represents around a third of the population of the world – is four times larger than that of the EU and is growing faster. Many of its members share similar legal and constitutional arrangements as well as historical links. In many cases they already cooperate with each other on trade and security. Perhaps more importantly, the Commonwealth represents a strong network at a time when globalisation is rendering international networks ever more important.

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*According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, the combined GDP of Commonwealth countries is likely to reach \$13 trillion by 2020, overtaking that of the Eurozone.*

Indeed, one of the greatest strengths of the Commonwealth is that it really represents a family of dozens of different societies, associations, organisations and charities, most of them grass-roots, engaged in different types of civil society and cultural relations work. In this respect the organisation is a lot less of a top-down structure and more of an organic people-

*Levels of trust in the UK's people, government and institutions are higher in the Commonwealth countries than in any other regional grouping in the G20.*

to-people network than other similar international groupings. Arguably, in the modern, networked world, this represents a significant and growing advantage.

Commonwealth countries are linked by language and culture. Membership is dependent on adherence to certain values, such

as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter. These are not mere formalities: unlike other groups like the EU, NATO, or ASEAN, several member states have in the past been suspended from the organisation for failing to meet these standards; and in recent years the Commonwealth has attracted new members such as Rwanda and Mozambique.

#### **A RENEWED RELEVANCE?**

The results of research by Ipsos MORI for the British Council into the perceptions of young people across the G20<sup>1</sup> suggest that mutual appreciation and close connections between Commonwealth countries and the UK are likely to continue in the future.

For example, levels of trust in the UK's people, government and institutions are higher in the Commonwealth countries than in any other regional grouping in the G20. The G20 Commonwealth countries typically reveal higher levels of all dimensions of trust than the G20 average by 8–10 percentage points. The UK is perceived particularly well by them in terms of how well it supports and upholds important global values. More than 50% of people surveyed in the G20 Commonwealth countries of India, Australia, Canada and South Africa thought the UK upheld values well, often at a similar level to how well they thought their own country upheld values. Belief that the UK upholds those values was 14 percentage points higher in the Commonwealth countries than in the G20 overall, and 25 percentage points higher than in the EU countries.

<sup>1</sup>Commissioned by the British Council, Ipsos MORI conducted an online survey across all 19 countries of the G20, interviewing 18–34 year olds with a minimum of secondary education. The first wave was conducted between 23 May – 16 June 2016 and the second wave was conducted between 8 September – 16 October 2016. Each country had a sample size of around 1,000. The total sample size of all G20 countries was 18,010, and the sample size for the Commonwealth countries surveyed (Australia, Canada, India, South Africa) was 3,998. In each market, the data is weighted to be representative of the national population by age (18–24 vs. 25–34) and gender. Additionally, the sample of the second wave is weighted to match the sample profile of the first wave on the following variables: interlocking age and gender quotas, education, area of residence, and employment status.

Across a range of areas, the UK was perceived as particularly attractive to young people in Commonwealth nations. For instance, the UK was the top study destination for young Canadians, and second for other Commonwealth countries. Canada and Australia were also rated very highly as attractive study destinations by young people from the other Commonwealth countries. The UK was also ranked highly as an attractive source of culture, with around 30% of young people from the major Commonwealth countries finding it attractive. These results are largely mirrored by the perceptions of young British people about those Commonwealth countries.

The Commonwealth nations and the UK have much stronger people-to-people connections than the G20 average. Around a third of people had friends in their country who were from the UK. This was as high as 36% in Australia (a quarter of whose young people had visited the UK), against a G20 average of 18%. Again, a very high proportion of people in the Commonwealth had family either living in or from the UK – this was as high as 40% in South Africa – against a G20 average of 15%.

Furthermore, the EU referendum result had a significant net positive effect on the UK's perceived attractiveness in the G20 Commonwealth countries of India, South Africa, Australia and Canada; with 32% of young people surveyed in those countries describing a positive impact on their views of the UK's attractiveness, as opposed to 20% reporting a negative impact. There was also a positive impact on their likelihood of visiting the UK, studying here, making friends with British people, or consuming British arts and culture.

When asked whether the referendum decision would make people more, about the same or less likely to engage with the UK across a range of areas, those from the Commonwealth countries envisaged more engagement. In Canada, Australia, South Africa, and India, 6%, 8%, 19%, and 28% respectively said they were more likely to trade with the UK.

So leaving the European Union may positively benefit the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth and its peoples. The mutual appreciation shown by the research to be shared by many young people from its major countries suggests a flourishing future for the Commonwealth, and one which the UK would be wise to embrace. This should start at home, with greater efforts to increase the British public's awareness of the Commonwealth.

As Lord Howell of Guildford has said: 'We need to get knowledge of the Commonwealth into our schools to reach children, who know nothing about it. Whenever we have tried to spread the message we've found a vast welling up of interest in every aspect of the Commonwealth'.



Editor: Roy Bacon

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We also work with and in many other countries around the world, both through our staff on the ground and through digital and broadcast media channels.

