



# **The Commonwealth Conversation**

HOSTED BY THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

## An Uncommon Association A Wealth of Potential

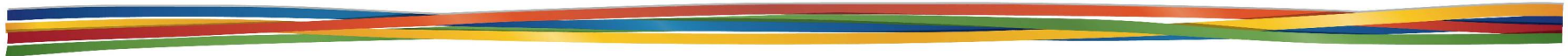
Draft recommendations from the  
Commonwealth Conversation



[www.thecommonwealthconversation.org](http://www.thecommonwealthconversation.org)

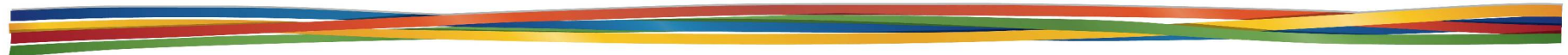
# From Emerging Findings to Recommendations

- In November 2009 we published the emerging findings of the Conversation. Click here to read the report, [Common What?](#)
- Throughout the Conversation we have heard much to concern us, not least that the association's **profile** is unhealthily low
- When we dug deeper into why profile is so low, we discovered an urgent need for the Commonwealth to refocus on its **principles, priorities and people**
- However, we have also heard much to give us hope. The Commonwealth has all the ingredients to be a leading, effective and influential international association in the 21st century...but it is essential that **all** members of the Commonwealth family make better, more strategic use of these assets
- As we near the end of the Conversation process, we have begun to draft 10 key recommendations based on all that we have heard.
- Let us know what you think of these 10 recommendations so far by giving them a thumbs up or thumbs down, and leaving your comments below...



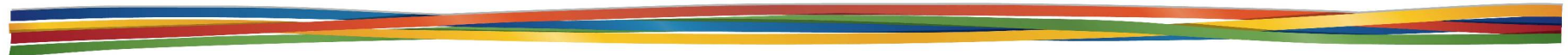
# 1. Live out principles

- People are **inspired** by the values and principles of the Commonwealth, but **frustrated** that it doesn't always walk the talk when it comes to upholding them. There is scepticism about the Commonwealth and its countries' true commitment.
- All member states should **uphold their commitments** and be prepared to **accept criticism** if they do not.
- There is a need to **speak out** when Commonwealth principles are transgressed.
- People are impressed by the existence of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), but it is criticised as being too **timid**, **restrictive** in approach, and **afraid** of causing offence.
- The current review of CMAG is a welcome opportunity to give it a mandate to **widen its remit** and **act more boldly**. This will go a long way to turning the Commonwealth into an organisation that is willing to stand by its principles.
- Walking the talk also means using every opportunity to **promote** the Commonwealth values and principles through our work. Everyone working in the Commonwealth family must **reflect** and **live** them in order to raise the association's profile and tackle misconceptions



## 2. Prove worth

- Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), Ministerial Meetings, and People's Forums are often unfairly thought of as **only talking shops**
- Publishing regular and accessible **updates on progress** towards the goals that are set at these meetings would help to tackle this
- **Measuring & proving** the **impact** of the inter-governmental Commonwealth's work would help to justify funding and improve efficacy, image and transparency
- Perhaps the accreditation of Commonwealth civil society organisations could involve **regular evaluations** of their impact and effectiveness



# 3. Select wisely

- The Commonwealth was at its strongest, most admired and most effective when it focused on **key priority issues** e.g. racism in Southern Africa
- Rather than spreading its limited resources too thinly, the Commonwealth should identify signature issues or ways of working in which it **adds unique value** in a crowded international marketplace
- Member states should set the inter-governmental Commonwealth's **priorities** and make sure that resources are directed accordingly
- Member states should reassess what function the Commonwealth fills as a tool in their **foreign policy toolbox**. The more it is used, and the more that is demanded from it, the more benefit it will bring



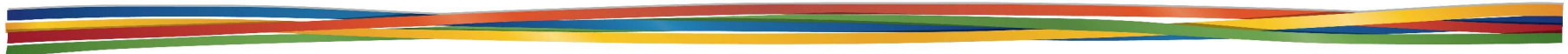
## 4. Be coherent

- Many people say it is **difficult** to communicate what the Commonwealth is or does
- Despite its complexity, the best way of addressing misperceptions is to re-state effectively the Commonwealth's **purpose** in the 21st century
- A new **Commonwealth Charter**, building on the Port of Spain Statement of values and principles, but ideally arrived at through public consultation, could help with this



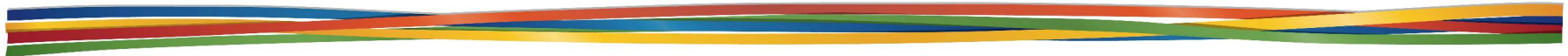
# 5. Innovate and be bold

- There is a need to correct the widely-held public impression that the Commonwealth is a **historical** organisation with diminishing relevance
- Many working methods used by Commonwealth organisations are seen as **old fashioned**
- Most often-cited achievements of the Commonwealth happened **20+ years ago**
- To change these perceptions, the Commonwealth family must build on its history but be **bolder** and more **innovative** in what it does today
- Commonwealth initiatives should **capture the public imagination** & project a **modern**, international organisation rooted in the present, not the past



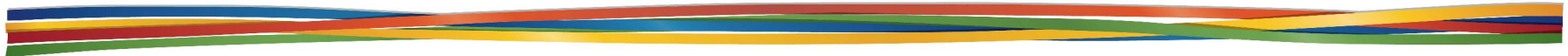
## 6. Reach wider

- When the Commonwealth's work directly touches the lives of individuals, it has a **big impact** (e.g. Commonwealth scholarships)
- But the Commonwealth is frequently described as **elitist** because its work directly impacts on only a lucky few
- Commonwealth organisations can help to reverse this by **expanding** the reach of projects & striving to **engage more people**
- There is a need to **embrace** new technologies and communication methods
- There is a need to capture the attention of **young people** - they know least about the CW, but are most impressed by it when they find out more and are given meaningful opportunities to engage



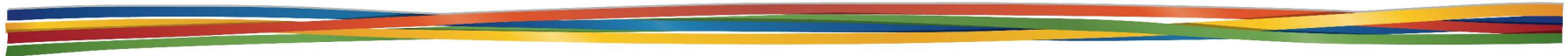
# 7. Put people first

- The Commonwealth is as much an **association of peoples** as it is of member governments
- Current mechanisms for **interaction** between members, the inter-governmental Commonwealth and civil society need to be improved
- Better opportunities for dialogue would help to attract the attention of wider global civil society who have little interest in the Commonwealth, but whose involvement could prove valuable and constructive. This would help to broaden Commonwealth discussions beyond just the 'usual suspects'



# 8. Invest

- The resources received by the intergovernmental Commonwealth are tiny in comparison to other international organisations.
- In order for the association to innovate, be bold and reach wider, it needs to be **adequately resourced**.
- Likewise, more needs to be invested in Commonwealth civil society organisations, both in terms of **funding** and **capacity building** e.g. management, HR and IT training
- The whole Commonwealth family needs to look beyond traditional funding sources to secure new partners and investors



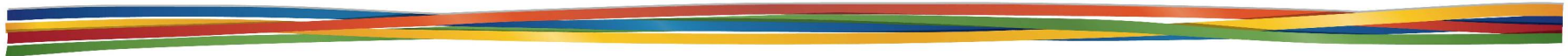
# 9. Lead from the front

- The Commonwealth needs **strong leadership**, able to stand up for the association's values, even if it means risking causing offence to member states
- To be most effective, the Secretary-General must be given **freedom** by member states and Commonwealth civil society to take **proactive, political** stances and be more than a vessel for consensus messages
- By leading from the front on key priority issues, a strong and visible Secretary-General would help to strengthen the Commonwealth, **raise its profile** and **tackle apathy & scepticism**



# 10. Short is sweet

- Lengthy communiqués & statements seem unfocused, inaccessible and unattainable



# The Next Steps...

- Please give your comments on these draft recommendations by **THURSDAY 18<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2010**
- You can do this either on this webpage, or by emailing your comments to [conversation@thercs.org](mailto:conversation@thercs.org)
- The recommendations will be finalised in late February and published, with a full report of the Commonwealth Conversation, in early March 2010
- We hope that the recommendations and report will be used by the Eminent Persons' Group on Commonwealth reform that is currently being established
- However, the Commonwealth family should not sit back and wait for the Eminent Persons' Group. It is the responsibility of everyone, from civil society, to the inter-governmental Commonwealth, to member states, to make sure that the association achieves its full potential in the 21st century
- We are already thinking about what the Royal Commonwealth Society can do to follow up on these recommendations. Please let us know if you have your own ideas

