

# Stronger civic voices

across the  
Commonwealth

**2017-2019**



Commonwealth  
Foundation

More voices for a fairer world

The Commonwealth Foundation is a development organisation with an international remit and reach. Uniquely placed at the interface between government and civil society, the Foundation is dedicated to strengthening civic voices for enhanced participation in governance.

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## Origins

Heads of Government established the Commonwealth Foundation in 1965, bestowing a mandate to support civil society. We interpret this as a responsibility to ensure that civic voices shape public discourse and are heard in policy processes.

## Our focus

The idea of ‘strengthened civic voices’ underpins our work as we make our contribution to the global development agenda. Our work is principally guided by Sustainable Development Goal 16: **‘Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.’**

We also recognise a responsibility to Sustainable Development Goal 5: **‘Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.’**

## Our programmes

**Participatory governance and gender** is our capacity development programme. We broker and enhance constructive engagement between civic voices and governance institutions by offering access to platforms and decision-making spaces. We integrate gender in all areas of our work, including its intersectionality.

**Commonwealth Writers**, our cultural initiative, inspires and connects storytellers while developing their craft and supporting them to gain access to spaces where their voice can be heard. It is underpinned by the conviction that **creative expression** has a power to contribute to social transformation.

We make **grants** to projects that help communities become more involved in policy processes, more effective at holding governance institutions to account and more able to influence public discourse on issues that are important to them.

We describe ourselves as a **learning organisation** and facilitate South-South and North-South learning exchanges where civic voices share their experiences, network and learn from each other.

## Our stories

We are midway through a four-year strategy period and our work with project partners is in full flow. The stories that follow demonstrate our commitment to amplify less-heard civic voices at all levels of society from the smallest rural community to the largest international forum.

**Many voices can make change happen.**



Director-General

## Vijay Krishnarayan

Many of the challenges we face today are either too big or too small for individual governments to confront. Whether it's climate change, rapid urbanisation, food insecurity, water scarcity or terms of trade, institutions are looking for answers.

*'There is a brighter future ahead and we are part of it.'*



© Matthew Andrews

There was an assumed consensus that these things were best tackled by states working together on a regional or international basis. Those assumptions are being questioned. This is a moment for institutions to take a good look at the part they must play in delivering a sustainable future.

*'The Foundation is a cog in the Commonwealth wheel. We were established more than 50 years ago because the Commonwealth is as much an association of peoples as it is of governments.'*

This is as true for the Commonwealth as it is for any other system in the multilateral world. Shridath Ramphal famously said 'The Commonwealth cannot negotiate for the world but it can help the world to negotiate.' With its emphasis on mutuality, collegiality and diversity you can see how the Commonwealth can add value to a global system that aspires to work for all.

The Foundation is a cog in the Commonwealth wheel. We were established more than 50 years ago because the Commonwealth is as much an association of peoples as it is of governments. These pages show that premise remains true but they also illustrate how we have applied ourselves in a contemporary context. Since 2012 the Foundation has focussed on strengthening civic participation in governance, which now resonates with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Foundation is showing that in addition to convening member states, the Commonwealth can bring diverse voices together, particularly the less heard so that better decisions are made. That's how we contribute to 'leaving no one behind.'

At a time when citizens are questioning whether institutions can deliver in the face of global challenges the Foundation has lit a candle. With this publication we show that we are not alone and that the movement for inclusive development continues to grow. There is a brighter future ahead and we are part of it.



© Matthew Andrews

## Deputy Director-General Myn Garcia

Over the last seven years, we have consistently reflected on our work, asking ourselves about the value we are adding to governance and development. We are committed to adaptive learning and management and have dedicated ourselves to strengthening civic voices to constructively engage in policy processes and contribute to shaping public discourse.

*‘Building trust is imperative in successful engagements and partnerships in governance.’*

One of the major learnings from our 2012-2017 strategy was that we must be better at integrating gender in our programme. Under the new strategy we have a **stronger focus on gender equality underpinned by the framework of gender and its intersectionality**. In keeping with our systems approach, this framework allows for an understanding of the different intersecting systems of oppression and recognises the different ways that gender inequality is shaped by these intersections.

The direction, speed and acceptance of change in a complex social and political system are difficult to predict. We have been more mindful that using a ‘longer’-term timeframe is critical to the success of the Foundation’s strategic priorities. **Strengthening civic voices means change over the long term.** Our planning now factors this in.

The highest degree of change can be observed when projects are based on the partners’ own assessment; taking the lead in determining and articulating the change they want to achieve, the capacities they want to strengthen and the effective approaches to be taken. **Customising support and taking into consideration the cultural and political context is fundamental.**

There are **no short cuts for anchoring the work on local ownership** and supporting a process beyond enhancing existing knowledge and skills of individuals whereby civic voices strengthen, create, adapt and maintain their capacity over time and realise their own agency. We **accompany partners, acknowledging that one size does not fit all** and we facilitate processes in prioritising and planning instead of imposing outside analyses and interests.

We have learned that support to civic voices **must address individual needs and consider how skills and abilities materialise in organisational and institutional processes**. We recognise that **structures and processes are influenced by system-wide issues**. We have found that initiatives and programmes require a wide range of adult learning approaches that are better adapted than traditional training and workshops. These include learning

by doing, peer to peer mentoring and on-site coaching. Combined with these, research, technical assistance, pilot projects, training and evaluations have proved to be useful.

We have also seen how individual strengths organised in and working as part of coalitions or alliances have demonstrated the effectiveness of collective efforts in engaging in policy advocacy and campaigning. **One ingredient that features in our work is partnering with effective and strong local resource partners who know the local context and have credibility in-country to deliver the gamut of support.** This approach contributes in the long term to strengthening the local enabling environment.

And finally, **building trust is imperative in successful engagements and partnerships in governance**. One way that civil society is able to build trust is to demonstrate its technical capacity and willingness to constructively engage in policy processes in governance.

The pages of this publication will give you a sense of what these lessons look like. They help us to be defiant in hope in such a time as this.

*‘Under the new strategy we have a stronger focus on gender equality underpinned by the framework of gender and its intersectionality.’*





Participatory  
governance  
and gender



Commonwealth delegation to the CSW63, New York, March 2019

## Capacity development for constructive engagement

The substantial transformation described by the Sustainable Development Goals is possible if civic voices are meaningfully included in governance. The Commonwealth Foundation supports the strengthening and the amplification of civic voices so they can engage constructively in policy processes and shape public discourse.

Through its Participatory Governance and Gender programme, the Foundation promotes inclusive governance and supports the capacity development of civic voices by offering access to platforms, policy processes and decision-making spaces. The Foundation enhances interaction between civic voices and governance actors at the national, regional and global levels.

### Movement building and South-South learning

In 2017 the Foundation supported a partnership between the West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and Gender Links for an intergenerational dialogue on ideas to revitalise the African women's movement and good practices in holding governments to account on the implementation of gender equality commitments.

*'It was a life changing three days of great reflections and valuable contributions towards advancing the gender equality cause, including sharing of good practices around feminist organising and movement building.'*

Participant from Cameroon

Providing access to platforms, facilitating intergenerational dialogues, peer-to-peer mentoring and learning-by-doing are some of the approaches that the Foundation takes to capacity development. In March 2019, the Foundation supported an intergenerational delegation of six women from West Africa to the 63rd Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) and the annual meeting of the Commonwealth National Women's Machineries in New York.

### Convening spaces for constructive engagement

As the Commonwealth's intergovernmental agency for civil society, the Foundation has a mandate to support civic voices to engage meaningfully in Commonwealth political processes. This has seen regular civic submissions made to Commonwealth Ministers Meetings on health, education and women's affairs. In these instances, the Participatory Governance and Gender programme works in close collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and, where relevant, the host government to convene a civil society forum that feeds into the ministerial meeting.



Shamima Muslim

Shamima Muslim, from Ghana, is Founder and Convener of Alliance of Women in Media, Africa.

*'I was a newbie at the sixty-third United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW63) and the Annual Consultation of Commonwealth National Women's Machineries this month. It was a great feeling to meet a few of the pioneers who attended the same conference in Beijing in 1995 – still going strong and honouring us with their hallowed presence. But I was left wondering:*

*Where is the vibrant African women's feminist movement that took charge after Beijing 1995? The movement appears to have subsided with time.*

*The new buzz-phrase for me is to 'push back against the push back'. After so much work on women's empowerment and equality, there seems to be a global push back against women's rights issues and in some cases an erosion of the gains – in political participation for example. Women's rights organisations and their allies must rise up and redouble their efforts to rebuild the movement.'*

## Improving access to affordable medicines

Trade agreements and intellectual property regimes can be a barrier to affordable medicines and improving access is a challenge. Research and advocacy organisation Third World Network is facilitating dialogue between governments, civil society, manufacturers and other stakeholders to advance public health policies in India and Malaysia.

### India and Malaysia

**Project duration:**  
2017 - 2020

**Partner:**  
Third World Network (TWN)

**Profile:**  
Third World Network conducts research on economic, social and environmental issues of concern to the Global South, engages at national, regional and global forums and builds the capacity of civil society organisations to engage in policy and legislative processes.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 acknowledges the importance of access to affordable medicines and calls for a pathway through the complex terrain of intellectual property rights and trade agreements. It references the 2001 Doha Declaration on the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right to use the full flexibility of TRIPS to provide access to medicines for all.

TWN recognises that trade agreements between countries include intellectual property clauses that run counter to TRIPS, impeding access and hindering the search for new medicines. Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) is recognised by world leaders as requiring an urgent public health response and this is being affected by intellectual property regimes.

TWN identified the need for engagement with governments in the Global South on the provision of effective and affordable medicines. Countries have committed to develop national action plans but intellectual property structures are having an adverse effect on political momentum and inhibiting investment in new antibiotics.

In Malaysia, they are helping the Ministry of Health navigate intellectual property provisions to improve access to medicines and are providing a civil society perspective on the implementation and monitoring of a National Action Plan on AMR. In both Malaysia and India, the implementation of the National Action Plan has taken a multi-stakeholder approach.



© Kayla Maurais on Unsplash

Chee Yoke Ling © Vicki Couchman

In 2012 the Ministry widened the focus of the AMR campaign from health professionals to the public at large and this called for considered and sustained civil society engagement. TWN acted as a champion, a trusted interlocutor, technical advisor and convenor. They raised awareness through events and publications and encouraged civil society to participate and monitor progress. This has helped to take the AMR campaign to new audiences such as farmers who use antibiotics in their animal husbandry practices.

TWN also partnered with the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative to target Hepatitis C in Malaysia. Together, they have engaged with the Malaysian government so that one major generic medicine was licensed and made available in 2018, opening the door for more medicines to treat Hepatitis C. TWN provided technical inputs on the TRIPS implications and opportunities to the government policy makers.

This breakthrough has contributed to the treatment of more than 1500 people to date.

*‘Structured and systematic engagement with policy makers, based on sound research and building of trust together with civil society solidarity, can yield significant public health results.’*

Chee Yoke Ling, TWN's Director of Programmes

In India, TWN partnered with the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN) to advocate for price control on selected medical devices, a new area of public health advocacy. There was coordination with like-minded civil society groups, the media and government decision-makers.

This resulted in the Indian Government imposing ceiling prices on cardiovascular stents and knee implants in 2017.

The project will continue to focus on the implementation of national AMR action plans in Malaysia and India. TWN will next focus on medicines for cancer in Malaysia and expand its advocacy on medical devices in India.





Marie Louise, recycler at landfill in South Africa

## Inclusion in action, informal workers engaged in waste management

Informal waste pickers play a vital role in the South African waste industry but lack recognition and security. WIEGO is supporting waste pickers' campaign for integration into formal waste management systems and better working conditions.

The government estimates that 90,000 people in South Africa earn a living from collecting, sorting and selling recyclable rubbish. They remove tonnes of waste from city streets and keep it out of municipal landfills. South Africa has one of the highest recycling rates in the world.

Despite this crucial component of the waste management process, the work of waste pickers is not formally recognised. Workers are exposed to unfair market prices and have no social protection.

Integrating informal waste pickers into municipal waste management systems can increase efficiency, reduce the amount of waste which ends up in landfills and increase recycling rates.

WIEGO is supporting informal workers in the waste industry to organise and coalesce as a group. In doing so, WIEGO provides training and technical coaching for waste pickers and their organisations

in Johannesburg, Tshwane and Sasolburg to effectively negotiate with city authorities for the integration of waste pickers into formal recycling and waste management systems.

*'Without structured forums for negotiation, the city has developed projects and programmes that endanger waste pickers' livelihoods. City officials claim that they cannot consult them because they are not organised.'*

Vanessa Pillay, Programme Officer with WIEGO's Organization & Representation Programme

Training has already helped waste pickers make progress. In July 2017, livelihoods were threatened by new private recycling contracts in Johannesburg. Waste pickers came together, making their demands through media and public demonstrations.

A 'separation at source' programme excluded waste pickers from the recycling service they provide at no cost to the city. Training from WIEGO enabled the waste pickers to make the case for a less costly and more inclusive waste management programme where waste pickers are integral to the process.

As a result of the campaign, the state-owned Pikitup (the official waste management service provider to the City of Johannesburg) put a halt to signing any new contracts with private companies and acknowledged waste pickers as principal stakeholders in Johannesburg's waste economy. The city began discussions with the African Reclaimers Organisation (formerly the Interim Johannesburg Reclaimers Committee) to develop a framework for the integration of waste pickers.

In February 2019, Pikitup and the City of Johannesburg, in partnership with the African Reclaimers Organisation began a process of registering reclaimers in the city. Reclaimers themselves have played an essential role in the registration process.

At the national level, South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs is developing guidelines for municipalities and industry on the integration of waste pickers. The South Africa Waste Pickers

Association and the African Reclaimers Organisation are giving waste pickers a voice in the national policymaking process. WIEGO and their allies have supported these organisations in analysing and providing substantive inputs to guidelines set to be finalised in 2019.

*'WIEGO helped us to bridge a very big divide between the residents in our suburb and the people who work so hard to support themselves as waste pickers. We are going to work out how best our community can work with the reclaimers who do so much for the environment, for the City and to keep our landfills less full.'*

Sophie Welz, resident of Brixton, Johannesburg May 2018

At a local level, progress has been made in improving public perception of the credible role of waste pickers, resulting in more acceptable working conditions. In Johannesburg, waste pickers held meetings with residents from several neighbourhoods about their work and the impact of the 'separation at source' model on their livelihoods. Residents indicated their willingness to work with waste pickers by facilitating their access to recyclables.

## WIEGO have helped waste pickers define four pillars of integration:

Recognition as workers providing public and environmental services for which they should be paid

Inclusion in the current and future solid waste management system

Consultation on all decisions affecting their livelihoods

Registration of all waste pickers in a centralised database to ensure that the integration process is well planned, fair, transparent and able to be properly monitored



## Women negotiating and sustaining peace

Women face the heaviest burden of violent conflict yet are rarely in positions of authority in peace processes. The Commonwealth Foundation is facilitating an ongoing dialogue to amplify women's voices and supporting an inclusive narrative on sustaining peace.

Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng © Kevin Cooper

*‘Women are always asked to justify their presence (in peace negotiations) but this is not required of men.’*

Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng, Uganda

A session on ‘Women negotiating Peace’ held during the Commonwealth People’s Forum 2018 in London explored the barriers faced by women in peace-building processes. Women have rarely been included at the negotiating table and are not visible in decision-making bodies.

In July 2018, in a conversation in Cyprus, feminist writers and peace activists were offered a platform to dialogue about challenges and voice alternative narratives. It highlighted the aspirations towards a holistic gender transformative peace; a peace that moves beyond communal boundaries by broadening inclusion of diverse communities and addressing the intersections of gender.

At a national level, ongoing work in Cyprus is building an island-wide women’s movement that crosses rural, urban and class boundaries. Strengthening women’s collective voice, it ensures the perspectives and priorities of all women are included in the ongoing peace process and post-agreement.

At the global level, a ‘Women’s Dialogue on Peace’ held in Belfast, Northern Ireland in May 2019 built on the CPF 2018 and the efforts in Cyprus. It brought together a large cohort of women from across the Commonwealth and beyond to undertake a deeper exploration of the factors that enable inclusion in peace processes.



Dialogue on Women and Peace, Northern Ireland 2019 © Kevin Cooper

The three-day dialogue established clear recommendations on meaningful inclusion and diversity in key governance and peace processes. A particular focus on the intersectionality of gender was applied.

A feature of these ongoing forums is to provide a space for women across generations and class to learn from each other, through peer-to-peer learning and discuss how to navigate challenges and share successful strategies for effective and meaningful inclusion.

*‘My learning has been enriched with all the information sharing and presentations but above all the warm relationships we built which are grounded on feminist solidarity and values! We formed a unique community of extra-ordinary women to continue the journey toward feminist social justice and feminist inclusive peace.’*

Maria Hadjipavlou, Cyprus

## Enhancing social protection for informal workers

In Papua New Guinea, the informal economy is central to the livelihood of around 85% of the population; the majority are women. The voice of informal workers needs to be heard and their contributions recognised. The Pacific People's Partnership and HELP Resources are empowering informal workers to engage with agencies in East Sepik to improve local-level implementation of national policies.

### Papua New Guinea

**Project duration:**  
2017 - 2020

#### Partners:

Pacific People's Partnership (PPP)  
HELP Resources (HELP-R)  
Voice for Change (VFC)  
Australian Volunteers International (AVI)

#### Profile:

Pacific People's Partnership works in the South Pacific region in the areas of peace building, environmental sustainability, social justice and community development.

HELP Resources works on human rights, gender equality and social development in rural communities.

Voice for Change is a provincial women's organisation, working on advocacy, empowerment and issues of gender-based violence.

Australia Volunteers International is committed to achieving economic and social development outcomes by connecting people to share experience and knowledge.

Government efforts to protect the informal economy are enshrined in the National Informal Economy Policy which pledges social protection and economic empowerment for workers. However, working conditions for women workers are often unsafe, unhealthy and discriminatory.

In 2015, the Constitutional and Law Reform Commission reviewed this policy and recommended that local governments develop strategies for local informal economic development best suited to their environments.

PPP in collaboration with HELP-R, are deploying a comprehensive programme to improve conditions for informal workers. The project is building the knowledge and skills of women workers to better understand the relevant laws and policies, strengthening local governments in supporting the informal economy within their constituencies and facilitating advocacy meetings with local policy makers.

A baseline survey took place in Wewak, capital of East Sepik province in October 2018. Approximately 140 workers in a total of 12 markets and street trading hubs were interviewed.

A preliminary census of the main Wewak market indicated that 1000-1500 people work at the market each day and that more than 95% are female. Workers highlighted daily problems with water supply, toilets, rubbish collection, general hygiene, drainage and a failure to restrict disorderly behaviour.



Young female vendor in Kreer market © HELP-R

Preliminary analysis and components of the baseline report have been shared with the national government and other regulatory bodies that are now taking steps toward implementation of the Informal Economy Act.

The baseline report is currently being prepared for publication. Around 3000 documentary photos were taken in year one as a visual complement to the baseline analysis. Selected photos will be packaged as a photovoice tool to encapsulate the challenges faced by women workers for use in future training and advocacy toolkits.

For additional visibility, the survey was scheduled to coincide with the '17 Days of Activism for Rural Women' campaign. Throughout the campaign, the HELP-R local research team was present at the main Wewak market conducting a wide range of activities and highlighting specific issues and discrimination faced by rural women working at the market.

In 2019, the first united vendors association has emerged, supported by HELP-R.

*'We established the first vendors association in early 2019. I was elected the interim Chair. I have a background with community development and faith-based community work. But I am also a vendor. I have to sell in the market every day in order to top up my husband's income, so that we can send our children to high school. We have already formed our small group of women who earn their living by making and selling clothes. It's called UNITY and is like an association of women tailors.'*

*There are other small groups of vendors united as dressmakers or jewellery makers etc. We are happy now to unite with other vendors. We agree to call it the Wewak United Vendors Association (WUVA). They organised in order to participate in some financial literacy programs. But they do not know about PNG laws, policies and how to participate in the decisions that affect their livelihood. All the youth and women from the main market and smaller markets are now getting really interested to join a new vendors association ... they are ready now.'*

Serah Naile, a vendor who is establishing the Wewak United Vendors Association

## Communities campaigning for improved air and water quality

Industrial activities in Jamaica are having an adverse effect on air and water quality. Health and environmental impacts of pollution from mining, quarrying and open burning of household waste are not widely recognised. The Jamaica Environment Trust raised public awareness of the issue and provided a platform for communities to advocate for improvements in air and water quality standards.

### Jamaica

**Project duration:**  
2016 - 2018

**Partner:**  
Jamaica Environment Trust (JET)

**Profile:**  
Jamaica Environment Trust is a non-government organisation which uses environmental education and advocacy to advance the protection of Jamaica's natural resources.

JET delivered a multidisciplinary project comprising research, public education, training and stakeholder engagement.

In October 2017 JET published the first detailed review of Jamaica's air and water quality standards, legal framework and monitoring protocol. This milestone report was launched at an Editor's Forum at The Gleaner, Jamaica's most widely read daily newspaper. It received substantial media coverage and formed the basis of subsequent stakeholder discussions. The extensive research that underpinned the report was a collaborative process between JET, their expert advisor Dr Anthony Greenaway, and government stakeholders.

With the review in circulation, JET began a year-long public education campaign to highlight the importance of clean air and water. The spirit of the campaign was captured in a series of six

video testimonials from Jamaican communities affected by air and water pollution. These stories provided an opportunity for 18 individuals to share their stories and have their voices heard.

The testimonials were distributed through social media alongside two animated public service announcements attracting over 240,000 views.

*'This is a very nice community. The only problem for the last couple of years is the constant nuisance of the smoke, just being a few miles from the Riverton City dump. We have to block up our windows. Sometimes you wake up in the middle of the night coughing. My wife has developed chronic respiratory problems.'*

Transcript from video testimonial: Noel Phillips, resident in Coorville Gardens, Jamaica



Noel Phillips interviewed in Cooreville Gardens © JET

120 people were trained in environmental advocacy during the project and are now more able to speak out on air and water quality issues.

*'The members of the community feel more empowered and able to make an impact. The training and advocacy meetings have taught us the difference between advocacy and complaining.'*

Dr Phillip Mighty, Pleasant Farm Village Community Group, Ewarton, St. Catherine, Jamaica

JET convened four stakeholder meetings that brought together government agencies with responsibility for air and water, industry representatives and communities which are directly affected by the pollution. This provided community representatives with a platform to articulate concerns directly and advocate for improved air and water quality.

JET facilitated a dialogue on the difficulties accessing and interpreting air and water quality data from the environmental regulator, the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). These issues were discussed at length during subsequent meetings with NEPA's air and water quality monitoring teams and the government Access to Information Unit.

The project has increased awareness and engagement around air and water quality issues and contributed towards improving Jamaica's environmental regulatory framework. NEPA has indicated that revised standards for both air and water quality are now being developed.

Anthony McKenzie, Director of Environmental Management and Conservation at the National Environment and Planning Agency, took part in a Commonwealth Foundation podcast, 'Jamaicans for Clean Air'

Listen to the full podcast here:  
[commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/jamaicans-for-clean-air](http://commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/jamaicans-for-clean-air)

*'The stakeholder meetings that we were engaged in were targeted by the virtue of JET's activities. They formally engaged the communities and we were brought into the workshops. Not only NEPA but other regulatory agencies [...] it helped foster and engender improved knowledge.'*

Anthony McKenzie, Director of Environmental Management and Conservation at NEPA



Dialogue, Jamaica, May 2019 © Leo Kiss

## Climate change: amplifying the voices of women and local communities in the Caribbean

The Caribbean region experienced two devastating hurricanes in September 2017. This destructive consequence of climate change affects people in all their diversity differently and women commonly face greater burdens. In this project the Foundation is supporting the need for gender-responsive climate change strategies.

Climate change impacts women, indigenous peoples and local communities more significantly than others. The degree to which people are affected by climate change is influenced by many factors, including social status, wealth and gender. It is vital that policy solutions take into consideration the voices of those more impacted for fair and sustainable solutions.

At a global level, significant progress was made at the 23rd Conference of Parties (COP23) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2017, where both the Gender Action Plan and the Indigenous and Local Communities framework were adopted. This was a major step forward in recognising the imperative of an inclusive process in policy making.

In partnership with the UNDP Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme in Barbados, the Foundation convened an exploratory discussion on the intersection between gender and climate change in the Caribbean. In June 2018, more than 40 civil society colleagues, from all Caribbean Commonwealth countries set out to understand the needs within the region, to share knowledge on good practices and to determine ways to advance civil society's policy advocacy in this area.

*'Gender is not just about men and women; it's about correcting the power imbalance and eradicating the factors which lead to one group being more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than the other... The fact that women are traditionally placed at the bottom of the barrel increases their vulnerabilities to climate change. This affects how women are able to respond to climate change as their access to the necessary resources are restricted to their gender roles; roles which lack fluidity in the Caribbean.'*

Dizzanne Billy, Caribbean Outreach Manager at Climate Tracker



Dialogue, Barbados, June 2018 © Andrew Ward

The Commonwealth Foundation is helping to galvanise the voices of women and local communities to engage in climate change policy processes by raising awareness of the differentiated and compounded vulnerability faced by women.

In the first phase of the project a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted relationship between gender and climate change is being developed. Participants in this process understood that climate change puts increased pressure on women and men because of the gender roles and responsibilities ascribed to them. They are affected directly and yet differently.

The in-depth exploration of the intersection of gender and climate change in this project is accompanied and supported by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

The next stage in the project is to enhance civic voice capacities and foster constructive engagement in policy processes. The Foundation is facilitating dialogue with decision makers and institutions to ensure that global commitments are implemented at the local level, and also to share findings from its analysis to influence regional and global policy negotiations.

*'Gender analysis allows for understanding gender roles and relations, recognition that there are gaps, identification of gaps, and leads to policymakers and practitioners using gender mainstreaming to achieve gender equality goals.'*

Kimberly Carr-Tobias, Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies

## Women living with HIV shaping health policy

Uganda recognises the need for civil society participation in its national response to HIV and AIDS but women remain underrepresented in decision-making processes. ICWEA supported women's organisations in Uganda to advocate for improved health services.

### Uganda

**Project duration:**  
2014 - 2017

**Partner:**  
International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA)

**Profile:**  
ICWEA is a regional advocacy network that supports women living with HIV, raises awareness of their rights, carries out specialised research and engages in dialogue with policy makers and health providers on critical issues affecting HIV positive women.

Uganda's National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan acknowledges the role of civil society in policy discussions to improve health care delivery. Women living with HIV and AIDS are often underrepresented due to the limited institutional and technical capacity of women's organisations.

ICWEA designed a project to strengthen organisations of women living with HIV to engage with government institutions and advocate for increased government resource allocation and policy reform for improved health services.

Lack of sufficient health funding in East Africa is reflected in an increase in new HIV infections and high rates of HIV transmission from mother to child.

The project centred on the creation of 14 district coalitions of women living with HIV. Training gave the women the skills and confidence to develop well-structured advocacy plans and to engage with policy makers and decision makers at both district and national levels. Over the course of the project, 400 women attended district dialogue meetings and voiced their concerns with nearly 50 policy makers, health officials and councillors.

The coalitions secured commitments for additional health service funds in several districts. For example, Mukono District pledged resources to provide youth-friendly services with an emphasis on sexual reproductive health and rights of women living with HIV and AIDS at local health care centres.

*District authorities became more willing to routinely engage with civil society organisations on budgeting processes.*

Significantly, district authorities became more willing to routinely engage with civil society organisations on budgeting processes, and established better systems for notification of upcoming budget conferences. Gulu District allowed women living with HIV and AIDS to participate in their monthly district health and social services planning meetings, providing a platform to share the needs and priorities of their peers.

*'We never used to know that women living with HIV can take part in district planning and budgeting meetings. Currently, we even mobilize many more to take part and our voices are recognized.'*

Eunice, a district coalition member from Kanungu District



Training for 42 civil society organisations across 14 districts in Uganda © ICWEA

ICWEA supported women living with HIV to become active in other national advocacy platforms, including enabling ten women to contribute to a negotiation for increased budget allocation for strengthening community systems at the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) scheme in Uganda.

The women's coalitions continue to function beyond this project and are now embedded in district-level governance for health services. Currently ICWEA coordinates over 45 national and district level civil society organisations to advocate for effective HIV and AIDS response.

Women living with HIV trained by ICWEA are participating in national level advocacy platforms. Some played a part in developing the 'People's Country Operational Plan' that was presented and accepted during the regional President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) meeting in South Africa in March 2019.

## Gender Disability Watch: monitoring women's rights

Women with disabilities in India live with disadvantage, even with the enhanced recognition of rights in new disability laws. The Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre is monitoring provision and strengthening advocacy for women with disabilities so they can engage in policy processes affecting their rights.

### India

**Project duration:**  
2016 - 2019

**Partner:**  
Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (SMRC)

**Profile:**  
Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre is a disabled people's organisation working on advocacy, gender equality, research and development.

In 2008, India signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). To fulfil these obligations, the government reviewed existing disability legislation with input from civil society. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in 2016 with greater emphasis on gender equality. It states that men and women shall be equally represented on its Central Advisory Board.

SMRC recognised this opportunity to advance the rights of women with disabilities and has established a monitoring mechanism, the 'Gender Disability Watch,' to gather information on women with disabilities.

Findings from the monitoring informed a report written by SMRC on progress towards fulfilling obligations to Article 6 of UNCRPD on women with disabilities. These civil society perspectives were

presented as part of a dialogue with the UNCRPD committee, along with the report, in February 2019.

The monitoring took place through a series of consultation workshops where 600 women with disabilities were trained in their rights and in advocacy skills to enable them to engage with government.

The report was used in four regional meetings with government representatives where women with disabilities had the opportunity to advocate for the improved provision of services.

*'A number of women with disabilities face different problems depending on their disability, but the core issues are the same and are intertwined. In the past the women with disabilities had no platform to assemble*



Campaigning to stop violence against women with disabilities © SMRC

*together and share their issues. The problems can be on education, health, accessibility, lack of toilets or any other subject related to their basic rights. At the same time, they had inadequate or incorrect information on the international and national Laws made to protect them. The Consultation Workshops gave them an opportunity to come together on a similar platform and put forth and discuss their issues. After attending this workshop, they acquire more clarity on their rights and entitlements and at the same time get an opportunity to meet their peers.'*

Noorjahan, Journalist, Patna, Bihar Consultation

To raise public awareness, more than 100 testimonies were collected during the workshops and distributed via social media, giving a brief insight of the many challenges faced by women living with disabilities.

At every consultation, participants were also invited to join the Women with Disabilities India Network, created as part of the project to provide sustained dialogue, both online and offline. Women are learning from each other through this virtual community; sharing solutions for similar challenges they face in their own lives and contributing to a positive change in perception towards disability in their local community.

## Disability Rights in Bangladesh

Bangladesh also signed and ratified the UNCRPD in 2007 and enacted the Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act 2013. More than 24 million people with disabilities live in Bangladesh, mostly in rural areas.

Turning Point Foundation are supporting Disabled People's Organisations to understand their rights, articulate their concerns and influence policy implementation. By improving their organisational systems and advocacy skills, these organisations are more able to participate in local decision-making processes and engage with governments.

Sobar Shathe Mishbo is a grassroots Disabled People's Organisation in Kushtia District, Bangladesh. They received training, mentoring and technical support from Turning Point Foundation and now advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities at both local and national levels.

## Civil society learning exchange on health governance

Access to quality health services and inclusion in health policy processes is crucial to building social and economic resilience. The Commonwealth Foundation has made grants to initiatives that improve health governance in 10 countries and has convened a learning exchange for the organisations to engage in peer-to-peer learning.

Spanning five regions, the grants include projects to address access to raising awareness of and improving the right to health services for people living with HIV/AIDs; advocating for intellectual property provision that improves access to safe and affordable drugs; accelerating national commitments to reducing non-communicable diseases and action on anti-microbial resistance; developing new mental health legislation; and, ensuring access to health for carers of persons with disabilities.

In May 2019, the Foundation brought together representatives from each of the 10 projects for a learning exchange in Geneva. It offered a space to share experiences and lessons on the challenges, strategies and approaches for holding governments to account on health policy commitments and in delivering responsive health services.

Different accountability mechanisms, including the integration of gender intersectionality and conditions for their effectiveness were discussed in each of the Commonwealth country contexts. The learning exchange culminated in a synthesis paper on good practices in civic voice engagement in governance in the health sector.

*A select group of learning exchange participants were given the opportunity to be observers at the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting.*



Learning exchange, Geneva, 2019 © Helen Putzman



*‘I was amazed at what is actually happening on the ground; how people are engaged and how civil society is participating in the different projects. It has been an opportunity to go in-depth into how civil society organisations work, how they see things, how they view partner organisations, donor organisations, governmental institutions, and what the approach is to the cooperation between civil society organisations, communities and government.’*

Susan Fock-Tave, Chief Medical Officer in the Ministry of Health, Seychelles

As part of the learning exchange, delegates participated in a Civil Society Policy Forum which is held annually, prior to the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) and is organised by the Commonwealth Health Professions Alliance. The forum provides an opportunity for civil society to engage with Commonwealth Health Ministers and decision makers on tangible policy positions and deliver key recommendations for action at the CHMM.

*‘When we sit with each other and hear what their challenges are and the processes they’ve undertaken, it has planted a seed in our mind of processes we can adapt.’*

Tabitha Griffith, KELIN, Kenya

This year a select group of learning exchange participants were given the opportunity to be observers at the CHMM as part of their exposure to policy processes in the Commonwealth.





## Commonwealth People's Forum 2018: a call for renewal

Civic voices from around the world gathered in London for the Commonwealth People's Forum 2018. They issued a call to action for inclusive governance, saying that the renewal of the Commonwealth is no longer an option, but an achievable imperative.

Mr Gee, spoken word artist at CPF 2018 © Vicki Couchman

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) take place every two years and since 1991 civil society organisations have gathered in the wings to learn from each other and engage with Ministers and senior officials. These significant civil society gatherings are known as the Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF).

At CHOGM 2015 in Malta, Heads of Government noted the consonance between the Foundation's mission and Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16) with its emphasis on peaceful and inclusive societies and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

In keeping with this mandate, the Foundation convened CPF 2018 in London under the heading, 'Inclusive Governance: The Challenge for a Contemporary Commonwealth.' This situated the Forum in the globally relevant context of calling for Commonwealth renewal based on a commitment to achieving SDG16.

CPF 2018 generated new insights on the opportunities and challenges associated with formulating inclusive policies, shaping accountable institutions and informing public discourse under the overarching lens of participatory governance.

Each of the Forum's three days focussed on a specific theme with roots in SDG16: exclusion, injustice and accountability. These themes were explored using plenary lectures, panel discussions, workshops, round table and policy dialogues.

Creative expression was a particular hallmark of CPF 2018. This encompassed art exhibitions, such as Mike Bowers climate change photography piece initially published by The Guardian, Australia, entitled *Waiting for the tide to turn: Kiribati's Fight for Survival*. The Foundation's cultural initiative, Commonwealth Writers, enriched the Forum by curating powerful performances.

*A roundtable meeting with Commonwealth Foreign Ministers provided an opportunity for 35 delegates to present the Call to Action and engage in dialogue on global issues.*



Panel discussion at CPF 2018 © Vicki Couchman

The main outputs from CPF 2018 were enshrined in the 'London Declaration on Inclusive Governance for A Renewed Commonwealth.'

The 'Call to Action' set out a collective Commonwealth agenda to end exclusion, tackle injustice and commit to accountability.

**Read the full declaration and call to action here:**  
[commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/CPF2018action](http://commonwealthfoundation.com/resource/CPF2018action)

A roundtable meeting with Commonwealth Foreign Ministers provided an opportunity for 35 CPF delegates to present the Call to Action and engage in dialogue on global issues raised in the Declaration. This meeting is a unique public platform for civic engagement with the Commonwealth's 53 member states through their Foreign Ministries and demonstrates how civic engagement can contribute to Commonwealth reform.

The design and delivery of the roundtable underlines the importance of collaboration between the Commonwealth Foundation and the CHOGM host government in creating a platform that enables meaningful civic access to decision makers.

**The CHOGM 2018 Communique reflected many of the key issues articulated by civil society representatives during the CPF 2018:**

- Inclusion of women as fundamental in inclusive governance and a key aspect of Commonwealth renewal
- Prevention and elimination of sexual based violence
- Inclusion of women in peace building
- Provision of affordable accommodation and access to justice for persons with disabilities
- Increasing resilience in the face of climate vulnerability

The next CHOGM and CPF will be hosted by the Government of the Republic of Rwanda in 2020.



Creative  
expression

# Poem for the Commonwealth 2018 by Karlo Mila

This poem was read by the author at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 to an audience of more than a thousand delegates.

## Extract from Poem for the Commonwealth 2018

Read in full on [addastories.org](http://addastories.org)

I did not come to sing a siren song  
on the sinking ship of empire,  
I come to sing of sinking islands  
in the South Pacific,  
on the blue continent  
where I come from.

What is at stake,  
Is the very land we stand on.  
The earth itself rejects us.  
It reneges its responsibilities.  
It has retreated  
back into the deep.

And if the ocean could speak  
in that choked overheated throat  
gagged with plastic bags  
in the way she once spoke to us  
and we could listen,  
she would say,  
too much salt on her tongue,  
she would say

rising with a surety  
that we have never seen before,  
she would say,  
ENOUGH!

If ever we needed  
to wake from our sleep  
and hear the call of the commonwealth,  
It is now.

The islands of Oceania – Kiribati,  
Tuvalu, Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu,  
We are the canaries  
in the coal mines of climate change.  
Singing and ringing the unruly bells.  
Beating the big drums.

And yet,  
drowned  
out.



Karlo Mila © Vicki Couchman

## About the author

Karlo Mila was born in Rotorua, New Zealand. She received her BA from Massey University and worked for ten years in labour organising and health research before earning her PhD in sociology.

Mila is of Tongan, Samoan, and European descent, and both her poetry and scholarship focus on the personal and political realities of Pasifika identity. Her first book, *Dream Fish Floating* (2006), won an NZSA Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry. She collaborated with German artist Delicia Sampero on her second collection.

Mila is the recipient of a Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency and represented Tonga at the 2012 Cultural Olympiad event Poetry Parnassus Festival in London. She lives in Palmerston North, New Zealand.

# Recognising new and emerging voices with the Commonwealth Short Story Prize

The prize is awarded annually for the best piece of unpublished short fiction, bringing stories from talented writers to an international audience.

The prize began in 2012 with the launch of Commonwealth Writers. It attracts more than 5,000 entries each year, representing nearly all Commonwealth countries. Stories often come from countries with little or no publishing infrastructure and areas of geographical, geopolitical or economic isolation.

The prize is awarded to five regional winners and one of these is chosen as the overall winner. All winning stories are published online in partnership with *Granta*, which hosts a platform for new writing with 120,000 visitors each month.

The focus on less-heard voices is reflected in the increasing breadth of languages received by the prize. Entries are accepted in Bengali, Chinese, English, Greek, Malay, Portuguese, Samoan, Swahili, Tamil, Turkish, and in translation into English from any language.

## Ingrid Persaud, 2017 overall winner, Trinidad & Tobago

Ingrid's winning story, *The Sweet Sop* was written for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize and went on to win the 2018 BBC National Short Story Award. Her new novel, *Love After Love* will be published internationally in 2020.



Ingrid Persaud © Jaryd Niles-Morris

*'In a world where division is being promoted, we welcome different voices. It is always hard for a new voice to get heard above the thousands of others. Prizes change that. Winning the Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2017 and now the BBC Short Story Award has literally opened doors overnight.'*

Ingrid Persaud

## 2019 Commonwealth Short Story Prize

On 9 May five women writers were announced as the regional winners of the 2019 prize.

For the first time writers from The Bahamas, Cyprus, Malaysia and Zambia have been chosen as regional winners, demonstrating the worldwide reach of the prize. The fifth winner is from New Zealand. Notably, the story from Cyprus is the first ever translated entry to receive this accolade.

The winning stories share personal perspectives on global issues and bring lesser heard narratives to a wider audience.

A shortlist of 21 stories was chosen from 5081 entries representing 50 Commonwealth countries.

*'The regional winners of the Commonwealth Short Story Prize explore a remarkably diverse range of subject-matter, including stories about war, love, abuse and neglect. What unites the stories is a common thread of narrative excellence and dramatic intensity. The voices of a truly global cast of characters enable us to engage with, and recognise, universal emotions of pain and loss.'*

Caryl Phillips, Chair of the 2019 judging panel

The five regional winners will be celebrated at an event in Québec City on 9 July, when the overall winner of the 2019 prize will be announced.

### Africa

Mbozi Haimbe, who was born and raised in Lusaka, Zambia, and now lives in Norfolk, UK, wins for *Madam's Sister*, in which the arrival of a sister from London causes upheaval in a Zambian household.



### Asia

Malaysian freelance writer, language and creative writing teacher Saras Manickam wins for her story *My Mother Pattu*. The story explores a mother's violent jealousy and envy towards her daughter, who finds that no one can protect her from the abuse except herself.



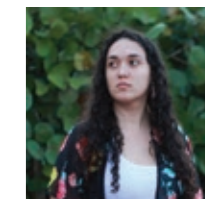
### Canada and Europe

Cypriot writer Constantia Soteriou wins for her story *Death Customs*, about mothers and wives in Cyprus who were led to believe that their loved ones were missing after the 1974 war, when the state had evidence of their deaths. The story was translated by Nicosia-based translator and cultural critic Lina Protopapa.



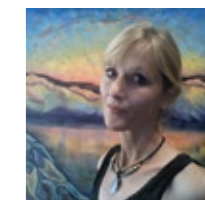
### Caribbean

Alexia Tolas, born and raised in The Bahamas, wins for *Granma's Porch*, which has her protagonist navigating the delicate border between adolescence and adulthood, guided by the past traumas of her friends and family and her troubled first love.



### Pacific

Writer, artist and editor Harley Hern, who lives on a rural block where she chainsaws firewood and fixes fences, wins for *Screaming*, in which a visit to a New Zealand care home forces two friends to confront deceit, identity and endings.



# Developing the craft of storytellers

The Foundation's focus on strengthening civic voices includes enhancing the craft of writers and filmmakers with bespoke workshops, regional facilitators and mentors.

Many stories received for the Commonwealth Short Story Prize each year are praised for their originality and potential but would benefit from further development to reach the shortlist.

*'Every participant showed interest and dedication, ranging from the occasional writer who felt her creativity reawakened by the workshop and the talks with her peers ("I've started dreaming again") to the professional and semi-professional writers who felt newly motivated to revise and finish work in progress, and to plan new projects for submission to both competitions and regional/international markets.'*

Karen Lord and Jacob Ross, workshop facilitators

The first short story craft development workshop took place in Barbados in June 2018 with writers from Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Grenada, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. Shakirah Bourne from Barbados and Alexia Tolas from The Bahamas went on to be shortlisted for the 2019 Commonwealth Short Story Prize, with Alexia Tolas being chosen as the regional winner for the Caribbean. The story which the Jamaican writer, Sharma Taylor, polished in the workshop helped her win the Johnson and Amoy Achong Caribbean Writers Prize at the Bocas Lit Fest in Trinidad on 4 May.

*'I return home feeling energized and motivated (about) my writing having received specific feedback on works in progress, re-affirmation regarding my writing, and reminders that*

*though it may often feel that way, regarding our experiences as writers/artists/creatives in the Caribbean region, we are not alone.'*

Joanne Hillhouse, workshop participant, Antigua and Barbuda

Writers from Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi and Zambia took part in the second short story craft development workshop in Southern Africa.

*'I was struck by the sudden feeling of clarity I had towards my own writing. The workshop had not only allowed me to interact with writers from places I had never been, but had opened my mind to better ways of shaping stories, new ways of creating worlds.'*

Tukiya Fundafunda, workshop participant, Zambia



Film still from My Mother's Blood

## My Mother's Blood

Written and directed by Katherine Reki, Papua New Guinea

Set in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, a mother raises her disabled son alone after her husband has died. Hardworking and aware of cultural traditions, she educates him on his land rights and how to protect them.

As a young man their close bond is ripped apart when she is accused of being a witch. Unable to physically defend her he can only hide and watch from a distance as his mother is dragged away and murdered by a violent mob.

*'I wanted to get something out so that people would really think about what was going on with witchcraft accusations and all the violence surrounding it, so that people will start to really think and say "yes, this is what is actually happening" – it is all in the name of something else and innocent lives are being lost. Also, I wanted to show the importance of women in our society. I have had a lot of really positive responses. I really would like to make films that inspire Papua New Guineans to think differently about themselves and explore the untapped talent we have to tell our own stories using our own voices.'*

Katherine Reki

## Supporting filmmakers in the Pacific

Commonwealth Writers also supports craft development for filmmaking. Building on the success of the 2012 Commonwealth Shorts initiative, Commonwealth Writers focused the second phase of its craft development for filmmakers in the Pacific region.

Six new and emerging filmmakers from Papua New Guinea and Tonga attended script development workshops with local writers before developing their own scripts and shooting their own films, with the assistance of New Zealand production company, BSAG Productions. All the films highlight stories and issues that affect their communities in the Pacific islands.

The films have been shown in over ten international film festivals in India, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, the UK and USA.

In April 2018, Pacific Shorts was screened at the first Festival of Commonwealth Film, held in the wings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and Commonwealth People's Forum. The festival was a collaboration between the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. It was attended by 1,200 people, and received 140 media mentions in print, online, radio and television.

*'This shines a light on us in ways that other mediums don't and can't do – it's so important to get to grapple with these issues.'*

Audience member at the Festival of Commonwealth Film

## Connecting writers with a global audience across the Commonwealth and beyond

*adda* is a gathering of stories that crosses literary borders. Writers of fiction, non-fiction and poetry speak in their own voice there, from their own histories, beyond the editorial appetites and constraints of the market.

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

*adda* was developed as part of the Commonwealth Writers programme to provide a platform for a growing community of writers to share unpublished stories with the world. Since its launch in June 2016 *adda* has gathered over 130 stories from writers in 35 Commonwealth countries. It is an opportunity for storytellers to speak from the heart and generate interest in issues important to them.

The stories and poems on *adda* attract media attention and a global readership. The non-fiction story by Sowmiya Ashok from India, *Welcome to the Bay Area*, had a wide reach on twitter and was read by 12,307 people.

*The Forgotten World: How Scotland Erased Guyana from Its Past* by Yvonne Singh was reprinted by The Guardian, UK. British politician David Lammy, of Guyanese descent, referred to the story on Twitter and it received over 1000 likes.



© Supreet Kaur

*'A beautifully written piece, giving a glimpse into a lovely repository of stories.'*

The Indian Express, commenting on *Lines on the Little Hands: A Portrait of South Asian Beauticians in Houston* by Sukhada Tatke

## Identity, disruption and performance in Igbo culture

Extract from *The Gender-nonconforming Spirit*  
by Emeka Joseph Nwankwo

Read the full story on [addastories.org](http://addastories.org)

*A name is not just a name, at least for us West Africans. It is significant; a testament of something hoped for, a marker of something experienced. So it makes sense that when a person is reborn, to purge themselves of their old self, they acquire a new name, one that bespeaks their new existence, their renaissance. Maka n'aguo onye aha chi ya anu – name a person and their god accepts.*

*Towards the end of the 1970s, just as the blood had dried into the earth from the Nigerian Civil War, an Igbo man in Southeast Nigeria, said to have been a civil servant before the war, disappeared into the wilderness.*

*'adda recognises the uniqueness and validity of each cultural experience, practices, approach, and language.'*

Emeka Joseph Nwankwo

*'The now that passes produces time, the now that stays produces eternity.'*

Boethius

*Dwelling*  
by Stephanos Stephanides

A rooster crows  
Morning softly thumps  
A medlar tree  
Eagerly unburdening  
Its fruit a heavy dew

Noontime hushing  
A drone of disquiet  
An expectancy of nectar  
Only the bumblebee

Silence the watchman  
Of speckled time,  
With sleight of hand  
Unleashes yellow butterflies

Courtyard of stony arbor  
Whispers *nunc fluens nunc stans*  
Rattles and squeaks  
Trembling of wings  
Murmuring starlings  
Trace the air

Chimes of Vesper  
Evening mourns  
In slumbering light  
Unexpectedly  
A dog barks

A thousand eyes  
Of sky glitter on  
Cascading night  
Deep in the valley  
A donkey brays



## The power of collectives, women advocating for land rights

In Sub-Saharan Africa many women rely on land for their security and livelihood. Women's organisation AMwA is strengthening women's voices to advocate for secure and equitable land rights.

Group discussion in Malawi © AMwA

eSwatini, Malawi, Zambia

**Project duration:**  
2015 - 2018

**Partner:**  
Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA)

**Profile:**  
AMwA is a feminist pan African leadership development organisation that seeks to strengthen the individual and collective leadership of African women, forming strategic partnerships to dismantle patriarchy and attain gender equality and women's empowerment for a just and secure Africa. Translated from Swahili, the name means 'solidarity among African women'.

A 2017 study conducted by AMwA found that restrictions on women's land rights in eSwatini, Malawi and Zambia are engrained in patriarchal cultural beliefs, discriminatory policies and low representation of women in senior leadership positions. Research also highlighted the commercial pressures of large-scale land acquisitions that often reinforce existing attitudes and practices, further denying women's access to land.

At the heart of the project is a collection of 'oral herstories'. Nine accounts from women, sharing their challenges and successes in pursuit of land rights. These untold experiences are being used to raise awareness of the effects of land acquisitions on women and to advocate for land rights.

In the words of Hope Chigudu and Rudo Chigudu who compiled the stories, 'Each narrative is a lesson in empowerment, educating women

about the challenges as well as possibilities for self-determination, livelihood security, dignity and rootedness possessed in land ownership and control.'

The 'oral herstories' are being used alongside a programme of leadership development, research and advocacy campaigns. These saw 60 women from eSwatini, Malawi and Zambia trained in community organising and policy research and advocacy. They went on to carry out research in their own countries and found a consistent disenfranchisement of women from land rights.

With strengthened voices, women formed networks to engage in dialogue with representatives from government to highlight recommendations from the research and advocate for land policy reform.

In Zambia, the Women's Land Network was invited to present a gender analysis of the country's land policy before the parliamentary

committee on land; and through the development of a gender shadow land policy they were able to effectively advocate for a better law. Some of the gains were women's participation in land administration as well as access and control of land.

In eSwatini, the Ministry of Gender pledged to develop a work plan to prioritise the gender gaps highlighted in the research and the Titling of Deeds representative pledged to strengthen the working relationship with women's land networks and engage with them during the review of land laws and policies.

In Malawi, the Women's Land Network developed land administration guidelines that expedited the implementation of a new Land Act passed in June 2016.



Women's Land Network in Malawi

### Thabile Mokoena Dhlamini shares her story on women's rights to land ownership and the power of community support in rural eSwatini.

'Here in eSwatini, most people know that for a woman to have a piece of land, she has to have a husband or a son. A woman would not have land in our community if they did not have these. The Rural Women's organisation opened our eyes. Most women were not aware of a section in our constitution of 2005 that talks about women's access to land. When I got that constitution in 2005 I just threw it in the cupboard and did not read it. It was only when I joined the Rural Women's Assembly that we started reading it. That is where we found our treasure.'

It was like a completely new discovery. I was finding out for the first time that as women, we have rights; my own rights as a woman in eSwatini not the rights I get because I am someone's wife or mother. Discovering that I, Thabile have a right to own land. I was so happy to learn this

that I sang and danced all the way home. I organised a meeting of women in my community and I took my constitution with me. I asked the Rural Women's Assembly to provide more copies and I handed them out to the women. We read the section containing our rights and every woman present was very happy.

We then selected an executive committee that would go into the inner councils in the communities just to share the beautiful news in the constitution. The head of the inner council was amazed when he saw the section. He asked where it had come from. I replied that it was from our constitution! They read it and then expressed how over the years they had suppressed their girl children and wives. They were not angry as one might expect. They too were tired of watching their daughters suffer. These were all men, the Rural Council. They said they would now like to have female representatives in these Councils so they went to our chiefs and chose some amongst us. I was the chosen one. I became a member of our Rural Council.'

## Raising awareness of child marriage

Although child marriage is less common today than in previous generations, the rate of progress in ending this practice is slow. Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed is using Forum Theatre as a process to encourage local communities to engage in finding a solution.

### India

**Project duration:**  
2016 - 2019

**Partner:**  
Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed (JSCTO)

**Profile:**  
Jana Sanskriti Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed uses Forum Theatre to promote social change in rural communities addressing sensitive social issues such as domestic violence, education and child marriage.

Forum Theatre dramatises a social problem from daily life. The audience is invited onto the stage to share their own experiences and suggest a solution. Members of the theatre are trained to facilitate the debate, encouraging the audience to publicly engage in the process.

Child marriage is particularly acute in West Bengal where currently over 40% of young women are married before they are 18. A pilot study conducted by JSCTO in 12 schools in Purulia, West Bengal, found that girls who remain in school longer grow in confidence and are better able to resist early marriage demands.

Building on these findings, this project spans 50 schools, training students to take part in Forum Theatre where performances challenge their fellow students, teachers, parents and local communities to consider how to address the issue of child marriage.

Six theatre teams have been created comprising 61 actors. More than 75% of the actors were women. In the second year of the project they performed 123 school shows reaching an audience of 12,535 students and 170 village shows reaching 25,944 people in local communities.



Theatre performance in West Bengal, India

Responses to the forum plays have been encouraging. Audiences have debated the complexities in addressing child marriage. Many times, children who have seen the same play in their school have watched it again with their family to have the opportunity to engage with the discussions on stage a second time.

Building on the heightened awareness of child marriage amongst local communities, JSCTO developed a network of committees across Purulia comprising theatre workers and community volunteers who are discussing the reactions of the audiences and considering ways forward.

## Stories of peace in Pakistan

In North Western Pakistan, young people from ethnic and religious minorities face many challenges. Minority Rights Group International is working with partners STREET and Human Friends Organisation to promote cultural respect and understanding in schools in Quetta, using storytelling and theatre.

Trained actor-activists created and presented an original piece of Forum Theatre. These first interactive performances reached 724 people across six schools.

'Stories of Peace' festivals provided a platform for students to share their creative outputs and experiences with a wide community of fellow students, school staff, parents and local decision makers.

*"The innovation in this project channelled actor-activists and student's potential to express themselves in more creative and inclusive ways. The diverse engagements, particularly the Stories of Peace festival, reconnected actor-activists and students of different religious, ethnic and linguist backgrounds to meet and celebrate together as agents of change."*

Jan Muhammad,  
Executive Director of STREET





Translation Symposium, Malaysia, 2019  
© Leo Kiss

## Translation: advocating linguistic diversity in the Commonwealth

Language, in particular one's mother tongue, is a marker of cultural distinctiveness and fundamental to concepts of identity. As highlighted by UNESCO, 'Through language, people preserve their community's history, customs and traditions, memory, unique modes of thinking, meaning and expression.'

Our work on translation strives to increase the visibility and spread of literatures. The Foundation is committed to linguistic diversity, and to support translation is to encourage writing in local languages and the proliferation of diverse narratives.

English as a global phenomenon creates opportunities; nonetheless, South and Southeast Asian creative works are rarely translated, either between regional languages, or into the languages of international markets such as Chinese, Spanish and English.

In March 2019, as part of UNESCO's International Year of Indigenous Languages, Commonwealth Writers convened a Translation Symposium in Penang, Malaysia, to investigate imbalances caused by the relative lack of literary translation in South and Southeast Asia.

This forum gathered 18 translators, writers, publishers and literary agents (speaking 14 languages between them) from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka to explore common issues and assess scope for collaboration and knowledge-sharing.



Nadiya Shabnam, Jayapriya Vasudevan and Bilal Tanweer, Malaysia, 2019 © Leo Kiss

*'It felt like the palimpsest of Bandung. I am referring to the Bandung Conference of 1955 that saw political leaders... discuss their collective future. We too were discussing a collective future... it was just as seminal.'*

Nazry Bahrawi, Translation Symposium participant

The Commonwealth Writers Translation Symposium in Malaysia is the beginning of an initiative that will later take in other countries; its aim is to advance creative expression and the status of creators. The hope is that, in the long-term, Commonwealth Writers will contribute to increasing the number of translated books in these two regions and beyond, increasing the circulation of translated works and the sustainability of local creative industries.

*'This conversation between practitioners, editors and publishers of translation is an urgent and necessary intervention. It offers us an opportunity to begin a serious discussion about how we can build an infrastructure for translation to push against the myopias that box us in and make our worlds smaller.'*

Bilal Tanweer, quoted in the Penang Monthly

