



What do the people of the Commonwealth need in 2024 and beyond?

A message to Heads of Government



Over three thousand civil society activists and experts from right across the Commonwealth participated in our online consultation.

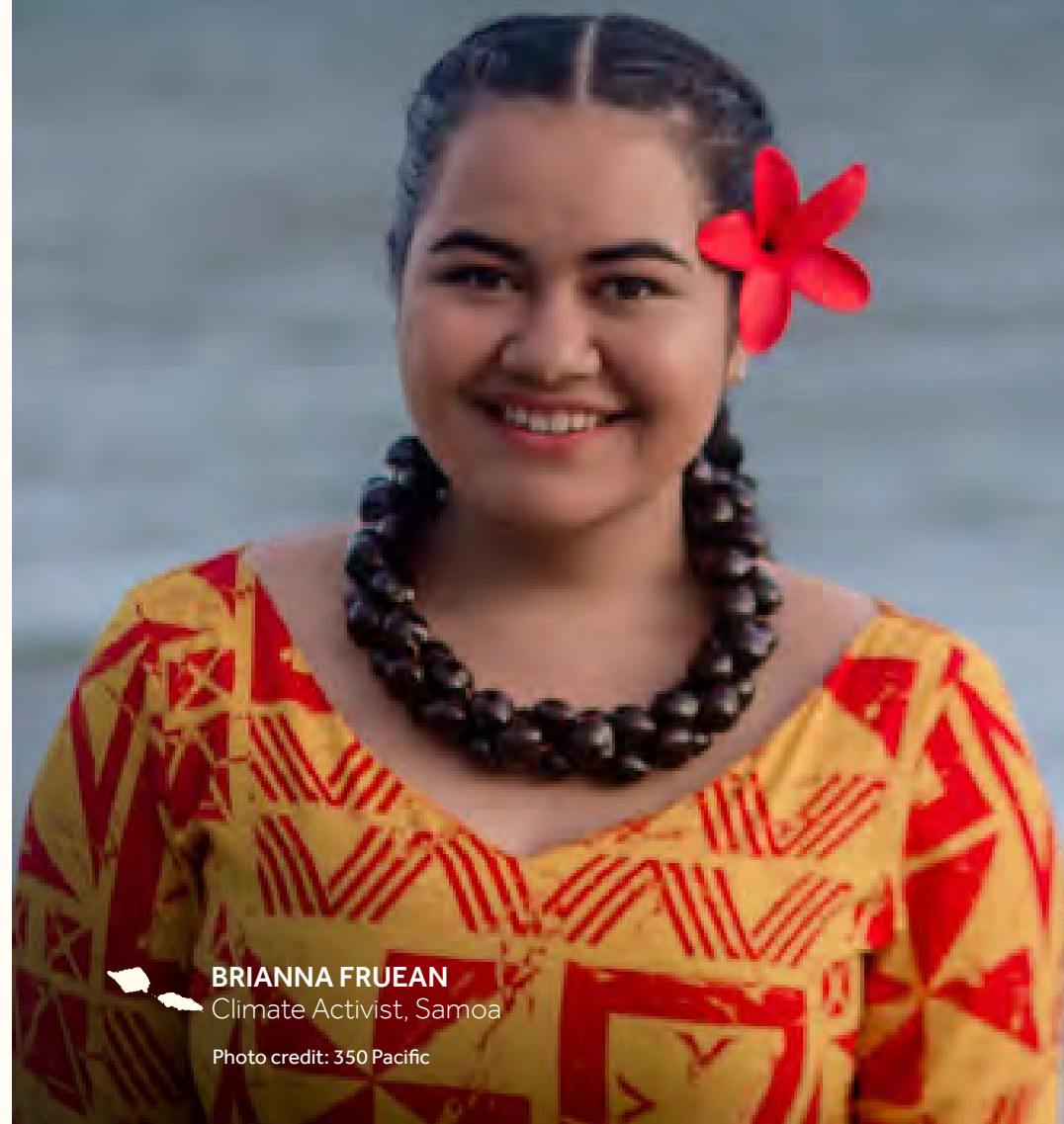
Hundreds more joined our in-person and online events in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific.



Cover image: Matalena and Pricilla paddle a canoe in the mangrove conservation area of Matafaa village, Samoa. Mangrove conservation protects people and their livelihoods from rising sea-level and coastal erosion.

“

I feel the confidence to speak out because of a global network of people that have come before me and mentored me. They have given me the skills, the opportunities, and shown me the path to change. Now all I need to do is raise my voice.



BRIANNA FRUEAN
Climate Activist, Samoa

Photo credit: 350 Pacific

At a glance: the most frequent recommendations made by civil society

To the Commonwealth:

1. Genuine Commonwealth-wide commitment to **protect civic space** and free expression
2. Consistent, credible **civil society involvement** in Commonwealth processes
3. Real, measurable **action on climate change** including delivery of climate finance to Small Island and Vulnerable states
4. Commonwealth-wide action to build and sustain **resilient, accessible health systems**

To governments:

5. New and better laws to **protect civic space** and free expression
6. Greater public **scrutiny of legislation**
7. Long-term, capital investment in the **public realm**
8. **Net-zero emissions** by 2050

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We have to make sure that we are a part of the process as much as possible, so our communities' needs are reflected and we are taking into account how decisions are going to impact them.

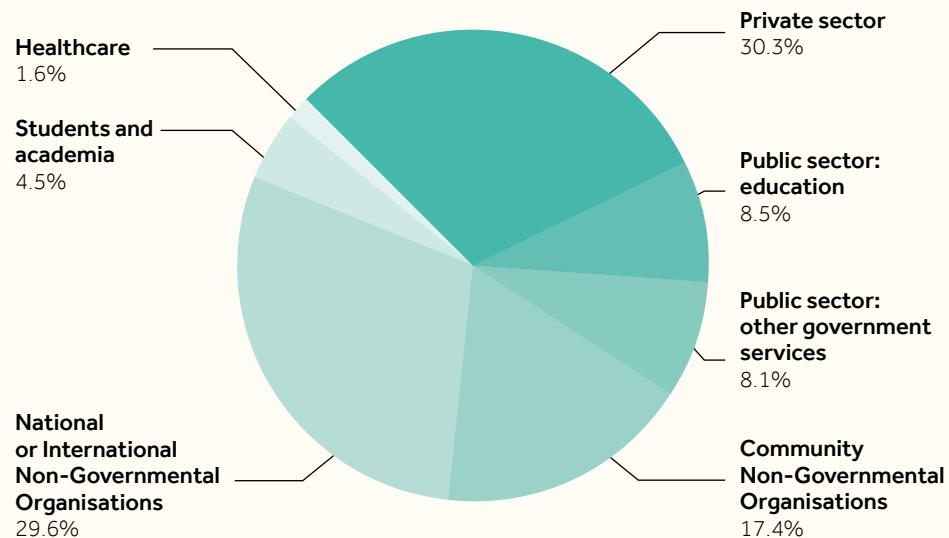


JOSEPH-ZANE SIKULU

Climate activist, Tonga

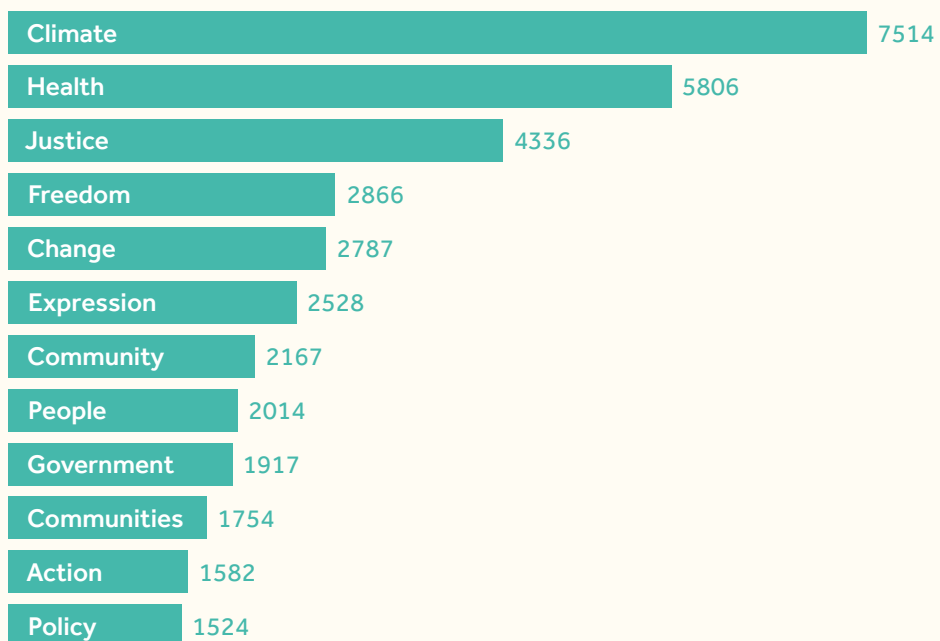
Photo credit: 350 Pacific

Participants by sector



Most important ideas for participants

Number of times words were mentioned by all participants in the consultation.



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The way to ensure that nobody is left behind is to integrate, to include civil society at every stage of decision making. And when I say civil society, I don't just mean organisations. I also mean activists. I also mean people whose jobs are directly affected by decisions.



SHAAMA SANDOOYEA

Climate activist, Mauritius

Photo credit: Tracie Williams / Greenpeace

Countries that contributed to the consultation

Caribbean & Americas

Antigua and Barbuda
The Bahamas
Barbados
Belize
Canada
Dominica
Grenada
Guyana
Jamaica
Saint Lucia
St Kitts and Nevis
St Vincent and The Grenadines
Trinidad and Tobago

Africa

Botswana
Cameroon
Gabon
The Gambia
Ghana
Kenya
Kingdom of Eswatini
Lesotho
Malawi
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Nigeria
Rwanda
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Togo
Uganda
United Republic of Tanzania
Zambia

Europe

Cyprus
Malta
United Kingdom

Asia

Bangladesh
Brunei
Darussalam
India
Malaysia
Maldives
Pakistan
Singapore
Sri Lanka

Pacific

Australia
Fiji
Kiribati
Nauru
New Zealand
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

What does civil society need from *the Commonwealth*?

Highlights from the consultation

Commonwealth Charter Articles I, II and V: Democracy, Human Rights and Free Expression

1. Genuine Commonwealth-wide commitment to protect human rights, civic space and freedom of expression

- Establish a scorecard system to track Member States' adherence to the rights and freedoms in the Commonwealth Charter
- Empower the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to address violations of Charter values
- Establish a Commonwealth Commissioner of Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights to advise the Secretary-General and CMAG

Commonwealth Charter Article XVI: The Role of Civil Society

2. Consistent, credible civil society involvement in Commonwealth processes

- Develop and implement a code of practice that formalises civil society involvement in Ministerial Meetings
- Develop mechanisms and procedures to maintain open dialogue between Commonwealth institutions, Member States and civil society

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After 30 long years we finally had a breakthrough at COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, where a decision was taken to establish the loss and damage fund. That is going to create a system that will help people recover from climate impacts. It's a breakthrough, but a work in progress, and the Commonwealth must continue to fight to ensure people get support.



HARJEET SINGH

Climate activist, India

Photo credit: Loss and Damage Collaboration

What does civil society need from *the Commonwealth*?

Highlights from the consultation

Commonwealth Charter Article X: Protecting the Environment

3. Real, measurable action on climate change including delivery of climate finance to Small Island and Vulnerable states

- Fully utilise the Commonwealth's collective voice at international climate negotiations to protect the interests of frontline Member States
- Increase investment in the Commonwealth Climate Finance and Disaster Resilience initiatives

Commonwealth Charter Article XI: Access to Health, Education, Food and Shelter

4. Commonwealth-wide action to build and sustain resilient, accessible health systems

- Make climate resilient health systems a declared key priority of the Commonwealth
- Direct resources and expertise to helping Member States adopt and implement the World Health Organisation's framework for Universal Health Coverage

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We used to have a fairly effective system of access to information but it hasn't been funded properly. Very often now, when citizens or journalists are trying to find out how decisions get made, they are waiting years to get internal documents back, and by that point, you might not even have the same government in power. And so the ability to hold the government to account is completely compromised.



KARYN PUGLIESE
Journalist, Canada

Photo credit: Jin Sun



What does civil society need from governments?

Highlights from the consultation

Commonwealth Charter Articles I, II, and V: Democracy, Human Rights and Free Expression

5. New and better laws to protect civic space and free expression

- Take decisive steps to implement the United Nations' Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity
- Do a better job of implementing comprehensive freedom of information laws
- Break up and prevent media monopolies, recognising their role in undermining free expression
- Prevent the misuse of defamation and blasphemy laws in ways that stifle free expression

Commonwealth Charter Articles I and XVI: Democracy and the Role of Civil Society

6. Greater public scrutiny of legislation

- Establish mechanisms that enable the people to have a say in laws and policies that affect their lives
- Introduce structured and periodic dialogue with civil society at all stages of policy development, implementation and review

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What is happening now is the weaponisation of media regulation where laws that ostensibly appear to be making it better are in practice restricting media. And then there is the total impunity of the security forces and the media magnates. The truth is too many good people have been silent, when they should have been speaking.



SHAHIDUL ALAM

Photojournalist and activist, Bangladesh

Photo credit: Suman Paul via Getty Images

What does civil society need from governments?

Highlights from the consultation

Commonwealth Charter Article IX: Sustainable Development

7. Long-term, capital investment in the public realm

- Widen and improve internet connectivity
- Improve access to reproductive health services
- Invest in resilient health systems that can withstand crises

Commonwealth Charter Article X: Protecting the Environment

8. Net-zero emissions by 2050

- Mandate environmental impact assessments across the public and private sphere, ensuring full transparency
- Take practical measures to reduce carbon emissions using a full range of tools including taxes
- Develop and implement laws that effectively criminalise and penalise the destruction of the environment

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When we talk about health justice, we are talking about health equity for all, irrespective of where they live, who they are, their background, their affiliation, their sexual orientation, their gender. When we talk about health justice, we are also talking about access to a complete continuum of care.



LILLIAN MWOREKO
Health activist, Uganda

About the Commonwealth Foundation

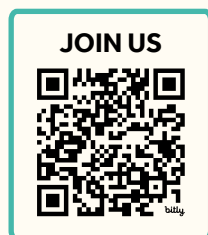
The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation mandated by its Member States to advance the interests of Commonwealth civil society. Upholding a firm commitment to the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth Charter, the Foundation seeks to nurture the growth of vibrant and free societies: championing the active and constructive participation of people in all aspects of governance.

Continue the conversation online

Scan the QR code to join our discussion forum for civil society across the Commonwealth. Be part of our global community and help build a Commonwealth for all.

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The Commonwealth is a strong enough body to be a serious lobbying force to ensure Governments are held accountable for the pledges they make at international forums.



MARGARET LAWRENCE
Health activist, Guyana

Photo credit: Joshua Yospy



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