



**Commonwealth Foundation Restructuring:
Enhancing and empowering the Commonwealth Civil Society
Advisory Committee (CSAC) in its facilitation role for better
results in the regions.**

CSAC Proposal

January 2014

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I- INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

I.1 General Context

Since its creation in 1965 the Commonwealth Foundation has consistently strived to bridge the space between civil society and government, creating links and structures for the two to work in congruence towards achieving developmental goals. The institution of the NGO Forums in the wings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1999 was thus meant to allow NGOs to engage with and highlight their added value to the Heads of Government.

In 2003, the Commonwealth Foundation reconsidered the ways in which civil society interacted with Commonwealth processes and with CHOGM in particular, expanding the NGO Forum to the Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF). Building on the success of the first CPF, the Commonwealth Foundation undertook a number of regional consultations in the months before the Malta CHOGM in 2005. The aim of these consultations was to enable a wider range of civil society organisations to participate in the debates and develop a civil society statement at the CPF. The civil society statement then became the principle mechanism for civil society input into CHOGM.

I.2 Commonwealth Foundation's new mandate

At the CHOGM in Port of Spain in 2009, Heads of Government committed to the reform of Commonwealth institutions. They established the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), which highlighted the importance of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to the future of the Commonwealth. In their final report they made several recommendations on ways in which the Foundation could support this constituency. When the report was received in Perth in 2011, Commonwealth Heads of Government committed:

To promote the future of the Commonwealth through the strong and important voice of its people by re-launching the Commonwealth Foundation in 2012, while retaining its fundamental intergovernmental nature and maintaining its accountability to member states, with a revised mandate and Memorandum of Understanding so that it can more effectively deliver the objectives of strengthening and mobilising Civil Society in support of Commonwealth principles and priorities.

I.3 Commonwealth Foundation strategic framework

In 2012, the Commonwealth Foundation underwent a strategic realignment process to refocus on participatory governance. The purpose was specifically to contribute to more effective, responsive and accountable governance with

civil society participation. Its Strategic Plan for 2012-16 coincided with the full adoption of Results-Based Management (RBM).

That strategy for sustainable effectiveness with a strong focus on outcomes, aligning the whole organisation in their pursuit imposed a gradual change in the Commonwealth Foundation's organisational culture. The Outcome Performance Framework that stems from the Commonwealth Foundation's new Logic Model has two main outcome areas: 1) enhanced capacity of CSOs to collaborate with each other and engage in participatory governance and 2) increased collaboration and learning between CSOs and institutions in governance.

I.4 Outcome and results of the CPF in Sri Lanka

Between 2009 and 2011, the Foundation moved from delivering a CPF where civil society statements were produced and where discussions to be had with ministers and senior officials were rehearsed – often without full reference to the preparatory consultations - to a structure where civil society pre-defined their desires of government through the regional consultations, leaving the CPF open as a forum for greater civil society – civil society debate, networking and sectoral capacity building, and increased engagement with government.

The 2013 Commonwealth People's Forum took place from 10 – 14 November 2013 in Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka on the theme 'Equitable growth and inclusive development: beyond 2015'. The discussions, in which a few hundred of Civil Society representatives participated, built on the results of a series of regional consultations undertaken with civil society to help develop a Commonwealth Agenda for Development, in contribution to the global reflexion on the post-2015 development agenda.

The major objective of the forum was to debate a number of relevant issues and present the outcome in the form of a declaration to Foreign Ministers at the CHOGM, on 16 November, 2013. Delegates also had the opportunity to take part in a series of Learning Journeys, visiting community projects and organisations in Sri Lanka. Commonwealth Foundation Advisory Committee (CSAC) members were all invited to take part, but not all of them were able to make it to Sri Lanka.

I.5 Justification of the paper

CSAC members collectively contributed to CPF operations, by advising and assisting Commonwealth foundation staff and issued a report presenting the Sri Lanka CPF results in the particular perspective of CSAC, with a view to drawing some lessons learned in relation to their interaction with the Commonwealth Foundation. This paper draws from the recommendations of the 2013 CPF report in the CSAC's perspectives and from lessons learned

from collaboration with the commonwealth Foundation to try to suggest how the Commonwealth Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC) could be enhanced and empowered in its facilitation role for better results in the regions, following the Commonwealth Foundation Restructuring. It is submitted to the Commonwealth Foundation to serve a background material for a review of the Commonwealth Civil Society Advisory Committee.

II- ASSESSING THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CSAC

II.1 CSAC's definition and ToR

Background to the CSAC

The Commonwealth Foundation set up an NGO Advisory Committee in 1996 which became the Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC) in 2000. The purpose was to keep abreast with the Civil Society and to develop programmes that address its needs and concerns. Even though based in London, the Commonwealth Foundation can thus be in constant consultation with civil society, and be able to grasp fully the many challenges that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) face, with their diverse nature across the countries of the Commonwealth.

Roles and responsibilities of the CSAC

The Commonwealth Foundation looks to the CSAC to provide information, advice and identify advocates and implementing partners. The roles of the CSAC is to: (a) provide advice, recommendations and guidance to the Foundation on all aspects of its programmes with civil society; (b) provide broad input into the Foundation's long-range plans, strategies and policy; (c) provide guidance on and inputs to the Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) process; (d) provide guidance and inputs to the Foundation's programme of work within Commonwealth Ministerial processes; (e) provide feedback on and inputs to the Foundation on its programmes in the regions, constituencies and networks of its members; (f) represent the Foundation at meetings and conferences as requested; (g) act as advocates for civil society within the Commonwealth and for the Commonwealth.

These CSAC roles carry a number of responsibilities including to: (a) advise and assist the Foundation through the Director in developing strategic priorities and objectives for its civil society programmes; (b) be a point of contact between civil society (including national, regional and professional or other networks) and the Foundation to improve the understanding of the relevance and impact of the Foundation's work in Commonwealth countries; (c) elect members to represent civil society on the Foundation's Board of Governors and Executive Committee; (d) report to the Foundation's Board of Governors and Executive Committee through its appointed representatives in keeping with the Foundation's established procedures; (e) report back to CSOs on the issues raised and decisions made by the Board of Governors, which have implications for CSOs.

Membership of the CSAC and Timeframe

The CSAC members are selected so as to ensure that it: contributes to the development and implementation of the Foundation's programme; is broadly representative of the different regions of the Commonwealth and different sectors and constituencies of civil society; and maintains a balanced gender profile. Only nationals of Commonwealth Foundation member countries employed by an established civil society organisation are eligible to be a member of the CSAC. The Commonwealth Foundation is committed to demonstrating principles of accountability and transparency in the recruitment of members to serve on the committee.

Members of the CSAC are selected based on their competence and experience, using a recruitment process conducted by the Commonwealth Foundation staff and led by the Director, from Commonwealth civil society leaders based on the criteria that: (a) they are familiar with the Foundation and its work; (b) they are active and respected by civil society within their countries, regions, constituencies or sectors; (c) they have extensive experience of networking and operating at national, regional and international levels; (d) they have a background of knowledge of one or more of the Foundation's core programme areas; (e) they have established relationships and dialogue with their governments; (f) they are willing to give their time and advice and participate in meetings on a voluntary basis.

The CSAC thus stands to be a great source of expertise for the Commonwealth Foundation, with a representative and diverse membership of 14 that achieves the following geographic spread: Europe two members with at least 1 non UK; Asia three; Africa three, one each from East, West and Southern Africa; Caribbean two with at least one non Canada; Pacific two with at least one non Australia or New Zealand; Commonwealth Associations two. All CSAC members serve for a period of four years, defined by the timing of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings. In the interests of both continuity and rotation, seven new members are appointed at the time of every CHOGM.

The CSAC Governance and meetings

The CSAC elects a Chairperson during its first meeting for a two year tenure. The CSAC also elects from its members the representatives (and alternates) who sit on the Board of Governors (five seats available) and Executive Committee (two seats available). The frequency and timing of CSAC meetings is determined by the Commonwealth Foundation in consultation with the CSAC and is at least once per year.

II.2 New strategy and opportunities for collaboration between CF and CSAC

The Commonwealth Foundation's principal mandate from Commonwealth governments is to strengthen civil society organisations, so as to maximize their contribution to the achievement of Commonwealth goals of good governance, poverty reduction, gender equity and sustainable development. Thus its mission is to build the capacity of civil society so that they can act together, learn from each other and engage with the institutions that shape their lives.

Part of the realignment process of the Commonwealth Foundation is to reconnect with the civil society in Commonwealth member states which represent the Commonwealth Foundation's core constituency, new partners and old, to better understand the contemporary landscape of civil society work. Through regional consultations, the Commonwealth Foundation achieves a mapping of the terrain of participation in governance across the Commonwealth.

These consultations are normally seen as an opportunity to prepare for the CPF. But beyond regional consultation, the Commonwealth Foundation hence also allocates resources for Participatory Governance activities in the regions, through its grant scheme. Considering the results based approach which now guides its performance, the Commonwealth Foundation needs a better footing in the region and must better rely on the CSAC to ensure effectiveness and efficiency, within the ToR of that institution. In fact, CSAC members should be in the position and power to extend the arms of the Commonwealth Foundation in the regions.

II.3 Difficulties and constraints

The restructuring process of the Commonwealth Foundation combined with other factors has led to a lower staff capacity (in number and experience). The implementation of the new strategy imposed some human resource constraints and the necessity for new recruitments. That seems to have affected the good understanding of the role and place of the CSAC in the system, by the Commonwealth Foundation staff. It has also limited the good use of the existing expertise within the CSAC, which on the other hand, despite a few initiatives from the members to step in some situations such as the CPF as trouble-shooters, has not really exhausted its pro-activeness potential.

The position of the CSAC as an extended operational arm for the Commonwealth Foundation in the regions could be factual and effective, if information is well disseminated on their role and responsibility. However the power to exercise that role and that responsibility intimately depend on the means and resources that are allocated by the Commonwealth Foundation for work by CSAC members, including financial resources, policy space, formal recognition and methodological approach.

The financial resources of the Commonwealth Foundation are limited and this is a serious hindering factor to additional allocations. That situation is exacerbated by the ongoing non-payment of contributions by some Member States, despite recent progress in that respect, imperilling the programmes and activities of the Foundation in the regions, to the detriment of civil society across the Commonwealth. Considering that “the Commonwealth Foundation is not in a position to solicit additional funding from external donors so as not to compete with CSOs”, availability of funds is an important challenge.

All these difficulties, far beyond cost and resources allocation issues, lead to a number of important questions to address in a view to ensuring effectiveness and efficiency for CSAC: (1) Has the CSAC helped the Foundation achieve its results? (2) Is the recruitment format of CSAC members still valid in the new context of the Foundation? (3) Is the number of CSAC members relevant? (4) What do the Member States think of the CSAC? (5) Is the meeting format of CSAC effective? (6) What are the best areas where CSAC can provide advice or assist the Commonwealth Foundation? (CPF, regional intervention monitoring, grants process, initiation of conversation at regional level) (7) Is the necessary expertise available within CSAC?

It is about time all parties worked to get sound answers to these crucial questions and open a new era of effective collaboration between the CSAC and the Commonwealth Foundation.

III ADJUSTING THE ROLE OF CSAC FOR BETTER RESULTS

III.1 Involvement in the Commonwealth Foundation planning

The Commonwealth Foundation Annual Planning Workshop that took place from 29 April to 3 May 2013 was a good example of collaboration between CSAC and the Commonwealth Foundation. The objectives were to: (1) review the progress towards results – outputs and outcomes - of the past 8 months and agree how to define these in readiness for reporting; (2) identify lessons from the period and apply them to the new planning period; (3) review findings from the scoping activities so far and implications for the Foundation's work in the new period; (4) determine the Foundation's broad focus and concrete priorities; (5) produce the first draft of activity worksheets in the light of internal capacities and resources; (6) revise and extend the overall performance framework of the Foundation's Strategic Plan to include outputs and their indicators.

Four representatives from the Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC) were invited to participate in the first three days of the workshop, and provide important input into the focusing of directions set for the year. They worked in good understanding with Commonwealth Foundation staff, under the supervision of the Director. The planning exercise was to look back and work better to move forward in a process of change that is real at the Commonwealth Foundation.

The outcome of the first three days of the Commonwealth Foundation planning meeting was essentially an adjustment of the strategic model by reorganising the content and the labelling of the various outcome areas, with a view to better translating objectives into an integrated results pack that matches expectations. To achieve this, past performance in each outcome area was reviewed and the planned activities reanalysed, through context setting and reality check.

The CSAC members were given the opportunity to contribute extensively during the first three days. Their intervention covered methodological aspects as well as content. They were instrumental in gearing the whole planning process toward the declared Results Based Approach and regional focus in terms of expected result. However, the main concern raised was about how the Foundation would be able to effectively manage very limited resources, including grants, to make visible and acknowledgeable results in the regions. Another concern is formal communication on planning matter between the Commonwealth Foundation and CSAC, in terms of report relating to the final results of the process.

If CSAC is not involved during the whole period of the planning exercise, an opportunity should be taken for exchange and discussion on the final outcome between the Commonwealth Executive and CSAC.

III.2 Role during actions implementation in the regions

In the new intervention approach of the Commonwealth Foundation in the regions, the role of CSAC has to be clearly defined, documented and shared with relevant stakeholders.

III.2.1 Regional mapping and consultation

For activities directly carried out by the Commonwealth Foundation, such as regional mapping and consultations, The CSAC should be aware of the plans and be involved in the related preparation, so as to fully integrate regional contextual factors. At implementation stage, all existing expertise within CSAC should be exhausted before recourse to other sources. When the Commonwealth has to rely on other external capacities, these should always be advised and asked to work in collaboration with CSAC members in their respective regions and insure their systematic participation.

III.2.2 Observation and monitoring

An approach that ensures systematic and full participation of CSAC members in their respective regions would give the Commonwealth Foundation a better verification and monitoring space. Soliciting CSAC members in their respective regions, as per the CSAC ToR is crucial. They need to be part of the identification of regional stakeholder, through on spot assessment investigation and regional due diligence enquiry.

III.2.3 Evaluation and impact assessment

The CSAC should be the Commonwealth Foundation's regular priority partner for evaluation and impact assessment of activities in the regions, no matter who the implementation partner is. The CSAC's perspective with regard to the results expected (at planning stage) or achieved (after implementation) in the region should be sought.

In that respect, CSAC members should be able to regularly interact with civil society constituencies in their respective regions, by information sharing, participation in their activities or joint initiatives where applicable and report to the Commonwealth Foundation. Part of the advising role of the CSAC would thus be plaid in a continued format through the corresponding reporting system.

III.3 Role during Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF)

From regional preparations onward through the COW, up to the field organisation of the CPF, the CSAC should be given space to closely work with the Commonwealth Foundation in shaping the CPF features, building from previous experiences. In that respect, from one CPF to another the Commonwealth Foundation and CSAC should implement a follow up mechanism that starts from a report with CSAC perspectives, providing precise recommendations and way forward to be discussed and capitalised on.

At the level of the CPF organisation proper, CSAC members should be active in helping with implementation of the programme. They should be given their specific role and make sure that they are present at all stages and in all the sessions, in order to be in a position to fully report on the proceedings and draw useful lessons. Having CSAC members involved in all sessions and side events of the CPF creates an opportunity for them to provide any regional or specific expertise that they may have as an asset both for content preparation and organisation proper.

This would be particularly useful for CPF components such as the one relating to interaction with Commonwealth Foundation grantees, regarding monitoring and evaluation of their projects and for specific sessions such as the one on MDGs in Sri Lanka, for which CSAC participation could have brought added value, considering the existing expertise within the CSAC.

It is also crucial that the CSAC plays a key role in the "CPF Reference Group" assigned to drafting the Civil Society statement to be presented to Foreign Ministers, as well as during the interaction with the Ministers. This is necessary as first step for the development of an advocacy plan building from the major results achieved during the CPF, with regards to engagement with government in the regions where CSAC is expected to support and advise the Commonwealth Foundation.

III.4 Mediation, advocacy and interaction with governments

CSAC's assistance work to the Foundation in the regions can thus go beyond mere interaction with civil society and extend to advocacy and lobbying with governments. On specific matters, CSAC members could get assignment from the Commonwealth Foundation or take initiative for action toward governments to solve specific issues of interest for the Commonwealth Foundation. A concrete example is the issue of contribution arrears of some member states. CSAC members could be called to contribute for personal in-country follow-up of the initiative that the Commonwealth Foundation Chair took last year by writing to relevant Member States.

IV ENHANCING AND EMPOWERING CSAC IN ITS ROLE

In the new context within which the Commonwealth Foundation operates, based on its new strategy aiming at achieving results in the regions on Participatory Governance, there is an urgent need to empower the CSAC as useful and supporting institution. This can be made possible through the following main strategic lines: (1) CSAC recognition and information on CSAC at regional level; (2) allocation of new and restructuring of existing resources for CSAC; (3) capitalising on the grant process in the regions.

IV.1 Recognition and information at regional level

This is about formally informing stakeholders in the Commonwealth regions on the role and responsibility of CSAC. Information on CSAC now exists, but is limited to communication on the Commonwealth Foundation's website. Information on the CSAC should be made available officially and formally by the Commonwealth Foundation, through communication with all stakeholders, including all Commonwealth Governments and regional partners of the Commonwealth Foundation.

IV.2 Allocating new and restructuring existing resources for CSAC

For CSAC to really take its role and responsibility as per its ToR and with regard to the new constraints relating to providing an effective assistance to the Commonwealth Foundation in the regions, for implementation of its new strategy, the cost issue is of prime importance and new financial resources need to be allocated and made available to CSAC members for their work. Additionally, existing resources that the Commonwealth Foundation invests in the regions for its intervention should be restructured in terms of activities programme to include actions to be carried out by CSAC members.

IV.2 Capitalising on the grant process in the regions

Capitalising on the grant process in the regions is another window through which resources can be made available for CSAC work in the region. In fact, considering that this process is about selecting, funding and having projects implemented in the regions by grantees, it is possible, as on way, to work on standards that insure a project design format for all cases that systematically include a reporting and monitoring and evaluation schemes that take into account CSAC intervention.

Another way could be to consider special grant applications by CSAC members' organizations in all Commonwealth regions that are built around CSAC contribution to the delivery of results on Participatory Governance in the regions. This could then open the way for special funding of projects

directed towards the overview or monitoring and evaluation of the projects that benefit from the Commonwealth Foundation grants.

III CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

V.1 General Conclusion

The implementation of a new strategy for the Commonwealth Foundation has imposed a number of adjustments in the functioning of the organisation, including its restructuring. The Commonwealth Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC), as an advisory institution for the Foundation also needs to be reviewed, adjusted and better empowered to better play its facilitation role for better results in the regions. To achieve this, there is need to facilitate clear recognition of, and formalising information on the CSAC towards the Foundation's partners and other relevant stakeholders in the Commonwealth Foundation's work. Additionally, resources should be formally allocated to the work of CSAC.

There may be some understandable reluctance and questioning on the format of CSAC's engagement in the regions, considering that the Commonwealth Foundation has Executing Partners in the regions, but if CSAC is to advise the Commonwealth Foundation, then it should also be in the position to advise its Executing Partners as well. One thing to avoid is trying to stop the advising institution, which CSAC is from advising, even though the Commonwealth Foundation is free to take or not to take the advice.

V.2 Recommendation to the Commonwealth Foundation

These recommendations are proposed to the Commonwealth Foundation as possible lines to follow towards empowering the CSAC in its facilitating role in the regions.

R1:

It is urgent to open inclusive dialogue between the Commonwealth Foundation to address the key questions concerning the review of CSAC, with the objective of empowering this advising institution for better delivery in the regions.

R2:

The role of CSAC should be more formally publicised in the Commonwealth regions, through official correspondences sent by the Commonwealth Foundation to Governments and Executing Partners of the Foundation.

R3:

The issue of cost relating to the work of CSAC should be openly and clearly addressed, by allocating new financial resources to this and by restructuring the use of existing resources for achievements in the region, by taking the work of CSAC into account when programming related work by the Commonwealth Foundation or its Executing Partners.

V.3 A Road Map for CSAC

Responsibility to review and restructure the work of the CSAC partly lies on the institution itself. In fact, the CSAC should be proactive and able to "ask, lead and provide a road map that will guide the CSAC's interaction with the Commonwealth Foundation". That road map must have a profile addressing the following:

- *Objectives and clarification of expectations of CSAC members' work at regional level, in line with the strategic plan of the Commonwealth Foundation and the related expected results;*
- *CSAC activity lines for all regions in close relationship with the Commonwealth Foundation's programming, with expected specific results as well as monitoring and evaluation indicators and description of areas of value addition to the Commonwealth Foundation's work;*
- *Reporting and communication strategy with the Commonwealth Foundation and other stakeholders, for effective collaboration;*

The CSAC road map could be complemented by a state of expertise within the institution and an outsourcing plan. Elaboration of the CSAC Road map should be set as a priority after the review of the institution and physically organised in terms of a dedicated process, including a multi stakeholders' validation meeting.

ANNEX

- 2013 CPF Report by CSAC
- Links to CPF material and information

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cwfoundation/sets/72157635804769854/with/9898336946/>

http://www.google.com.sg/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&ved=0CDcQFjAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cpf2013.org%2F&ei=dGyTUuTsH4SJrQeg0oHwAw&usg=AFQjCNHGFx0GrBgR30JJ_6OcWQyOvkvGnA&bvm=bv.56988011,d.bmk