

RESPONDING TO RAPID URBANISATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

# CALL TO ACTION

ON SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION  
ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH



ASSOCIATION OF COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITIES  
COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF ARCHITECTS  
COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION OF PLANNERS  
COMMONWEALTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT FORUM

# A CALL TO ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH TOWARDS THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING, KIGALI, RWANDA

By 2050, an additional 2.5 billion people will be living in the world's towns and cities, with almost 50% of that growth taking place in the Commonwealth. Member states, both large and small, are facing the impacts of climate change and rapid urbanisation. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these impacts and resulted in one of the worst global health and economic shocks of recent times. Consequently, progress towards achievement of the SDGs has been eroded in many countries, undermining the first year in the Decade of Action towards Agenda 2030.

**People are at the heart of the Commonwealth. At this important moment, as the Commonwealth Heads of Government prepare to meet in Kigali, Rwanda, we call on the Commonwealth to ensure that sustainable urbanisation is at the forefront of the Commonwealth's development agenda, and the COVID-19 recovery.**

With almost 50% of Commonwealth citizens living and working in cities and human settlements (C&HSs), and 65% of the 169 targets underlying the 17 SDGs linked to territorial and urban development, sustainable urbanisation must be central to the Commonwealth's agenda for delivering a common future: connecting, innovating, and transforming.

Well managed C&HSs are drivers of economic development, centres of innovation and entrepreneurship, and sources of trade and employment that are vital for the livelihoods of their citizens, 60% of whom are under 30. C&HS are responsible for ensuring delivery of essential services including water, sanitation, healthcare, education, public transport, and housing, upon which their citizens depend. There is already a substantial deficit in investment in essential urban infrastructure.

Sustainable urbanisation requires C&HS that are well led and well planned yet many lack the capacity, capability or resources to respond. Cities are also a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and where the impacts of climate change are experienced acutely.

Commonwealth organisations representing cities and local government, the private sector, academia and the built environment professions, are championing this **Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation across the Commonwealth**. This will help ensure that C&HSs are properly equipped to deal with the challenges of climate change and rapid urbanisation, to reduce risk and vulnerability, inequality and informality, while promoting inclusion and capitalising on the opportunities presented by agglomeration to promote social economic and environmental well-being. Sustainable urbanisation requires a commitment to good governance, integrated planning, effective service delivery together with fiscal and political empowerment. Universities, research, technology, innovation, and knowledge sharing will be at the heart of ensuring sustainable C&HSs of the future.

The Call to Action has been informed by an extensive consultative process drawing on the experience and expertise of contributors from all the regions of the Commonwealth. It recognises the importance of the rural-urban continuum together with the role of secondary and coastal cities. It is issued at a time when COP26 will be seeking urgent action to reduce carbon emissions, halt biodiversity loss, strengthen climate resilience and adaptation, while addressing the finance gap and calling for a greater local response to climate change issues.

**The Call to Action seeks to locate sustainable urbanisation within a broader Commonwealth framework. All the Commonwealth member states'**



**urgent priorities have an urban dimension, and a greater focus on sustainable urbanisation will ensure that people and improving the quality of life for all remain central to the work of the Commonwealth.**

The Commonwealth has the potential to transform the way in which it does business to achieve a uniquely Commonwealth response to the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation. The Commonwealth family already brings together inter-governmental, governmental, civil society, professional, private sector and academic organisations under one umbrella. By supporting a multi-disciplinary partnership that reflects the commitment to multi-level governance set out in the Agenda 2030, the Commonwealth could facilitate a collaborative partnership to strengthen policy making, enhance financing, build capacity, promote learning and enable innovation in a more integrated way towards a shared commitment to sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth.

Sustainable urbanisation demands collective action - genuine multi-level governance - to empower, enable and support cities and their citizens. This is critical as many Commonwealth C&HSs are grappling with poverty, informality, food security and migration. They are vulnerable to external shocks and natural disasters and are dealing with both the immediate and long-term effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic. **The Commonwealth is the only multilateral entity that could leverage this rich network of decision makers and practitioners. The moment for action is now.**

We call on member states to use the CHOGM as a platform to launch a collaborative partnership towards sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth. The Call to Action proposes a Commonwealth partnership,

leveraging inter-governmental, associated, and accredited Commonwealth organisations, with dedicated resources to support sustainable urbanisation that is anchored in core Commonwealth values, specifically:

- **A greater focus on enabling sustainable urbanisation in Commonwealth policy making.**
- **A Commonwealth dialogue to define and implement a new way of working across our respective networks towards multi-level governance and sustainable urbanisation.**
- **Commitment by member states to a new Commonwealth Initiative of practical action to support sustainable cities and human settlements across the Commonwealth to respond to the Call to Action and to play their full role in achieving the SDGs. This will be driven by Commonwealth cities and human settlements, and delivered by relevant Commonwealth partners: the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN), Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA), Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and other governmental, professional and technical partners.**

By mobilising its network, the Commonwealth has a unique opportunity to ensure that sustainable urbanisation is at the heart of our common future, and is firmly rooted in Commonwealth values, as we work collectively to achieving the global goal of leaving no one and no place behind.

<sup>i</sup> CLGF, CAA, ACU and CAP, with the support of the Government of Rwanda and The Prince's Foundation are already advancing this agenda. The Call to Action is part of a sustained consultative process, which has brought together Commonwealth actors, High Commissions, and a cross section of other key stakeholders. Events at the 2020 World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi resulted in a commitment to collaboration between UN Habitat and the Commonwealth on sustainable urbanisation. Starting in June 2020, to coincide with the dates of the postponed CHOGM 2020, the partners launched a 12-week online programme on sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth, bringing together high-level speakers and practitioners. This reached over 2,000 participants to raise awareness, inform the Call to Action and to better understand how the values and strengths of the Commonwealth could best be leveraged towards achieving sustainable urbanisation ([www.commonwealthsustainablecities.org](http://www.commonwealthsustainablecities.org)).



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