

CITIES SPACE

A roundup of key advancements through the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network in 2023



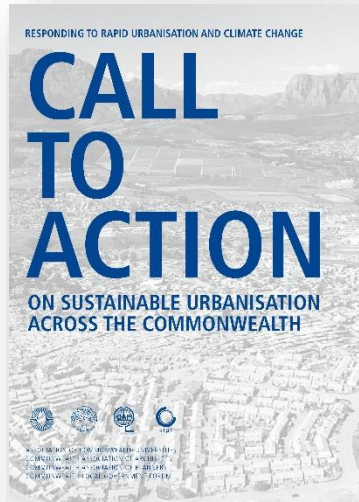
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Advancing the Call To Action on Sustainable Urbanisation

Building on the achievements of the ongoing work of the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative¹ (CSCI), CLGF has been active over the course of 2023 on the implementation of the Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation and the Commonwealth Declaration on Sustainable Urbanisation (adopted by Commonwealth Heads at the 2022 CHOGM), with a focus around:



- increasing awareness and focus on urbanisation in the Commonwealth and specifically in policy-making;
- working collaboratively across governmental spheres and professional disciplines; and
- finding practical ways to progress work and 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.

The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) is CLGF's principal vehicle for work on advancing the Call to Action and this news brief highlights a number of activities and initiatives which have been an important part of the 2023 workplan.

Strengthening strategic partnership for sustainable urbanisation

In June 2023, The CSCI partners (The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the Association of Commonwealth Architects (CAA), the Association of Commonwealth Planners (CAP), the CLGF and the King's Foundation) formalised their strategic partnership and strengthened commitment to support sustainable urbanisation through a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU establishes a framework for the partners to work together in a coordinated and mutually beneficial manner to achieve their shared goals and objectives and to further leverage the power of the Commonwealth to deliver change and innovation.

ACU, CAA, CAP and CLGF also signed a MOU with UN Habitat's Capacity Building Unit to advance capacity development for cities and human settlements. CLGF is committed to ensuring the local government voice, needs and ambitions in this partnership as we support and empower cities and member states to implement the Call to Action.

¹ The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative is a partnership group comprising the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA), the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).



CSCN is partnering with UNDP cities in the rollout of the UN SDG Action Campaign. CLGF was happy to have the UNDP cities team at the CLGC 2023 in Kigali (Rwanda) where they showcased the innovations of Kigali and Rourkela (India) and promoted dialogue around innovation toward the SDGs. [Learn more](#)

The European Union's commitment to cities and Regions

At the end of November 2023, City and Regional representatives gathered in Brussels for the biennial Cities and Regions for International Partnerships Forum. The 2023 meeting entitled *Localising Global Gateway: Connecting Intermediary Cities and Investing together for more Inclusive and Innovative sustainable cities and regions* took place from 30 November to 1 December and was co-organised by the European Commission's Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA) and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR).



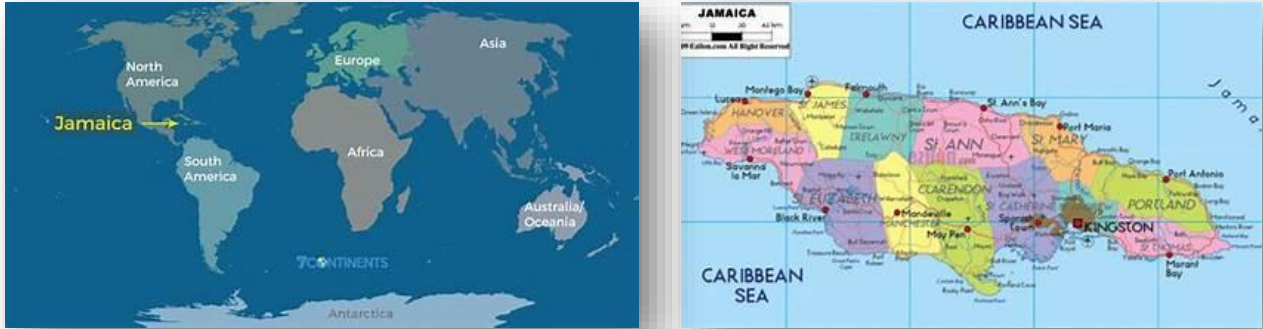
The Forum was an opportunity to discuss the EU's [Global Gateway Strategy](#) and the place of cities and regions in ensuring its implementation includes local impacts. Launched in late 2021, the Global Gateway Strategy is an investment strategy which is set to mobilise €300billion into sustainable, high-quality projects, developed in partnership with partner countries in the following sectors: digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research. The Forum focused on the 4 x I's : Inclusion, Innovation, Investment, and Intermediary and looked to discuss how EU policy and, specifically the Global Gateway, could better support decentralisation, local government service provision and democratic inclusion, and decentralised cooperation.

CLGF will continue to monitor this commitment as part of the EU Global Gateway CSO-LA Dialogue Platform, which will provide policy inputs at a global level to help guide the implementation of the Global Gateway Strategy.

Addressing urban resilience in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS)

The 2023 Commonwealth Local Government Conference held in Kigali, Rwanda, focused on the theme *Resilience*. CLGF is spotlighting the perspectives of two SIDS – Jamaica and Fiji – as they share what they see as urban resilience in their communities and what more they are planning to undertake to increase resilience from a city perspective.

Spotlight on Jamaica (City of Kingston)



According to Delroy Williams, Mayor of Kingston, Jamaica’s capital, the city has adopted a threefold strategy to address ad hoc unplanned informal settlements and communities. Focus is placed on:

- 1) Creating a strong economy which can finance urban resilience
- 2) Strengthening infrastructure
- 3) Increasing access to quality housing

Key initiatives have included a focus on reducing the debt service ratio and strengthening of the economy to finance infrastructure, with a specific focus on tropical storm resilience and other climate related projects. Local economic development is also a priority to reinforce citizen’s economic and social resilience. Working to address substandard housing and service infrastructure, a *National Housing Trust* has been introduced to support access to mortgages. In addition, social housing programmes are in place, as are housing upgrade and renovation programmes.

Spotlight on Fiji



Insights into the urban resilience responses in Fiji were shared by Reijjeli Sivo, Deputy Director of Local Government, Ministry of Local Government and Housing, Fiji.

Increasing informal settlements is Fiji's main urbanisation challenge resulting in significant environmental issues around water supply, increased waste and improper waste management and traffic. Additionally, the lack of mandate for service provision to informal settlements continues to pose a challenge. Without a clear mandate to address local government issues such as lack of waste collection and other sanitation services, the adverse impacts of these issues on the urban environment are growing. The Government of Fiji is working to address this through providing a solid waste subsidy to municipal councils, to assist in waste collection. In addition, policy support to master planning for urban land with a focus on compact development and sprawl limitation is being provided, in addition to an ongoing review of the existing town planning act.

Advancing the local government urban agenda at the Caribbean and Pacific Urban Forums 2023

Caribbean Urban Forum (CUF)

From the 31 May to 2 June 2023, CLGF participated in The Caribbean Urban Forum (CUF) in Paramaribo, Suriname. The CUF is an international conference on urban planning and development, land management and other spatial related topics relevant to the Caribbean context. The 2023 conference focused on the theme: **Improving Resilience and Sustainability through Innovation.**



The conference was hosted by The Anton de Kom University of Suriname and the Spatial Planners Association of Suriname and organised in close partnership with the government of Suriname, represented by the Ministries of Spatial Planning and Environment and Public Works and the Caribbean Network for Urban and Land Management.

The project *Harnessing Innovative Technologies to Support Resilience on the Coastal Zones of the Caribbean* ([HIT RESET Caribbean](#)) was highlighted in the agenda focusing on digital and modelling technology to improve climate resilience targeting and urban planning and policy making.

Mrs Janine Xavier-Cross, Senior Programme Officer – Networks, represented CLGF, the partners of the CSCI and the CYSU, speaking in a panel discussion on Built Environment Professionals, Youth and Actors Advancing Sustainable Urbanisation as a driver of development in the Caribbean, and presenting the Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation (CYSU) network in a session on creating platforms to empower marginalised groups to engage across sectors in urban planning.

Over the three days day of conference, a number of key priorities were identified_to ensure sustainable urban development in the region:

- Financial support
- Policy change
- Proper planning
- Reverse brain drain
- Coordination
- Develop policies
- Engagement
- Integration
- Education
- Evidence Based decisions
- Commonwealth Support
- Cooperation

Based on the discussions, **the top priorities identified for the region** were 1) ensuring that Caribbean actors were empowered to tell their own stories, and that these fully reflect traditional knowledge; 2) that data, research and development programming be put at the centre of self-determined priorities and finally 3) that space be provided at CARICOM Heads of Government meetings to address these issues and listen to the concerns and experience of Caribbean populations.

Pacific Urban Forum (PUF)

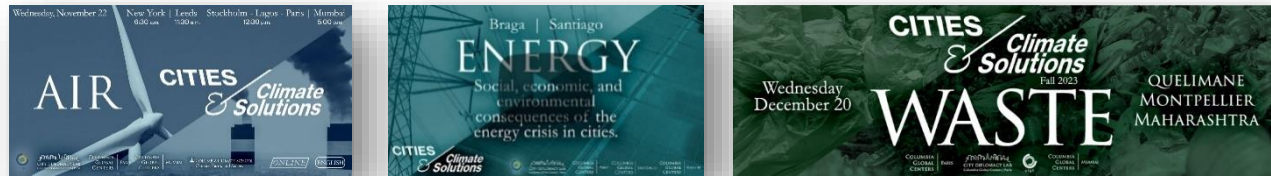
Fiji was recently the host of the [Sixth Pacific Urban Forum](#) (PUF6), which took place from 5 to 7 September 2023. This inclusive, multi-stakeholder platform provided a vital opportunity to address the rapid urbanisation trends facing Pacific Island Countries, encompassing challenges such as unemployment, inequality, urban service pressures, affordable housing, and climate change vulnerabilities. Around a quarter of the Pacific's inhabitants live in cities and towns, and the region is urbanising at rates well above the global average. This rapid urbanisation, intertwined with the region's high level of vulnerability to climate change and disaster risk, is leading to a range of socio-economic and environmental challenges.

The 2023 PUF was co-hosted by the Pacific Urban Partnership, which brings CLGF together with a range of other partners including UN-Habitat and ICLEI, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat with the aim of developing action plans and providing recommendations for urbanisation strategies aligned with the Pacific New Urban Agenda (PNUA). By eliciting voluntary commitments from diverse stakeholders and showcasing innovative Pacific regional approaches, the forum looked to contribute to building sustainable, safe, resilient, and inclusive human settlements.

The [PUF Outcome Statement](#) focused on increased recognition of the challenges of urbanisation fostering sustainable, risk-informed urban development practices, that prioritise resilience, justice, equity, and the protection of vulnerable communities. It also called for greater recognition of traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices and recognising and rectifying gender inequalities and barriers in urban areas. Finally, it recommended strengthening the urbanisation dimensions of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent Implementation Strategy. The outcomes were presented at the 52nd Pacific Island Forum in the Cook Islands in November 2023.

Cities and Climate Solutions Webinar Series

CLGF was also a partner in the Cities and Climate Solutions webinar series, organised by Columbia Global Centers | Paris and the City Diplomacy Lab. Three dialogues took place in the month of December on the themes of Air, Energy and Waste. These brought together cities with best practice to highlight their experience and process in taking action on these key themes.



Cities and Climate Solutions – Air

On 22^d November 2023, this webinar brought together representatives from Lagos, Leeds, Mumbai and Stockholm to discuss the topics of air pollution monitoring, local public health impacts, carbon neutrality, climate budgets and equity and inclusion.

Click [here](#) to view the webinar

Cities and climate solutions – energy

On 6th December 2023, this webinar brought together representatives from Braga, Nairobi, and Santiago to discuss the topics of energy poverty, urban renewable energy, building energy regulations, energy retrofit, and just transition.

Click [here](#) to view the webinar

Cities and climate solutions – waste

On 20 December 2023, this webinar brought together representatives from Quelimane, Mozambique; Montpellier, France; and Maharashtra, India to discuss waste management, waste reduction, waste valorisation, public health, and the circular economy. The discussion was moderated by City Diplomacy Lab Director Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi. Click [here](#) for more information on the webinar

Strengthening action for youth inclusion in cities

Young people under 30 make up 60% of the population of the Commonwealth, and in Commonwealth cities the percentage population is often even higher. It is this statistic, coupled with a genuine will at city level to improve both the way that they engage and reach young people, but also the quality and appropriateness of the services that they provide, which saw the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) choose to prioritise youth and youth engagement as one of their focal areas.

Youth in cities survey and youth and cities report

CSCN in collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation Network (CYSU) published the [Youth and Cities Report](#) which, alongside a cross-Commonwealth youth survey, allows for an overview of a number of key thematic areas to better understand the challenges and needs of young people in a city context, specifically: economic, social, housing, public space and democratic inclusion. It also explores themes and examples for integrating young people into political processes and how to better reflect their needs in the planning and decision-making of cities. Read the Youth and Cities Report [here](#).

Youth in cities dialogue sessions

The CSCN in collaboration with the CYSU hosted two dialogue sessions to share and exchange on the youth agenda for cities in the Commonwealth. Two sessions were held on **9 May 2023** for the Caribbean, Canada and Pacific Regions and **11 May 2023** for the Africa, Asia and Europe regions. These sessions brought together a panel of city leaders, youth leaders and youth networks from across the Commonwealth to share learning, exchange on the key issues facing young people in cities and reflect on the next steps for CSCN to focus its work in this area. Around 270 participants took part in the dialogues and the key points of discussion are available [here](#) (Caribbean, Canada Pacific) and [here](#) for (Africa/Europe/Asia).

City inclusiveness and resilience - CSET children and youth challenge

From June to August 2023, The Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Sustainable Energy Transition (CSET) and CYSU held a cross-Commonwealth competition for young people to identify innovations in sustainable energy and energy transition. CSCN has partnered with this initiative to support the showcasing of winning entries to local leaders and policy makers.

Advocacy for youth in cities

In response to the call for a focus on youth and the Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation across the Commonwealth, a new multidisciplinary youth network was developed - the [Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation](#) (CYSU). The network is guided by a youth-led steering committee comprising representatives from Belize, Cameroon, Eswatini, Malaysia, Nigeria, India, Cyprus, New Zealand and the UK. Local government is represented by Deputy Mayor Allan Pollard Jr, Belize City Council, Belize (a political representative) and Mandisa Mthimkhulu, who represents young professional practitioners and works in HR in Mbabane Municipal Council, Eswatini. The CYSU Network was formally launched at CHOGM on 19 June 2022 and comprises young city leaders, mayors/local councillors, local government officials, planners, architects, academics, etc.; all of whom play a critical role in ensuring sustainable communities. The purpose of the network is to empower Commonwealth youth to support,

contribute to, and advocate for sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth, and to look at ways in which cities and human settlements can better reflect the needs of youth.

CLGF at Commonwealth youth leadership summit

CLGF hosted a session on *Building partnerships for the future of cities and local government* at the Commonwealth Youth Leadership Summit hosted by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London on 7 March 2023. Allan Pollard, Deputy Mayor of Belize City, CLGF’s political representative on the CYSU Steering Committee attended the full Summit, joining leaders from various Commonwealth organisations from across the 56 countries of the Commonwealth. Essentially about leadership, the summit sought to both enrich Commonwealth policy and programming with the perspective of these youth ambassadors, as well as to equip them with the knowledge and overview of the Commonwealth to be effective ambassadors in their respective jurisdictions. Read more about the Summit [here](#).

CLGC23 Youth leadership for a resilient future

The Commonwealth Local Government Conference (CLGC 2023) took place in Kigali, Rwanda from 14 to 17 November 2023 under the theme *Local Government: Building resilience across the Commonwealth*. CLGC 2023 acknowledged that there can be no long-term sustainability or resilience without robust strategies for the inclusion of young people, and recognising the important role of young people in shaping our common future and a strong youth presence was included throughout the conference.



Working jointly with [PLATFORMA](#), the [Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation \(CYSU\)](#) and the [Commonwealth Secretariat](#), the *Youth Leadership for a Resilient Future* events ensured the mainstreaming of youth throughout the conference, including ensuring a strong youth delegation through targeted sponsorship, a launch event with Ms. Sandrine Umutoni, Rwanda Minister of State for Youth; a working group bringing together youth leaders from across the Commonwealth, with key CLGF members to discuss issues around democratic inclusion and outreach to young people, and a *young leaders caucus* allowing for the development of a set of youth-led recommendations on how Local Government, CLGF and the wider Commonwealth can better ensure our collective future resilience.

Youth participants developed an outcome statement, the [Kigali Youth Outcomes Statement on Youth Leadership for a Resilient Future](#) - a list of youth recommendations which will feed into the ongoing work of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN), the Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation (CYSU) Network and the overall CLGF Conference outcomes statement - [The Kigali Declaration on Building local resilience across the Commonwealth](#). These recommendations will be submitted to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa in 2024.

Urban innovations boot camp – Kumasi, Ghana

Across Africa, the number of people living in urban areas is expected to reach 1 billion by 2042, according to the World Bank. For local governments, this rapid urbanisation increases the strain to provide basic social amenities, jobs and modern infrastructure for citizens. In this context it is essential for cities and city leaders to innovate to be able to provide services, ensure inclusion, and address urban issues.

In 2021, CLGF partnered with Bloomberg Philanthropies to reach out to and support its members to participate in the 2021 Bloomberg Global Mayors Challenge, an initiative geared toward finding the most creative and ambitious urban innovations to transform cities to meet the challenges of urbanisation. Over 631 cities applied to the challenge which saw 15 successful cities each receive \$1 million US dollars to support implementation of their innovative projects. 5 of those 15 cities were CLGF member cities. However, recognising the demand, CLGF is now exploring ways to mobilise through the CSCN, to build on this interest and support innovation from its city members.

In Ghana, Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly was successful in winning one of the \$1 million US dollar prizes to implement a waste management project focused on providing low-cost toilets to households. Building on this project, UNDP, CLGF and the National Association of Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG) partnered to bring together the 10 Metropolitan and Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) which made submissions to the Mayors Challenge to exchange ideas and

build their capacity on designing and implementing mission-driven and sustainable urban projects.

The workshop titled *Urban Innovations Boot Camp on Sustainable innovations to solve urban problems* held between 11 and 13 December 2023 in Kumasi, Ghana, sought to:

- Introduce participants to the best practices for defining public problems within metropolises and municipalities;
- Build capacity in using data, collective intelligence, and design-thinking to solve problems more efficiently and effectively;
- Introduce tools and technologies for designing and implementing mission-driven projects.

Sessions focused on understanding urban innovation, problem identification techniques, developing & testing innovations, achieving change through theory of change, key parameters for successful implementation plans, project feasibility and viability, and the success factors and pitfalls in proposal writing.



Workshop participants from municipal assemblies (Jaman south, Oforikrom, Wa, Ketu south), metropolitan assemblies (Tema, Tamale, Cape Coast, Secondoi-Takoradi, Accra) and CLGF

Over three days, 30 participants were actively involved in pitching project ideas, group work, meetings, exchanging views and sharing experience and knowledge. CLGF will be looking for further opportunities over the course of 2024 to connect CSCN members with funding opportunities for their innovative projects.

Looking Ahead

- Mobilising Climate Finance for Cities – moving from concept to proposal – A Dialogue with the City Finance GAP Fund | Date: Week of 19 February 2024

CSCN will partner with the World Bank and European Investment Bank's [City Climate Finance Gap Fund](#) to present online workshops on moving from idea to investment, discussing what makes a strong proposal, key elements to consider, and the process for requesting support from the GAP Fund.

- Webinar on gendered cities | Date: TBC

Cities are hubs of economic activity, innovation and cultural exchange, however development planning and urban policies often exacerbate existing disparities between men and women in safety, access and economic and cultural opportunities. This webinar will discuss gender disparities in cities and highlight best practice for addressing these and building more inclusive urban spaces and mainstreaming gender-responsive approaches to urban planning and design.

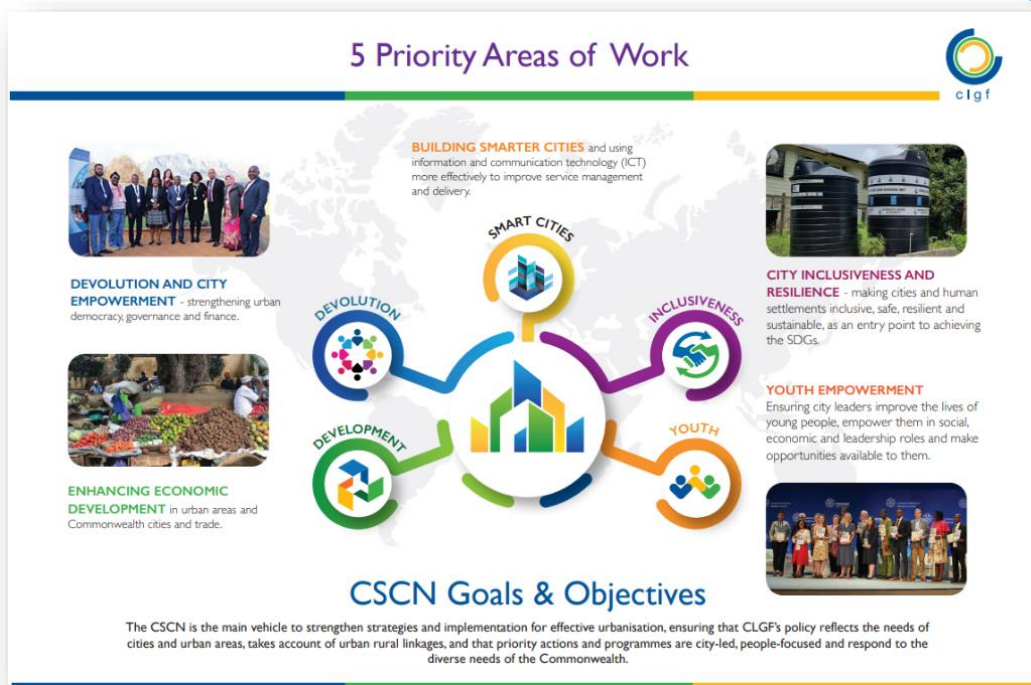
The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN)

CLGF launched the Commonwealth the Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) in 2015 to respond to the city agenda. CSCN brings together Commonwealth mayors and managers to support cities and human settlements in responding to the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation. Specifically, the network is working towards supporting the CLGF membership and actors more broadly in advancing the New Urban Agenda and achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11 (make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), through improved policies; global, Commonwealth, regional and national advocacy; exchange of experience, city to city partnerships; shared learning; targeted programmes; and strengthened city leadership.

Focal areas

The network has five priority areas:

1. **Devolution and city empowerment** - strengthening urban democracy, governance and finance.
2. **Enhancing economic development in urban areas** - Commonwealth cities and trade.
3. **Building smarter cities** - using ICT more effectively to improve service management and delivery.
4. **City inclusiveness and resilience** - making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, as an entry point to achieving the SDGs.
5. **Youth development** – ensuring city leaders improve the lives of young people, empower them in social, economic and leadership roles, and make services and opportunities available to them.



Using the CSCN as a key vehicle, CLGF seeks to strengthen strategies and implementation for effective urbanisation: ensuring CLGF policy reflects the needs of cities and urban areas, takes account of urban rural linkages, and that priority actions are city-led, people-focused and respond to the diverse needs of the Commonwealth.

Providing a framework

CSCN provides a framework for (i) Learning and exchange, (ii) Enhancing capacity to enhance delivery in cities, (iii) A platform for research and knowledge-sharing, (iv) Identifying and developing evidence-based policy, (v) Strengthening advocacy in support of sustainable urbanisation in the Commonwealth and in other international fora.

Membership

Membership of the CSCN is open to all Commonwealth cities. CLGF welcomes capital as well as secondary and other cities, including cities in small and developing states which are not generally represented in other networks. Any Commonwealth city where their parent ministry or local government association is a member of CLGF, or where they have individual membership of CLGF, can become a member of the CSCN. The objective is to ensure broad membership across cities and human settlements of all sizes and from all regions of the Commonwealth.

Oversight of the work of the CSCN is provided by Janine Xavier-Cross,
Senior Programme Officer – Networks.

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