



CITIES SPACE: Annual Newsletter 2024

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Commonwealth Local Government Forum
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Executive Summary

In 2024, the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) continued its mission to advocate for sustainable urbanization across the Commonwealth. This year was marked by major milestones, including the strengthening of governance through the Steering Committee, the expansion of partnerships with engineers and planners, and impactful advocacy at global events like CHOGM 2024 and COP29. Significant progress was made in advancing gender-inclusive urban development, mobilizing climate finance, and empowering youth leadership. Notably, Mayor Geraldine Lendor-Gabriel of Castries, St. Lucia, served as a judge for the prestigious UN SDG Action Awards, further emphasizing the critical role of local leadership in global development. These achievements set the stage for a dynamic 2025, with priorities focused on deepening city-to-city partnerships, fostering innovative funding mechanisms, and amplifying youth inclusion in urban policymaking.

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Highlights of 2024	3
3. Looking Ahead: 2025 Priorities	8
4. Member Spotlights and Success Stories	9
5. About The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN)	9
Focal areas	9
Providing a framework	10
Membership	10
6. Conclusion and Call to Action	10

1. Introduction

Since its establishment in 2015, the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) has remained at the forefront of addressing the opportunities and challenges of urbanization across the Commonwealth. The network engages mayors, urban planners, technical experts, and policymakers to achieve the vision of Sustainable Development Goal 11: making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. In 2024, CSCN's initiatives focused on key areas such as climate resilience, gender equity, economic development, and youth leadership, ensuring that local governments were well-represented on both regional and global platforms.

2. Highlights of 2024

Governance and Advocacy

The governance of CSCN took center stage in 2024, starting with the *Steering Committee's* annual meeting in October. This online gathering brought together key city leaders, including Bernard Wagner, Mayor of Belize City (Belize); Samuel Dusengiyumva, Mayor of Kigali (Rwanda); Cyril Xaba, Mayor of Durban (South Africa); and representatives of Queen Omagano Kamati, Mayor of Windhoek (Namibia). The discussions revolved around urban challenges like climate adaptation, economic growth, infrastructure development and preparations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

Key outcomes included:

- Approval of member-led webinars for 2025, enabling cities to share best practices and innovative solutions.
- A proposal to integrate youth representation into CSCN governance structures.
- Initial steps towards establishing a City-to-City Partnership Programme.
- A call to develop city best practice case studies to allow for the exchange of experience and peer-to-peer support across the Network

The *Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2024*, held in Apia, Samoa, from October 21 to 25, emphasized sustainable urbanization under the theme “One Resilient Common Future: Transforming our Common Wealth.” The unique challenges of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) took precedence, with Samoa's Prime Minister highlighting the importance of building resilient societies. The full set of [official outcomes documents are available here](#).

In addition, members of the CSCN actively represented local governments at key international platforms throughout the year:

- **4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (May 27-30, 2024)**, Antigua and Barbuda: The Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity set the agenda for the next ten years focusing on resilient economies; safe, healthy & prosperous societies; environment & sustainability. Good governance and the importance of robust

and resilient local institutions was recognized and targets set for economic development, environmental protection and climate change mitigation included reference to the roll of local government in achieving this sustainable future. Click [here](#) to view the Final Outcome Statement .

- **UN High-Level Political Forum (July 8-17, 2024):** Championed advocacy for localization and strengthening the role of cities and localized SDG implementation, strategies for fostering ecological transitions. emphasizing the role of cities in enhancing equity through placing human rights and local public service provision at the center, city level action for peace and building stronger governance and the importance of access to finance at the local level human rights
- **UN Summit for the Future (September 22-24, 2024):** Saw the development of a Pact of the Future with chapters on Sustainable development and financing for development; International peace and security; Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation; Youth and future generations; and transforming global governance. Click [here](#) to view the Pact of the Future.
- **World Urban Forum (November 4-8, 2024):** Resulted in development of the [Cairo Call to Action](#) – a guiding document capturing the Forum’s key messages and proposed solutions to urban challenges. The call advocates – for urgent action to address the global housing crisis; for achieving global goals through local action for sustaining a systemic representation of local actors at all levels; for sharing urban spaces and opportunities inclusively; for urban planning to deliver better local outcomes; for unlocking finance for cities and communities; for ensuring equity and justice for sustainable cities; for leveraging local and grassroots data for decision-making; for harnessing culture and heritage as an asset for sustainability; for building coalitions and alliances to scale local impact
- **COP29 (November 11-22, 2024):** Resulted in an [agreement](#) calling on developed countries to deliver a \$300 billion annual climate finance commitment by 2035 to support developing nations.

Strategic Partnerships

The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative: Building on the achievements of the ongoing work of the coalition partnership of the [Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative](#)¹ (CSCI), CLGF has been active over the course of 2024 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 policymaking;
- 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.

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) the Commonwealth Engineers Council, and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF).

The CSCI collaborates with a diverse coalition of organisation, enabling partners to bring technical expertise, foster knowledge sharing, and drive advocacy for sustainable urban development across the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) is CLGF’s principal vehicle for work on advancing the Call to Action

Key initiatives championed by the CSCI include:

- Expanding Membership and Partnerships:** The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative (CSCI) achieved a significant milestone in 2024 by welcoming the Commonwealth Engineers Council into its network. This expansion added technical expertise, fostering collaboration between engineers, architects, planners, researchers, and local governments.

- Sustainable Urbanisation at CHOGM:** Building on the successes of CHOGM 2022 held in Kigali, Rwanda, CLGF collaborated with its Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative (CSCI) partners, including The King’s Foundation, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Governments of Rwanda and Samoa, to deliver a compelling side event at CHOGM 2024. This event highlighted sustainable urbanization as a cornerstone of resilience-building and urged member states to recommit to the 2022 Declaration on Sustainable Urbanization. Discussions centered on sharing best practices and leveraging Commonwealth networks to drive implementation. With strong member state support, a follow-up meeting in early 2025 will finalize a detailed roadmap for action. View the outcomes documents from the CHOGM [here](#).



- Key Messages from Partners attending the CSCI Side event at CHOGM:**



- Advancing sustainable urbanisation: working with Commonwealth countries to build a transformative coalition:** Scheduled for March 31 to April 2, 2025, CSCN,

through the CSCI, will partner with Wilton Park and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to host a high-level dialogue on advancing sustainable urbanization. This event will convene experts, policymakers, and city leaders to address the combined challenges of climate change and rapid urbanization. The programme's goals include:

- Developing a roadmap for implementing the 2022 Commonwealth Declaration on Sustainable Urbanization.
- Establishing strategies for cross-sector partnerships, particularly in rapidly urbanizing low-income cities.
- Fostering practical, scalable urban solutions across Commonwealth nations.

Other Key Strategic partnerships

- **Bloomberg Global Mayors Challenge:** CSCN partnered with Bloomberg Philanthropies for the 2025 Global Mayors Challenge, which attracted over 180 submissions from Commonwealth cities. This innovation competition is designed to inspire bold, forward-thinking solutions to pressing urban challenges while enhancing public services and improving residents' lives. Cities with populations over 100,000 were invited to participate, and CSCN played a pivotal role in encouraging applications from its membership and providing support throughout the process.



Key benefits for participants include:

- **For 50 Finalist Cities:**
 - \$50,000 to prototype and test their ideas.
 - Technical assistance and expert advisory support.
 - Access to the prestigious Ideas Camp, where finalists refine their projects.
- **For 25 Winning Cities (to be announced in late 2025):**
 - \$1 million over two years (January 2026–December 2027).
 - Two funded staff positions to support implementation.
 - World-class technical support, expertise, and implementation coaching.

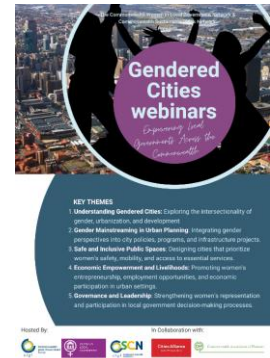
Beyond funding, cities benefit from global recognition, access to a worldwide peer network, and resources to scale impactful innovations that address complex challenges.

- **The City Climate Finance Gap Fund** - In February and March 2024, CSCN partnered with the City Climate Finance Gap Fund to host two webinars focused on mobilizing climate finance for cities. These sessions provided practical guidance for local governments on securing funding for climate-smart projects, with insights from organizations like Bristol City Council (UK) and Vielle Case (Dominica). Members highlighted the need for support to address strategies for just transitions, post-disaster rebuilding, ensuring appropriate legislation to enable local governments to leverage investment, and leveraging international funds for vulnerable communities. Read more about the Gap Fund Webinars [here](#)



Gendered Cities Initiative

Gender equity was a core priority for CSCN in 2024 which saw the CSCN partnering with the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network (ComWLG), the Cities Alliance and the Commonwealth Association of Planners to host through webinars and dialogues held in May and June.



The Gendered Cities Initiative addressed pressing issues such as gender-sensitive urban planning, inclusive public spaces, and women’s leadership. Highlights included:

- Ratification of the South Asia Gender Equality Charter² during the South Asia Regional Meeting held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in June.
- Recommendations for gender-responsive budgeting, creating safer urban environments, and inclusive policies.
- Contributions from Geraldine Lendor-Gabriel, Mayor of Castries, St. Lucia, who showcased her city’s initiatives to enhance safety and economic empowerment for women.

Read more about the Gendered Cities Dialogues [here](#)

Climate Finance and Urban Resilience

CSCN continued to advocate for increased funding to address the climate emergency, emphasizing the critical role of local governments in implementing practical solutions.

At **COP29** held in November in Baku, Government heads reached An [agreement](#) calling on developed countries to deliver at least \$300 billion per year to developing countries by 2035 to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect lives and livelihoods from the worsening impacts of climate change. Additionally, **The GAP Fund** partnership highlighted how cities could access technical support to develop fundable projects aligned with their climate resilience goals.



Youth Inclusion and Leadership

Youth engagement was a hallmark of 2024. Leaders like Mandisa Mthimkhulu from Mbabane City Council in Eswatini and Councillor Cici Manwa of Thurrock Borough Council in the United Kingdom brought fresh perspectives to CHOGM and other forums. Highlights of youth contributions included:

- Advocacy for inclusive urban development policies.
- Emphasis on integrating youth into decision-making processes.

² The Gender Equity Charter touches on the causes and systematic challenges facing the region, concepts and priority actions under the areas of) Leadership and local governance, 2) Social Transformation and health care systems, 3) Economic empowerment, 4) Ending Violence, 5) Climate change, disaster risk reduction and relief and rehabilitation and recommends interventions, monitoring and advocacy to advance its objectives.

Empowering Local Governments for Sustainable Development: Key Initiatives and Collaborative Efforts

At the 21st NALAO Annual Conference, held from November 20-22, 2024, in Windhoek, Namibia, Janine Xavier-Cross of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) delivered a presentation titled "Governance and Political Leadership: A Call to Action for Achieving the SDGs." NALAO, the Namibian Association of Local Authority Officials, hosted the event. The presentation emphasized the critical role of local governments in advancing the SDGs, particularly in areas such as poverty reduction, healthcare, and climate resilience. Key CLGF initiatives were highlighted, including the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative (CSCI), which builds capacity in urban planning, governance, and financing to empower local governments and cities. The Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network (CSCN) and Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation (CYSU) were also discussed as platforms for knowledge exchange and best practices. The importance of empowering women in local governance through the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network (ComWLG) was underscored, alongside practical tools like the Rapid Planning Toolkit and the Survey of the Built Environment Professions to help local governments address urbanization challenges. Updates from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) were shared, and local governments were encouraged to leverage these resources and networks to turn the SDGs from global goals into local realities, ensuring cities are inclusive, resilient, and future-ready.

3. Looking Ahead: 2025 Priorities

CSCN's plans for 2025/2026 are ambitious and forward-looking. Key initiatives include:

- **Advancing sustainable urbanisation: working with Commonwealth countries to build a transformative coalition:** through the CSCI, to advance global advocacy on Sustainable Urbanisation and develop a road map for action. (31 March to 2 April 2025, UK)
- **City-to-City Partnership Programme:** Scaling up collaboration and shared learning opportunities between member cities.
- **World LED Forum:** highlighting local economic development as a key driver for cities to provide sustainable inclusive livelihoods for citizens, with a focus on triple transition, financing and economies that work for people & planet (1 to 4 April 2025, Spain)
- **The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development Forum (FfD4):** Exploring innovative mechanisms to support urban projects (30 June-3 July 2025, Spain)
- **Bloomberg Mayors Challenge 2025:** Finalists will be announced in March 2025, followed by the selection of 25 winners in October.
- **CLGC 26 – Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2026**
- **CHOGM 2026 in Antigua and Barbuda:** CSCN will use this platform to scale sustainable urbanization initiatives and advocate for inclusive policies.

4. Member Spotlights and Success Stories



Belize City, Belize: Mayor Bernard Wagner, Chair, Commonwealth Local Government Forum and Steering Committee member on the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network, championed climate resilience initiatives, integrating sustainable practices into urban planning and setting a benchmark for other cities.

Castries, St. Lucia: Mayor Geraldine Lendor-Gabriel led transformative projects focused on **gender equity, safety, and economic** empowerment for women. As a judge for the 2024 UN SDG Action Awards, she highlighted the importance of creativity and innovation in achieving sustainability goals.



Mbabane, Eswatini: Mandisa Mthimkhulu is from Mbabane City Council in Eswatini and the local government representative member of the Commonwealth Youth for Sustainable Urbanisation (CYSU). Mandisa Mthimkhulu's leadership at CHOGM exemplified the transformative potential of youth participation in governance.

Milton, Canada: Cllr Sameera Ali, a Town and Regional Councillor for the Town of Milton and Region of Halton shared on the experience of incorporating policy changes to transform Milton, Ontario's (Canada) level of gender inclusion as part of the Gendered Cities Dialogues.



5. About 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.

6. Conclusion and Call to Action

As we reflect on 2024, CSCN's collective efforts have made significant strides in advancing sustainable urbanization across the Commonwealth. CSCN invites cities to participate in member-led webinars and programs to share their innovative solutions and achievements. Interested cities should contact us at CSCN@clgf.org.uk