

COMMONWEALTH LEADER JOURNAL

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Empowering Women

*Commonwealth Scholars challenge the barriers
which girls face to an equal education*

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Welcome



From the new Chair of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission.

As you may have noticed, I took over as Chair of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK on the 1 January 2022. I am absolutely thrilled to be taking on such an exciting role, especially in a year of such significance for the Commonwealth. Before I give a brief introduction to myself, let me first acknowledge the outstanding job done by my predecessor, Richard Middleton, who was Chair of the CSC for 7 years and a Commissioner for 5 years before that. His contribution and service were rightly recognised in the New Year Honours 2022 List, in which he was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, for services to the Commonwealth and to Higher Education.

In addition to being the Chair of the CSC, I am also Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (International) at the University of Birmingham. I am an academic economist and have worked on various aspects of game theory during my research career. I also sit on several regulatory bodies, including the Competition Appeal Tribunal and the Financial Conduct Authority. Although now in the UK, I was born elsewhere in the Commonwealth: in Kingston, Canada. I have been incredibly fortunate that the whole of my education has been free from age 11 onwards, thanks to scholarships. Without those scholarships, I could not have gone to university (I am still the only person

in my family to have done so), continued to a PhD and eventually become an academic. I am therefore absolutely passionate about the transformative effect of education—on individuals, societies and countries—and the importance of scholarships in giving gifted individuals the chance to thrive. My aim as Chair is to see the CSC grow and to promote even further the great work that it does.

2022 is a good year to embark on that, since it is such a big year for the Commonwealth. In the next few months alone we will see Commonwealth Day, the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Commonwealth Games; and the Queen's Jubilee (formally held on 6 February, but which will be marked throughout the year).

The last aim that I have for this year is to be in touch with as many Scholars and Alumni of the CSC as I possibly can. Without your engagement and stories, the CSC cannot demonstrate the great impact that we all know it has. So please do stay in touch with us at the CSC. I look forward to meeting you.

Professor Robin Mason
Chair of the CSC

Common Knowledge

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The first word



Girls' Education provides a foundation for more healthy, wealthy, sustainable, and peaceful communities. It engenders benefits at the individual level, setting women on a path for lifelong learning and empowerment, and at the societal level, boosting economies and health outcomes for future generations.

Huge leaps have been made in this area since world leaders committed to ensuring that all children would be able to complete primary school by 2015 at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000. UNICEF reports that at that time, 57 million primary school age girls globally were out-of-school, compared to 42 million boys. By 2018, these numbers had fallen by 44% and 37% for girls and boys respectively, with much of the progress made by 2007 and stalling thereafter.

It was estimated by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report in 2020 that globally three-quarters of children of primary school age who may never set foot in school are girls. Viewed regionally, the largest disparities exist in the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia and areas of Africa. COVID-19 has only made matters worse, further exacerbating the pause on progress and threatening to undo gains made in recent decades. Data published by UNESCO to mark International Women's Day in 2021 projected that 11 million girls might not return to school post-pandemic. We will need to closely examine how this projection lines up with reality over the next year.

So, when the UK government announced its ambitious target to get 40 million more girls in low and lower middle income countries in school

by 2026, we were keen to help push forward this goal at the CSC.

2022 sees the start of the CSC's multipronged Time Limited Programme in Girls' Education. From supporting 29 Professional Fellows embarking on a programme of professional development with 5 host organisations focused on Girls' Education, to a year-long communications and engagement strategy promoting this theme, we aim to support innovative research, build capacity, and generate more awareness around the issues of equity and access in Girls' Education.

It is fitting, then, that in this edition of *Common Knowledge*, we seek answers to the questions: Why is Girls' Education important and why are so many girls still being denied access to it? What implications does this issue have for international development? And in what ways are the UN's Sustainable Development Goals involved?

To this end, we commissioned articles which highlight the range of work of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni within the field of Girls' Education.

In the article 'Supporting women in STEM', 2019 Commonwealth Scholar Angela Koranteng from Ghana shares her journey, from her own decision to pursue an education in STEM to founding STEMbees, an organisation

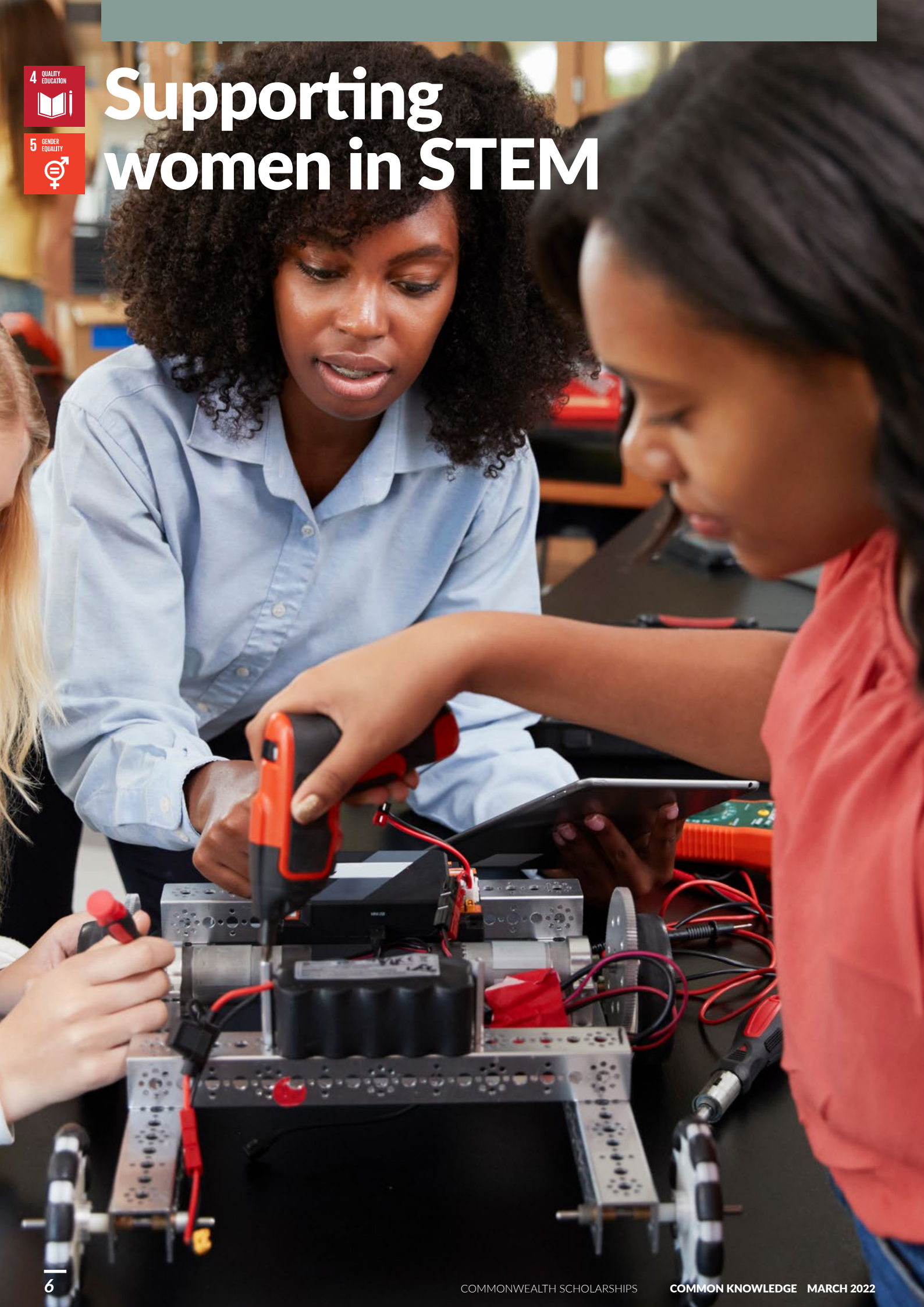
seeking to empower high school girls to pursue science studies. 2015 Commonwealth Scholar Steven Bwanali from Rwanda, meanwhile, traces the progress he and his team are making as part of the USAID funded DREAMS programme to support 57,000 adolescent girls and young women in southern Malawi to remain in school and safe from early/child marriages and other harmful practices that can put them at risk of acquiring HIV. You can also read about the vital research already being done in the area of Girls' Education by current Commonwealth Scholars: Aboabea Akuffo from Ghana and Kerissa Nelson from Jamaica.

Together, these articles show the diverse and multi-layered approaches needed to not only get more girls into school, but to support girls to progress through all its levels and across subject areas. In doing so, they highlight the importance of the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme in bringing together great minds from across the world, each with a unique standpoint from which to explore and enact the development impact our world so desperately needs.

Professor Nuala McGrath
CSC Commissioner



Supporting women in STEM



Angela Maame Afua Koranteng

2019 Commonwealth Shared Scholar

Ghana

MA Education, Gender and International Development

University College London



*In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly declared 11 February as the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. Recognising women and girls in science as agents of change is vital in achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals. In this article, **Angela Koranteng** shares why, and how, her organisation STEMbees seeks to empower high school girls in pursuing science studies.*

I completed my undergraduate degree in civil engineering as one of 8 women out of a cohort of 80 students. Following my studies, I worked on a two-year programme in software development. Moving from civil engineering to computer science, there was still an imbalance with regards to the number of male and female students - I was one of 4 women out of 25 trainees in this instance. During my undergraduate studies, I was questioned as to how or why I was pursuing education in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subject, which was demoralising. This experience inspired my co-founders and myself to build awareness and interest amongst girls in STEM subjects and to increase female representation.

I am now one of three founders and currently the Programmes Director of STEMbees Organisation, which seeks to empower and engage primary, junior, and senior Ghanaian high school girls to pursue their interest and dreams in STEM. Through our programmes we encourage girls to explore computer science, develop their skills, and increase female participation and leadership in STEM education. The opportunities we offer include after-school programmes in junior and senior high schools which introduce girls to ICT, LEGO® Education, Robotics, 3D design and technology, coding, and career counselling.

Getting girls involved

As the Programmes Director, responsible for managing STEMbees activities, I liaise with schools across Ghana to pitch projects and programmes and identify girls to take part. Our after-school programmes support 30-60 girls per programme to develop their digital and coding skills, and our one-off workshops can bring together up to 150 girls. As well as offering unique programming, we have also worked with schools to offer courses which supplement the science curriculum and support an improvement in grades amongst students.

Increasing digital skills amongst participants is a critical outcome of our programmes, as well as generating an increased interest in STEM. This outcome is not limited to the study they might then choose to pursue at university, as STEM-based course fees can be prohibitive, but also enhances their ability to apply and understand science and the application of technology across a range of subjects, sectors, everyday actions, and global challenges.

Putting skills into practice

In 2021 I had the opportunity to support and mentor 12 students from the Aburi Girls Senior High School to virtually participate and represent Ghana in the FIRST Global Challenge, an annual international robotics competition. Teams representing over 170 nations are invited to work together to complete tasks themed around a global challenge, including the 14 Grand Challenges for Engineering.

For 2021, the competition focused on advancing new ways STEM can offer practical solutions to problems facing youth and their communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our team selected the theme of health and developing a sustainable

During my undergraduate studies, I was questioned as to how or why I was pursuing education in STEM, which was demoralising."



Codebus Africa Team - **Angela Koranteng** is fourth from left

solution to the use of disposable face masks. Team members identified the possibility of using plant-based fibres, such as banana or coconut, to make face masks and reduce waste.

Alliance is a very important part of the competition. Teams do not compete as a nation but with other national teams to develop their technology-based solutions. This year, we worked with the team from Belarus whose health-based project explored using drone technology to deliver medicine to remote communities. Together, team members were able to communicate and share their ideas and experience to support the development of their ideas and learn to work with people from a different country and background.

STEMbees has supported the Ghana team since the competition was launched in 2017. The annual competition provides an opportunity for STEMbees to support a new group of girls to participate and gain exposure to robotics, as well as meet and work with participants across the world.

The future of STEM education for girls

There is still a lot of ground to cover in creating more inclusive environments and opportunities for girls and women in STEM. In engaging with high school girls, we realised that they are not aware of the opportunities available through a career in STEM, with limited data and examples of successful female STEM graduates published on school, university, and workplace websites.

A number of my female peers have left the STEM field due to limited opportunities and discrimination, or are pursuing more societally-acceptable female roles. I regard myself as one of the women who has left the applied STEM sector because my focus is now on education and gender. In pursuing my Master's degree, I was inspired to complete a course that would help me understand research and policy addressing education and gender in international development, as part of my work with STEMbees. Through my Master's, I was able to learn about and develop a theory of change for the organisation and have a greater appreciation of the importance of data for social impact.

As a result, I am currently seeking to collaborate with the Ghana Institute of Engineers (GhIE) to undertake a baseline study on the status of STEM higher education in Ghana. Although work is being done to expand opportunities in STEM education, there is no real data on the current landscape to understand how efforts at both the secondary and tertiary level have impacted access and equity, especially for girls and women.

I believe undertaking this study will serve as a benchmark for future monitoring and evaluation, and the data can be used to develop relevant policies and coherent interventions. I hope this study will encourage institutions to publish data on representation across STEM programmes to highlight issues and progress. I also hope that the data will support the GhIE to target graduating engineers; encourage women to join the institution; and promote female engineering in Ghana.

CK

Enabling equity

Heinrich Mutsinzi Rukundo shares his work and experiences in developing gender-sensitive education systems across Africa



Heinrich Mutsinzi Rukundo

2010 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar

Rwanda

MSc Education for Sustainability

London South Bank University



As a UNICEF Education Specialist, I provide technical leadership and support to national governments on education systems. This involves planning and developing innovative strategies and interventions that contribute to gender-equal outcomes and access to education for all. I help ensure that children and adolescent girls are supported through gender-responsive education systems and that schools provide a safe learning environment for girls. I have worked in Rwanda, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and currently Malawi, to help build sustainable education systems through the development of major policies and capacity development initiatives to education officials at the national, decentralised, and school level.

Identifying girl-specific needs

Gender responsive education starts with planning: making sure that, for example, if education access is being expanded, then both boys' and girls' needs are considered, as well as the needs of those in a rural or urban setting. Through my work, we are trying to make sure that everybody achieves their potential, including those most likely to miss out on opportunities: girls and children with disabilities.

Achieving gender responsive education requires a comprehensive approach, implementing complementary interventions and working across multiple sectors. Within the field of girls' education, the contexts are challenging, and often start at the community level. In most cases,

families will prioritise supporting a boy child, meaning that girls can be left behind from the outset. The programmes and interventions I have worked on have been designed to address several barriers to girls' access to education, including scholarship opportunities, violence

prevention, and menstrual hygiene.

To highlight two barriers, girls risk missing up to five days of classroom attendance a month due to limited or no access to water and sanitation at the school level during menstruation. In this situation, schools are not responding to their needs, leading to absenteeism and higher drop-out rates among secondary school aged girls. In some cases, the distances girls are required to walk to school can also



EQUITY

In a gender-responsive environment, it is vital that [female] champions and role models are available who girls will go to for help, support, counselling, and mentoring."

increase their vulnerability to harassment and assault, leading to high rates of child abuse, teenage pregnancy, and arranged marriages.

When you are dealing with some or all these issues, you need more than one intervention at a national level, you also need interventions at the community and school level.

Leading by example

Working at an international level with UNICEF has enabled me to work in different countries and gain insight into different education systems and contexts, which each involve their own challenges and opportunities to achieving equitable access to education. Through my international role, I can apply specialist expertise through my knowledge of the many interventions applied across these countries and can recommend their application within different contexts.

I have worked as part of the Girls' Education Programme 3 (GEP3), an 8-year project (running from 2012 to 2020) which sought to improve school access, retention, and learning outcomes for girls in five northern Nigerian states. Working in predominantly Muslim states, my role was to support the quality aspect of the programme - ensuring that whilst girls were in school and supported, they were also accessing quality learning. I helped develop an early grade reading programme that successfully improved literacy and numeracy outcomes for children in the schools, as well as developing a school-based teacher training strategy which helped to improve the capacities of teachers to teach. These interventions were designed to also support gender-responsive teaching at the classroom level to improve outcomes, such as ensuring that teaching content does not compound gender stereotypes and that girls and boys are given equal opportunities to learn and take on classroom-based roles, such as prefects and class monitors.

Creating a gender-responsive educational environment requires a range of interventions to be implemented and monitored. This can start with ensuring that headteachers

are implementing school standards and guidelines which state that both boys and girls are required to be in school. Female representation amongst teachers is also important, and often there are more male teachers and headteachers than female. In a gender-responsive environment, it is vital that champions and role models are available who girls will go to for help, support, counselling, and mentoring.

Tackling inequitable gender norms

Between 2014-2015, Sierra Leone experienced an Ebola epidemic, which impacted families, communities, the health system, and economy. During the epidemic, schools were closed, and girls experienced more sexual harassment and abuse. By the time schools re-opened, many were pregnant and could not come back to school due to preventative readmission policies.

I was posted to Sierra Leone to work with the Minister of Education and local communities to ensure the safe return of adolescent and pregnant girls to school. I also developed complementary programmes that would help them learn and transition back into the school system. 14,000 girls emerging from early pregnancies were able to access the accelerated learning programmes and receive support to continue their education, 50% of whom returned to the school system.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls' education raises similar issues. I am currently working in Malawi, where we are concluding work developing a readmission policy to enable girls who have become pregnant during the pandemic to return to school. In Malawi, over 40,000 girls have been impregnated and engaged in child marriages. Through the readmission policy, we have now targeted these girls and supported their return to school. As part of this, in some schools we have provided childcare centres so girls can take their young children with them and continue to access school.

Addressing readmission policies and ensuring there are national standards and guidelines in place to support and encourage pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers to



return to school is an important step in addressing barriers to girls' education. Whilst it has an impact at the school level, such policies and the recent positive results also have an impact at the community level, by helping to break stereotypes and social norms about who can go to school and by improving the support that schools will provide to girls facing such challenges.

Scholarships to boost girls' access to education

In Malawi, the number of girls accessing lower primary education compared to boys is even until ages 11-13. At this point, we see many adolescent girls dropping out, with a limited number transitioning to secondary education. Primary education in Malawi is free but the inability to afford the costs of secondary education can present a significant challenge to girls continuing their education.

To tackle this challenge, I have also worked with the Minister of Education to introduce merit-based scholarships for girls to access and complete secondary education. The scholarships have led to an annual increase of 10,000 girls completing secondary education, approximately 10% of whom were from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds. For those from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is important to remember that their backgrounds can continue to affect them even when they are in school. As such, we have followed up with these girls through specific programmes of coaching

and mentoring, as well as girls empowerment camps, to support their progress.

I have further expanded access to secondary education for adolescent girls in Malawi by developing a free secondary education policy framework and strategies. To ensure education systems are gender-responsive, I supported capacity development for secondary school teachers in gender-responsive teaching methods, training over 1,000 teachers in applying these to improve teaching and learning at the classroom level.

Providing an enabling environment for girls to come to school has also led to the introduction of interventions to tackle barriers beyond the curriculum, including gender-based violence and promoting menstrual hygiene through the provision of water and sanitation facilities. Over the one-year period of the intervention, there has been a 20% reduction in school-related gender-based violence, and the introduction of school mentors in over 500 secondary schools has empowered girls and schools to report cases of violence.

My work with UNICEF across various organisational, community, and national levels, means I have been part of building systems and working with people who are also champions of girls' education. In this way I am able to see and feel fulfilled by how work directed towards equitable access to education is making a difference.

CK

From dreams to reality

Determined, **R**esilient, **E**mpowered,
AIDS free, **M**entored and **S**afe

DREAMS is the flagship programme of the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) aims to reduce rates of HIV amongst adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in countries with the highest HIV rates. USAID reports that AGYW account for 74% of new HIV infections amongst adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa and nearly 1,000 AGYW are infected every day.



Steven Mtendere Bwanali

2015 Commonwealth
Distance Learning Scholar

Malawi

MA Education

University of Nottingham



The DREAMS programmes target AGYW aged between 10-24 through various interventions aimed at building their social assets, such as support networks, and equipping them with skills to navigate their social settings in a holistic manner. The interventions also include working with guardians and parents to improve their day-to-day living to support the girls and provide for their needs until they become independent.

Tackling the barriers to girls' education

As a Technical Specialist in Education/Social Asset Building, I am working on project implementation in eight districts in southern Malawi under the Bantwana World Education Initiative. This is part of an ambitious five-year DREAMS programme targeting 57,000 AGYW to equip them with social asset building, education support, school reintegration, and many other evidence-based interventions aimed at helping AGYW remain safe, navigate their social settings, and reduce their vulnerability. AGYW can often fall victim to societal norms, including early/child marriages (resulting in high drop-out rates amongst girls whose families value boys' education over girls'), alongside harmful cultural practices that put them at risk of contracting HIV and AIDS.

The project works with five local organisations and my role is to provide technical assistance and guidance on issues related to education support. The organisations I am working with are present in each of the districts and therefore already have a presence and familiarity with the issues facing AGYW in these areas. As part of

my role, I am also supporting these local organisations to build their capacity to undertake wider programmes and seek funding opportunities from international NGOs for future interventions.

My Dream, My Choice

The districts chosen for the programme were selected following extensive research in Malawi on the areas with the highest risks to girls' education and the highest HIV rates amongst AGYW. Whilst previous projects have provided education support, the programme I am currently working on is in the process of slowly changing the cultural or societal norms surrounding the girl child. These changes are necessary for the development of a country: if a girl has been educated, that means her family has also been educated, and the girls' future family is in turn more likely to be educated too.

Our holistic approach operates in the knowledge that when a girl has been through school and has been fully supported, they are empowered and able to negotiate their rights in relation to early/child marriage and other cultural issues. The interventions developed target



DREAMS girls participating in a mentorship session

different stages of life for AGYWs between 10-24 years of age. They are broken down into age bands and are responsive to the specific risks AGYWs may face at these ages: 10-14, 15-19, and 20-24.

The materials and curriculums that are used as part of the programme are evidence-based and adopted from existing curriculums developed by researchers. As a technical specialist, I am responsible for reviewing the curriculum in the context of Malawi and changing and adapting things to the local culture and social context. I was involved mostly in identifying existing curriculums in other countries and reviewing what could be adopted to create a new, evidence-based curriculum for Malawi. Local Malawians were also included in developing the materials for the Malawi DREAMS toolkit. It is called the 'My Dream, My Choice' toolkit.

Beyond the dream

Through this programme, myself and others involved have been able to incorporate wider interventions designed to support delivery. This has included introducing an 'Early Warning System', designed to identify girls at risk of dropping out of school, and training the school communities and authorities on

monitoring retention rates and delivering specific interventions for those at risk.

We have also introduced the Girls Literacy Plus programme for girls who have dropped out of school or entered an early marriage, but who are now reintegrating into the school system. We provide a 6-week long accelerated learning programme and curriculum, which has been developed with a local partner and is specifically designed to help such girls re-familiarise themselves with the school curriculum and context.

In all our interventions, or when we're giving education support, the community is a part of the process of identifying the girls that need this type of support. Community members also engage with our project officers and projects more generally. This is a two-way process, where we are also able to learn from communities as to how we and they can best support girls' access to education.

One example of this is called the Mother Group. These groups are made up of mothers from the villages around a school and they are all trained in making reusable sanitary pads. UNESCO estimates that 1 in 10 girls in Africa will miss school during their period. This is

Our holistic approach operates in the knowledge that when a girl has been through school and has been fully supported, they are empowered and able to negotiate their rights in relation to early/child marriage and other cultural issues"



DREAMS Girls being trained as facilitators for a self-defense curriculum

partly due to an inability to afford or access disposable sanitary pads in some villages. As part of the group, mothers teach the girls about sanitary hygiene and how they can make their own reusable sanitary pads.

As well as providing sanitary pads and information, the Mother Groups provide an approach to which we felt the girls would be able to relate. The women are from their own communities, they are older and may have experienced similar issues which the girls are now facing. When they can share these experiences in a different setting, away from their homes and school, the girls often hear or listen more attentively. Whereas teachers are there to get paid and do their duty as per the interventions implemented, their level of understanding of the cultural issues is often not the same as within the Mother Groups, where the women are from the girls' community and understand their background.

In trying to deal with the harmful impacts of cultural or societal norms on girls' education and health, we do not just go directly to the villages or the school. We also target community leaders, starting with chiefs or district authorities, who will introduce us and our project to local people. We outline the objectives of the project so they can understand why we are saying certain norms they are practicing are not good for girls and for girls' education, whilst acknowledging it is part of what they are used to doing and part of what their ancestors or their forefathers have been doing. It is a slow process but gradually we are seeing some changes and hopefully one day the story we will tell will describe a significantly changed situation for girls.

Evaluating DREAMS

Every girl enrolled in the DREAMS programme is assigned a unique identifier code which enables us to monitor and follow-up on their progress across the programme as well as their experiences of the intervention measures. This tracking system will enable us to know when we have reached the target 57,000 girls and to plan for future targets.

Challenges still remain, such as sustaining good interventions after projects are phased out. This is particularly true for the practice of changing societal norms as this cannot be achieved in a short period of time and instead requires long-term, sustainable approaches that communities can adapt and carry on even when the project is long gone. However, I remain optimistic. I have seen previous projects implemented under different names or organisations bring about major shifts in the number of girls that are able to complete school and in the reduction in the number of teenage pregnancies. I am confident and hopeful that this project will do too.

CK



An ecological approach to women's empowerment



Petua Isabirye Babirye explains her work which advocates for change in how girls are perceived at a cultural level – as well as implementing practical measures to improve the conditions which girls and women face in schools and workplaces across Uganda.

Petua Isabirye Babirye

2013 Commonwealth Scholar

Uganda

MA Education

University of York

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in Uganda is mandated to eliminate and redress discrimination and inequalities against any individual or group of persons on the grounds of sex, age, race, colour, ethnic origin, tribe, birth, creed or religion, health status, social or economic standing, political opinion, or disability.

In Uganda, women are one of the most marginalised categories of persons. As a woman who went through some of the challenges which still exist for girls today, I am using my studies and role as the Principal Education Officer for the EOC to identify and eliminate the challenges which stand in the way of girls achieving equal access and participation in education and, ultimately, their full potential.

An ecological approach

During my Commonwealth Scholarship, my studies focused on gender and equity and how, despite several interventions implemented in Uganda to mitigate the barriers impeding girls from participating in education, research reveals high numbers of girls continue to drop out of school. Reasons for this include families financing education for boys over girls, sexual harassment, and a lack of washrooms and toilet facilities to support girls during menstruation. In response, I focused my research on the need for an ecological model and approach, which would take into consideration all sectors and factors which affect girls' education. Education cannot be effective in isolation; it is dependent upon the successful resolution of various cultural issues and the support of various stakeholders.

When policies are being developed, we need guidelines which speak to every stakeholder; we want to speak to the parents and the community around the girl; we want to speak to the caretakers within the school; and we want to speak to the ministry and members of parliament who make decisions.

Addressing the skills and attitudes of those involved in delivering girls' education is critical to achieving access and opportunity. During my dissertation, I looked at the

knowledge and perceptions of teachers, caregivers, and community members as to what they think a girl is. There were some concerning findings from those responsible for protecting girls. My research identified that in some cases, girls were being raped and impregnated by teachers, and the perpetrators received no repercussions.

Implementing the ecological approach developed during my studies has resulted in the creation of guidelines for each of the stakeholders working in or across girls' education, including the school, community, and family. Before a girl starts school, marginalisation and discrimination can begin at home and within their community. Social constructs often result in the marginalisation of girls, as cultural and practiced norms perpetuate attitudes that girls cannot perform at the same level as boys. Through the EOC and the Department of Education and Communications, we have an objective to educate the public around issues of discrimination and marginalisation. In relation to girls, we educate the public on the issues they face, their importance, their abilities, and on the fact that equal opportunities must be available to them.

District-specific interventions

Previous policies and interventions have been implemented to tackle these issues at the national level. However, through the ecological model, we approach the design of district-specific policies with the understanding that they each have unique challenges impeding girls' education. For example, districts which have fishing as an economic activity are often hard-to-reach as communities are spread across islands. Once we understand these challenges, we can design appropriate interventions to support girls in these areas.

Education cannot be effective in isolation; it is dependent upon the successful resolution of various cultural issues and the support of various stakeholders."

At the EOC, we have the advantage of reviewing all government policies to ensure compliance and response to gender and equity issues. As well as reviewing policies, we are now responsible for training all new members of parliament in gender and equity to ensure they understand and can develop gender-responsive and sector-specific policies which go beyond the issue of women's emancipation. This training also provides an opportunity for the EOC to tell them where we are coming from, where we are, and where we want to go in relation to gender and equity, as well as building the capacity of policymakers to understand what to include in their policies.

Tackling barriers to employment

I am currently coordinating a programme at the EOC on women in the public sector. This is a further output of my dissertation which acknowledges that even when girls manage the challenges faced at the school-level, those who make it into the public sector still encounter many challenges in taking up leadership positions and making independent decisions, due to factors such as low self-esteem, low placement of women in the sector, and sexual harassment.

The programme seeks to address these challenges by engaging women at all levels in the public sector, from those at the entry point to women that have made it into leadership positions. Our discussions highlight that in some cases, these women are still traumatised and marginalised by male counterparts who think that women cannot perform at the same level as men.

We have realised that laws for women in the public sector are not gender responsive and have recommended a review of these policies in order to promote and protect women in the sector. Applying the ecological perspective, you cannot empower women without the support of other women and people around them. We are therefore recruiting male champions at all ages and levels and providing a platform for them to understand the issues that women have and continue to face so that they can support them in the workplace.

There is a significant correlation between the challenges girls face in accessing education and those faced by women joining the workplace. The general current perception is that after they have finished school, girls will be empowered enough to stand as women, to fight for their spaces and rights. The reality is that women still face challenges that we need to allocate resources towards tackling, so that they can access leadership positions, create a safe and supportive environment

for the next generation of girls, and go out to schools to encourage those girls to become independent.

Training on the ground

The training provided for those in the public sector has also now been replicated in schools, by providing training and dialogues through school clubs. This has included discussing topics seen as taboo, such as menstruation, with boys so that they can normalise and understand them, and advocate for girls to have their own toilets and washrooms in schools. I have worked closely with the Ministry of Education as a consultant on menstrual hygiene and management and have helped develop communication materials to share with various stakeholders. I have also trained mentors to support and encourage girls in schools and have facilitated the school clubs, which has involved travelling around Uganda to implement these interventions and see my ecological approach in action.

The mentoring programme provides an opportunity for women to show how they have overcome challenges while growing up and have made it to where they are now. The girls feel encouraged after meeting the mentors because most of them, including myself, studied in the rural areas of Uganda and our examples are therefore relatable. We are also able to show the difference between what the community or culture is saying about girls and women, and how we present ourselves in reality.

Now that I am influencing policy and other stakeholders through the ecological approach, we are beginning to see change. I know that communities will become increasingly positive about girls' education as we challenge the various aspects of culture which affect or impede girls' development, achievement, and ultimate fulfilment in life.

CK





The CSC's Time Limited Programme for 2021-22: Professional Fellowships in Girls' Education

Each year, the CSC offers Professional Fellowships for mid-career professionals from low and middle income countries to spend a period of time at a UK host organisation for a programme of professional development. The Fellowships provide recipients with an opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills in their given sector, and to have catalytic effects on their workplaces and beneficiaries after their placement.

In 2021-22, Professional Fellowships are being offered as part of our Time Limited Programme (TLP). The TLP is a year-long programme of activities and events which have a particular focus. Previous TLPs supported work on disability, and The Gambia re-joining the Commonwealth. This year, the TLP is focused on promoting Girls' Education as part of the UK government's ambitious initiative to get 40 million more girls from low and middle income countries into primary and secondary school by 2026 and improve learning levels, so that girls can achieve their full potential.

Professional Fellowships comprise one strand of the TLP's activities this year and will be bolstered by a range of other activities designed to support the Fellows and to underpin the importance of work in this area. These include a year-long engagement and communications strategy focused on promoting Girls' Education; alumni

events held across the Commonwealth; and additional support being provided to the CSC's 'Access, Inclusion and Opportunity' online Knowledge Hub.

Our 5 host partners were selected for the Professional Fellowship programme in late 2021, and a total of 29 Fellows have been selected. Our host partners will welcome the Fellows when they arrive in the UK in March 2022 and throughout their 3-month stay. This is the first year the CSC has facilitated a Professional Fellowship programme that focuses on one theme and that runs concurrently at all host organisations. Offering the programme in this way allows for and encourages collaboration between hosts, who will each also hold engagement activities during the programme at each site around the country. These events will allow for more opportunities for Fellows to learn from each other and make connections across the whole cohort.

Meet some of this year's Professional Fellows

Dr Rosa Marina Persendt

Namibia

Lecturer at the University of Namibia

Cardiff University Phoenix Project



With the information and connections I will gather over the course of this Fellowship, I hope to contribute towards improving public school education amongst girls in rural areas in Namibia. Implementing a safe space for girls to study and work, improving access to information regarding women and girls' health, creating an ecosystem of peer-to-peer training where girls (and eventually boys) can advocate for each other and learn about issues such as gender-based violence and the importance of education: these are some of the schemes and ideas I look forward to exploring over the course of this Fellowship. Ultimately, I hope they will result in a decrease in gender-based violence and educational inequality in Namibia.

Gohar Zaman

Pakistan

Deputy Commissioner at the Capital Development Authority

Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation



I strongly believe that ICT can play an important role in empowering women through education and skills development. But I also know that this requires new public policy initiatives. I will soon be posted to the education department of my province, where I will be directly involved in public policy design and implementation – and will therefore have the potential to greatly enhance girls' access to quality education through ICT. To make the most of this opportunity, I am embarking on this Fellowship to gain the skills and knowledge that will help achieve my objectives to enable girls in the remote and tribal areas of Pakistan to access quality education and thus contribute to the overall target of getting 40 million more girls in schools by 2026.

29 Professional Fellows have been selected from the following countries:



Fellows will be welcomed to the following host organisations:

Cardiff University's Phoenix Project – Cardiff, Wales, UK

Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation – London, UK

Knowledge For Change – Skipton, UK

Lifegate Outreach Centre – Walsall, UK

Windle Trust International – Oxford, UK

Duncan Mutisya Kamau

Kenya

Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant, Windle International Kenya

Windle Trust International



I would like to explore how Windle International Kenya's Girls' Education strategies and frameworks can be strengthened. I see it as an opportunity to observe how real-world problems slowing down access to education for girls in East Africa are being resolved by Program Managers at the Windle Trust International and at other international development levels. Among the strategies that promote girls' education that I would like to develop/learn over the course of the Fellowship are media and communication practices, safety toolkits, and special needs awareness and empowerment campaigns.

Mary Kobugabe

Uganda

Community Development Officer, West Division Fort Portal City

Knowledge for Change



The Fellowship will help me to acquire skills in leadership, mentorship and training, alongside helping me to build up my knowledge base in Girls' Education, sex education, sexuality and gender. Upon returning to Fort Portal, I will then be in a better position to engage with all educational stakeholders in my community to identify the challenges faced by girls in school and devise solutions to these issues. I am particularly interested in sharing the knowledge and expertise I will build up through the Fellowship through music, dance, and drama at schools and to establish a local radio talk programme with the help of educational partners, where community sensitisation on Girls' Education will be carried out through radio talk shows, skits, songs, and plays.

New research, new knowledge

The CSC Research Impact Awards (RIA) (previously the Best Journal Article Prize) celebrate the research and publication endeavours of doctoral Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni at the early and mid-career researcher stages. The annual awards are offered through two streams, with an annual topical prize also available to entrants.

In this article, the winners of the 2021 CSC Research Impact Awards and two fellow finalists summarise their pioneering research.



Professor Dr Muhammed Shafiq-Ur Rahman

2009 Commonwealth Scholar

Bangladesh

PhD Transport Studies

University of Leeds

2016 Academic Fellow

Transportation

University of Leeds

The Taylor & Francis CSC Research implementation and uptake stream

Professor Dr M. Shafiq-Ur Rahman is the winner of the 2021 Taylor & Francis CSC Research implementation and uptake stream for his article 'Public bike-sharing schemes (PBSS): Prospects in Bangladesh' published in *Transport Research Part A: Policy and Practice*.

My article discusses the feasibility of implementing public bike-sharing schemes (PBSS) in Bangladesh, particularly in Dhaka City. As part of my research, I conducted a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis in case study locations in Dhaka. Based on the guidelines and suggestions provided in the paper, the PBSS has been implemented in seven different locations. Through a collaboration with private company, Jobike Limited, the first of these bike sharing schemes was rolled out at Jahangirnagar University campus, where I work.

Local people have welcomed the PBSS, which has helped solve several transport-related issues, including alleviating air pollution and providing greater access to transport. This sustainable low-cost travel solution has cut travel times for both regular and recreational users of PBSS and its success has been broadcast in electronic media and newspapers throughout Bangladesh.

Thus, my research has had a high impact in addressing global challenges related to good health and well-being, such as mobility problems and air pollution that exist in many cities in low and middle income countries.

Findings from my research have been included in the course curricula of both undergraduate and master's level city/transport planning modules of several universities in Bangladesh. Seven students have conducted their undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations on topics related to PBSS.

The findings have also been presented in a congress seminar held on 'World Cities Day 2019' in Dhaka and an earlier version of this article was presented at the 13th International Conference of the Eastern Asia Society for Transportation Studies (EASTS) on "Redesigning Transport & Logistics for the Rise of Asia" in 2019. Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA), the apex body for transportation planning and management of Dhaka city, has conducted a feasibility study to assess implementing PBSS in Dhaka city and a scoping study is underway. Consultation meetings have also been held with NGOs in Dhaka to share the results of the research and encourage wider implementation.



Dr Dacia Leslie

2011 Commonwealth Scholar

Jamaica

PhD Criminology

Cardiff University



CSC Research output stream

Dr Dacia Leslie is the winner of the 2021 CSC Research output stream for her article 'Reassessing Conditions of "Prison" in Jamaica' published in *International Criminal Justice Review*.

Finding ways to effectively re/integrate ex-prisoners into mainstream society remains a pressing but complex social, economic and moral challenge globally, as we seek to achieve just, peaceful and inclusive societies by 2030 (UN SDG 16). Prison populations worldwide continue to rise despite overwhelming evidence of the low return on investment that the prison sentence provides as a default sanction. This is especially true for young people and children.

In Jamaica, about 1 in 2 newly released adults will either be re-arrested or returned to prison, many leaving children behind unsupervised after having re-entered the community ill-prepared. By drawing on primary and secondary data, my article explores these issues and makes recommendations on how the high rate of violent crime can be tackled by ensuring that inmates are better-empowered to lead crime-free, productive, and dignified lives in prison and upon release.

Findings from the paper have been reflected in the Caribbean Youth Advocacy & Action Agenda on Violence Prevention, entitled 'Creating a Culture of Peace'. They have also contributed towards the monitoring and evaluation framework for Jamaica's National Poverty Reduction Programme. Both of these outcomes help foreground the concerns of persons deprived of liberty on the national and regional policy agendas and help continue to amplify the experiences of ex-offenders by promoting and advocating for their social reintegration needs.

The needs spotlighted in the article have also inspired the formation of the Crime Prevention and Offender Management (CPOM) research cluster, which I chair and which advocates for criminal justice reform in the Caribbean region through collaboration and research. This advocacy work continues and complements broader efforts to strengthen global peace, security, and governance through promoting the social inclusion and citizenship of inmates and ex-offenders (including deported migrants). This research work has included developing an Integrated Strategic Plan for witness care in Jamaica which was formally presented to the Minister of Justice, the Honourable Delroy Chuck, QC, MP, on 28 October 2020 on behalf of Global Affairs Canada and the United Nations Development Programme.

Bovinille Anye Cho

2019 Commonwealth Scholar

Cameroon

PhD Process Integration

University of Manchester



RIA Annual topical prize- climate change related research

Bovinille Anye Cho is the winner of this year's annual topical prize for climate change related research for his article 'Synergising biomass growth kinetics and transport mechanisms to simulate light/dark cycle effects on photo-production systems', published in *Biotechnology and Bioengineering*.

Whilst waste is an inevitable consequence of industrialisation and rapid urbanisation, the production of clean and renewable energy is a pressing requirement to sustainably meet urgent demands. The world's energy demand is dependent on fossil fuel-based energy sources, which account for 80% of the world's energy and have brought about serious global environmental problems.

Bioenergy, derived from direct sunlight and waste organics (a product of industrialisation and rapid urbanisation) in specialised types of bioreactors, namely photobioreactors (PBRs), are regarded as clean fuels with great potential for substituting fossil fuels. However, the efficient design and upscaling of these PBRs to sustainably meet the ever-increasing energy demands has been limited primarily by light attenuation challenges. In other words, the uneven availability of local light availability for photosynthetic conversion by microbial cells in PBRs.

To tackle this dilemma, in my article I propose the first mechanistic model which enables the modelling and optimisation of cell light/dark cycles within these PBRs. As a result, cells within the PBR's dark region can be frequently transferred to the light region for photosynthesis, thereby alleviating light attenuation while maintaining a high biomass growth rate and biofuel production. This research presents an important biotechnological advancement for the economic viability of sustainable biofuel production in PBRs.

Highly commended entries



Ranjot Kaur

2017 Split-site Scholar

India

PhD Pharmacology

University of Central Lancashire and Panjab University



Sheikh Taslim Ali

2011 Split-site Scholar

India

PhD Statistics

Imperial College London and Karnatak University



The Taylor & Francis CSC Research implementation and uptake stream

Ranjot Kaur was highly commended for her article 'Nebulised surface active hybrid nanoparticles of voriconazole for pulmonary Aspergillosis demonstrate clathrin mediated cellular uptake, improved antifungal efficacy and lung retention', published in the *Journal of Nanobiotechnology*.

Microbial lung infections have raised concerns in clinical healthcare, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The causative microbes primarily target immunocompromised people, thereby causing lung superinfections like pneumonia, aspergillosis, and mucormycosis. My research work explores the untapped potential of inhalational drug delivery, together with nanotechnology, for effective management of fungal lung infections.

An unprecedented upsurge in COVID-19 associated pulmonary aspergillosis (a condition usually caused by inhaling tiny bits of mould) has further complicated treatment in coronavirus-affected patients, increasing their mortality rates by approximately 50%. Scientists in these situations often struggle to attain and retain an adequate amount of drugs at the infection site. Aerosolisation of antimicrobials, in this context, has gained immense importance for the treatment of lung infections, as the drug is rapidly and directly available at the infection site.

Biomimetic surface-active lipid-polymer hybrid nanoparticles of a first-line antifungal drug were formulated using principles of Quality-by-Design, employing a lung-specific lipid and a natural biodegradable polymer. The optimised nanocarriers, thoroughly characterised using extensive in vitro and in vivo studies, exhibited their ability to cross the physical, biochemical, and cellular barriers of lungs, following nebulisation. Current studies show immense potential of the inhalable systems developed in effectively targeting the lungs. The knowledge and know-how gathered from my current research will enable researchers working in inhalational drug delivery to develop the next-generation aerosol systems to improve lung targeting.

CSC Research output stream

Sheikh Taslim Ali was highly commended for his article 'Serial interval of SARS-CoV-2 was shortened over time by nonpharmaceutical interventions', published in *Science*.

In infectious disease epidemiology it is important to understand the disease dynamics at real-time scale to develop optimal interventions to mitigate or control infections. Correctly estimating the related epidemiological parameters is essential for better mitigation strategies against any infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

COVID-19 has affected every dimension of life across the world. Many countries have been tracking COVID-19 via the daily reproductive number (R_t) to measure transmissibility and inform better real-time interventions. A critical component of this is reviewing the time between the onset of the illness in the primary case and in the secondary case. This is known as the serial interval.

For COVID-19, several studies have estimated that the mean serial interval is around 7 days. In this study, however, we showed that the serial interval may not be constant over time. In China, for example, our study showed the mean effective serial intervals shortened from 7.8 days initially, to 2.6 days towards the end of the first epidemic wave. The reason for this decline is the enhanced nonpharmaceutical interventions, particularly the timely identification and isolation of cases. This approach reduces post-symptomatic transmission so that more of the transmission that occurs is pre-symptomatic. On average, this leads to shorter serial intervals.

This is a completely novel finding leading to a number of follow-up studies identifying a similar phenomenon elsewhere, and has opened several scopes of methodological developments in approaches to estimating R_t . The real-time assessment of temporal changes in the serial interval distribution allows more accurate and timely estimates of R_t than the traditional estimates. These findings will lead to the improved assessment of transmission dynamics and prediction of future incidence, as well as improving real-time impact evaluation of control measures, providing timely and better mitigation and containment public health policies.

Equity begins at home



Aboabea Akuffo unravels the puzzle regarding gender disparity and the familial micro-politics underpinning girls' access to secondary education in Ghana.

In 2017, Ghana took significant steps towards translating the global education goal SDG 4 into practice with the introduction of the free Senior High School (SHS) policy. It aimed to enable qualified Junior High School candidates, especially girls, to transition to SHS at around 15 years old. The initiative was spearheaded by President Nana Addo Dankwah Akufo-Addo to tackle the estimated one-third of students who passed the exam to attend senior high school each year but could not afford to attend. It thereby focused heavily on the economic disparities affecting education access.



Aboabea Akuffo

2018 Commonwealth Scholar

Ghana

PhD in Sociology (Gender, Education and Family)

University of Oxford



With the first cohort of students to benefit from the Free SHS policy having graduated in 2021, I set out to evaluate whether education access is not just economically determined, but also gendered and regionally varied. These are two factors that are too rarely recognised within the data of the education ministry in Ghana and the international education community.

A review of the existing literature suggests that most academic studies undertaken so far have focused disproportionately on macro and organisational-level structural interventions, such as government policy changes. They have often overlooked the enabling and inhibiting role of the family and micro-level politics at the household level in determining who receives an education. Research which analyses the interface between the micro and macro-level factors that affect girls' access to education is rare.

My focus now is to look at the interface between specific structural educational interventions in context-specific areas and the micro-politics at the household level to understand how families are taking advantage of structural educational interventions to educate their girls. The findings through my Commonwealth Scholarship will help government to tailor interventions and policies so that they can enable every person, especially girls, to take advantage of such interventions. The research will specifically help the government measure how its flagship Free SHS policy (introduced in 2017) is faring in places that have traditionally had more education access versus those places with less access, not only from the usual quantitative trend of analyses but also from a qualitative perspective, in order to give an accurate picture of individual context and regional variability.

To gather this evidence, I am examining the relationships at the micro level, the varying interests at play, and the politics that characterise relationships. I am also looking at how people negotiate their way around such interventions to enable them to enrol their girls in school. My work aims to discover:

- What are the political triggers at the micro-level that inform which child is chosen to take advantage of structural education interventions?
- Who determines who gets enrolled in response to structural policies and why?
- What other underlying family circumstances determine which child is enrolled in high school?

To answer these questions, I collected data from 328 interviewees drawn from 6 regions, 12 districts, and 24 communities in Ghana. These interviewees included children who qualified for the transition from Junior High School (JHS) to Senior High School (SHS), the guardians

or relatives of these children, policy implementers and policy makers, and NGO representatives whose work interlaced with girls non (access) to education. Interviews with policy makers explored the interesting reliefs that the policy provides such as removing costs, improving infrastructure, and increasing the proximity of children to schools. The differential implementation approaches of policy implementers were also examined.

The exploration of the policy and its implementation provided context to explore the household micro-level realities and how people negotiate access. Significantly, this research will help us to better understand how structural policies and family politics shape the education of girls.

Challenging the national context

Ghana has a reputation for exemplary education policy and structural intervention initiatives with free education for everyone. Drop-out rates however remain high, with the rate increasing the higher one goes up the academic ladder. Ongoing barriers which are impeding children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from accessing education include requirements for parents to buy expensive items – from selected textbooks to mattresses and a long list of other items – prior to their children's enrolment.

Whilst the new access policy seeks to solve these issues, by making secondary education free for everyone, the efforts are often impacted by the inequality axes of gender, differential economic quantiles, regional disparity, and school-based disparity. For example, there are instances where students have been allocated schools that are very far away, requiring parents to either invest in expensive travel costs or to rent accommodation closer to the school. This latter example brings its own risks for minors living away from home that are particularly acute for girls, in turn engendering a further barrier to equitable education opportunities.

Economic barriers to education disproportionately affect girls. My research so far has shown that parents are often more likely to purchase required additional items such as textbooks for their sons rather than daughters, given the higher value that is placed on boys' education in Ghanaian society. This stems from ongoing trends that show men to earn more than women in the labour market. As a result, men are seen to gain more economically from their education than women. There are also the cultural expectations for girls to be quieter and more obedient in accepting their parents' decision that I would like to explore further in my research to see whether this factor disadvantages girls in negotiating their right to an education.

Economic barriers to education disproportionately affect girls.”

Transforming society through the social reproduction of knowledge

The results of my research so far support the hypothesis that the Free SHS policy only considered economic disparities while trying to improve education access for all, rather than taking vital gender disparities into account. It also shows that the effectiveness of the policy differs between regions and subgroups, and that the narrow conceptualisation of some of the issues the policy aims to tackle and the marginalisation of deeper concerns (such as gender, regional and geographic factors) continues to drive non-access.

Against this backdrop, I hope to submit context-specific briefs on the policy to the Ministry of Education in Ghana, highlighting the issues and the proposed solutions based on the research evidence. At the international level, I hope to engage UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report with my findings about the new ways of exploring data. To this end, I have introduced the concept of a Gender Disparity Index (GDI) to provide a clearer picture of gendered non-access that recognises gender disparity as a wider socio-cultural issue. This is simple but novel, and I hope it can be adopted at the global level to enable a new understanding of disparity in addition to the Gender Parity Index (GPI) that is usually calculated to make sense of the gains that have been made in this

area. I believe countries with similar education policies to Ghana's will also benefit from the findings and that Ghana's access policy could become a model on how to overcome gender disparities. I hope to engage the Ministry of Education on this.

In the future, I seek to continue exploring structural interventions: how they fuel the multi-dimensional character of gender relations, and how girls and women are taking advantage of such interventions. I am also interested in power relations, especially how education results in changing gender relations and whether it reflects gender decomposition, re-composition, or intensification.

I have come to appreciate that part of what makes my chosen academic and career path special is the opportunity to transform society through the social reproduction of knowledge. I consider lecturing to be a powerful instrument in transforming society. It is also my desire to discover new things through research and to mentor the many more women still struggling to break the glass ceiling. For this, I will need the best training. I know that my Scholarship will be a great opportunity to help me on this path, to make intellectual contributions to the body of knowledge in Ghana and in other scholarly circles, and to put me in the best position to mentor others.

CK



More than meets the eye

Kerissa Nelson explains the need for girls with dyslexia to be provided with more structured psycho-emotional support inside an inclusive classroom.



Kerissa Nelson

2018 Commonwealth Scholar

Jamaica

PhD in Education

University of Plymouth



“[A girl with dyslexia] might not want to take up job offers in future where she has to speak or read out loud because she does not want to risk re-living the emotional pain she felt at school”

Dyslexia is a common learning difference which is experienced by boys and girls to differing degrees. Whereas the causes and treatment for dyslexia are active areas of research, few studies are available on girls with a range of special education needs, including dyslexia.

The research carried out during my Commonwealth Scholarship looked into the psycho-emotional experiences of mainstream secondary school students with dyslexia, the majority of whom were girls. I am particularly keen to understand how students with dyslexia feel when transitioning from primary to secondary school, and how this learning difference can affect their identity. My study also aims to highlight the importance of an appropriate amount of support to enable students with dyslexia to achieve their overall academic potential.

The goal of my research is twofold: to increase the level of knowledge around dyslexia and to promote a better understanding of the psycho-emotional experiences of students with dyslexia (SWD) in mainstream classrooms to help teachers as they consider SWD's perspectives in informing their teaching practices. As most of my participants were girls, my research ended up providing particularly important and rare insights into the psycho-emotional experiences of girls with dyslexia.

Over the past year I compiled a series of case studies involving semi-structured interviews over Zoom with secondary school SWDs from South West England, the teachers and teaching assistants of those students, alongside university students with dyslexia who reflected on their experiences in secondary school. The secondary school students I interviewed were between the ages of 16 and 18, a critical stage in the development of an individual's identity and self-esteem. These interviews were enlightening. They showed how tackling the challenges of dyslexia adds another significant layer of complexity to young people's development.

As I am still in the process of finalising and writing up my findings, I can only provide early indications as to what my findings suggest. However, I can already say that based on the responses in the interviews, and following thematic analyses, the evidence so far suggests dyslexia has a striking impact on students' identity. This seems to be especially true for girls, and their sense of identity varies depending on their coping skills and the relationship that students have with their social circumstances.

Preliminary findings indicate that the majority of girls with dyslexia that I studied showed evidence of coping skills such as resilience and good self-esteem. But their relationships with others in the school community still had a significant impact on their identity. In practice, this might mean that a girl with dyslexia may feel different and/or less than others because of her learning difference. For example, if a girl is in a classroom and cannot read as well as her peers, but she is called upon to read out loud and does not receive a supportive reaction from her peers or teachers (such as laughter, sounds of impatience, and other humiliating responses) it might negatively affect her psycho-emotional well-being as well as her identity. This might lead to her not wanting to take up job offers in future where she has to speak or read out loud because she does not want to risk re-living the emotional pain she felt at school. I hypothesise, therefore, that the risk of dyslexia affecting a girl's sense of identity in the long-term varies according to her sociocultural experience and the level of support which she receives at school.

This relationship is why schools must enact inclusive policies involving all students. I hope that if I achieve the practical component of my research, it would mean that creating an inclusive environment with inclusive teaching methods for these students would no longer force teachers into the uncomfortable position of having to guess how they can support their SWDs, but that instead intervention methods would be based on clear evidence and strategic aims.

Following my Commonwealth Scholarship, I hope to carry out post-doctoral studies, and use information from my PhD thesis to develop strategies and a toolkit that can be introduced to teachers in secondary schools and be implemented in the school curriculum, to improve the experiences of students with dyslexia. Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic meant I was unable to conduct my research in-person within schools, I would also like to deepen my qualitative data by facilitating the creation of video diaries with participants in person. I believe this would be another important step towards improving our existing understanding of what it means to be a young person and girl with dyslexia.

CK

Scholar events

Over the past year, we've been delighted to see the return of many in-person Scholar events, as well as retaining the benefits for learning, sharing and collaboration across continents, countries and regions that the virtual sphere continues to offer through online and hybrid events. We're pleased to share a snapshot of those events with you here.

Leaders for Sustainable Development Programme

First launched in 2018 as the Development Training Programme, the aim is to provide a committed and motivated community of Scholars with opportunities to share learnings on how Scholars can enact change across the CSC's six development themes upon their return home. Here is a taste of just a few of the 26 workshops that have taken place virtually since July 2021.

Writing for Development

This session focused on development concepts and principles and how they apply to research: who are the main actors and institutions in international development? What skills and expertise are required as a researcher working in the field of international development?

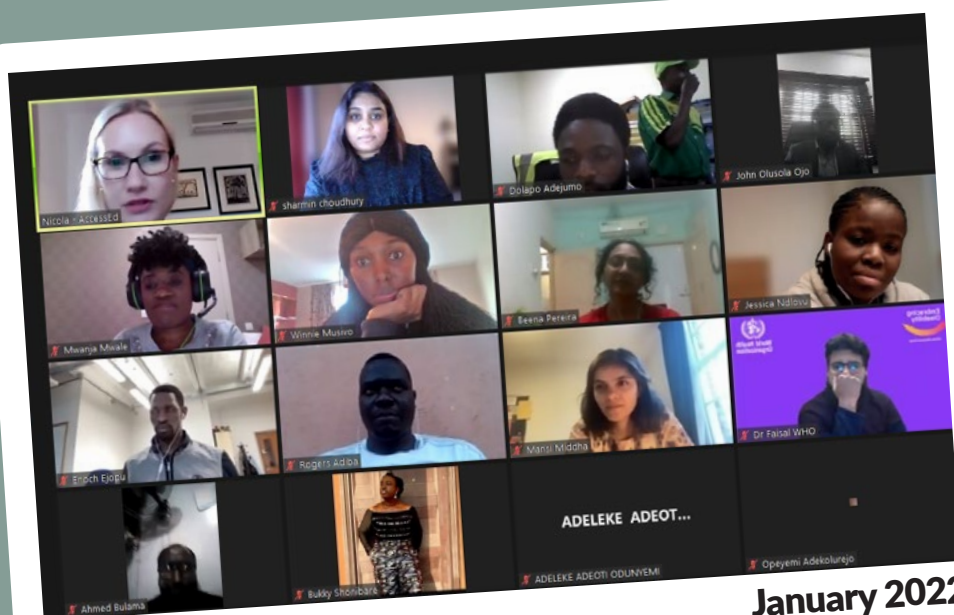
I would definitely recommend this training to others because it not only helped me to understand the broader concept of research writing in the field of development but also gave a chance to the scholars to critically engage and interact with other scholars"

Social Entrepreneurship: Launching Your Own Social Project

Scholars interested in setting up their own social enterprise, organisation or social project learned 10 practical steps to follow when considering setting up a social project or organisation.

Preparing for Social Impact

During this session, Scholars examined what development impact looks like at a practical level in the context of their own research.



Preparing for Social Impact workshop

"For young professionals like us, this training has many things to offer in order to help figure out the effective strategies for bringing sustainable social impact to our communities and beyond."

Regional Network Events

2021 saw the return of in-person Regional Network events, helping Scholars and Fellows meet with others in their region as they settle into their new environment and into their various Scholarships and Fellowships.



Cambridge - London Commonwealth Scholar Picnic

July 2021



Midlands Picnic in Leamington Spa

June 2021



Midlands F2F Workshop
(The first of many face to face workshops of 2022!)

February 2022



Northeast Get-Together at Newcastle Art Centre

December 2021

Connect and Collaborate

In February 2022, the Connect and Collaborate event welcomed over 400 PhD and Master's Scholars to the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London for a day of talks, discussions and networking. This special occasion marked the first time since November 2019 that Commonwealth Scholars from 34 universities across the UK were able to come together in-person.



Connect & Collaborate Event

February 2022

Alumni news

The updates below (listed by year of award) summarise just some of the achievements of our global alumni. To let us know about your successes, email alumni@cscuk.org.uk

1976

James Mitchell Buttle has received the J. Tuzo Wilson Medal for his research contributions to the field of forest hydrology. He is now working with researchers across Canada studying issues related to drinking water quality. (Scholar from Canada, PhD Geography, University of Southampton)

1984

William Thomas Kymlicka has been awarded the Royal Society of Canada's (RSC) Pierre Chauveau Medal for his distinguished contribution to knowledge in the humanities. He has helped pioneer two major fields of research: the normative foundations of minority group rights within liberal democracies and the place of animals within political theory. (Scholar from Canada, BPhil Philosophy, University of Oxford)

1989

Judith Anne Aldridge has won the British Society of Criminology Women Crime and Criminal Justice Network Paper Prize 2021 for her co-authorship of the paper "Gendering research on online illegal drug markets", in the journal *Addiction Research & Theory*. (Scholar from Canada, PhD Sociology, University of Manchester)

1990

Susan Ellen Doreen Mumm has been appointed Chancellor of the American University of Sharjah (AUS). Her priorities will include advancing the mission of AUS, continuing to enhance the student experience and fostering the university's research agenda. She is the first woman to lead a coeducational university in the Gulf region. (Scholar from Canada, DPhil History, University of Sussex)

1992

Siaosi 'Ofa Ki Vaha Folau Sovaleni has been elected as the new Tongan Prime Minister. At 51, Mr Sovaleni will be the youngest PM to hold office. Health, illegal drugs and school dropouts are the three major concerns for the PM designate. (Scholar from Tonga, MSc Computer Science/Mathematics, University of Oxford)

1994

Qazi Azizul Mowla has been appointed Vice Chancellor of Leading University by the President of Bangladesh and the Chancellor of the Universities, Bangladesh. (Scholar from Bangladesh, PhD Evolution of Urban Design, University of Liverpool)

1998

Shivakumara Swamy Siddaramappa has been appointed Associate Professor at the Institute of Bioinformatics and Applied Biotechnology for his contributions to teaching and administrative responsibilities, as well as coordinating a master's programme. (Scholar from India, MSc Veterinary Microbiology, Royal Veterinary College)

2000

Eneke Esoeyang Tambe Bechem has been appointed the first female Registrar of the University of Buea (UB). She was one of the first intakes of students admitted into UB in 1993. (Scholar from Cameroon, PhD Fungi Infecting *Gnetum* spp., University of Aberdeen)

2002

Erika Chamberlain has been appointed to the Independent Advisory Board for the Supreme Court of Canada Judicial Appointments. (Scholar from Canada, PhD Negligence Law Concept of Duty of Care, University of Cambridge)



**Shivakumara Swamy
Siddaramappa**



**Nicku Abraham
Mathew**



Chinwe Chukwudi



**Adaobi Elizabeth
Osuji**

2008

Chinwe Chukwudi has been welcomed by the African Postdoctoral Training Initiative (APTI) into the second cohort of ten fellows to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). (Scholar from Nigeria, PhD Molecular Biology and Microbial Genetics, Royal Veterinary College; 2017 Academic Fellow)

2016

Nicku Abraham Mathew was awarded the Equator Prize 2021 as part of the non-profit organisation, India Foundation for Humanistic Development (IFHD). The prize, hosted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Equator Initiative, was awarded for the IFHD's project in protecting and restoring freshwater swamps, evergreen forests, and mangrove ecosystems. (Shared Scholar from India, MSc Leadership for Sustainable Rural Development, Queen's University Belfast)

2019

Adaobi Elizabeth Osuji established the first audiological (audiovestibular) medicine unit in the Ear, Nose and Throat Department of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, Rivers State, Nigeria in August 2021. She has trained personnel, including medical students and resident doctors, to increase manpower to support the unit, which will provide dedicated services to patients with hearing, speech, and balance disorders at the hospital. (Scholar from Nigeria, MSc Otology and Audiology, University College London)

Obituaries

1961

Muhammad Qais Uddin was awarded a scholarship to complete post-doctoral research at Imperial College London. He was the Founding Chairman and Professor of the Department of Biochemistry at the University of Rajshahi where he was also the Dean of Faculty of Science and the President of Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (RUTA). He is a former Vice Chancellor of Islamic University Bangladesh and Bangladesh Open University. He published more than 50 research articles in local and foreign science journals. Muhammad passed away on 11 November 2021. (Scholar from Bangladesh, PhD Antibiotics, University of Glasgow)

2001

Daniel Akwa Okae-Anti was Professor of Soil Science at the University of Cape Coast. One of his lifelong dreams was to support aspiring soil scientists in their academic careers. His estate has endowed five early career conference grants valued at £5000 to support early career soil scientists around the world to attend conferences to present their research and network with other like-minded colleagues. Daniel passed away on 20 June 2021. (Academic Fellow from Ghana, Soil Science, University of Reading)

Alumni events

July 2021-Feb 2022

Pre-departure briefings

The British Council held pre-departure briefings for Commonwealth Scholars commencing their studies in the UK in 2021/2022. The events provided new Scholars with valuable information and resources to help them prepare for living and studying in the UK.

Welcome home events

The British Council held welcome home events for recently returned Commonwealth Scholars following their studies in the UK. These events provided an opportunity for recently returned Scholars to connect with fellow Commonwealth Alumni and their local alumni network.

Kenya

Panel discussion on education technology

The British Council and FCDO held a virtual panel discussion on Education Technology in July 2021. The discussion focused on raising awareness around sustainability in education, private sector interventions, global best practices, sector challenges, and government policies.

Panel discussion on inclusive employment

The British Council held a virtual discussion on the topic of Inclusive Employment in July 2021. The discussion focused on creating awareness of various barriers to inclusive employment and provided a platform for attendees to share their personal experiences in inclusive employment.

South Africa

CoSFA-SA Career Development Workshop

Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows Alumni South African Chapter (CoSFA-SA) hosted an online Career Development Workshop for potential scholarship applicants in July 2021. Commonwealth Alumni shared their experiences and guidance on developing a career path and promoted CSC opportunities.

The impact of COVID-19 on mental health and wellbeing

A panel of experts, including Commonwealth Alumni and Scholars, shared their experiences of studying and living during the pandemic and how this impacted on their well-being in August 2021. Understanding that mental health and well-being is a multi-layered challenge, participants

were able to listen to and learn ways to navigate the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.

Zambia

Panel discussion on the impact of mining and agriculture on climate change

The British Council, in collaboration with Copperbelt University, hosted a multi-stakeholder panel discussion to discuss the impact of mining and agriculture on climate change in September 2021.

Canada

Canadian Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows Alumni meeting

The Canadian Association of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows (CACSF) brought together fine arts alumni in November 2021. Alumni discussed the impact of their Commonwealth Scholarship on their career and ways in which art contributes to civic engagement, social well-being, and public service outcomes.

Nigeria

COSFAN Training of Magistrates and Area Court Judges, Kwara State

Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows Alumni Association Nigeria (COSFAN) held a 3-day workshop in Ilorin, Kwara State Nigeria between 29 November – 1 December 2021. The workshop was designed to support the general training of 100 lawyers on family court procedure and 15 judiciary staff on family court and child justice administration.

Workshop on inclusion and digital accessibility of persons with disabilities

This event marked the International Day of Persons Living with Disability on 3 December 2021. It explored digital accessibility for persons with disability in a post-COVID-19 world and further actions needed to achieve inclusion through a moderated panel discussion.

Knowledge Hub webinar series

This webinar series is a platform for Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni to discuss their work and contributions to the six CSC development themes across a range of contemporary global challenges, and provide insight into ongoing research and action.

July 2021

Drone technology and agricultural development: Awareness and adoption in Nigeria

CSC theme: Science and technology for development

Commonwealth Alumnus Femi Adekoya discussed the need for farmers and stakeholders within the agricultural sector to adopt drone technologies and highlighted how this would enable them to practise precision agriculture. Whilst acknowledging the challenges of adopting drone technologies in the Nigerian agriculture sector, Femi's presentation also pointed to solutions to overcoming these barriers.

August 2021

Development of printable solar photovoltaic devices towards achieving net zero targets

CSC theme: Science and technology for development

In this webinar, Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Vishal Sharma discussed his research on the development of low-cost fully printable solar photovoltaic devices for mitigating climate change and global warming and emphasised the need for action in the solar technology area.

September 2021

Volcano monitoring in the Eastern Caribbean: A chronicle of collaboration and resilience

CSC theme: Strengthening resilience and response to crises

Commonwealth Alumnus Michal Camejo-Harry discussed her academic journey into the field of volcanology and her personal experience working on Caribbean volcanoes, including the recently erupted volcano in St. Vincent. Michal's presentation explored the collaborative strategies that have been employed in the region to reduce volcanic risks and the response to volcanic crises.



October 2021

Youth, sport, and cultural interventions in preventing violent extremism: Insights from the field in Kenya

CSC theme: Strengthening global peace, security and governance

Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Lin C Sambili Gicheha discussed the positive contribution that sport can play as an enabler for sustainable development. Lin highlighted the growing body of evidence which has shown the effective and cost-efficient contributions to several SDG targets that the intentional use of sport-based policy and programming can have.

You can watch previous webinars on the CSC YouTube channel through the CSC Webinar series playlist.



Knowledge Hub webinar on the development of printable solar photo devices towards achieving net zero targets.

Climate Action webinar series

Between 25 October-19 November and 6 December, the CSC Alumni Team hosted 12 webinars as part of the CSC's Climate Action webinar series. The series provided an opportunity for Commonwealth Alumni to share their work, research, and contributions to tackling the climate crisis in different parts of the world.

You can watch the webinars on the CSC's YouTube channel through the Climate Action playlist.

Joint Scholarships Alumni Climate Change Hackathon

The HMG Scholarships Alumni Climate Change Hackathon brought together over 130 alumni from the Chevening, CSC, and Marshall scholarship programmes to develop innovative solutions to some of the most pressing climate-focused global challenges. Working in 36 teams over a total of 24 logged hours, each team's proposal addressed a climate-related issue which supports one of the COP26 Goals in the team's represented country or region.

The teams then pitched their solutions to a panel of expert judges during 3 online presentation events, competing to win a place in the grand final. On 27 October, 4 teams representing each of the COP26 Goals, presented their policy solutions to an audience of judges, fellow Alumni, and Scholars at the grand final event.

Team 'Mountain Mates', were selected as the overall winning team. The team represented the COP26 Goal of mitigation and was comprised of team members representing each of the three scholarship programmes, including Commonwealth Alumnus, Geetanjali Singh. Their policy proposal was to enhance the quantity and quality of agriculture in the Hindu Kush Himalayas region (enabling it to be resilient to climate change) through reintroducing resilient species native to the region.

The winning team presented their ideas at a closed roundtable discussion with senior climate change experts and government officials.

You can watch the team presentations on the CSC's YouTube channel through the Chevening, Commonwealth, and Marshall Scholarships Climate Hackathon Competition playlist.



Get involved

You can stay part of the CSC community through events across the Commonwealth, by promoting our Scholarships and Fellowships to potential applicants, and by joining our alumni associations and other networks.

Regional Networks

Regional Network Coordinators have been continuing to organise virtual events as well as celebrating the return of in-person events with regional activities happening across the UK. From workshops on relevant topics to informal sight-seeing and picnics, these get-togethers are a chance for Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows in the same university or region within the UK to connect and support one another. The regions represented are:

Scotland
North-West England
North-East England
Wales

Northern Ireland
Midlands and Oxford
South-West England
South-East England

Find out more about Regional Networks
<https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/networks/regional-networks>



Knowledge Hubs

The CSC's Knowledge Hubs provide a platform for Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni studying and working in similar disciplines to network and exchange ideas to support a shared sustainable development outcome under the CSC's six themes:

Science and technology for development
Strengthening health systems and capacity
Promoting global prosperity
Strengthening global peace, security and governance
Strengthening resilience and response to crises
Access, inclusion and opportunity

As a member of a Knowledge Hub, you can post news about your current work and research, share links to reading and publications, and ask and answer questions related to your work.

Find out more about the Knowledge Hubs
<https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/networks/knowledge-hubs/>



Events

Find out about upcoming CSC community events:

 @commschols

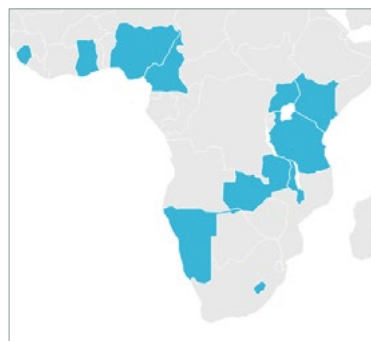
 @commonwealthscholarships

 <https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/events/>



Alumni Associations

Meet and network with Commonwealth Alumni through your local alumni association. CSC alumni-run associations are present in the following countries:



Africa

Cameroon	Nigeria
Ghana	Rwanda
Kenya	Sierra Leone
Lesotho	Tanzania
Malawi	Uganda
Mauritius	Zambia
Namibia	



Caribbean

Barbados	St Lucia
Dominica	Trinidad and Tobago
Guyana	
Jamaica	



Europe

Gibraltar



N. America

Canada



South Asia

Bangladesh
India
Malaysia
Pakistan
Sri Lanka



For full details, visit <https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/alumni/associations>

For further details about these activities and more, visit www.cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk

COMMON KNOWLEDGE

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▲ DREAMS programme girls' mentorship session led by Commonwealth Alumnus Steven Bwanali from Malawi