



COMMONWEALTH  
SCHOLARSHIPS

# KNOWLEDGE

ISSUE #15 DECEMBER 2023

## From the margins

*Supporting the rights, freedoms, dignity and inclusion of  
communities facing discrimination*

# Contents

## 4 The first word

## 5 Ageing well

Commonwealth Alumnus **Chukwuenyegom Egbumike** discusses his passion for healthy and successful ageing and elderly care irrespective of social differences.



## 8 Challenging laws and changing perceptions in Kiribati

Commonwealth Alumnus **Tebeio Tamton** is the Co-Founder of Boutokaan Inaomataia ao Mauriia Binabinaine Association (BIMBA), an LGBT+ advocacy and activism civil society organisation. Tebeio Tamton shares his motivations for founding BIMBA and promoting the rights of LGBT+ people in Kiribati and the Pacific.



## 10 Prose and cons: paving the way for LGBT+ literature

**Shreyoshee Bandyopadhyay** explains how literature can help audiences gain an insight into the experience of LGBTQ+ communities in cities and increase fair representation of LGBTQ+ people in the media.







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## 12 Becoming the change you want to see

**Kamanda Bosco** is a transgender youth activist from Uganda advocating for LGBT+ rights. In this article, they share their ongoing work to challenge systems of oppression and empower transgender and gender-diverse persons.



---

## 14 Putting people at the centre of public health

**Damilola Oloriegbe** explores the social factors affecting HIV transmission in Nigeria and how to increase access to sexual healthcare among sexual minorities.

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## 16 Study UK Alumni Awards 2023

The Study UK Alumni Awards celebrate the outstanding achievements of alumni and showcase the impact and value of UK higher education.

---

## 17 Scholar events

---

## 18 Alumni news

---

## 20 Alumni events

---

## 22 Get involved

# The first word



**Welcome to this edition of *Common Knowledge*. Our focus this time is on a topic that's both timely and timeless: gender and sexuality. As we navigate the evolving landscape of understanding and acceptance, it's crucial to be informed, and this issue aims to do just that.**

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) has consistently supported research and education that addresses pressing societal issues. In alignment with our current Time Limited Programme (TLP) and Fellowship programme, this edition highlights the commendable work of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni in the realm of LGBT+ issues and rights.

Take, for instance, Shreyoshee Bandyopadhyay, a Scholar from India, who delves into the issue of LGBT+ representation in literature and the importance of giving a voice to underrepresented communities. Or consider Kamanda Bosco, an Alumnus and transgender youth activist from Uganda, whose article sheds light on economic empowerment for LGBT+ people and ways to strengthen LGBT+ allyship in healthcare and beyond. And not to be missed is Tebeio Tamton's account of LGBT+ advocacy in Kiribati, working with local communities to challenge discriminatory laws and change mindsets.

Gender and sexuality are more than just terms; they're integral to the identities of people and communities across the Commonwealth. While progress has been made in certain areas, there's still a long road ahead in many parts of the world. This journey, though challenging, is marked by determination and hope.

Our Scholars and Alumni have been instrumental in shedding light on these topics. Their research and advocacy work raise understanding of gender and sexuality across various cultural and societal backdrops. From analysing historical gender roles to addressing current challenges faced by the LGBT+ community, their contributions are both relevant and insightful.

We are proud to feature the work of those Scholars and Alumni who are making strides in the area of LGBT+ rights. Their endeavours, be it in research, activism, or community engagement, are creating positive change.

This issue is designed to be accessible and informative for all readers. The aim is not just to present facts but to encourage reflection and foster understanding. The diversity of the Commonwealth is one of its greatest strengths, and understanding gender and sexuality is a step towards celebrating that diversity more fully.

In conclusion, we hope this edition serves as a valuable resource and sparks constructive discussions. A big thank you to our Scholars and Alumni contributors for their invaluable input. We look forward to building bridges and working together towards a more inclusive and informed Commonwealth.

**Professor Morag McDonald**  
Deputy Chair of the CSC

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# Ageing well

Commonwealth Alumnus **Chukwuenyegom Egbumike** discusses his passion for healthy and successful ageing and elderly care irrespective of social differences.



## **Chukwuenyegom Egbumike**

2019 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar

Nigeria

MSc Gerontology

University of Southampton

**I am a lecturer at a private university in Nigeria, and a clinical physiotherapist at a federal teaching hospital in Nigeria. My passion for the issues affecting our ageing population has propelled me to bridging the intergenerational gap between young and older people in Nigeria, and Africa more broadly.**

Older people (aged 60 and over) are the fastest growing demographic in Africa. The proportion of older people in Africa is projected to reach 7.6% of the total population by 2050, and 80% of the older population are expected to be from low- and middle-income countries. By 2030, 1 in every 6 persons in the world will be aged 60 or over and the number of persons aged 60 and above is estimated to rise to 2.1 billion by 2050.

Gerontology, the study of the process of ageing and health and wellbeing of older adults, is critical for understanding this population shift and ensuring that older people are valued and included in societies. My Master's degree in Gerontology transformed my thinking about ageing, and improved my knowledge of the changes people experience as they grow older. It also led me to appreciate people's differing experiences of ageing as influenced by their social identities such as race, sex, and gender and sexuality.

To understand the social experiences of one such vulnerable group in Nigeria, older people of the sexual minority group, I am involved in an advocacy project with the Global Alliance for Public Health Initiative (GAPHI), a local non-governmental organisation in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State. The project aims to deliver unlimited and non-discriminatory access to medical care in public healthcare settings for older sexual minority group people, and is sponsored by the Initiative Sankofa d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ISDAO), a non-governmental organisation dedicated to improving the lives of sexual minority groups in Africa.

The social atmosphere of Nigeria threatens the well-being of the sexual minority group. Members of this group struggle to meet their social needs, especially in terms of social participation due to negative stereotyping

and the stigma attached to them in Nigeria. Not only does this situation affect their health and well-being, but it also threatens their personal security.

Through my interactions with the members of this group I have observed that the discrimination they face in wider society is also felt in healthcare settings.

This perception, as well as the attitude of professionals towards this group, has made them reluctant to seek healthcare from public hospitals. Public healthcare institutions are expected to deliver comprehensive, all inclusive, and cost-effective care, but these characteristic benefits are restricted for these minority groups due to their reported experiences of prejudice. To avoid prejudice, these people may instead choose to access substandard healthcare resources. This contributes to wide-spread mental health concerns among this group, and leaves them isolated, insecure, and depressed.

## **Engaging with state actors on the right attitude towards sexual minority groups**

State actors or the agencies and authorities whose voice can influence policy and practices in a state include: National Human Rights Commission Ebonyi State Chapter, security agencies including the Nigeria Police Force and the State Vigilante Group, and NGOs, healthcare practitioners, and other state agencies on gender violence and HIV-related issues.

This advocacy work has allowed me to interact with many sexual minority groups and understand their experiences in accessing public health services.





**I have met with many people who identify as members of the sexual minority group to understand their experiences accessing public health services, however I've scarcely met with anyone aged over 50. And I've been asking the question, why is that so?"**

Due to the heightened discrimination against this group and the associated fear among its members, it has become difficult to engage with this minority group in public events. Despite these challenges, in May 2023 GAPHI organised a programme on sexual health and reproductive rights which promoted the non-discriminable and all-inclusive distribution of health resources to enable everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation, to thrive. During the programme, event speaker Chris Okorie, the Ebonyi State Coordinator of the National Human Rights Commission, emphasised that sexual orientation was a natural disposition that should be understood. In his talk, he called for sexual minority group people to be seen as 'human beings' with the right to state and national resources.

While some of the state actor representatives present were not acquainted with the concept of 'sexual minority groups', or their rights and identities, the programme persuaded attendees of the need to accommodate sexual minority group people and allow them access to societal resources, especially public healthcare services.

Following the event, those in attendance expressed satisfaction with the programme and promised to contribute to non-discriminatory services in their localities and remain advocates for a change of attitude and mindset.

### **Supporting older people through COVID-19**

Following my Master's, I joined the Stakeholder Group on Ageing in Africa (SGA), a regional coalition of civil society organisations, NGOs, and professional organisations that addresses ageism in Africa. Through its work, the SGA aims to ensure the recognition and integration of ageing and older persons' rights in achieving sustainable development.

Shortly after I joined the SGA, the COVID-19 pandemic began, and it soon became clear this infectious disease would pose a serious threat to older people across the world. While the development of a vaccine gave us hope, we quickly realised that the roll out across Africa was not taking place fast enough and we needed to advocate for the rights of older adults to receive the vaccine.

As part of the SGA campaign for older people in Africa to access the COVID-19 vaccine, I reported on the experiences in





**Community outreach, with the former Commissioner of Health, Enugu state, Nigeria**

Nigeria, including the problem of insufficient vaccine supply and uptake especially among the older population. My team and teams from other African countries deliberated with representatives of the Africa Union, United Nations, and World Health Organization (WHO) on ways to improve accessibility and uptake of the vaccine among this population.

Once vaccine supplies did improve, I helped to address barriers to vaccine uptake among older people, countering the effects of misinformation and disinformation around the vaccination programme, and restoring trust in government advice. In this way, I contributed to achieving the WHO's vaccination targets among the older population while advocating for older people's health rights in Nigeria.

## A brighter future for older people

The SGA's work in this period was instrumental to the development of the National Policy on Ageing for Older Persons in Nigeria, which was approved by the former Nigerian President in 2021. This policy sets out the framework for a society where senior citizens are guaranteed security, independence, participation, comprehensive care, self-fulfilment, and dignity.

Through active engagement by the SGA at an individual and societal level, and with the introduction of the government policy on ageing, there has also been a reawakening of the National Senior Citizens Centre. This nationwide body gives older people a platform to raise their concerns and present issues for consideration by policymakers, government, and care practitioners, development agencies, and pension institutions.

Looking to the future, my dream is to establish an NGO focused on ageing that promotes healthy and successful ageing, with an emphasis on the interests of older people, irrespective of their social differences.

I work with different interest groups and NGOs on activities for living and ageing well. In this capacity, I teach the community about elderly care and how to live well in older age, while supporting the health needs of older adults irrespective of their religion, gender, sexual orientation, values, and belief systems.

CK



# Challenging laws and changing perceptions in Kiribati

Commonwealth Alumnus **Tebeio Tamton** is the Co-Founder of *Boutokaan Inaomataia ao Mauriia Binabinaine Association (BIMBA)*, an LGBT+ advocacy and activism civil society organisation. BIMBA works to end violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE) in Kiribati. Here, Tebeio shares his personal motivations for founding BIMBA and promoting the rights of LGBT+ people in Kiribati and the Pacific.



**Tebeio Tamton**

2015 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar

Kiribati

PGDip. Sustainable Aquaculture

University of St Andrews

**In Kiribati, legislation prohibiting same-sex relationships between men has existed since 1892 when it was introduced during British colonial rule. While there has been no recorded enforcement of this law in recent years, its existence still threatens the rights of LGBT+ people and could be seen to validate violence and other forms of discrimination against them.**

## Creating a broad-based platform for rights

Growing up in Kiribati as a binabinaine (in i-Kiribati this refers to gay boys/men, bisexual boys/men, and transgender girls/women) in the 1990s was challenging because of the verbal and physical bullying, discrimination, and stigmatisation I experienced at home, at school, and in local villages.

These experiences motivated me to establish BIMBA as a vehicle to, first and foremost, alleviate and eradicate all forms of violence based on SOGIE. In setting up BIMBA, I was inspired to end the criminalisation of homosexuality in Kiribati. As a collective, BIMBA aims to amplify the voices of all binabinaine, advocating for their rights and dignity, and increasing their prominence and visibility in local communities.

## Taking campaigns to the community

The activities and operations of BIMBA mean a lot to me and our members in different communities across Kiribati. Although we operate without a budget, our campaigns and advocacy work has achieved significant reach, and enabled us to connect with people both in the LGBT+ community and beyond. This work is thanks to our generous and supportive allies/donors at the national, regional, and international levels.

As Co-Founder and pro-bono Advisor and Coordinator, my role encompasses many responsibilities. Applying

for small grants to support campaigns, monitoring and reporting on the impact of activities, and utilising our member network to manage activity delivery are just some of areas in which I work. Sustaining BIMBA's volunteer-led activities is particularly challenging because most of our members are school drop-outs with limited knowledge and skills of project management, which is critical to acquire funding for advocacy, awareness, and action campaigns.

Despite these challenges, however, BIMBA has delivered some landmark activities in recent year, including a multi-stakeholder sensitisation workshop on SOGIE. This workshop ran in tandem with SOGIE training for family and friends of BIMBA members, as well as in-country allies and supporters.

We have developed a range of information, education, and communication materials about binabinaine awareness which have been distributed in various settings. To reach wider audiences, we have also broadcast information on local radio and television, and utilised social media, including Facebook and YouTube, to boost awareness campaigns.

These campaigns are aimed at sensitising wider communities about the lived experiences of binabinaine, as well as showcasing BIMBA members' success stories. Through our campaigning we hope to build working relationships with allies and stakeholders who play a significant part in our growth and development as an organisation.



**Growing up in Kiribati as a binabinaine in the 1990s was challenging because of the verbal and physical bullying, discrimination and stigmatisation I faced at home, school and in local villages.”**



**Engaging members, stakeholders and the public is central to BIMBA's aims**

## Beauty, performance and expression

In 2018, BIMBA held its first beauty pageant to promote LGBT+ visibility and engage people from the local communities in a performance celebrating SOGIE.

As a long-time follower and mentee of Joeleen Joey Mataele, Vice-Chair of The Commonwealth Equality Network (TCEN) and co-founder of the Miss Galaxy Queen Pageant in Tonga, I was aware of the impact that an event like this could have for BIMBA's work. Although I was initially sceptical because beauty pageants relate more to western culture, the success of the Miss Galaxy Pageant, which plays a significant role in our advocacy in Kiribati, eventually inspired our decision to launch BIMBA's own beauty pageant.

Supported by the newly established Ministry of Justice in 2018 as part of its official launch, the pageant provided an important platform to showcase beauty, cultural performances, talents, wisdom, and, of course, advocate for causes close to BIMBA's work.

For some contestants, the pageant offered a moment for acknowledgement rather than acceptance, and visibility rather than recognition. For others, though, being on stage was a time to be truly open about their sexual identity and, for the transgender community, a chance to be heard, to be seen, and to be understood.

The pageant was live streamed for audiences outside Kiribati to increase exposure and, despite some homophobic comments, the overall response and engagement was positive.

## Partnering to end discrimination laws

Building partnerships and connecting with other LGBT+ rights organisations is important for BIMBA's work, both in Kiribati and internationally. In 2023, I attended the TCEN Pacific Regional Convening, a meeting place for

similar organisations advocating for LGBT+ rights in the Pacific. The Convening provided a critical opportunity to share our work, hear from others about their advocacy challenges, and strategise on eradicating discrimination, stigma, and violence against people based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

At this year's Convening, decriminalisation and law reform were key priorities among regional TCEN members representing countries where homosexuality is illegal. This was a significant outcome from the Convening alongside the commitments to strengthen regional advocacy and identify opportunities for strategic collaboration.

As we look towards the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa in 2024, we hope to build on the work that TCEN has begun by showcasing Pacific cultures, identities, and vulnerabilities in the context of climate change and LGBT+ rights. I am excited to be part of the TCEN regional working group that has been formed to take this plan forward.

## Empowering the next generation

One of BIMBA's defining missions is to educate and inform the next generation about SOGIE.

At BIMBA, we believe that children and youths who grow up acknowledging and knowing that binabinaine or people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression exist, within their local communities, could make more informed leadership decisions.

At the end of the day, our advocacy, awareness, and action campaigns are not just intended for us, they are also for the future generations of binabinaines. It is my hope that as our advocacy and campaigning continues to grow, we can create friendlier and more accepting environments for young people, so that they don't have to experience the challenges and suffering that we did. **CK**



# Prose and cons: paving the way for LGBTQ+ literature

*Shreyoshee Bandyopadhyay explains how literature can help audiences gain an insight into the experience of LGBTQ+ communities in cities and increase fair representation of LGBTQ+ people in the media.*



**Shreyoshee Bandyopadhyay**

2022 Commonwealth Master's Scholar

India

MSt World Literatures in English

University of Oxford

**In India, as in many other Commonwealth countries, the media and publishing realms have become sites of contention over the rights of minorities, particularly LGBTQ+ communities. Although LGBTQ+ writers have been slowly gaining prominence, their access to mainstream media representation has frequently come under threat from influential figures and groups propagating anti-LGBTQ+ discourse in the media.**

It is essential to enable LGBTQ+ communities to determine how and in what ways they want to be represented. This not only empowers LGBTQ+ voices, but it also creates the space for more varied, diverse, and inclusive narratives to emerge.

## The geography of LGBTQ+ communities

During my Master's, I conducted research into how LGBTQ+ communities are excluded from spatial representations of the city. In Mumbai and Osaka, which were the focus of my study, I found that areas unofficially deemed LGBTQ+ spaces tended to be left off official maps and popular representations of the city as a way of denying the existence of LGBTQ+ communities who inhabit these spaces.

At the same time, I found that popular forms of literature like comics and graphic novels often gave readers a window into these areas (seen as off limits and unappealing in the eyes of the state), and access to the stories of the LGBTQ+ cultures and communities who populate them. By showing the rich diversity of these overlooked areas, graphic novels can counteract official representations and serve as a touchstone for readers who identify with the marginalised communities and spaces being portrayed.

Not only do graphic novels portray places written out of official representations, but they also create

communities in themselves. I have always been interested in how popular forms of literature – magazines, online writing communities, fanfiction – have led to interesting communities being formed; a refuge for those who may not feel represented or safe in the mainstream. By offering spaces for self-expression, discussion, and celebrations of love and community that are often prohibited in public discourse, these forms of literature can help create and foster narratives of resistance. For Asian LGBTQ+ writers, who are underrepresented in traditional literary settings, popular forms of literature have been essential for highlighting and celebrating LGBTQ+ rights and identity.

My aim is to preserve these unique creative spaces, which nurture LGBTQ+ communities in India, while at the same time enabling writers and creators from these spaces to reach a more mainstream audience. The challenge in doing this is how to make this work accessible to a non-LGBTQ+ audience without sanitising the rich culture and language which has grown around the formation of LGBTQ+ communities.

## Publishing challenges

Before my scholarship, I worked for several publishing houses in India – both multi-national and independent – and saw how the conflict around politics and culture in India is manifesting in publishing.

While interning at Pan Macmillan India, for instance, I was able to work with multiple books that had



**I want to help make underrepresented communities in my home country look to literature and find their own voices and stories looking back at them.”**



faced pushback for platforming lesser-heard voices and critiquing the status-quo. These experiences demonstrated how attempts at censorship can hamper writers who want to challenge official narratives, particularly on social or political topics, by creating complex issues when publishing their work.

There are also difficulties around introducing unknown writers especially if their work calls into question harmful norms surrounding gender or sexuality. Promoting new LGBTQ+ writers, who may be less economically viable, is likely to present a significant challenge in such a commercial industry.

Given the stigma around being LGBTQ+ in India, the cultural pushback against LGBTQ+ literature, especially for younger audiences, is likely to be a major battleground in the years ahead. This climate of stigma can be illustrated by an experience from earlier days. At school, my friends and I tried to host a LGBTQ+ sensitisation workshop for younger students but were stopped by the school administration after parents complained that, in their view, the content was inappropriate for children.

Despite these attitudes, I am determined to platform more LGBTQ+ literature for children. Literature is essential for helping children and young people learn about and understand their place in the world and is vital for creating more inclusive and tolerant societies.

### **Strengthening networks during my Commonwealth Scholarship**

The experiences I have gained during my Commonwealth Scholarship have been invaluable in supporting my aims. While at Oxford, I contributed to my faculty's research journal, *Oxford Research in English*, by bringing together researchers and academics from

similar areas as part of the article peer review process. In this role, I was exposed to different areas of English literature research and formed new contacts in the research space. I also had the opportunity to meet fellow Commonwealth Scholars working in areas such as girls' education, reproductive health, and media representation at the CSC's Connect and Collaborate Event.

These experiences have given me useful insights into the research happening in my field and adjacent areas of interest and have allowed me to strengthen my network of researchers for future collaboration.

### **Preserving spaces for the future**

The question I keep returning to when thinking about my work is: who gets to decide whether LGBTQ+ spaces are open to a wider public and how do we approach this process of 'opening up' in a safe way for the communities involved? For me, this is central to improving inclusion for LGBTQ+ communities through literary and media representation.

Just like any community, LGBTQ+ people are diverse and encompass different points of view. Attempting to define LGBTQ+ culture and identity as an outsider can be difficult because it risks essentialising LGBTQ+ people. Regardless of good intentions, this can lead to the same suppression of LGBTQ+ voices as those countervailing forces that seek to silence LGBTQ+ communities altogether.

By giving space for a range of LGBTQ+ views and experiences within mainstream literature, I hope to allow LGBTQ+ communities to control their own narratives and help define the change they would like to see in society.

CK

# Becoming the change you want to see

Commonwealth Alumnus **Kamanda Bosco** is a transgender youth activist from Uganda advocating for LGBT+ rights. In this article, they share their ongoing work to challenge systems of oppression and empower transgender and gender-diverse persons.



## Kamanda Bosco

2021 Commonwealth Shared Scholar

Uganda

MSc International Development, Social Justice and Sustainability

University of Bath

**In May 2023, Uganda passed the Anti-Homosexuality Act, one of the world's strictest anti-LGBTQ+ bills. Prior to this Act, Uganda's existing penal code criminalised same sex conduct with life imprisonment, however the new law introduces the death penalty for certain same-sex acts and a 20-year sentence for the 'promotion of homosexuality'. The Act violates fundamental human rights under Uganda's Constitution and international human rights agreements and threatens to criminalise advocacy for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer citizens in the country.**

I started out from a background of marginalisation. In my country, it is difficult to attain an education when you are transgender. Growing up, I was surrounded by narratives that I would not amount to anything and that, as a transgender person, I would be marginalised economically because transgender people don't have access to education. But for me, I was ready to defy all odds.

In 2017, I was selected for the Young African Leadership Initiative which set me on the path to becoming an LGBT+ activist.

My passion for LGBT+ rights and advocacy has led me to work with regional bodies and movements within Africa to raise awareness of the issues affecting LGBT+ people. As a result of my work, I have been invited to address governments and discuss my work at international conferences, including the International Human Rights Council at the United Nations during the 33rd session in Geneva, Switzerland.

I have also worked for organisations including She Decides, a global movement which campaigns on issues of bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), as well as being a member of the Generation Equality Youth Task Force. In 2020, I was a United Nations Religion Fellow of OutRight Action International, which partners with local LGBT+ groups to stop gender-based violence and discrimination against LGBT+ people.

I believe that improving knowledge about how we protect and promote LGBT+ rights and addressing topics of gender and sexuality are vital for building inclusive, equitable, and just societies to ensure that no one is left behind.

## Overcoming discrimination through economic empowerment

In Uganda, LGBT+ people face huge challenges in terms of employability. Regardless of their level of education or work experience, they can be denied employment based on their sexuality. Even for those who are employed, there is a constant threat that their employment may be terminated on the same basis. This unequal situation is compounded by the fact that many LGBT+ people do not complete their high school education because of the discrimination they experience for expressing their sexuality or gender identity.

During my undergraduate studies in business administration, I discovered that entrepreneurship presents LGBT+ people with an important opportunity for self-empowerment. In creating their own businesses and becoming self-employed, LGBT+ people can obtain economic independence where they are free from employer discrimination and are able to promote inclusive practices such as employing other LGBT+ people.



Unfortunately there's still a big gap between LGBT+ people of colour and those that are white because there's intersectionality that ties with race, sexual orientation, and gender identity."



**Kamanda Bosco at UK Parliament**

During my Master's in International Development, Social Justice and Sustainability at the University of Bath I developed this approach further by conducting research into entrepreneurial opportunities for LGBT+ people using a social justice lens to identify the stakeholders needed to support such ventures.

### Supporting LGBT+ students

As a student at the University of Bath, I became a campaign manager for the student LGBT+ club where I took a proactive role in leading LGBT+ activities. These ranged from improving facilities for transgender people, for example by installing inclusive toilets, to increasing the visibility of LGBT+ students on campus. I also led a campaign to enable more students of colour to participate in LGBT+ activities.

Taking on this role helped me to meet new people across the student and staff body and connect with LGBT+ groups working in the UK.

### The transgender healthcare gap

In response to the passing of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, I was invited to attend a reception at the House of Lords to discuss the impact of the Act on LGBT+ people and the UK government response. The reception brought together LGBT+ rights activists and organisations working in Uganda to explore how international partners could practise active allyship with those affected by this legislative change.

I have also been engaged in high-level discussions with members of the UK Parliament and civil society organisations (CSOs) on ways to improve transgender healthcare in the UK. Currently, transgender people struggle to access HIV healthcare and there is a lack of preventative public health messaging aimed at transgender communities. There is also a lack of training among NHS workers about healthcare needs

for transgender people with wider funding restrictions making it harder to reach transgender communities.

Through this work, I have been able to connect with CSOs and government representatives in the UK to propose ways of tackling these challenges. This has included incorporating gender, sexuality, and diversity training into healthcare curriculums with specific measures to support transgender people. Having explored how civil society and governments can work together to improve services and human rights during my Master's degree, I was well equipped to take on this challenge.

To further highlight the challenges transgender people face in accessing healthcare, I helped organise a Trans Pride march in London which advocated for more inclusive healthcare.

### Building a platform for LGBT+ allyship

I have pledged to always commit to developing my country and I feel my community needs me, especially considering the situation in Uganda. In the coming years, I hope to leverage the high-level connections I am currently making. By strengthening organisations back home and bringing on board more development partners, I plan to facilitate initiatives that improve financial literacy and entrepreneurship within the LGBT+ community. As an advocate for inclusive healthcare, I will also take steps to strengthen the healthcare system in Uganda and develop more opportunities for young people. As an example, I plan to provide training for peer educators to increase the capacity of young people from the LGBT+ community, which will in turn enable them to reach out to others and share resources for information. I also intend to support wellbeing groups for mental health and building relationships in the community. **CK**



# Putting people at the centre of public health

*Damilola Oloriegbe explores the social factors affecting HIV transmission in Nigeria and how to increase access to sexual healthcare among sexual minorities.*



## Dr Damilola Oloriegbe

2022 Commonwealth Shared Scholar

Nigeria

MSc Sexual and Reproductive Health

Queen Margaret University

**In Nigeria, the prevalence of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) among gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) is higher than among the general population. Yet, sexuality is rarely considered when diagnosing and treating sexually transmitted infections such as HIV.**

Heteronormative assumptions in Nigerian society that all men are 'naturally' heterosexual prevents GBMSM from getting sexual health advice relevant to their sexuality for fear of being outed. At the same time, the stigma around contracting HIV, falsely linked to ideas of moral degeneracy, makes GBMSM wary of seeking treatment to help them live with HIV. Even within the medical sphere, the language and framing of HIV is profoundly homophobic, underlining the prejudice that LGBT+ communities face in Nigeria when seeking sexual healthcare.

## Providing healthcare services and education

Extending access to sexual and reproductive healthcare (SRH) would go a long way towards addressing the prevalence of HIV among GBMSM. By providing HIV care, testing, and antiretroviral drugs across a wide geography, GBMSM with HIV would be able to receive support on living with the condition. At the same time, sharing safe sex guidance and information on HIV preventative measures, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), would reduce rates of HIV transmission within the GBMSM community.

Education and community engagement play an important role in addressing public health issues such as HIV, but they also contribute to changing mindsets and tackling health inequalities.

In Nigeria, organisations that provide health and legal services to sexual and gender minorities contribute to

challenging negative societal norms around sexuality. By highlighting the severe public health consequences of Nigeria's Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, I hope to further support this community in overcoming stigma and discrimination and gaining access to appropriate and adequate healthcare in line with their fundamental human rights.

## The social factor

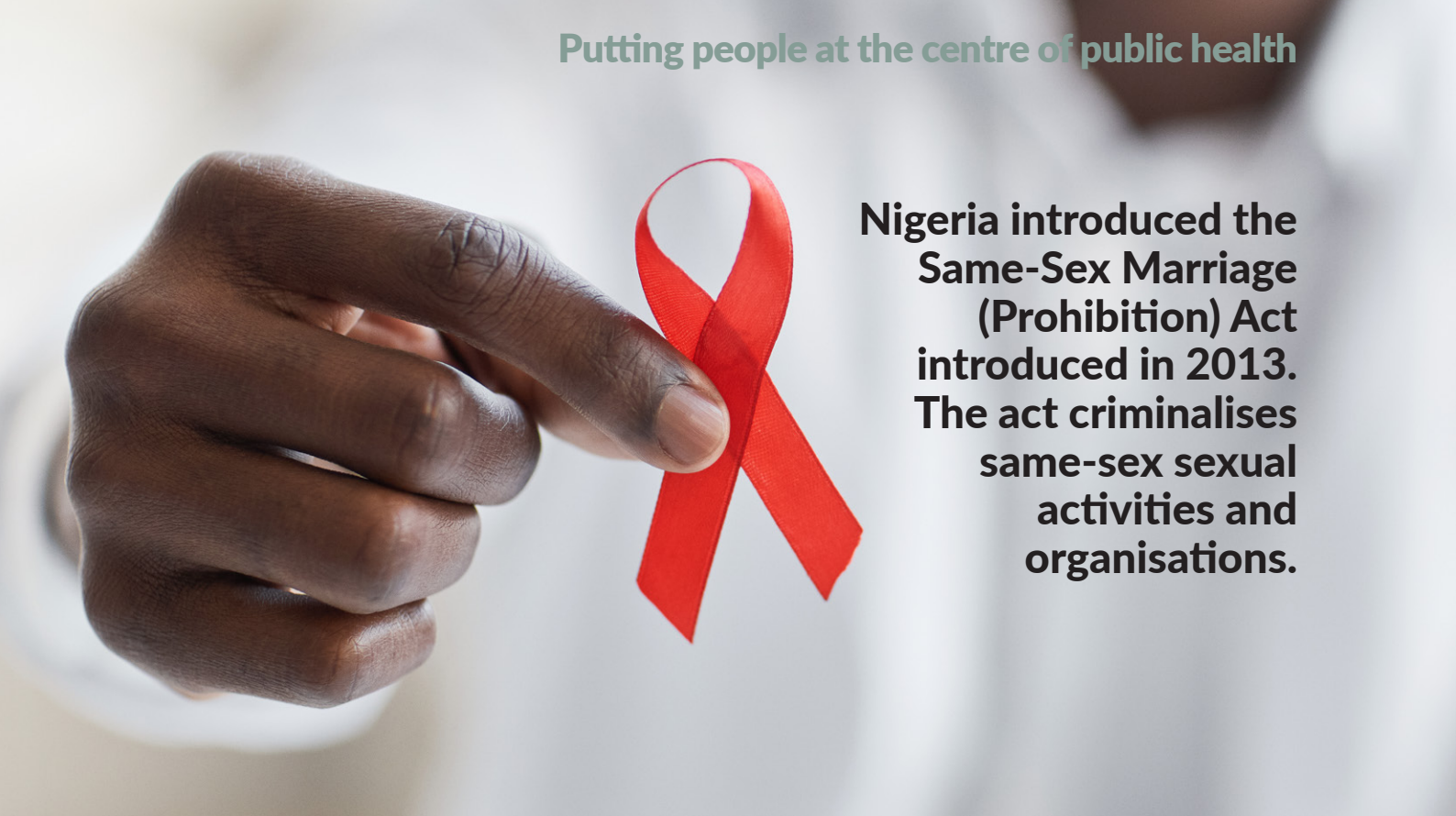
Undertaking my scholarship made me aware that we live in an unfair world where access to healthcare is deeply inequitable and has political dimensions. Social change is incredibly difficult and takes time, but it is achievable.

During my medical training in Nigeria, there was little appreciation of the social determinants of health, such as gender, sexuality, geographical location, socio-economic status, and how these intersect and contribute to health outcomes. Foregrounding social factors, however, is essential for creating public health and treatment strategies that correspond to the differing needs of individuals on a national and global scale.

My scholarship explored how cervical cancer (CaCx), a highly preventable and gendered disease, is symptomatic of the unequal and inequitable state of global health.

According to the World Health Organisation's Director General, Dr Ghebreyesus, one woman dies of CaCx every 2 minutes, yet the disease disproportionately affects women in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), who cannot access adequate SRH services. In





**Nigeria introduced the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act introduced in 2013. The act criminalises same-sex sexual activities and organisations.**

2018 alone, 90% of CaCx-related deaths occurred in LMICs.

While cervical cancer is preventable with public health strategies such as vaccination and periodic cervical cancer screening, many LMICs have yet to implement a national vaccination programme to target Human Papillomavirus (HPV), the causative agent for CaCx. Notwithstanding policy-level decisions on introducing a national HPV vaccination programme, my research considers the factors affecting vaccine uptake in Nigeria: what do Nigerian women know about CaCx and the HPV vaccination and are they willing to accept it?

Understanding the potential barriers to uptake and the concerns of women who receive the vaccine is essential for implementing an effective public health strategy that tackles cervical cancer. Gender analysis can be a useful tool for acknowledging the historical and social inequalities faced by women to inform the design of such a vaccination programme and ensure it addresses these inequalities.

Deploying a similar approach for HIV could help to address the root causes of HIV transmission and reduce further incidences as well as ensuring people living with HIV receive adequate and appropriate treatment for the condition.

## Working with communities

Prior to my scholarship, I worked for an NGO that supported people living with HIV. I was involved in providing healthcare to people with HIV, as well as improving community outreach and public health education on HIV. In this role, I also led capacity strengthening initiatives by training and recruiting case managers, counsellor testers, and peer educators to support the NGO's work in different areas.

During my scholarship in Glasgow, I volunteered for Waverley Care Scotland, a sexual health charity that provides sexual health education, safe sex products, and HIV, Hepatitis C and Syphilis testing to gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men. Volunteering for Waverley Care Scotland gave me the chance to participate in outreach opportunities such as Edinburgh Pride where I engaged with more than 250 people, offering sexual health advice and signposting sexual health services.

My aim is to continue working in the HIV health space to promote and enable health services among key populations, particularly the LGBT+ community. Utilising my knowledge and skills in capacity strengthening peer educators, conducting gender analyses of HIV programmes, and developing adolescent friendly SRH programmes, I intend to increase safe sexual practices and community HIV testing. I also plan to improve sexual health education and deliver counselling for people living with HIV in Nigeria.

## Looking to the future

There is a broad consensus among academics and practitioners that the major objective of global health is the achievement of health equity and improving health for all people worldwide with an emphasis on transnational health issues, determinants, and solutions.

By listening to the GBMSM community and focusing on the underlying issues that affect its members, it is possible to design HIV programmes that respond sensitively to their needs and end the cycle of discrimination and fear around HIV diagnosis and prevention.

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# Study UK Alumni Awards 2023

*The Study UK Alumni Awards celebrate the outstanding achievements of alumni and showcase the impact and value of UK higher education. Award winners and finalists are leaders in their fields who have used their experience of studying at a UK university to make a positive contribution to their communities, professions, and countries.*

## Business and Innovation Award

**This award recognises alumni who are initiating and contributing to creative new ideas, solutions, or business opportunities that have the potential for growth.**

### Winner - Pakistan

Yaruq leads the innovation and partnerships at the National Science and Technology Park in Pakistan. His work has generated revenue and start-up funding of more than 10 billion PKR (Pakistani Rupees), as well as conceptualising over 150 start-ups, and creating more than 4,500 jobs. This has contributed to improving Pakistan's position in the Global Innovation Index in the last 3 years.



### Yaruq Nadeem

2015 Commonwealth Scholar

Pakistan

MSc in Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Management

Imperial College London

## Social Action Award

**This award recognises alumni who have made an exceptional contribution and commitment to creating positive social change and improving the lives of others.**

### Winner - Pakistan

Dr Munir is a teacher and a human rights advocate, who works as an assistant professor at Sindh Madressatul Islam University. He has presented his research at multiple conferences and, through the means of digital literacy, he has disseminated educational training to underprivileged communities, including to teachers from over 65 countries.



### Munir Sadruddin

2016 Commonwealth Scholar

Pakistan

MA Online and Distance Education

The Open University

## Science and Sustainability Award

**This award recognises alumni who have distinguished themselves through their career and achievements in the world of science and sustainability.**

### Winner - Bangladesh

Dr Sakib is Associate Professor of Economics at North South University and was recently appointed Assistant General Secretary of the Bangladesh Energy Society. His research is focused on electricity price reform and energy policy in developing countries.



### Sakib Amin

2017 Rutherford Fellow

Bangladesh

Post-doc Energy Economics

Durham University



# Scholar events

## Leaders in Sustainable Development programme

The Leaders in Sustainable Development Programme supports and enables Scholars to respond to development challenges in their countries and communities.

Over 150 Scholars attended the Leaders in Sustainable Development online workshops between November 2022 and June 2023 to develop skills in writing for development, decision making, theory of change and much more.



Scholars attend the residential workshop at Cumberland Lodge

## Residential workshops at Cumberland Lodge

As part of the Leaders in Sustainable Development programme, the CSC held two residential workshops for Scholars at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park. The workshops focused on enhancing Scholars' ability to impact change through discussions, learning, and networking.

In March, 46 Master's Scholars attended the 'Maximising your impact: training for development' workshop to explore current development issues and how they would contribute to solving them. In May, 44 PhD Scholars joined the second workshop to investigate ways to apply their research and engage decision makers with their findings.

*"Networking with fellow Scholars was great because I got to know the various projects other Scholars were doing and how it also links to my project. Ideas and experiences shared during interactions were thought-provoking and inspiring. The session gave me more grounding on what the objectives of my project are; why I want to indulge in the project; who the project is for, who to talk to; where the project should take place, and how to go about the project. This event is a life-changing event and a pathway to fulfilling one's developmental impact."*

2023 participant at residential workshop

## Parliamentary Reception for Commonwealth Scholars

The Parliamentary Reception held in June offered Scholars a unique opportunity to meet UK parliamentarians and learn about the workings of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. This year, 35 Commonwealth Scholars joined the event where they engaged in discussions on governance and democracy in the modern Commonwealth.

## Regional Network events

Our Scholar Regional Network Coordinators organised more than 40 events between November 2022 and August 2023 for Scholars across the 12 UK regions.

In the North East, Scholars joined a special webinar on the progress made towards the SDGs in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific with keynote speakers Daniel Eshetie and Dr Arman Bidarbakhtnia from the United Nations, and Commonwealth Alumnus Margaret Kamau.

In the Midlands, Scholars attended a spring academic conference, where they presented and discussed their research. Each session was chaired by a PhD Scholar and the conference included a session on how to write a good PhD proposal.

In June, Cambridge Scholars made the most of the good weather by taking part in an afternoon of 'sip and paint', where they chose one of the city's historic sites to paint while enjoying a relaxing drink.

## Farewell 2023

In July, Commonwealth Scholars joined Chevening and Marshall Scholars for the joint scholarship Farewell Event at Alexandra Palace. The event celebrated Scholars' achievements during their time in the UK and, this year, featured guest speakers The Rt Hon James Cleverly MP and HRH The Prince of Wales.

Joining students and guests from across the world, Scholars had the chance to strengthen their international networks as they prepared to return to their home countries and make a difference in their communities.

# 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](mailto:alumni@cscuk.org.uk)*

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## 1983

**Sarah Borwein** was awarded a 2023 Women of Influence Award (WOI Award) in the Woman Entrepreneur/ Non-Profit Leader category. The WOI Awards is one of the most established women's award ceremonies in the Asia Pacific region. It recognises individuals and organisations in Hong Kong who have achieved exceptional goals and have a steadfast commitment to supporting female leadership inside and outside the workplace. (Scholar from Canada, MSc Development Economics, University of Oxford)

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## 1996

**Graeme Day** was the winner of the Royal Society of Chemistry Corday-Morgan Prize for pioneering the development of computational methods for guiding the discovery of functional molecular crystals. (Scholar from Canada, MSc Theoretical Chemistry, University of Oxford)

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## 2007

**Shakir Mohamed** has been listed as a TIMES 100 Most Influential People in AI 2023. Shakir is the Research Director at Google DeepMind where he pioneered some of the early research around generative AI models. He is also the co-founder of Deep Learning Indaba, a grassroots movement whose mission is to strengthen African machine learning through a spirit of community and collaboration. (Scholar from South Africa, PhD Biomedical Signal Processing, Cambridge St John's)

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## 2009

**Mohammad Jahirul Hoque** has been appointed Vice Chancellor of Metropolitan University, Sylhet. They are the youngest Vice

Chancellor of all public and private universities in Bangladesh. (Scholar from Bangladesh, MA Peace and Development, Leeds Beckett University; 2012 PhD Development Studies, SOAS, University of London)

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## 2012

**Jason Haynes** has been named as the laureate of the UNESCO/Juan Bosch Prize for the Promotion of Social Science Research in Latin America and the Caribbean. The prize recognises his research monograph 'Rethinking Anti-Trafficking Law and Practice: European and Commonwealth Caribbean Perspectives'. Dr Haynes is the first person from the English-speaking Caribbean to receive this award. (Scholar from Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, PhD Law, Durham University)

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## 2014

**Stephen Ajadi** won a 2023 Cambridge Society for the Application of Research (CSAR) PhD Student Award for his research on the spatial impact of extreme conflict and violence on open spaces in Nigeria and certain areas of the Sahel. The awards recognise outstanding research with real world application. (Shared Scholar from Nigeria, MSc Design and Innovation for Sustainability, Cranfield University)

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## 2015

**Claire French** was awarded a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Fellowship from Horizon Europe for her research project 'Dramaturgies for languaging: developing linguistically sustainable theatre and performance'. The project will interrogate the core principles and systems driving European multilingual performance; articulate an interdisciplinary methodology for analysing the reproduction of



**Sarah Borwein**

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**Jason Haynes**

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**Olakunle Oginni**



**Abdul Haseeb**

potentially damaging knowledges for minority and low-status language speakers; and make suggestions for linguistically sustainable dramaturgies to a new multilingual performance network. (Scholar from Australia, PhD Theatre Studies, University of Warwick)

**Osman Yansaneh** has invented and tested the world's first reactor capable of converting polymeric wastes and other solid wastes into multiple solid, sustainable products in a single process. This output is part of his recently completed PhD. (Scholar from Sierra Leone, MSc Petroleum, Oil and Gas: Chemical Engineering & Technology; 2018 PhD Chemical Engineering, University of Hull)

## 2018

**Olakunle Oginni** was awarded a Gottesman-Shields Prize for his PhD thesis entitled 'Sexual orientation and health disparities: investigating etiological mechanisms using genetically-sensitive designs'. The prize is awarded annually by King's College London to PhD students in the Social, Genetic and Development Psychiatry Centre who have completed their studies to an outstanding level. (Scholar from Nigeria, PhD Genetics, King's College London)

## 2020

**Abdul Haseeb** and his co-author received the Composite Award by the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining for their paper on 'Contact resistance heating of unidirectional carbon fibre tows in a powder-epoxy towpregging line'. The award recognises publications of particular merit in the field of composites made by scientists and technologists in the early stages of their career. (Scholar from Pakistan, MSc Sustainable Energy Systems, University of Edinburgh)

# Obituaries

## 1966

**Stanley Alfred Moore** served over 50 years in the legal profession. In 1979, he was appointed an Acting High Court Judge and served as the Home Affairs Minister and as a Member of Parliament in the Government of Guyana between 1981 to 1982. He also served as Attorney General in Montserrat and a Judge in several Caribbean states. He was appointed a Judge in Botswana and Swaziland until 2016. He passed away on 31 March 2023. (Scholar from Guyana, LL.M Law, University College London)

## 1971

**Danny William Rurak** was a professor in the department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of British Columbia for five decades. During this time, he established a research laboratory and the BC Institute for Women's and Children's Health, taught and mentored students, headed various committees, and spoke at universities and conferences around the world. Dr Rurak passed away on 6 March 2023. (Scholar from Canada, DPhil Physiology, University of Oxford)

## 1990

**Richard Lessard** served as the Director of Public Health on the Montreal Regional Health and Social Services Board. He was also the Principal Investigator on the Federal-Provincial Heart Health Initiative. Dr Lessard passed away on 20 July 2023. (Fellow from Canada, Cambridge Health Authority)



# Alumni events

February 2023-July 2023

## Global events

### Interchange23

In February 2023, the British Council, on behalf of the CSC, hosted the third annual global conference for Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni, Interchange23. The overarching theme of the conference was Clean Energy, Air and Oceans.

The five-day programme featured a mix of roundtable discussions, skills workshops, and networking sessions, and provided an opportunity for Commonwealth Scholars, Alumni, and other stakeholders to share knowledge and research related to preserving marine resources, increasing the use of renewable energies, and reducing air pollution.



Interchange23

### Protecting and promoting the rights of LGBT+ people webinar

In June 2023, representatives from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) Gender and Equalities policy team delivered an informal briefing about the work the UK delivers globally to defend LGBT+ rights. The briefing focused on the efforts to champion grassroots activists as well as providing an overview of the UK Government's diplomatic engagement and overseas programmes in this area. This was followed by discussion between two alumni speakers, who shared their work experiences as LGBT+ activists in Uganda and Jamaica, highlighting the challenges associated with advocating for LGBT+ rights in their respective countries. The event was open to Commonwealth and Chevening Alumni.

## In-country events

### Pakistan

Alumni in Pakistan came together at a hybrid roundtable event to discuss solutions to climate change through the adoption and implementation of climate adaptation strategies and science in March 2023. Expert alumni shared their research experiences during a panel discussion on 'Climate change - building a resilient Pakistan'.



In-country event – Pakistan

### Tanzania

Commonwealth Alumni collaborated with the Ministry of Education Science and Technology to promote Commonwealth Scholarships at higher education institutions in Zanzibar in March 2023. Alumni shared their experiences and offered advice with potential applicants.

### Zambia

Newly returned Commonwealth Scholars from Zambia attended a Welcome Home Event in March 2023. The event aimed was a celebration of Scholars' recent academic achievements and provided an opportunity for recently returned Scholars to receive support and guidance on adjusting to life back in their home country.

# Alumni Association events

## Canada

In May, Canadian Commonwealth Alumni living in the UK were invited on an exclusive tour of the Royal Opera House (ROH) in London, UK led by Commonwealth Alumnus and ROH Stage Director, Dan Dooner.

## Nigeria

In April, the Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows Alumni Association Nigeria (COSFAN) held a Commonwealth Day lecture and swearing in ceremony for its new executive committee. The lecture was titled 'Improving democratic governance for sustainable peace and development in Nigeria'.

In July, COSFAN held an inauguration ceremony for members of the Interim Executive of the Lagos Chapter of COSFAN. The chapter will support alumni engagement across Lagos.

## Ghana

In July, the Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows Alumni Association Ghana (COSFAG) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology co-hosted an information session on the theme 'Life after school' to support students coming to the end of their studies and share information on Commonwealth Scholarship opportunities.

## Development in Action Webinar Series

March 2023



**FinTech: its uses and impact on sustainable development in Asia Pacific**

**CSC theme: Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship**

Commonwealth Alumnus Jewel Kumar Roy explored how FinTech can contribute to sustainable development in the Asia Pacific region, highlighting the ways in which it has transformed access to financial services, offering greater financial inclusion than traditional methods, and how it has supported sustainable investments.

May 2023

**High-risk feminism in Colombia: women's mobilisation in violent contexts and lessons learnt**

**CSC theme: Strengthening global peace, security and governance**

Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Julia Zulver delivered a presentation on her doctoral research into high-risk feminism in Colombia. Highlighting her extensive work with grassroots women's organisations, she spoke about their role in supporting women seeking justice amidst conflict in Colombia, and the need for collective action to support feminist movements globally.



April 2023



**Democratising healthcare in Pakistan through telemedicine**

**CSC theme: Strengthening health systems and capacity**

Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Iffat Zafar Aga is the Co-Founder and Chief Operations Officer of Sehat Kahani, a telemedicine start-up based in Pakistan. In this webinar, she discussed the role that telemedicine plays in Pakistan and its potential to revolutionise the healthcare industry, showcasing the impact made by Sehat Kahani on communities in Pakistan as an example of success.

June 2023

**The pedagogy of water: designing education to support a better understanding of climate induced water crises in India**

**CSC theme: Strengthening resilience and response to crises**

Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Mansee Bal Bhargava discussed the discourse around climate-induced water crises and how it affects vulnerable groups in society, especially in India. She also spoke about the importance of changing perceptions of climate change and the importance of closing the education gap on water.



# Get involved

*You can stay part of the CSC community through events across the Commonwealth, by promoting our Scholarships and Fellowships to potential applicants, by joining our alumni associations and other networks, and by keeping us up to date with your recent achievements and challenges.*

## CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

The CSC Evaluation and Monitoring team measure the outcomes and impact of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships on individuals and institutions, as well as communities and societies by gathering data through longitudinal surveys, counterfactual studies, and case studies involving Commonwealth Alumni. This data is shared through reports to funders, on our website, on social media, and in publications. It also helps inform CSC policies and strategy. Alumni can get involved by taking part in:



Surveys sent via email



Focus groups



Interviews



Diary studies



Research projects



The Alumni Advisory Panel

Find out more at [cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/csc-evaluation](https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/csc-evaluation)



## Regional Networks

Regional Network Coordinators organise in-person and virtual events and regional activities across the UK for Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows based at the same university or region within the UK to connect and support one another. The regions represented are:

East Scotland

West Scotland

North-West England

North-East England

Wales

Northern Ireland

Midlands

Oxford

London

Cambridge

South-West England

South-East England



Scan to find out more about the 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 innovation and entrepreneurship**

**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 readings and publications, and ask and answer questions related to your work.

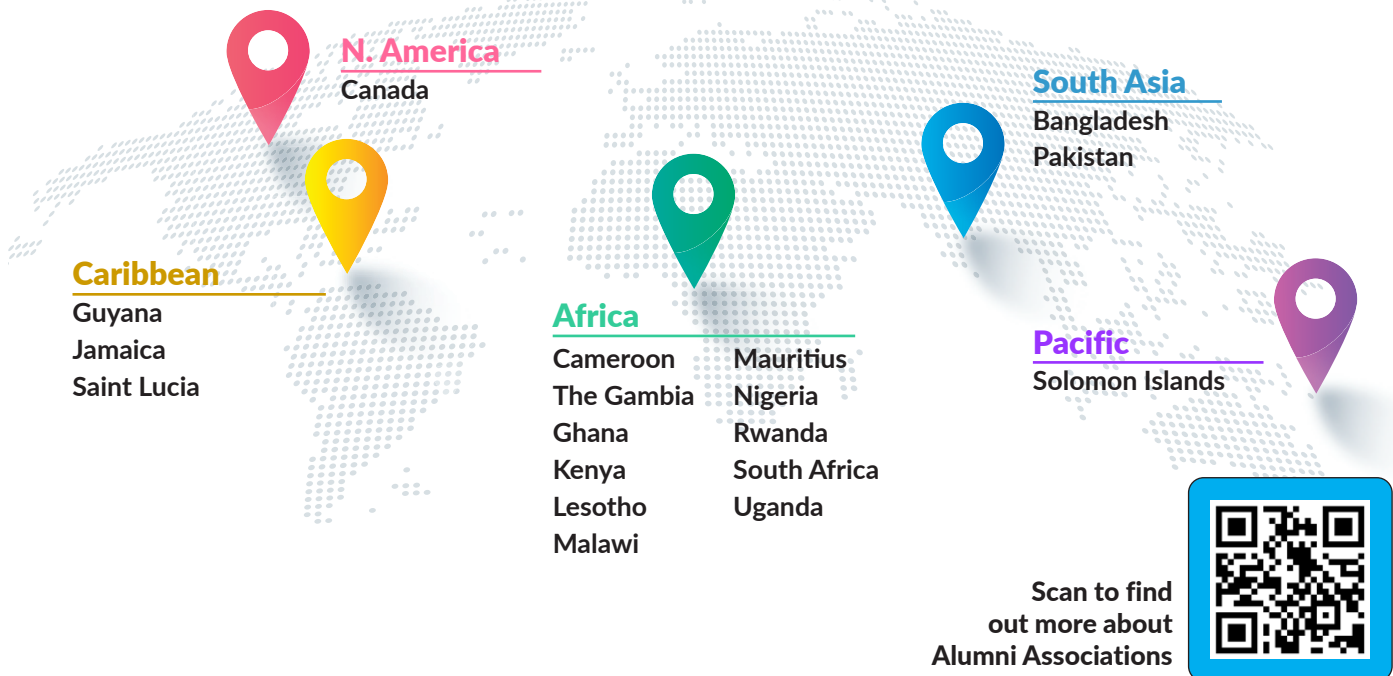


Scan to find out more about the Knowledge Hubs



## Alumni Associations

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



## Events

Find out about upcoming CSC community events:

@commschols @commonwealthscholarships [www.cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk](http://www.cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk)

Scan to find out more about upcoming events



## Share your updates with us

We always love to hear from Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni via email or our social media channels about events you've been involved with, development activities you have undertaken, awards you have won or papers you have published. Here are just some of the Scholars and Alumni we have featured on our channels this year thanks to the updates they shared with us:



For further details about these activities and more, visit [www.cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk](http://www.cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk)

# COMMON KNOWLEDGE

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