

Driving UK-Global Partnerships Through Commonwealth Scholarships

Policy briefing paper

Nighat Anwar

Introduction

Commonwealth Alumni are drawing on their expertise and networks to drive partnerships that advance development outcomes, strengthen institutions, and sustain meaningful collaborations and partnerships.

International scholarships are a key driver of global mobility, and evidence shows a strong positive association between mobility and international collaboration. The UK National Academies, for example, report that 95% of surveyed Fellows and grant recipients engaged in at least one international partnership—findings that mirror the collaborative patterns observed among many Commonwealth Alumni.

This paper examines how Commonwealth Alumni draw on their experiences, networks, and professional positioning to initiate international collaborations and partnerships. These include links with UK organisations that support development impact and institutional strengthening. It considers how Alumni-led partnerships sustain professional exchange, advance shared development priorities, and maintain long-term international engagement.

Key Messages

- Alumni-led partnerships generate policy, institutional, and service-delivery gains across key sectors.
- Sustained engagement with Commonwealth Alumni strengthens long-term collaboration between the UK and partner countries.
- Targeted support for networks and partnership-building amplifies the impact of Commonwealth Scholarships.

The findings draw on qualitative analysis of 46 Alumni cases from the CSC longitudinal survey and selected Alumni case studies. This combined approach provides a multilayered view of how Alumni-led partnerships emerge, evolve, and contribute to development outcomes and ongoing UK engagement.

Findings

There are several notable characteristics of Alumni-initiated partnerships, particularly in relation to UK collaboration, the role of Alumni, partnership scope, and resulting development impact.

Alumni partnerships strengthen UK collaboration, visibility, and strategic influence

Alumni-led partnerships play an important role in sustaining long-term connections with the UK. Commonwealth Alumni frequently report ongoing engagement through joint research, participation in UK-funded programmes such as GCRF, UKRI, and British Council initiatives, and continued involvement in Alumni networks. They often draw on perspectives shaped by their UK study experience—particularly in development practice, governance, and institutional functioning—and apply these within their national contexts. Across all cases, clear points of connection back to the UK are evident, including academic collaboration and contributions to UK-based dialogues and platforms.

The work of Commonwealth Alumnus [Stephen Christopher Johnson](#) demonstrates how Alumni translate UK models into practice, reinforcing the UK's visibility across global development sectors. Drawing on perspectives shaped during his PhD at the University of Sussex, he adapted the Glasgow public-health model for youth crime prevention through his work with FHI360 International and USAID, integrating it into Jamaica's national framework. His collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme similarly builds on the Oxford-designed Multidimensional Poverty Index, which he contextualised for Jamaica by proposing a digital inclusion indicator.



Stephen at the UNDP Jamaica Office presenting on the findings of the MPI modification at a validation workshop with local stakeholders.

Alumni play pivotal roles as initiators, facilitators, and sustainers of collaboration

Commonwealth Alumni are central actors in advancing international partnerships, taking on roles as initiators, facilitators, and long-term sustainers of collaboration. They draw on their leadership positions, institutional affiliations, and professional networks to build, formalise, and expand partnerships. As their careers progress, Alumni are often able to scale these collaborations or embed them within formal institutional structures. For instance, [Jean Chrysostome Sehene](#) illustrates how Alumni act as drivers of international partnerships.

'The knowledge and skills acquired from the Commonwealth Scholarship helped me to increase my work performance and get promoted. The promotion from national to international level expanded my exposure and thus increased my professional network and sphere of influence.'

Jean's career progression enabled him to take on increasingly influential leadership roles, allowing him to formalise and scale collaborations, embed them within national structures, and sustain long-term environmental action. As a result, he has collaborated with organisations including USAID, UNDP, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Mission for Stabilization in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and WFP, working across East and Central Africa to strengthen climate resilience and environmental governance.

These partnerships operate across multiple levels and purposes

Analysis shows that Commonwealth Alumni establish partnerships at personal, departmental, institutional, and cross-sectoral levels. These collaborations support activities ranging from capacity building and policy influence to social entrepreneurship and network strengthening. Institutional partnerships are the most common, followed by departmental and individual engagements.



A group of soil scientists from the Soil Resource Development Institute and the University of Saskatchewan visiting a soil site in Gazipur, Bangladesh.

The multilevel nature of Commonwealth Alumni partnerships is illustrated by [Shayeb Shahariar](#), whose collaborations span personal mentoring, departmental research exchange, and major institutional and international agreements. His work linking the University of Saskatchewan with the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, alongside partnerships across the Netherlands, China, Japan, and the USA, shows how Alumni build capacity, share expertise, and strengthen systems. Examples such as Shayeb's demonstrate how Alumni operate across scales to address development challenges, from grassroots initiatives to system-level reforms.

Alumni-led partnerships deliver diverse development outcomes

Partnerships led by Commonwealth Alumni generate a wide range of development outcomes. Policy influence is evident in work such as [Dr Jeremy Gareth Taylor's](#) humanitarian advocacy with the Norwegian Refugee Council, which informs decision-making in bodies including the UK House of Commons International Development Committee, FCDO, and the US Department of State, and contributes to initiatives like the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

Capacity-building outcomes emerge through partnerships such as [Ananya Bhattacharya's](#) leadership within the UNESCO-accredited ICH NGO Forum and the Global Coordination Committee for the 2005 Convention, and [Dr Tabeth Lynn Masengu's](#) gender-equality work with the Council of Europe, EU-CORD, and judicial networks across Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia,



Dr Tabeth Lynn Masengu delivering Women's Pioneer Leadership Training Weekend 2015.

Tanzania, and Uganda. Alumni also support service-delivery improvements, illustrated by [Dr Dacia Latoya Leslie's](#) coordination of the Crime Prevention and Offender Management Cluster at the University of the West Indies, and by [Durreshawar Mahmood's](#) work with the World Bank, EU, UN Women, the German Red Cross, and the EU-funded SUCCESS programme in Pakistan.

The findings indicate that the programme continues to generate substantial and enduring contributions across multiple sectors through partnerships. Sustaining this momentum will be important for future UK engagement and the delivery of shared development priorities.

Policy Implications

- **Strengthening Alumni collaboration aligns with the UK's broader international development and soft-power objectives**, supporting durable, mutually reinforcing relationships with partner countries.
- **Maintaining support for Alumni-driven collaboration helps strengthen the UK's long-term global engagement**, particularly through continued academic cooperation, knowledge exchange, and professional mobility.
- **Sustaining Alumni engagement mechanisms reinforces long-term international collaboration**, helping preserve the benefits generated through Alumni-led partnerships across sectors.
- **Targeted investment in Alumni networks, institutional linkages, and partnerships** would enhance the developmental value associated with the Commonwealth Scholarships and maximise opportunities for shared learning and cooperation.
- **Prioritising mechanisms that enable Alumni to scale or formalise partnerships**, particularly those linked to leadership progression or institutional affiliation, could amplify the long-term impact of alumni-led initiatives.
- **Reducing investment in Alumni support systems risks weakening the cumulative and system-level outcomes** evident in the findings, including contributions to policy reform, institutional strengthening, and improved service delivery.