

Unlocking Graduate Potential: Commonwealth Alumni and Entrepreneurship

Policy briefing paper

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Introduction

In recent years, the proportion of populations enrolled in tertiary education in low and middle income countries has increased dramatically. Whilst this is a significant achievement, job markets in these countries have struggled to keep pace, and economies have failed to create sufficient **skilled jobs** to meet the demands of the **rising numbers of graduates**. Demographic changes in these countries have resulted in **larger working-age populations**, leading to **highly competitive job markets**, and many skilled graduates cannot secure a quality job. This situation is set to worsen over the coming years; in the



Dr Deborah Ruth Amulen conducting hive inspections in the field.

Summary

- Tertiary education in low and middle income countries has grown rapidly, but graduate job creation has not kept pace.
- Demographic pressures will intensify employment challenges, with 1.2 billion young people entering the workforce in the next decade in these countries.
- The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission supports graduates to **create employment for themselves and others** through Commonwealth Scholarships and the Commonwealth Startup Fellowship.
- Alumni-founded ventures span key sectors including **healthcare, clean energy, and disability inclusion**.

next decade, the World Bank estimates that 1.2 billion young people in low and middle income countries will reach working age. The need is expected to be greatest in Africa and Western Asia, where rapid population growth will intensify these challenges.

The United Nations has called for action in this area, and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth promotes the development of **policies to foster job creation and growing enterprises**, as well as the **promotion of youth employment, education and training**. These pressures were also acknowledged by the UK Government in a 2023 white paper, which outlined the UK's goal to **support economies to transform at pace** to meet the needs of their growing populations **and provide quality jobs for an expanding workforce**.

Commonwealth Scholarships and Entrepreneurship

In order to capitalise on and support growing graduate populations, new jobs must be created. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission supports this goal by equipping graduates with the skills and resources they need to **create jobs for themselves and others**. This has been achieved both through the Commonwealth Scholarships programme, and through the recent creation of the **Commonwealth Startup Fellowship** which supports entrepreneurs to build thriving businesses, scale operations effectively, and drive job creation in their home countries.

The benefits of entrepreneurship by Commonwealth Alumni are twofold. Not only are Alumni helping to address the need for job creation, but ventures founded by Alumni frequently address critical development-related issues, including **healthcare, clean energy, and food security**.

Commonwealth Alumni are Founders and Innovators

The CSC regularly asks alumni to report on their post-award activities, including details of any startups they have created. From 2016 to 2023, **almost one-fifth of respondents indicated that they had founded or co-founded a new company, department or institute** following the completion of their Commonwealth Scholarship. This impressive figure underscores that Commonwealth Alumni are making a tangible and significant contribution to job creation for themselves and others in their home countries.

Furthermore, more than **90% of alumni** have indicated that they had **personally led or designed a new initiative or project** in the last two years. Similarly, almost **three-quarters of alumni** have indicated that they had acted as **the lead author or negotiator on a bid for funding or investment** in the last two years.

Led a new project

94%

Led on funding or investment bid

71%

Commonwealth Alumni are Entrepreneurs

This entrepreneurial spirit is exemplified by [Femi Adekoya](#), a Commonwealth Alumnus and entrepreneur who graduated from Harper Adams University in 2019 with a Master's in Integrated Pest Management:

'We want to transform and revolutionise agriculture to be able to deliver on the promise of food security and a resilient food system. We are at the forefront of introducing drone technology to smallholder farmers, empowering them with tools to optimise crop health and yield.'

Harper Adams is a centre for precision agriculture, and whilst on award Femi was able to access an industrial sprayer drone. Drone technology is already widely employed in the UK farming industry; drones reduce the intensity of the labour required by farmers and also increase safety by removing the need to handle dangerous chemicals directly. However, in Nigeria in 2020, drone technology was little used and poorly understood. Following his graduation, Femi founded Integrated Aerial Precision (IAP), which uses drone technology to improve **efficiency, sustainability and profitability** for Nigerian farmers. He offers drone services in a variety of areas, including herbicide application and farm mapping.

Today, Femi's company has ten members of staff, in addition to contractors hired on a project-by-project basis. Femi exemplifies the impact of entrepreneurial Commonwealth Alumni, as he has used his degree to create **quality, sustainable employment**, whilst also addressing the **key development challenges** of **food security** and **sustainable agriculture**.



Femi standing with a 40L capacity agricultural spray drone engaged for aerial applications of crop protection and agro-input solutions.

Commonwealth Alumni are Supporting Entrepreneurship

Whilst some Alumni work as entrepreneurs themselves, others go on to support the next generation of entrepreneurs. This is demonstrated by [Deborah Ruth Amulen](#), a Commonwealth Alumna who received a Split-site scholarship and spent a year studying at Bangor University as part of her PhD in Applied Biological Sciences. During her year at Bangor, Deborah studied the **link between beekeeping and poverty alleviation**, and she saw that **quality**



Deborah and the CIRD team training Black Soldier Fly farmers.

employment in the agricultural sector could be transformative for Ugandan communities. Upon her return home, she founded the Centre for Insect Research and Development (CIRD), an NGO focussed on research and product development for beneficial insects. Through CIRD, Deborah provides **essential training and resources** to enable farmers to begin beekeeping and rearing Black Soldier Flies. CIRD has directly supported more than **500 insect farms**. This demonstrates the compounding impact of the Commonwealth Scholarships, as one alumna can go on to have a deep and profound impact in their home country.

Conclusions

- Commonwealth Alumni are playing a critical role in addressing the growing gap between rising tertiary education enrolment and limited graduate employment opportunities in low and middle income countries.
- Through both Scholarships and the Commonwealth Startup Fellowship, the CSC is equipping graduates with the skills, networks, and resources needed to generate their own employment and create jobs for others.
- Alumni-led ventures are not only expanding economic opportunities but also tackling urgent development challenges in sectors such as healthcare, clean energy, and disability inclusion.
- High levels of entrepreneurial activity – reflected in the significant proportion of Alumni founding startups and leading new initiatives – demonstrate the CSC's impact in fostering a new generation of job creators and innovators.

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK

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