



# **SPEAKING OUT FOR SOCIAL WORK IN THE COMMONWEALTH 2019 – 2021**



**December 2021**

## Foreword – COSW Chair Sylvia Daisy Romanus



With great pleasure I present the COSW report on activities 2019-2021. I am proud to say that the commitment and dedication of COSW Board members has led to success in achieving the objectives of COSW in these two years.

In this COVID 19 pandemic there were dramatic changes in our family and work life but we found creative ways to adapt to a new lifestyle. Similarly, COSW Board members found dynamic ways to connect with partners and to stay focussed on the accomplishments.

As you read the annual report you will understand the representation of COSW Board members in various Commonwealth meetings organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and their significant contributions at regional, national and international conferences organised by reputed social work organisations such as IFSW. The report on the young carers program, a project implemented in East Africa that has run for over 10 years, shows the strength of networking with like-minded organisations. Shifting completely to online work mode, organising meetings, elections and webinars, COSW became more visible to professional social workers spread across the globe. COSW was able to reach the student community and social work fraternity in large numbers through the online webinars organised with the support of BASW, Social Work History Network and Madras Christian College. The launch of the COSW Website and new format newsletter and the promotion of Commonwealth and COSW activities through Twitter and Facebook accounts have made the COSW online presence significant in the pandemic.

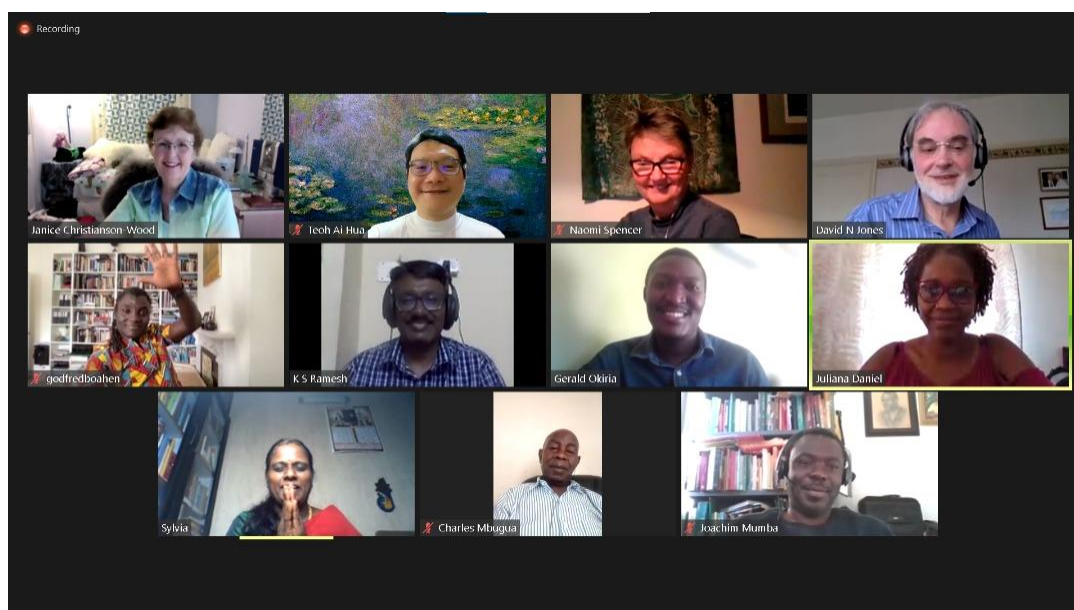
As I look back at the accomplishments of COSW, I realise that without the support of Board members it would have been difficult. My sincere appreciation to David Jones, COSW Representative to Commonwealth Institutions, for his good stewardship and heartfelt thanks to each and every Board member for their pertinent contribution. I wish all readers not only interesting reading but also adopting the Commonwealth values outlined in this report.

With every good wish,



*The Charter welcomes 'the valuable contribution of the network of the many intergovernmental, parliamentary, professional and civil society bodies which support the Commonwealth'*

## Governance



The following Board members were elected at the 2020 online General Meeting:

- Sylvia Daisy Romanus (India) - COSW Chair
- Monique Auffrey (Canada) - Honorary Secretary
- Godfred Boahen (UK) - Honorary Treasurer
- David N Jones (UK) Main Representative to the Commonwealth Institutions
- Board members - Jan Christianson-Wood (Canada), Teoh Ai Hua (Malaysia), Charles Mbugua (Kenya), K. S. Ramesh (India) and Naomi Spencer (Australia)

The Newsletter editor, Gerald Okiria (Uganda), attends Board meetings.

The Governance Working Party is reviewing governance arrangements and membership.

## Memorial to COSW Board member Terry Bamford

Terry Bamford was a founder Board member of COSW and a tireless activist in social work and human rights in the Commonwealth, within IFSW and in the UK. He died following a fall when on holiday in February 2020. The funeral service in Worthing, UK in March 2020 immediately preceded the UK lockdown and the pandemic prevented a physical memorial event in London. COSW Board member David N Jones delivered the eulogy at the funeral, including reference to Terry's Commonwealth activity. An online memorial event was organised by BASW in May 2021 with around 20 speakers including COSW Board members Charles Mbugua and David N Jones; a video can be watched [here](#). A memorial lecture on global human rights and social work is planned for 2022.



## Statement on Human Rights in the Commonwealth



COSW adopted a statement on 'Human Rights for all Peoples in the Commonwealth' which restates the principles of the Organisation and reaffirms support for the Commonwealth Charter. As a Commonwealth Organisation, COSW cannot ignore the legacy of colonialism, racism and other discriminations which have left an indelible legacy. In response to the #BlackLivesMatter protests and the indisputable evidence of structural racism and of persistent discrimination faced by Indigenous Peoples and other minorities around the Commonwealth, COSW recognises its responsibility to uphold those principles and to take action to challenge and correct past abuses. COSW Chair Dr Sylvia Romanus commented 'These principles and commitments are not new in social work, but at this crucial and troubling time in the world, we need to restate them and be ready to stand by them'.

## Finances

COSW is primarily sustained on the basis of voluntary commitment by Board members and others. Madras Christian College and the British Association of Social Workers have provided administrative support, especially in relation to webinars and online meetings.

## Commonwealth accreditation

COSW has retained [formal accreditation](#) to the Commonwealth throughout this period. Representatives have participated regularly in the Commonwealth meetings in person and online, including the biannual dialogues with the Secretary General.

## Communications

The new COSW website ([www.cosw.info](http://www.cosw.info)) was launched in March 2021 as planned and has been regularly updated. COSW has a [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) account which have been used to promote Commonwealth as well as COSW activity. COSW information is widely disseminated by the International Federation of Social Workers ([www.ifsw.org](http://www.ifsw.org)), the British Association of Social Workers ([www.basw.co.uk](http://www.basw.co.uk)) and other associations through websites and social media.



A new PDF [newsletter](#) was launched, as planned, in March 2021 and the second issue was published in August 2021.

COSW has contributed presentations at national, regional and global online social work conferences over the period including the reorganised IFSW 2020 world conference which took place online in July 2020.





## Activities

### Young carer project - developing a Commonwealth Charter for Young Carers

The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) has now co-sponsored four young carer festivals in Nairobi for a festival of fun, reflection and campaigning organised by in partnership with the Kenya National Association of Social Workers and others and with support from Nairobi County Council. In 2019, the [fourth festival](#) organised on this basis used social media and video, funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat as part of the Commonwealth @70 grant, enabling the East African young carers to connect with young carers in other Commonwealth countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom. They shared the pressures of their daily lives, such as caring for disabled or sick parents, 'parenting' siblings, doing small jobs to earn money to pay rent and buy food, doing school work, and being forced to be 'responsible' whilst being denied respect by officials and communities.



COSW is working with several organisations to deliver this project including the Noel & Thea Jones Fund (NTJF), Kenya National Association of Social Workers, Nigeria Association of Social Workers, Rwanda Association of Social Workers, Tanzania Association of Social Workers, National Association of Social Workers of Uganda, Children's Society (UK), International Federation of Social Workers, Carers Worldwide (India), Northamptonshire Young Carers (UK), young carer organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada and the Commonwealth Youth Programme. The NTJF provides funding for travel to the event, usually by public transport, accommodation and meals for participants. COSW would be interested in exploring funding options with other partners.



Improvements sought by the young people included helping school teachers and public officials to understand their pressures instead of punishing them for shortcomings (resulting from their caring responsibilities), arranging help with school fees, making it easier to get medical help when needed and spreading awareness in the community.

This project has run for over 10 years focused on East Africa but in 2019, with the aid of a Commonwealth Secretariat grant, the reach of the project extended to young carers in other Commonwealth countries including Australia, Canada, India, Nigeria, Aotearoa New Zealand and the UK. The plan was to involve young people in developing a Young Carers Charter to be presented to the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kigali. The pandemic has disrupted this programme but work is going ahead to develop the Charter for 2022, in active partnership with the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

The COSW project, in partnership with The Noel and Thea Jones Fund, also supports 'after school' clubs for young carers in the greater Nairobi area. During the pandemic, the staff in the project have been supporting young people out of school with practical and emotional support, such as coping with loss of income, family conflicts and pregnancies in young girls.

### **Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO)**

COSW was a founding organisational member of IFCO and has a representative on the Steering Group. COSW has contributed to all meetings of [IFCO](#) and has supported the co-ordination and administration of the Forum, including the development of clusters of organisations with a shared concern (e.g. health and wellbeing, sustainable urbanisation, children) and discussion of common policy positions and draft CHOGM submissions.



Commonwealth Day flags in Parliament Square, Westminster

COSW had prepared for the anticipated 2020 CHOGM in partnership with IFCO and the [Rwanda National Organization of Social Workers](#). Delegates to the civil society, youth and women's forums had been identified. COSW took joint responsibility for the draft CHOGM submissions on health and wellbeing and also on digital transformation and new technology, both roles endorsed by the Secretariat. Sadly, the CHOGM was twice postponed (2020 and 2021) because of the pandemic but the preparation and partnership working will not be wasted.

## Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance

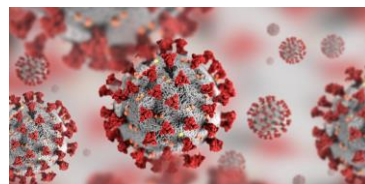


COSW is an active member of the [CHPA](#) and Board members participated in the annual meeting, the [2020](#) and [2021](#) Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forums and other events. COSW took a lead role, working with other Alliance members, in drafting the proposed CHOGM submission on health and wellbeing and contributed to CHPA webinars.

## Support for social workers responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

COSW issued a [statement](#) on the role of social workers in responding to the social, economic and medical crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic which was distributed to Commonwealth Organisations and the Secretariat in advance of COSW participation in the Secretary General's online consultation. COSW has contributed to Commonwealth Secretariat, CHPA and IFSW discussions about the pandemic and a global partnership on equitable access to vaccines

COSW helped facilitate the British Association of Social Workers grant distribution aiming to support specific social work projects responding to the pandemic. One project based in Zambia involved a series of online webinars co-ordinated by the IFSW Africa region (mainly involving Commonwealth countries) presenting information about different aspects of the Covid-19 responses including a focus on women's issues and also domestic violence. Of the eight projects given financial support from the BASW [International Development Fund](#), of around £60,000 over two years, six related primarily to Commonwealth countries. A publication describing the projects is well advanced, to be published online by BASW.



COSW held its first global [webinar](#) on 27-29 July 2020 hosted by Madras Christian University. This attracted over 10,000 participants and views of the [video](#) recording. Entitled '*Global Trends In Mental Health*', the webinar included speakers from the Caribbean, India, Malaysia, Australia, Malta, the UK and the IFSW Africa President.

## Linking with diaspora social work groups in the UK



COSW is endorsing a project led by the British Association of Social Workers to identify and strengthen working links with formal and informal networks of social workers from Commonwealth (and other) countries now working in the UK. During the year BASW confirmed the formation of a [Diaspora Special Interest Group](#). An AGM resolution in 2021 and articles in professional magazines further promoted the concerns identified by this group.

The UK Department of Health and Social Care launched a new code of practice for employers of social workers coming to the UK with overseas qualifications. The code mainly focuses on recruitment to the health service, whilst claiming to cover social care as well.

There are many shortcomings in the social care elements of the code, which is being taken up by BASW in a forthcoming meeting with the Minister. The work by BASW on these issues has significant implications for Commonwealth social workers in the UK.

### Comparative Histories of Commonwealth Social Work



A two-hour [webinar](#) was organised by the UK based Social Work History Network in partnership with COSW and Madras Christian College. It was broadcast live and is available on [YouTube](#). Nine speakers reflected on the development of social work in their regions, alongside a description of relevant material in the IFSW archive dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prof Philip Murphy (ICWS) was the lead discussant, highlighting the importance of this history for the Commonwealth. The video is made available and has reached a global audience of around 1,000 viewers.

This event was hosted by the Social Work History Network in partnership with Madras Christian College Social Work Department (India). Other bodies included members of Barbados Association of Social Workers, Kenyan National Association of Social Workers, National University of Singapore, University of the West Indies, the International Federation of Social Workers and others.

COSW has announced a formal partnership with the Institute for Commonwealth Studies, A steering group has been formed. The call for [presentation proposals](#) for an online conference in March/April 2022 has been issued. This is intended to be a springboard for a major funding proposal, and it is planned to develop partnerships with universities in a number of Commonwealth countries as the project unfolds.

### Sustainable cities and urban environments

COSW has supported the major project on sustainable cities and communities with a particular interest in the links between physical and social planning and sustainability, led by the Commonwealth Association of Architects, Commonwealth Association of Planners and others. A COSW Board member attended Habitat 2020 and contributed to the panel discussion. Both partners are looking to extend the partnership in the current year.



### Participation in global survey of the working environment for social workers

International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has a research agreement with Bath Spa and Ulster Universities (UK) to undertake [biennial global surveys](#) of social workers to gain a systematic understanding of the impact of the working environment on their health, wellbeing and effectiveness. It has been agreed that the research reports will include a specific report on the situation in Commonwealth countries. The report of the pilot study was launched at the IFSW world conference in July 2020 and plans are already underway for the first full survey to be published in 2022. Academic articles will be published in 2022.



The global survey is based on a national survey undertaken for BASW, using standard international psychological instruments, published in 2018 and 2019. It is planned to develop partnerships with universities in a number of Commonwealth countries as the project unfolds.



David N Jones (COSW),  
Paula McFadden (Ulster Univ),  
Rory Truell (IFSW),  
Silvana Martinez (IFSW),  
Lola Casal (IFSW),  
Jermaine Ravalier (Bath Spa Univ)

Partners in this project, which is led by IFSW and its member organisations, currently include Bath Spa University, Ulster University, UN Research Institute for Social Development, British Association of Social Workers, Makerere University and others.

### **The People's Summit – a new ecosocial world – June 2022**

COSW is a partner with IFSW, UNRISD, the Commonwealth Secretariat, IASSW and many others in a ground-breaking new approach to global conferences and consultations.



## Human Rights for all Peoples in the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Charter embodies the values of the Commonwealth and Accredited Commonwealth Organisations (COs), including the Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work, are bound to uphold its principles. As a Commonwealth Organisation, we cannot ignore the legacy of colonialism, racism and other discriminations which have left an indelible legacy within the Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, in response to the worldwide #BlackLivesMatter protests and the indisputable evidence of structural racism and of persistent discrimination faced by Indigenous Peoples and other minorities around the Commonwealth, we reaffirm our commitment to the values expressed in the words of the Commonwealth Charter and recognise our responsibility to uphold those principles in the practice of social work and the education of social workers and to take action to challenge and correct past abuses.

We note that, despite the good intentions and fine commitments of the Commonwealth Charter, health inequalities, poverty and other forms of discrimination continue within and between Commonwealth countries. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on black and minority ethnic communities in the Commonwealth gives renewed urgency to the need to challenge structural racism in social work education and practice and to create a society of fairness.

Recognising that structural oppressions affect everybody, including our own organisations, and that we have an equal responsibility to be self-aware and open to challenge, COSW therefore resolves to:

- work to enhance equal opportunities for peoples of all races, ethnicities and backgrounds, supporting the case for decent work, sustainable livelihoods and health equity, within healthy human settlements;
- raise awareness of the consequences of racism and discrimination throughout the Commonwealth and work with governmental and non-governmental partners to challenge these inequities, in particular as they affect the practice and education of social workers and social work agencies;
- support the inclusion of decolonisation perspectives at all levels of social work education;
- look for respectful ways to memorialise the colonised;
- advocate that all members of our communities must be supported and protected from harassment;
- report to the membership on the diversity of membership of our governance structures and take steps to ensure that our organisation reflects the diversity of the Commonwealth.

Extracts from the COSW statement – the full statement is available at <https://coswcw.files.wordpress.com/2021/07/coswhumanrightsstatement2021.pdf>

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<sup>1 1</sup> Virtual Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting, 14 October 2020 - CFAMM (VIR)(20)(9)REV3

## The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work

### History

Inspired by the vision of Anthony Tan, a social worker from Malaysia, COSW was first discussed at a meeting of social workers from Commonwealth countries during the biennial conference of the International Federation of Social Workers in 1994 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Following development work and further exploration, the constitution was endorsed by social workers from 11 Commonwealth countries and signed in Montreal, Canada in 2000. COSW was registered as a company limited by guarantee in London in 2005.



COSW was first accredited to the Commonwealth in 1995 and attended its first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Edinburgh in 1997. COSW has been represented by local social workers at every CHOGM since that date. COSW plays an active part in Commonwealth networks in discussion with the Secretariat and Foundation and with other accredited organisations through the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations.

### Objectives

- To promote the education and training of social workers throughout the world for the benefit of the public
- To relieve poverty
- To promote the education of the public in matters of social policy, social organisation and social problems.

### Goals

- To provide a Commonwealth network for information about social work and social development
- To provide support and sharing of technical knowledge and expertise between and amongst Commonwealth countries and their social workers
- To identify contact people in all Commonwealth countries who will act as liaison persons for interested individuals, groups and organisations within their countries
- To establish a link with Commonwealth organizations with similar objectives in order to pursue common objectives
- To work closely with the International Federation of Social Workers and to promote active involvement of Commonwealth social workers in international social work and social development organisations.



*COSW at CHOGM  
2018*

*Godfred Boahen  
(above)*

*David Jones (below)*

## The Commonwealth

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of [54 independent and equal countries](#).

It is home to 2.5 billion people and includes both advanced economies and developing countries. 32 of the members are small states, including many island nations.

The member governments have agreed to shared goals like development, democracy and peace. The Commonwealth values and principles are expressed in the [Commonwealth Charter](#).

The Commonwealth is often described as a 'family' of nations. At the heart of this family are 3 intergovernmental organisations:

- The Commonwealth Secretariat supports member countries to achieve the Commonwealth's aims.
- The Commonwealth Foundation supports people's participation in democracy and development.
- The Commonwealth of Learning promotes open learning and distance education.

Member countries are also supported by [a network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil, cultural and professional organisations](#), of which COSW is one. The accredited organisations work together through the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations.



December 2021

[www.cosw.info](http://www.cosw.info)