



Commonwealth
perspectives
from social
workers

Activity Report
2021-2022

FOREWORD BY THE CHAIR



I am pleased to present the Annual Activity Report of COSW. The past year has been yet another incredible journey for COSW. There has been consistent coordination between COSW and the global social work bodies, international NGOs and the other Commonwealth Organisations. COSW retained our Commonwealth [accreditation](#). It is becoming more and more evident that COSW, with its strong networks, is promoting the Commonwealth goals of prosperity, democracy and peace.

This annual report is packed with information relating to the activity supported by the COSW Board, including participation of COSW in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda in June, Commonwealth Health Professions & Partners Alliance, Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Network, the new Children's Cluster of independent Commonwealth Organisations, the IFSW/UNRISD People's Summit, the Young Carers Charter, several webinars (including a two-day webinar on Comparative Histories of Social Work in the Commonwealth) and much more.

The COSW Board approved a statement on *Human Rights for all People in The Commonwealth* at the start of the year, including a commitment to support for decolonisation and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples. This report highlights how our activities have supported our human rights commitments. We know that more needs to be done and this remains a core concern and commitment of the COSW Board.

The Commonwealth united in August to celebrate outstanding achievements in the Commonwealth Games but was sadly united again in mourning the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the longest-reigning monarch in British history and Head of the Commonwealth. The COSW [condolences](#) recognised her decades of public service.

Last but not the least, this report outlines the launch of the historic change in COSW governance arrangements and the launch of the COSW Open Policy Forum. Staying connected and learning from the experience of colleague social workers are needed even more in these times of uncertainty. Facilitating connections remains the COSW mission.

I hope you enjoy your reading: sending best wishes for your success. We love to hear from you. Do send your suggestions, feedback and comments to coswmember@gmail.com.

Dr. Sylvia Daisy Romanus, (Chair, Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work)

COSW STATEMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL PEOPLE IN THE COMMONWEALTH



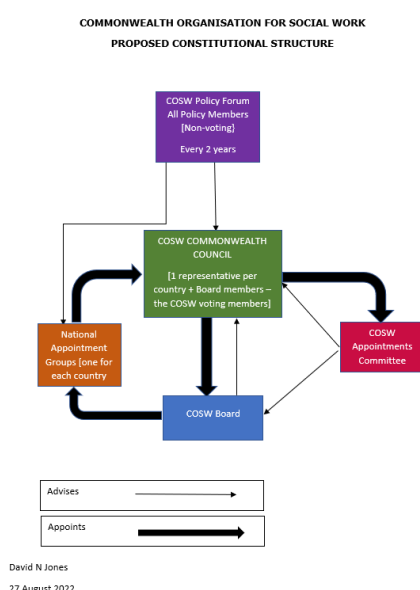
The COSW Board approved a [statement on human rights for all](#) including commitments to decolonialisation at its meeting in June 2021.

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 resolved 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.

These commitments are evidenced in this report and in the revised governance arrangements which are being implemented. The Board recognises that this is a commitment which is never concluded and welcomes feedback and debate about effective strategies for implementation.

REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND CONSTITUTION



The COSW constitutional structure has effectively remained unchanged since its formal adoption in 2000 and registration as a company limited by guarantee in 2005. The Board has agreed that there is a need to review the structure to ensure sustainability and improve transparency. The Board engaged in dialogue over several months, including reviewing the structure of other Commonwealth Organisations and of similar voluntary and membership-based organisations. The Board eventually concluded that COSW should have a constitution based on a 'trust' model rather than the more traditional association membership model, noting the administrative challenges in managing a global membership with limited resources.

The COSW Board approved the outline of the new structure at its meeting in September 2022 and a two-year implementation programme to put all the elements in place. The proposals include

Commonwealth perspectives from social workers 2021-2022

creation of a COSW Commonwealth Council with a representative from each Commonwealth country having equal votes.

The new governance structures and related issues will be presented in an open online event in October 2022 and implemented over a two year period.

YOUNG CARER PROJECT - DEVELOPING A COMMONWEALTH CHARTER FOR YOUNG CARERS

THE COMMONWEALTH CHARTER FOR YOUNG CARERS



Young carers from across the Commonwealth have developed this Charter, grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Young carers in every country look after someone in their family who has an illness or a disability or other condition. Sometimes they look after the whole family. Young carers are children and young people first and should be free to develop emotionally and physically and to take full advantage of opportunities for educational achievement and life success.

"It is important to involve young carers in all aspects of policy making and decision making. We have a voice - listen to us!"

AS YOUNG CARERS FROM AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH WE ASK THAT WE:

Are listened to and our views and culture are respected.

Understand how we feel and what we need.

Do not face discrimination as a carer or for our family situation.

Have our physical health and emotional needs acknowledged and assessed.

Have a right to an assessment of our needs separate from the needs of the person we care for.

Going a young carer can be challenging and sometimes we all need a little support and time out, just to be ourselves and relax.

Have the right support given to the person we care for, so we don't have to provide excessive care which impacts on our own health and wellbeing.

Have practical support and help offered including respite care.

Are protected from psychological and physical harm.

Have the right to education, time to focus on our studies and be offered real choices in accessing further education and future aspirations.

Adults who work with us should know about who we care for and how it might affect us.

Have the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

Have a home that is suitable and safe for us and our family.

Young carers should be treated equally... no one should be judged because of their family situations.

It's hard... trying to find a balance in life - juggling everything we have to do.

We want schools to respect and understand the issues we have to deal with at home!

The Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work (COSW) works with others to ensure that social work voices and social concerns are heard in the Commonwealth. Find out more at: www.cosw.info

May 2022

This project has run for over 16 years focused on East Africa and the UK but in 2019, with the aid of a Commonwealth Secretariat grant, the reach of the project extended to young carers in other Commonwealth countries.

The pandemic disrupted this programme but work went ahead involving young people in developing a draft Young Carers Charter which was launched in a participant event in the 2020 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) People's Forum in Kigali. The seminar was presented jointly with International Social Service, It's a Penalty, Commonwealth Lawyers Association and others.

There has been active consultation with the Commonwealth Youth Programme throughout and further consultation on the draft is planned through the Youth Forum leading to eventual endorsement as a Commonwealth statement

(<https://coswcw.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/220512youngcarercharter.pdf>).

Improvements sought by the young people included helping schoolteachers 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 and acceptance in the community.

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. An evaluation of the project was commissioned during this year leading to a review of the future of the project in 2022/3.

The projects have been described in conference presentations, including the People's Global Summit: Co-building a New Eco-Social World in June 2022

(<https://newecosocialworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/AbstractBook-v11.pdf>).

COMPARATIVE HISTORIES OF COMMONWEALTH SOCIAL WORK



COSW and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS), School of Advanced Study (SAS) launched a global project to document the history and development of social work across the Commonwealth, in a partnership with The University of Edinburgh and King's College London. The aim is to develop a bid for a programme of funded research on this theme. In

preparation for this a two-day online conference was held in March/April 2022 to identify key themes and potential collaborators for the bid.

This major study of the diverse histories of social work across the Commonwealth is expected to involve a partnership of Commonwealth universities alongside COSW and ICWS. This webinar set the scene for this bigger project, which comes at a significant moment in social work education, as the discourse on 'decolonising' the social work curriculum gathers momentum.

The webinar included contributions from the COSW Chair, the Commonwealth Secretary General, the Director General of the Commonwealth Foundation and the Vice Chancellor of University of London. Papers were presented by contributors from Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia, India, Zambia and Zimbabwe, United Kingdom, Jamaica and Canada. All the proceedings are available as videos.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM) 2022 IN KIGALI, RWANDA



COSW had prepared for the 2020 CHOGM in partnership with Commonwealth Organisations coordinated through IFCO and involving the Rwanda National Organization of Social Workers (<https://rwasw.wordpress.com>).

Delegates from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda represented COSW in CHOGM 2022 and the People's, Youth and Women's forums.



COSW took joint responsibility for the draft CHOGM submissions from Commonwealth Organisations on health and wellbeing and on digital transformation and new technology, both roles endorsed by the Secretariat (<https://coswcw.files.wordpress.com/2022/06/chogm-2022-submission-of-cw-organisations-to-cow.pdf>).

From Left: Gerald Okiria (UG), Alice Mbiyu (KE) and Innocent Hambifura (RW) some of the COSW delegates at the Commonwealth Peoples' Forums



1 From Left: Gerald Okiria (UG), Charles Mbugua (KE) and Innocent Hambifura (RW) at the CHOGM official Opening Ceremony.

The Children's Cluster of Commonwealth Organisations was successful in securing one of a limited number of participant-led seminars in the People's Forum. The chosen themes on children's issues included the significance of the Hague Convention on inter-country mobility of children and families (International Social Service), safeguarding and modern slavery (It's A Penalty) and the proposed Commonwealth Young Carers Charter (COSW), all in the context of the Kigali Declaration on Child Care and Protection Reform. Contributors to the seminar included the Rwanda Director of Hope and Homes, President of the Commonwealth Association of Lawyers and a senior representative of Commonwealth Trades Unions, among others.

COMMONWEALTH NETWORKING



Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations

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.



2 Photo: Commonwealth Secretary-General with representatives of Commonwealth Organisations (including COSW representative David N Jones) following a dialogue meeting at Marlborough House in 2018

Commonwealth Secretariat Review of Accredited Organisations

The Commonwealth Secretariat invited Commonwealth Organisations to participate in a review of the contribution of Accredited Organisations to the life of the Commonwealth. COSW participated actively in the discussions between Commonwealth Organisations, facilitated through IFCO, and a COSW Board member was appointed to the Steering Group. A COSW Board member has been interviewed by the researcher.



Formation of Commonwealth Children's Cluster

The Children's Cluster is an informal grouping of Commonwealth Organisations with an interest in policy and practice related to children and families. The inaugural meeting in April 2022 attracted a significant number of organisations who expressed an interest in working together. COSW chairs the cluster in the first instance and administration is provided by International Social Service. The cluster organised a participant-led session in the 2022 People's Forum (See above).



Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance

COSW is an active member of the CHPA and Board members participated in the annual meeting, 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.



Sustainable Cities and Urban Environments

COSW has supported the Call to Action on sustainable cities and communities led by the Commonwealth Association of Architects, Commonwealth Association of Planners, Commonwealth Local Government Association, Association of Commonwealth Universities, Prince's Trust and others. A report on the call to action was included in the COSW plenary presentation to the People's Global Summit in June 2022.

THE PEOPLE'S GLOBAL SUMMIT: CO-BUILDING A NEW ECO-SOCIAL WORLD LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND



The People's Global Summit (<https://newecosocialworld.com>) was facilitated by IFSW and UNRISD and brought together individuals and

communities and people with lived experiences, alongside global organisations (such as UNICEF, UNESCO and professional bodies) to co-build a combined global conversation on the creation of globally shared values for a new eco-social world that leaves no one behind. COSW facilitated the engagement of the Commonwealth Secretariat as a formal partner in the conference.

The vision of this people's global summit emerged from the pandemic, the climatic crisis, and the need to co-build a new eco-social world based on values that shape policies and practices to ensure sustainability and good quality life-cycles – not only for each human being but for each part of our eco-systems on which we all depend, leaving no one behind.

The people's global summit provided spaces for individuals as well as for group representatives to advance their ideas and provided a platform for engagement across different cultures, diverse lived experiences, professional groups, and perspectives. All contributions shaped the People's Charter for a new eco-social world that was to be delivered

to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum in July 2022 aiming to create a catalyst for further global action (<https://newecosocialworld.com/the-peoples-charter-for-an-eco-social-world>).

Effective social work almost always requires partnership working with communities, service users and with other professions. In the pre-recorded COSW plenary presentation, COSW was joined by three Commonwealth partner organisations representing nurses and midwives, the interests of older people and the call to action on sustainable development (<https://newecosocialworld.com/speaker/sylvia-daisy-romanus-david-n-jones-kathleen-mccourt-andrew-larpent-and-peter-oborn>). The organisations shared their perspectives on global challenges in their sectors and the value of partnerships with social workers. The call to action on sustainable development included contributions from several eminent global leaders discussing the challenges in creating sustainable urbanisation, challenges which are familiar to social workers and require an integrated approach to the natural, physical and social environments – co-building a new eco-social world: leaving no one behind. The presentations highlighted the importance of social workers in shaping policy and practice across the 54 countries of the Commonwealth.

COSW continues to play a key role within the coalition in the promotion of the Charter and its ideals.

COSW CONFERENCES AND WEBINARS



COSW has presented or contributed to a number of online events for Commonwealth social workers and others over the year, most of which are mentioned above. These have included: social work and public health (see below); Commonwealth histories of social work (see above), It's a Penalty Commonwealth campaign on child sexual exploitation, the Global People's Summit (see above) and a webinar with the Sri Lankan association (SLAPSW) on the social and economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

COSW contributed a Commonwealth webinar to the first Global Public Health Week in April 2022. Following a presentation on the impact of health inequalities on social work practice, there was a presentation on the permeable boundaries between health and social professions followed by case studies of social projects promoting public health, including Children's Corners in Malawi, mental health and homelessness: an Indian perspective and issues from social prescribing (UK). The webinar concluded with reflections on social work in public health: lessons from the pandemic and concluding observations from the IFSW Vice President for Africa and the UK. The webinar highlighted the inter-connected realities of health and social policy and illustrated the importance of public health to the practice of social work.



A series of webinars is being planned on the regulation of the social work profession drawing on the differing experiences and approaches of Commonwealth countries. A webinar to promote the Commonwealth Young Carers Charter is being considered.

GLOBAL SURVEY OF THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has a research agreement with Bath Spa and Ulster Universities (UK) to undertake biennial global survey 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 can 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 the first full survey was undertaken in 2021-22. It was reported to the 2022 People's Global Summit and an academic article will be published in October 2022. It is planned to develop partnerships with universities in several Commonwealth countries as the project unfolds.



COSW COMMUNICATIONS

The new COSW website (www.cosw.info) was launched in March 2021 as planned and has been regularly updated with news items and COSW developments (www.cosw.info/cosw-news). COSW has Facebook and Twitter accounts 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), the British Association of Social Workers (www.basw.co.uk) and other associations through websites and social media.



A new PDF newsletter was launched, as planned, in March 2021 with subsequent issues published in August 2021, March 2022 AND October 2022 (www.cosw.info/newsletter).

COSW published an activity report on the website Speaking Out for Social Work in the Commonwealth 2019 – 2021 in December 2021 highlighting activity during the pandemic, which was promoted in social media and other communications (<https://coswcw.files.wordpress.com/2021/12/2021-cosw-activity-report.pdf>).

Press releases were issued on: the People's Global Summit; human rights in Afghanistan; history and development of

social work across the Commonwealth; aggression in Ukraine supporting the statement of the Secretary General; Commonwealth Day statement reaffirming the commitment of social workers to public service and calling on The Commonwealth to facilitate vaccine equity; commercial determinants of health: evidence linked to the 2022 Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forum; Submission by Commonwealth Accredited Organisations to CHOGM 2022; young carers charter; social workers activity in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL WORKERS RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

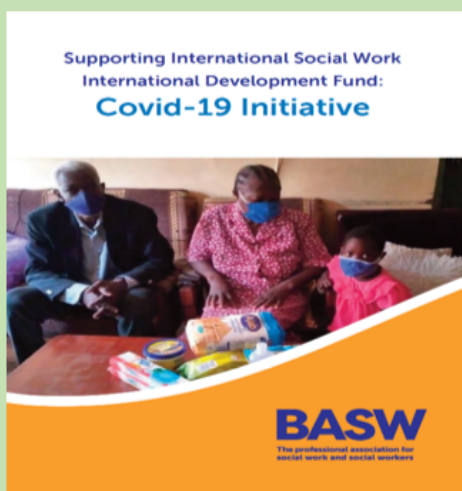
COSW has continued to work with Commonwealth and global partners on the role of social workers in responding to the social, economic and medical crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, including participation in Commonwealth Secretariat, CHPA and IFSW discussions about the pandemic.

COSW actively participated in a global partnership campaigning for equitable access to vaccines, led by The World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) and IFSW, which co-ordinated a submission to the World Health Organisation.

COSW helped facilitate the British Association of Social Workers grant distribution aiming to support specific social work projects responding to the pandemic. 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 free publication describing the projects has been [published by BASW](#).

The impact of the pandemic on the practice and teaching of social work was discussed in a live COSW Panel during the People's Global Summit in June 2022.

BASW publishes report on the 8 COVID-19 projects funded in several Commonwealth countries



The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) has published a report on the impact of eight Covid-19 projects which were funded from the association's International Development Fund. This fund is intended to support members of BASW in developing international research and development, including funding of travel to establish partnerships. This became impossible during the early stages of the pandemic so BASW repurposed the fund to support social work practice in responding to Covid-19 in several countries.

The report just published includes material from projects in India (2), Kenya, Malawi, Palestine, Guinea Bissau, and Uganda and also from the African Social Work Conversation Virtual Forum project which initiated a series of pan-African webinars in a partnership between IFSW and the Zambian Association.

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. BASW confirmed the formation of a Diaspora Special Interest Group at the 2021 AGM 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 England with overseas qualifications. The code mainly focused on recruitment to the health service,

Guidance

Code of practice for the international recruitment of health and social care personnel in England

Updated 22 August 2022

Commonwealth perspectives from social workers 2021-2022

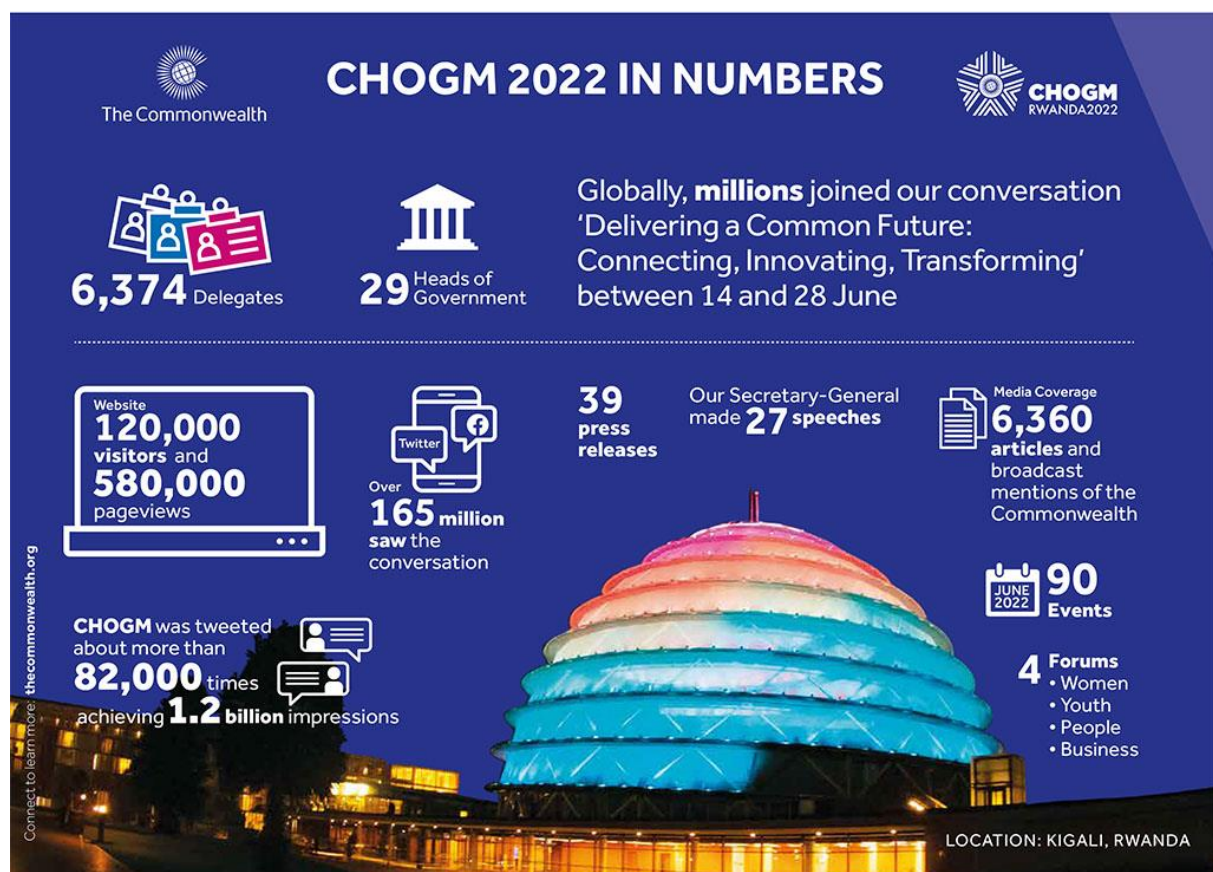
whilst claiming to cover social care as well. There were many shortcomings in the social care elements of the code, which have been taken up by BASW in meetings with the Department of Health and Social Care and a revised code was issued in August 2022. The work by BASW on these issues has significant implications for Commonwealth social workers thinking of coming to or who are already in the UK.

FINANCIAL REPORT July 2020 – June 2021

COSW has a bank account in the United Kingdom and a balance of under £1,000.00. As a company limited by guarantee, all financial accounts and relevant information is available on the Companies House (London) website.

Estimated COSW expenditure in the Commonwealth during 2021-2 was less than £1000.00, mainly on expenses for attending CHOGM in Rwanda, most of which is expected to be refunded by a donation. The website involves a very modest annual expenditure.

COSW has limited access to funds and almost all activity is undertaken by Board members and others on a voluntary basis. The Board hopes to develop new sources of funds for projects in the coming years.



Commonwealth perspectives from social workers 2021-2022

Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work Executive Board 2021-2022			
Sylvia Daisy Romanus (India) – Chair	Monique Auffrey (Canada) – Honorary Secretary	Godfred Boahen (UK) – Honorary Treasurer	David N Jones (UK) – Main Representative to Commonwealth Institutions
			
Charles Mbugua (Kenya)	Jan Christianson-Wood (Canada)	Sharon-Rose Gittens (Barbados)	Joachim Cuthbert Mumba (Zambia)
			
K. S. Ramesh (India)	Naomi Spencer (Australia)	Teoh Ai Hua (Malaysia)	Okiria Gerald – Uganda – Chief Newsletter Editor
			

