

Commonwealth Living Lands Charter: A Commonwealth Call to Action on Living Lands (CALL)

We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth,

1. **Acknowledge** that land, including its waterbodies, is both a source and sink of greenhouse gases and supports billions of people for their food, livelihoods, and wellbeing. The Earth's climate is changing at an alarming rate and the associated impacts and risks are being felt increasingly across a range of terrestrial ecosystems, which are essential for nature and people;
2. **Note** that these impacts threaten global efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), climate goals including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. For many vulnerable Commonwealth member countries, especially developing countries, the least developed countries and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), these impacts hinder and threaten their economic and social development;
3. **Acknowledge** that unsustainable land use, combined with increasing climate extremes, have a direct impact on the destruction and degradation of soils, forests and biodiversity in many countries, and pose a high risk of land-related natural disasters, and extreme depletion and contamination of groundwater sources, which affect the health of millions of people, (particularly the most vulnerable groups including youth and women), including increases in environmentally induced migration.¹
4. **Recognise** that the sustainable use of land resources and biodiversity including agricultural cropland, livestock, wild species, soil and water, forests, and wetlands, contribute significantly to the sustenance and socio-cultural values of local peoples, including Indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge, in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Land resources are a major source of livelihoods, jobs and subsistence to the people of the Commonwealth;
5. **Reaffirming** our commitment to the Paris Agreement goal, grounded in science, of holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and resolve to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, recognising that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts² of climate change and increase the ability to adapt;
6. **Undertake** to support progress toward an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity

¹ IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land, Summary for Policymakers [SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf \(ipcc.ch\)](#).

² United Nations Paris Agreement (2015), https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

framework on area-based conservation measures and restoring degraded terrestrial coastal and natural ecosystems.

Commonwealth Commitment to Safeguard Global Land Resources

We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth,

7. **Note**, with concern, the alarming decline in the health and productivity of our land resources, with more than a third of land having been degraded in the last two decades;
8. **Recognise** the leading role that Commonwealth member countries are taking to meet adaptation and mitigation actions; and recognise the necessary involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, including local actors, Indigenous peoples, youth, women, business leaders, regional partners, and other civil society stakeholders;
9. **Recall** the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the United Nations serving as a wider platform for the secretariats to work together on pressing global issues including, sustainable development, inclusive growth, and environmental and climate action for member countries within the UN Rio Conventions;
10. **Recognise** that most, if not all, member countries have been challenged with meeting their respective commitments and obligations. The developing countries, least developed countries and SIDS face particular challenges due to their unique vulnerabilities and capacity constraints.

Commonwealth Call for Coordinated Action on Land

We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth,

11. **Affirm** our strong resolve to build natural resilience by halting and reversing biodiversity loss, while ensuring the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity, reversing land degradation and enhancing land-based climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts;
12. **Recognise** the need to strengthen synergies and enhance coordinated implementation, at the national, regional and global level at the necessary speed and scale, of relevant actions under the three Rio Conventions – (i) the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), (ii) the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and (iii) the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC);
13. **Note** that the Commonwealth Secretariat aims to support member countries to: (a) synergise the implementation of commitments agreed to under the three Rio Conventions and (b) take multi-level adaptation and mitigation actions, including Nature-based Solutions and ecosystem-based approaches, that ensure benefits around combating climate-induced land degradation, climate change, desertification and halting and reversing biodiversity loss;

14. **Recognise** that 47 of the 54 Commonwealth countries have coastlines, and 45% of the member countries are large ocean states, thereby requiring an inclusive approach to sustainable land management in coastal zones by working in tandem with the principles of the Blue Charter,³ and recognising the intermediate area where ecosystems interact between land and marine environments;⁴
15. **Recognise** the role of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH) in providing technical support and helping member countries, giving priority to developing countries, least developed countries, and SIDS, to access finance and to facilitate the implementation of this Charter, through embedding advisers in member countries to work collaboratively with regional partners, development organisations and international finance institutions;
16. **Note** the demand for a just transition which calls for substantially increasing investments tied to the global low emission and climate resilience shift and the support required for developing countries, least developed countries and SIDS, with reference to the COP26 Glasgow Climate Pact;⁵
17. **Welcome** the contribution of Commonwealth Accredited Organisations, including the Commonwealth Forestry Association, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and other initiatives, such as the Queen’s Commonwealth Canopy to support the implementation of the Charter through advocacy and research;
18. In the face of the rapidly changing climate and to forge new pathways towards the achievement of a climate resilient, nature positive and land degradation-neutral world, **we, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth**, recognise the need to build natural resilience by boosting biodiversity conservation, while ensuring the sustainable use of the components of biological diversity, reducing land degradation, and enhancing land-based climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

19. **Underlining** the pressing need to implement international and regional commitments at national and subnational levels, we, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth:
20. **Recognise** that the vulnerabilities of our ecosystems to land degradation, biodiversity loss and climate change are closely interrelated and need to be considered collectively;
21. **Recognise** that sustainable land use depends on good land governance and secure tenure rights; acknowledge the critical guardianship provided by Indigenous peoples and local communities in protecting land and vital ecosystem services, and recognise the land and resource rights of these communities, in accordance with relevant national legislation, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other international instruments;

³ ,<https://bluecharter.thecommonwealth.org/>

⁴ 45% large oceans states refers to 25 Commonwealth States.

⁵ Statement is line with Glasgow Climate Pact paras 32 and 49: [Decision 1/CMA.3 \(unfccc.int\)](#).

22. **Note** that our land resources are often transboundary in nature and support ongoing regional and sub-regional efforts to promote transboundary management of land for collective benefits across communities, landscapes and boundaries;
23. **Emphasise** the importance of technology and innovation toward achieving the goals of the Rio Conventions;
24. **Recognise** the need to cooperate at regional, national and subnational levels to meet the Rio Convention commitments, including with the non-state sector and the private sector through sharing of knowledge, expertise, success stories, and good practices in sustainable land management, and incentivising investment flows and technological innovation;

A Principled Approach

25. **Recognising** the need to promote sustainable and equitable outcomes across the Commonwealth, **we, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth:**
26. **Reaffirm** the continuing relevance of the Charter of the Commonwealth, our shared interests, and the rule of law;
27. **Underscore** that the 16 Principles contained within the Commonwealth Charter⁶ and the 17 SDGs⁷ are relevant to meeting land-related commitments;
28. **Underscore** the commitments Commonwealth member countries have made in the context of the Rio Conventions on consensus and common action, and the agreed principles of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances taking into account mutual respect, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, legitimacy, and gender responsiveness;
29. **Recognise the need** to take an approach consistent with the Principles of the Commonwealth Charter as well as evidenced-based science and knowledge to meeting our climate resilient development of land and its resources;
30. **Will voluntarily dedicate** a 'Living Land' to the future generations of every Commonwealth country with assured prosperity, sustenance and security, in line with the Strategy set for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration.

Implementation

We, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth:

31. **Endeavour** to work towards climate resilient and sustainable land management in member countries by integrating the goals of the three Rio Conventions towards

⁶ [Commonwealth Charter | Commonwealth \(thecommonwealth.org\)](https://www.thecommonwealth.org)

⁷ [THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/)

catalysing progress in achieving the SDGs, including SDG 15 (Life on Land), as well as ambitious climate action, including implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement, Land Degradation Neutrality targets, and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework when it has been adopted;

32. **Mandate the** development of an Implementation Plan for CALL for consideration of Commonwealth members.

Republic of Rwanda
25 June 2022