The adoption by member governments earlier this year of a new, more results-focused strategic plan for the Commonwealth Secretariat for 2013–17 marked a significant shift in gear for the organisation. One of the key changes has been the adoption of a more narrowly focused work programme, as mandated at the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth, in order to sharpen the impact of the Secretariat’s work.

As such, the Secretariat’s overall focus under the new strategic plan will be to work toward the realisation of three key, interlinked goals:

- Strong democracy, rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and respect for diversity
- Inclusive growth and sustainable development
- A well-connected and networked Commonwealth

These goals are naturally aligned with the two pillars on which the Secretariat’s work programme has historically been built – the promotion of democracy and development within its member states. These two pillars, recognised by heads at the 2003 Abuja CHOGM as goals each in its own right, they must be mutually reinforcing, with a clear “democratic dividend” in terms of delivering tangible benefits to people. However, as the Commonwealth has consistently argued, neither democracy nor development is sustainable in the absence of good governance, underpinned by effective and well-led public administration.

With this in mind, the Secretariat has renewed its focus on ‘more effective, efficient and equitable public governance’, bringing the Secretariat’s historical programmes in the areas of human rights, rule of law and public administration together under the umbrella of a single ‘governance’ programme. This new programme is grounded upon the recognition that well-performing public institutions are critical for establishing and sustaining democracy, good governance and development. The programme will build upon the Secretariat’s track record of strengthening key public institutions for rule of law, human rights and public administration through context-sensitive technical and peer-to-peer support.

In this regard, within the context of the new governance programme, the Commonwealth will direct its focus on public administration toward achieving the following four outcomes:

- Member states with more effective institutions at the centre of government
- Anti-corruption and public procurement agencies functioning effectively through networks
- Member states strengthening democratic oversight of public financial management standards
- Small states applying comparative experience to develop more effective public administration

Implications for the Secretariat

The development of the new strategic plan provided considerable opportunity for reflection within the Secretariat on what its main priorities and modes of delivery in the area of public administration should be. With total global aid flows on governance exceeding US$10 billion a year it is clear that, in financial terms, the Secretariat is a very small player. Accordingly, in order to deliver both the value for money and impact that our member governments expect, the Secretariat will need to focus on low-cost high impact niche areas, making the maximum possible use of our comparative advantages.

The Secretariat has identified its comparative advantages in the area of public administration as follows:

- **Trusted partner status.** The Commonwealth has no vested personal or organisational interests: our development work is paid for by a mutual fund to which all recipients contribute and all have a say in how it is disbursed. This promotes genuine country ‘ownership’ and gives us a strong convening power. Accordingly, the Commonwealth can more easily address politically sensitive issues than traditional donors or development agencies. Used widely, this can help facilitate key sustainable reform

- **Fostering communities of practice and South-South learning** through networks between member countries on priority areas such as anti-corruption. This co-operation
enables us to focus on ‘best fit’ reforms appropriate for context, building on member countries’ shared history of public administration

- **Priority to helping small and vulnerable member states** that are neglected by others. The Commonwealth has long served as an advocate for small states in international fora. Small states are under increasing pressure to improve their public administration to attract investment, increase competitiveness and effectively deliver public goods and services to their citizens.

- **Rapid response** in a manner that large aid agencies – both bilateral donors and international financial institutions – often cannot provide, responding to country needs based on a keen appreciation of the unique nature of Commonwealth nations. Time is often of the essence as political opportunities to act do not come up twice.

- **A willingness to support and seed-fund good ideas** which, once they have taken off and demonstrated their worth, can be taken up by major funders.

In this regard, the Commonwealth will seek to leverage its comparative advantages in the following manner:

**Member states with more effective institutions at the centre of government**

A primary focus of the Commonwealth over the next four years will be to **support and strengthen the political and bureaucratic environment** at the centre of government to enable reform and development. We will do this by improving the relationships between the critical elected (ministers) and appointed (civil servants) actors at centres of government in targeted member countries (the political and administrative interface), and developing the systems, structures and processes that facilitate co-operation, collaboration and co-ordination, ensuring it is sustainable. The trust the Commonwealth enjoys from its members allows it to access politically sensitive areas of government where other international organisations cannot. This strategic position enables the Commonwealth to influence political leadership and create the political will necessary to facilitate a common national vision and development agenda.

The Commonwealth’s work in this area will be grounded upon the **theory of change** that, by addressing the relational issues within the political-administrative interface and strengthening the capacity of key public institutions, increased efficiency and effectiveness in public administration will be achieved that will enable governments to more effectively deliver key reforms and achieve sustainable national development. The Commonwealth will therefore work toward ensuring that: (i) adequate and appropriate resources are developed and allocated at the centre of governments; (ii) newly developed systems and procedures sustain collaborative and coordinated working practices; and (iii) political-

**Anti-corruption and public procurement agencies functioning effectively through networks**

Another key focus for the Commonwealth over the next four years will be on establishing, developing and nurturing regional and pan-Commonwealth thematic networks on anti-corruption and public procurement. We will do this by strengthening existing regional networks into fully functioning communities of practice. Building upon Commonwealth member’s similar political, legal, administrative and judicial systems, we will support these networks in brokering the exchange of ideas, experiences and ‘best-fit’ practices between key institutions in member countries, as well as acting as a conduit for technical assistance – including pro bono support between members – to address mutually recognised capacity constraints.

The establishment of the Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption Centre in February 2013 represents the first major step in this direction. Based on Gaborone, Botswana, the centre supports the existing Association of Commonwealth Africa Anti-Corruption agencies. It aims to: become the prime vehicle for improving co-ordination between agencies in Commonwealth Africa, brokering the exchange of ideas and good practices among African Commonwealth countries; encourage the sharing of professional skills, knowledge and experience in areas of comparative advantage; harness political will; and strive for adequate legislation, policy reform and law enforcement. The centre also supports the transfer of knowledge, skills, guidance, training, mentoring and coaching together with other forms of assistance sought by the heads of agencies.

**Member states strengthening democratic oversight of public financial management standards**

The third area of focus for the Commonwealth under the new governance programme will be to enhance the ability of governments to exercise democratic oversight of public finances. Oversight institutions – such as parliamentary public accounts committees, supreme audit institutions and internal audit functions – play a key role in ensuring transparency and accountability. They can act as a ‘check’ on the bureaucratic and executive arms of government, encouraging respect for the rule of law.

In this regard, the Commonwealth will work to strengthen oversight institutions in member governments. This will include the undertaking of diagnostics and follow up technical assistance to strengthen and enhance the independence of supreme audit institutions in key member states in order to more effectively exercise their oversight responsibilities. We will also explore models for ‘best fit’ audit approaches for small states (e.g. the ‘value for money’ audit approach or the ‘performance’ audit approach).
Reforming public service pay has been a challenge to most countries. In Ghana, many post-independence pay reforms were not successful largely because there was no legal body mandated to oversee such reform. It is for this reason that the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission Act 2007 was promulgated by parliament, setting up the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC).

Mission
The FWSC exists to ensure that best practices in job grading, evaluation, performance management and research are employed in pay administration to ensure that pay in the public services is linked to productivity and that high-caliber employees are attracted to and retained within the public service.

Vision
To become a world class reference center in Pay Administration, promoting Fairness, Equity and Transparency in Public Services Compensation and Benefits.

Implementation of the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS)
Ghana is currently implementing a unified salary structure for the entire public service to eliminate the huge inequities that existed in public service pay. The SSSS implementation started after a job evaluation of all public service grades, resulting in the establishment of a unified grading and salary structure – as opposed to the 126 existing salary structures.

Challenges
The implementation of the SSSS has not been without challenges. This manifested itself in industrial actions because the public expectation of the policy was high.

Establishment of the Public Services Joint Standing Negotiating Committee (PSJSNC)
The PSJSNC comprising all labour unions and professional associations in the public service of Ghana has been established by the FWSC. This allows for one round of negotiation of salaries among all public service institutions. It also helps resolve implementation challenges.

Continental Consultations
The Government of Kenya has requested the Commission to oversee the development and implementation of their public service salary structure. A delegation, headed by the Chief Executive, visited Kenya to evaluate their salary regime prior to its launch. FWSC has also had similar discussions with delegations from Rwanda, Nigeria and The Gambia.

Other Phases of Implementation
The Commission is in the process of implementing the other phases of the SSPP which include:

- Linking Pay to Productivity
- Standardising all allowances
- Introducing Market Premium as a retention strategy to attract and retain critical skills in short supply in the public service (A major nationwide market survey is about to be undertaken to inform the determination of Market Premium).

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We will also work to improve the relationship between key oversight institutions at the centre of government in member states, in particular the interface between supreme audit institutions, the Public Accounts Committee and internal audit functions. We will work in collaboration with the CPA in this area, given their role in parliamentary capacity building.

Small states applying comparative experience to develop more effective public administration

The final area of focus for the Commonwealth over the next four years will be to support and enable small states to adopt and apply comparative experiences and ‘best fit’ solutions toward more effective public administration.

In contrast to larger states, the opportunities for the smallest states to develop innovative solutions to public administration challenges appear weak and their smallness means that most development organisations pay inadequate attention to their specific public administration needs. Moreover, the middle-income status of many small states camouflages the extent of their vulnerability. In this regard, the Commonwealth will leverage the access and convening power that our historical engagement with small states has given us, as well as the Commonwealth’s networking potential and shared history of public administration, in order to identify, document and enable small states to adopt or adapt innovative models of public administration already in use in other small states. Particular attention would be given to those practices, which effectively address the unique characteristics of public administration in small states, such as multi-functionalism and a reliance on informal structures and personal influence.

We will also support small states in adopting and implementing e-governance policies and strategies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration. Defined as ‘the utilisation of modern information and communications technology to interact with and provide services to businesses, citizens and other governments with the intent to improve transparency, increase public service efficiency and deepen democracy’, e-governance can help improve transparency, public service delivery, and the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector, increasing citizen participation in government.

Recent Secretariat supported initiatives have highlighted the transformational effect e-governance can have on public administration – this includes the introduction of Transparency Sierra Leone (an online portal through which citizens can access and scrutinise information about government and donor projects, acting as online
watchdogs) as well as technical assistance to support Seychelles in developing and implementing an e-governance strategy (positioning Seychelles as the number one country in Africa for e-government, according to the UNDP). Accordingly, the Commonwealth will support countries in developing e-governance strategies and policies, and will develop and deepen its strategic partnerships to support member states in implementing these strategies.

**How we will deliver**

Whilst the adoption of the new strategic results framework does entail a scaling down of Secretariat programmes in some areas – in particular those in which it has been harder to show demonstrable impact as well as areas in which other organisations are more active and better resourced – it has nonetheless enabled a redeployment of the organisation’s limited resources to areas in which it enjoys a distinct and demonstrable comparative advantage.

This includes a move away from certain modes of delivery – such as one-off or standalone workshops that are not grounded in a wider reform process or part of a larger scale project or intervention. This is in line with the findings of the ‘Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Training Programmes 2003/04 – 2008/09’, which highlighted the lack of impact of such interventions. Similarly, the Secretariat will also scale down its involvement in certain areas in which it has been difficult to clearly demonstrate impact, such as public-private partnerships (in line with the 2012 evaluation of the Commonwealth Secretariat's public private partnership programme).

The Secretariat will also scale down its involvement in certain other areas – such as local government – given the fact that other Commonwealth organisations are highly active and engaged in them. In this regard, GIDD has been working closely with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) over transition arrangements.

Similarly, in light of resource constraints and the requirement to move away from small-scale, one-off interventions, it is clear that the Secretariat will not be able to provide direct assistance to every single member government under the public administration programme. Instead, a more focused approach will be needed, with the Secretariat providing larger scale support to a select group of priority countries, with assistance on public administration provided to the remainder primarily through regional or pan-Commonwealth level programmes.

In doing this we believe that we will continue to provide members with high quality assistance that will be of real value and benefit in strengthening their public administration systems. As always, we rely on the engagement and support of our members in this process and look forward to working in partnership to deliver this.

**Endnote**