

Meetings with High Level Review Group and Partnerships Office

1. High Level Review Group

Background

At the 2015 Malta CHOGM Heads “mandated the Secretary-General to convene a high-level group to review the full governance arrangements of the Commonwealth Secretariat to ensure that its governance is streamlined and integrated in order to improve oversight, efficiency and transparency”. A *Consultant Project Director for the Independent Secretariat, High Level Group to Review the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Governance Arrangements* was to be appointed with “a solid background in research, analysis and report writing for high level meetings and fora as well as a sound understanding of the international governance architecture, multilateral governance systems, contemporary issues and reform processes”. The report was originally to be presented at the London CHOGM, but will now be presented to Foreign Ministers in New York in September 2018.

Meeting with HE Anote Tong

On **2 June 2018**, as agreed at the IFCO on 1 June, I had the privilege of a brief meeting with HE Anote Tong, former President of Kiribati (2003-16) and Chairman of the High Level Review Group (HLRG), as well as an internationally renowned campaigner on climate change and sustainable fisheries. We discussed various aspects of the role of the IFCO and the contribution COs make to the Commonwealth as well as concerns regarding the inclusion of COs by Commonwealth institutions since responsibility for COs shifted from the Foundation to the Secretariat. I was then invited to put the key points to the HLRG in writing, and the resulting paper has been previously circulated to the IFCO. (Please contact me if you require a further copy.)

Meeting with David Gomez

I subsequently met with David Gomez, Consultant Project Director for the HLRG, on **13 July 2018**, to inquire about progress. Here, I outline the key points I took away from our discussion. First, the Commonwealth has lost sight of its *raison d’être* and to repurpose itself, to find a role distinct from the myriad tasks mandated at CHOGM and Ministerials. There also needs to be an identifiable ‘Commonwealth’ voice in policy debates at international forums such as the UN. Second, the two main deficits are that the Commonwealth neither responds to Members’ development needs, nor to the development priorities of the key contributors. It will need to respond both to the development needs of members and align with the development goals of the contributors.

In order to enhance transparency and accountability, the HLRG is exploring the roles of the institutions – the Board of Governors, the Executive Committee, the Secretariat and the

Heads of Government – and how they interact in practice. This is a necessary step in order to ensure improved oversight of the Secretariat by the Board and the ExCo.

There is a potential, enhanced role for Commonwealth Associated Organisations (AOs) and Accredited Organisations (COs) to help integrate and amplify Commonwealth efforts if there were better in-country alignment of organisations in support of projects/programmes. [This highlights the potential value of the IFCO's proposed mapping exercise of COs. NW] At this stage, COs would appear to have more trust from governments than from the Secretariat.

From our discussion, several things became clear. We can expect international norms of human resources management, transparency and accountability will be brought to bear in the evidence-based analysis, which has included both interviews with Secretariat staff and close inspection of documentation relating to the Board of Governors and Executive Committee.

Outputs will include criteria and process for appointment of the Secretary General; recommendations for clarifying and strengthening the role of Board of Governors and Executive Committee in oversight of Secretariat operations, as well as the relationship between their roles and the role of Heads; recommendations for the application of good practice norms in human resources management, including performance review of high level staff (given that there are presently no such requirements).

There is a need to clarify the roles of Board of Governors and the Executive Committee in holding Secretaries General to account. The Executive Committee needs to be rebalanced to ensure improved representation by region, gender and special interest (SIDS, LDCs). The importance of re-establishing the core purpose of the organisation in ensuring accountability of the Secretariat will be to clearly prioritise among the plethora of mandates from CHOGM and from multiple other ministerial meetings, as well as ensuring better links between outcomes of ministerial meetings and CHOGM. A key concern is whether the Secretariat should concentrate on coordination, rather than implementation, of programmes.

There is also a need for appointment by Heads of a Deputy Secretary General to work with the Secretary General in an administrative as well as a governance capacity. Taken as a whole, this implies the need for a change management process for which there will be little appetite, but which must happen. This in turn requires re-visioning the purpose of the Commonwealth, and rearrangement of its structures, and then exploration of how the Commonwealth is aligned with other global organisations.

Implications for COs, currently largely sidelined, are that they will need to make clear their contribution, as well as enabling any Commonwealth projects in-country to link with COs in-country, so that such project relations will happen organically. One of the key take-aways from the meeting was that COs are weak in messaging their achievements. [This is part of

our request for access to ARs held by the Secretariat to map our activities and achievements. NW] David Gomez was clear that the HLR, having consulted with stakeholders, should return to them for consultation on the draft. The timing (as at 13 July) was for a draft to be circulated to the HLRG on 17 July with a review meeting scheduled for 26-27 July, another 1-2 weeks to revise the text with a delivery deadline of 25 August (but actual delivery likely by 17 August). This means that any other input from COs will need to come in the next few days after the Marlborough House meeting on 31 July.

To recap, the report will address relations across Commonwealth organisations, will focus on its purpose, and identify changes that need to be addressed in order to enhance accountability and oversight of the Secretariat and boost its effectiveness. The experience and commitment of the Consultant Project Director inspires confidence that the Review is in good hands.

Partnerships Office (PO)

On **12 July 2018**, David White and I were invited to meet with Abhik Sen and Jamie Wiles of the Partnerships Office to discuss progress on the mapping of COs. In our submission to the CHOGM Communiqué process, we (the IFCO) had committed in the Partnerships paper (Lead Lewis Brooks) to mapping the COs against the Sustainable Development Goals. We reminded the PO, who had asked us to supply our analysis, that they held the data and have yet to allow us access to it. Also, we would need to secure a small amount of funding to complete the analysis. A request for the current round of annual reports has since been sent to COs by Jamie Wiles.

Abhik Sen also informed us that the Partnership Strategy had been signed off, so that we may hope to see it soon. He also made it clear that the composition of partnerships would be at the discretion of policy teams in the Secretariat. Available details of partnerships can be found in the Delivery Plan. [These vary in level of detail, and few identify COs by name, with the exception of Education.]

Finally, we were invited to submit items for the agenda of the meeting with the SG on **31 July 2018** by early the following week, which we did.

Nicholas Watts 30 July 2018

(subject to correction by David Gomez, David White.)