



REPURPOSING SPORT FOR COMMONWEALTH^[1] RESILIENCE

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“We are living through a time of profound disruption: shrinking trust in institutions, rising geopolitical tensions, steep inflation, crushing debt and the existential threat of climate change. These challenges affect us all, but they are felt most sharply by those with the least capacity to respond”^[3]. Shirley Botchwey- Secretary General of the Commonwealth

56	2.5B	17%	74
Commonwealth nations	People across the Commonwealth	SDGs achieved by 2024	Commonwealth Games Associations

Introduction

1. Sport is not a luxury the Commonwealth can afford in good times. It is a necessity the Commonwealth cannot afford to waste.
2. At the Commonwealth Games 2026, it is expected that 3000 athletes from 74 nations will compete over 11 days^[4]. Glasgow is expected to welcome more than 700,000 people—including visitors, athletes, officials, and volunteers^[5]. More than 600 hours of live coverage will be available with the television audience for the multi-sport event typically reaching over 1 billion people worldwide^[6].

[1] The term Commonwealth as it is used here refers to the family of Commonwealth nations and territories.

[2] The Academy of Sport is an international think tank at the University of Edinburgh which brings policy experts, civil servants, sports professionals and University employees from around the world to serve the Sports industry and provide sporting solutions. This team for this project has included Professors Grant Jarvie, Liz Grant and Corinne Reid and Walker J. Ross, Chang Su and Minquan Xiong all from the University of Edinburgh. Ross Walker is with the University of Stirling and Bradley Sharples with the University of South Carolina.

[3] The Commonwealth (2025). The Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan 2025-2030: Building a More Resilient Commonwealth. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

[4] <https://www.glasgow2026.com>.

[5] <https://www.glasgowchamberofcommerce.com/news/news/2026/june/15/glasgow-businesses-urged-to-seize-commonwealth-games-opportunity-as-city-gears-up-for-2026/>.

[6] <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2026/may/15/channel-5-secures-commonwealth-games-highlights-deal-bbc-ends-72-year-run>.

3. This report from The University of Edinburgh's Academy of Sport makes the case that sport — properly repurposed — is one of the Commonwealth's most powerful and underutilised assets for building resilience. Sport is not just entertainment. Sport is inspired by, but goes beyond, the spectacle of the Commonwealth Games. Sport can be even more than 'soft' power or sports diplomacy. All have been important for creating connection and community, but with the renewed intentionality and purposefulness of the Commonwealth, so perhaps we are ready for the next evolution in Commonwealth sport: sport as infrastructure for human development. Building on all that has gone before but elevating sport to meet its unique potential as the most accessible, adaptable, affordable system for building human health and wellbeing in every corner of the planet - sport can be a vehicle for health, education, economic inclusion, peacebuilding, gender empowerment and climate action, deployed systematically, strategically, and at scale across all 74 commonwealth Games Associations.

4. The case rests on three foundations. First, the evidence base: the February 2026 Global Sport and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Baseline and Initial Impact Report — drawing on data from 210 countries — has for the first time established a measurable framework for sport's contribution to sustainable development[7]. Second, the institutional moment: the Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games opening on 23 July marks the launch of a reformed, Games model with sustainability, and shared impacts, in mind. Third, the strategic opportunity: the Commonwealth's diversity, shared values, and dispersed network of sports institutions make it uniquely placed to deploy sport for resilience in ways few other multi-lateral institutions can match.

5. When repurposed from a spectacle into a system, sport becomes a potentially lowest-cost, shared, highest-reach resilience infrastructure available to Commonwealth governments. A tool that has scale, reach, evidence and popularity.

The Strength of Nations and Territories

6. Commonwealth lives and livelihoods lived in a uniquely challenging world: The Commonwealth of Nations and Territories face a defining moment with only 17% of the Sustainable Development Goals achieved by 2024. Its 2.5 billion people, spread across 56 nations ranging from the world's largest democracy to its smallest island states, face compounding challenges of climate vulnerability, youth unemployment, gender inequality, political fragility and economic exclusion. The tools of conventional development — aid, trade, and diplomacy — are necessary but insufficient.

7. Commonwealth resilience. The Commonwealth is among the world's most diverse international organisations — spanning six continents, nine time zones, and income levels from the G7 to some of the world's low-income nations. Diversity is perhaps one of its greatest assets and greatest challenges. Resilience means different things in different contexts: climate adaptation for Pacific Island states; youth employment for sub-Saharan African nations with median ages below 20; political stability for post-conflict states; economic diversification for commodity-dependent Caribbean nations.

[7] Commonwealth Secretariat (2025). The Global Sport and Sustainable Development Goals Baseline and Initial Impact Report. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
<https://thecommonwealth.org/publications/global-sport-and-sustainable-development-report> [Accessed 5 July 2026]. This data base is sporadically updated.

8. Commonwealth positioning: Few international organisations combine the Commonwealth's breadth of membership, depth of sporting tradition, shared institutional infrastructure, and explicit commitment to values of humanity, equality and destiny. The Commonwealth Games — the world's third largest multi-sport event — brings together 74 nations and territories under one banner every four years to compete and to connect. The Commonwealth Secretariat's Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) team provides expert policy advice, evidence frameworks, and capacity-building to support all 56 member governments in translating this inspiration into grassroots action. This infrastructure, if properly resourced and strategically directed, is a resilience machine waiting to be further activated.

9. The time is now. The Commonwealth of Nations and Territories face a defining moment. What unites global challenges is their structural character. They are not problems that can be solved by a single intervention or a single institution. No nation or territory can do this fully on its own. They require building the social, economic and human capital that allows communities to absorb shocks, adapt to change, innovate and sustain progress across generations. That is precisely what well-deployed sport — embedded in communities, schools, and governance structures - offers and can help build, within and across borders.

The Evidence

10. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledged sport as 'an important enabler of sustainable development'. Yet despite significant initiatives worldwide, evidence shows that only a fraction of the global goals have been realised. Only 17% of the sustainable development goals achieved by 2024. This is not evidence that sport has failed, it is evidence that sport's potential has not been systemically or systematically unlocked.

11. As indicated earlier *The Global Sport and SDGs Baseline and Initial Impact Report*, developed with input from over 150 government, sport, and civil society partners including UNESCO, the World Health Organisation, the International Olympic Committee and Peace and Sport, is the most comprehensive evidence base yet assembled on sport's contribution to sustainable development[8]. Drawing on data from 210 countries, it establishes what sport can deliver across six resilience dimensions. It is a resource that is fluid, ongoing, but if used properly helps make the case when government's ask what can sport do?

[8] Commonwealth Secretariat (2025). Op cit [14 July 2026].

Dimension	What sport delivers	Commonwealth leader
Health resilience	Reduced non-communicable disease burden, mental health benefits, reduced mortality risk from inactivity	Australia — highest for sport system integrity
Education resilience	Improved school retention, cognitive development, mentorship for at-risk youth, structured after-school pathways	Multiple SIDS nations through school sport
Gender equality	Female empowerment, leadership development, reduced gender-based violence, girls' participation	Jamaica — highest globally for gender empowerment through sport
Peacebuilding	Cross-community dialogue, conflict prevention, post-conflict recovery, social cohesion	Rwanda, Sierra Leone — community sport as reconciliation
Economic resilience	Youth employment, tourism, skills development, social enterprise, reduced welfare dependency	India, South Africa — sport as economic infrastructure
Climate resilience	Community cohesion to survive climate shocks, low-carbon event models, sport as green infrastructure	Pacific nations — sport as climate adaptation tool

12. Health: A cost-effective intervention. Sport can be the lowest-cost, highest-reach health intervention available to Commonwealth governments. Community sport programmes in schools, parks and local clubs build physical and mental health resilience at population scale — reducing the burden on healthcare systems that many Commonwealth nations, particularly small island states, cannot afford to expand.

13. Education: The gateway through sport. The three countries scoring highest on Quality Education and Lifelong Learning, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Samoa, showed a significant and constant investment of Education budget spent on Physical Education (PE); quality PE policy Implementation; strong PE teacher qualifications in all grade levels; and PE programmes monitoring to ensure sustainability.

14. Gender Equity: Jamaican lessons. Jamaica's compulsory PE programmes for girls, have significantly and consistently contributed to empowerment by promoting physical health, confidence and leadership skills among young women.

15. Peacebuilding: sport across divides. For the Commonwealth — a family of nations spanning some of the world's most fragile states alongside some of its most stable — sport provides a uniquely non-threatening space for dialogue across political, ethnic and religious divides. The Commonwealth Games itself has historically served this function: nations that have no diplomatic relations compete on the same track, share the same village, and exchange the same handshakes.

16. Economic resilience: sport, public expenditure business and trade. Europe saw a gradual increase in the percentage of national public expenditure on sport, from 0.877 per cent in 2016 to 0.987 per cent in 2019, hence an increase in Economic Growth and Productive Employment for All. The top three European countries using the Commonwealth methodology were Iceland, Hungary and Montenegro, with Malta receiving the highest score among all Commonwealth countries[9].

17. Climate resilience: Many small island states face existential climate threats. Sport can be a vehicle to raise awareness and mobilise action — athletes are powerful advocates, and green stadium initiatives model sustainable practices. Climate risks are often transboundary and transnational in nature, making them difficult to address effectively through the actions of a single host city or organizing committee alone. Consequently, the Commonwealth Games Federation, host cities, member nations, international sport federations, public health agencies, meteorological authorities, and emergency management organizations need to establish more systematic mechanisms for international cooperation. Such collaboration could support the development of event regulations, risk assessment standards, and emergency response procedures that are applicable across different climate scenarios[10].

The Reset Moment: Glasgow 2026 and Beyond

Talking at the 2026 United Nations Sports Diplomacy summit former US Sports Diplomacy Chief Ashleigh Huffman asked, “what if the most important statistic from the FIFA 2026 World Cup is not measured as attendance, viewership or impact but that for a few weeks people chose belonging over division?”

She went to argue that “sport doesn’t just reveal who we support. It reveals that we’re hungry for connection, identity, purpose, community and that in an era of polarisation, loneliness, and declining trust, maybe that’s why humanity keeps showing up at these events”[11].

18. Glasgow stepped in to save the Commonwealth Games recognising its’ vital role in drawing together and strengthening communities in turbulent times. To fully contribute to the Commonwealth priorities of development and peace, the Commonwealth Games must first have its own house in order – to lead by example in being sustainable and having a positive impact for communities. Australia ranks highly for strong sporting systems, partnerships and protecting the integrity of sport. Yet Australia has faced a seemingly unsolvable barrier to hosting the 2026 Games. In sport as in life, it would seem important to learn collaboratively from such critical events to help guide us towards better future outcomes.

[9] Commonwealth Secretariat (2025). Op Cit [Accessed 14 July 2026].

[10] The Marshall Islands are facing threats from the encroaching sea. They have built a football stadium that doubles as a sea wall, protecting this part of the coast from disappearing land mass through coastal erosion. Sport may also function as an aid to climate resilience if leveraged strategically. As many island nations have been noted as at-risk of climate threats (IPCC, 2023), Commonwealth connections may become increasingly necessary.

[11] See [Ashleigh Huffman talking about the 2026 FIFA World Cup](#).

19. While Glasgow 2014 also presented itself as reset moment, Glasgow 2026 presents a proof concept in relation to the resilience and potential sustainability of the Commonwealth Games itself.

Old model — why it failed	New model — Glasgow 2026
Purpose-built athlete village — cost: billions	Athletes in hotels using existing city infrastructure
20+ sports requiring specialised venues	10 sports across 4 venues in an 8-mile corridor
Budget overruns of 172% on average since 1990	Hard cost ceiling; Scottish Government commitment: no public overspend
Hosted by Australia or Britain in 5 of last 6 editions	Transferable model: Ghana has next-necessary infrastructure now
Para sport as a separate, secondary event	First fully integrated Para and able-bodied competition
Legacy as infrastructure legacy	Legacy as human development: Community Campuses across the Commonwealth

20. With just 10 sports across 4 venues, Glasgow is attempting to show that a Commonwealth Games can adapt, be delivered sustainably, at scale, and with full Para integration — without a billion-dollar infrastructure programme.

21. Looking ahead The Commonwealth Games Organising Committee is prioritising building significant sporting structure but also a sporting culture. Each host city has different strengths and different needs. The answers for Victoria, or for Glasgow, are unlikely to be the right answers for Ahmedabad. Local context and situation have primacy but if proven successful how could other nations and territories build on this model? The question is not whether smaller nations can host the Games. It is whether the Commonwealth will give them the support to do so in a place-based way.

22. The Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games — opening 23 July — is not merely a sporting event. It is the first live demonstration of a fundamentally reformed model: leaner, more flexible, more collaborative, and explicitly designed to be replicable by any of the Commonwealth's member associations. This matters enormously for the resilience agenda. A Games model that only wealthy anglophone nations can afford to host is a model that excludes the majority of the Commonwealth's membership from one of its powerful demonstrations of collective identity and shared values.

23. If Glasgow 2026 can build on the legacy lessons of Birmingham 2022, of grassroots re-investment through re-purposing Games infrastructure into community accessible sporting facilities; if localized, place-based hubs that integrate sport, education, employment training, and cultural programs can be co-designed with young people as part of the Games regeneration and renewal legacy; if such a sustainable network of Community Campuses[12] can stretch across the Commonwealth bringing together sport, education, digital innovation and community leadership, then the Games will deliver something far greater than a sporting spectacle[13]. They will deliver hope, backed by opportunity. One of most powerful forces for resilience a society can create.

24. The Commonwealth, through the Games, is also uniquely committed to, and positioned for, bringing communities together around, alongside and through sport. The Commonwealth Games are unique in being situated within a global, values-driven sociopolitical organisation. Purposeful planning means that governmental delegations will be attending sideline talks about shared social and economic interests; and shared global concern for the planet. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Sports Breakfast and the Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting (CSMM) will happen on the margins of the Games. Already all 74 nations of the Commonwealth have participated in the Kings Baton Relay activating local action on cleaning plastic from the waterways around the globe. At a grassroots level, the Glasgow 2026 Festival brings diverse communities together to experience more than 150 sport, cultural and community events.

From Aspiration to System

“Beyond 2030, the challenge is not recognising sport's potential — it is unlocking it.” Dr Lin Sambili, Adviser for Sport for Development and Peace[14].

25. For decades, The Commonwealth Secretariat has advocated for sport as a vehicle for development and peacebuilding. The Global Sport and SDGs Baseline and Initial Impact Report marks a turning point[15]. As suggested above there is a measurable, evidence-based framework for holding governments and sporting bodies accountable for delivering on the SDP agenda. No longer can governments ask, where is the evidence, or use such an allegation as a delaying tactic to refuse funding. Here is a tool that works.

26. The Commonwealth Games is a vital window to reinforce messages of resilience through inspiration and strategic advocacy every four years. In between these years, across the Commonwealth territories, carrying the messages, and translating them to action, remains vital. A poorly resourced Commonwealth Secretariat leverages the scale, reach and popularity of sport in a multitude of ways. There are too many projects to mention in this report, but the following are indicative of a much larger grassroots programme of work on policy, programmes and monitoring and evaluation.

[12] <https://www.youthcharter.org/community-campus-model>

[13] The Community Campus is a place-based framework designed to integrate sport, education, culture and digital innovation in local communities. Community Campuses bring together sport, education, digital innovation and community leadership under one integrated framework, demonstrating how the energy of major sporting events can be translated into community-based development infrastructure.

[14] The Commonwealth (2025). Op Cit [Accessed 14 July 2026].

[15] Commonwealth Secretariat (2025). Op Cit [Accessed 14 July 2026].

- **Expert policy advice:** The Sport for Development and Peace team provides guidance, helps draft national policies, and supports monitoring and evaluation across all 56 member governments.
- **Measurement leadership:** The Commonwealth is leading global efforts to measure the contribution of sport to the SDGs — the February 2026 baseline report drawing on data from 210 countries is the most comprehensive evidence base ever assembled.
- **eqUIP programme:** 83 internships across 6 Commonwealth regions since 2018, building young leaders who embed sport-for-development thinking in Commonwealth Games Associations worldwide[16].
- **Sports Ministers Meetings:** Held every two years, these convene ministers from across 56 nations to share best practice, align policy, and drive accountability on sport's contribution to development priorities.
- **Commonwealth Sport Declaration on Reconciliation and Partnership with Indigenous People:** Launched at the 11th Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting, embedding Indigenous and traditional sports within the Commonwealth's sporting framework.

27. Despite progress structural gaps prevent the SDP agenda from reaching its potential. The place and priority of sport within national ministries remains incommensurate with the return on investment. Funding, the application of evidence and elite-community disconnect are but three challenges that exist all of which are fixable given the will and making of strategic choices[17].

Gap	Current reality	What is needed
Funding	Project-based, fragile, often dependent on bilateral donors	Mandatory SDP budget lines in national sport strategies, tied to outcomes and evaluation of Games hosting rights
Evidence	The evidence exists but needs to be continually worked on and applied consistently across 56 nations	Universal adoption of the February 2026 SDG measurement framework. Specific SDG targets set for sport to guide action and enable clearer monitoring.
Elite-community disconnect	Elite sport generates visibility; community sport delivers SDG outcomes; the link could be stronger. Events at best provides spikes of improvement.	Mandatory sustainable community legacy obligations for all Commonwealth Games and major events

[16] eqUIP is a Commonwealth wide approach to develop youth leaders through internship and employment opportunities, for youth to enable further a positive contribution to their communities through sport.

[17] More specifically 3 structural gaps inhibit sporty from reaching its potential. First, funding remains fragile and project-based rather than embedded in national budgets. Second, evidence collection is improving but inconsistently applied across the 56 member nations. Third, the disconnect between elite sport — which generates visibility and inspiration — and community sport — which delivers the actual development outcomes — remains wide. The Glasgow 2026 model, with its fully integrated Para sport programme and explicit legacy framework, is an attempt to bridge that gap structurally rather than rhetorically.

The Repurposing Case

28. The repurposing of sport for Commonwealth resilience does not mean abandoning sporting excellence. It means treating the infrastructure, institutions and passion that sport generates as inputs to a broader human development system. It means being more intentional, strategic and committed to drawing the most benefit from sporting excellence, in both practical and conceptual ways.

29. It means further activating human development and capability building (individual, national and community) within the new narrative that the Commonwealth is using to re-position itself. A narrative that talks of five pillars of 'wealth' creation: sport, cultural, social, diplomatic, and economic wealth[18].

30. Here are dimensions through which a repurposing of sport delivers resilience.

31. Sport as Diplomatic Glue: The Commonwealth Games is the Commonwealth's most powerful demonstration of free collective identity. Gabon and Togo joined the Commonwealth in 2022 with no previous ties to the British Empire — demonstrating that nations now find (and create) new value in this family, partly because of sport. A repurposed Games that belongs to all 74 associations — not just the wealthy anglophone four — is a diplomatic instrument of extraordinary reach.

32. Sport as a Sustainable Events Model: Glasgow 2026 has proved a lean model. The 2030 Centenary Games in Amdavad will test it at scale. The 2034 Games should be awarded to an African, Caribbean or Pacific nation, supported by Commonwealth Sport's financial and technical assistance, as a matter of deliberate policy. New Zealand being one of three nations expressing an interest in 2034, the others being Nigeria and Wales.

33. Sport as Youth Resilience Infrastructure: Across the Commonwealth, young people face growing pressures: NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) rates rising, mental health crises deepening, economic opportunity narrowing. Community sport can provide a structured routine, trusted adult relationships, and sense of belonging that formal institutions struggle to maintain. The Youth Charter must continue to work across the Commonwealth using sport, arts and culture as vehicles for youth engagement, social inclusion and community development. Community Campuses — linking Glasgow 2026's legacy to a Commonwealth-wide network of youth development centres — can make this sustainable if the will is there[19]. It is a choice Commonwealth leaders should enable through co-operation with youth focused organisations.

[18] Commonwealth Sport. A New Games Model - <https://www.commonwealthsport.com/commonwealth-sport/games-reset> [Accessed 5 July 2026].

[19] Through its newly proposed Commonwealth Youth Legacy Declaration, Glasgow 2026, the Youth Charter is calling for the establishment of a global network of Community Campuses designed to support youth development through sport, education, arts and leadership programmes — with targets of 50 Community Campuses across Commonwealth nations by 2030, 10,000 trained Social Coaches supporting youth development, 1 million young people directly engaged through sport, education and cultural programmes, and 5 million young people indirectly impacted through community outreach and digital engagement

34. Sport as Gender Equality Architecture: Jamaica's example of advances in gender empowerment through sport is replicable. Every Commonwealth nation has women and girls who can be inspired, supported and developed through sport — and who with support become visible as capable leaders in communities, economies and governments. The women's football boom is an example: from 500 million fans today to a projected 800 million by 2030. The fastest-growing major sport in the world is demonstrating that investment in women and girls through sport yields returns, creates opportunities and is but one step to restore justice where once opportunity was denied.

35. Sport as Climate Resilience: Small island Commonwealth states face existential climate threats. Sport can help to build co-operation and help foster social cohesion, trust, collective identity and shared agency, that communities need to help survive climate shocks. An environmentally sustainable approach to Commonwealth sport might make more use of facilities and networks already in place, helping island nations and others who already suffer disproportionately from climate risk. Glasgow 2026's all-renewable energy commitment and infrastructure-light model is an example that future Games and Commonwealth sporting events could consider[20]. Albeit keeping in mind the principle of place -specific local community solutions with the Games being a vehicle to enable infrastructure development.

36. A next step is to work with potential host cities on adapting to climate challenges as part of developing readiness for hosting rather than just shifting locations to accommodate climate conditions[21]. For example, India, an important participating country in the Commonwealth Games, has experienced increasingly frequent and severe heatwaves in recent years. In May 2024, temperatures in parts of Delhi approached 50°C. In May 2026, some areas again experienced extreme heatwaves that broke century-old meteorological records. Summer temperatures in some parts of the country frequently exceed 40°C and may reach or exceed 45°C during extreme heatwaves. High temperatures not only affect athletes' performance and physical health, but may also endanger volunteers, staff and spectators.

37. Sport as Peacebuilding: Malaysia leads across the Commonwealth in promoting peaceful, inclusive and equitable societies through sport. Peacebuilding must not be an accidental or incidental outcome but the product of partnership and deliberate policy choices to embed sport in peace and social cohesion agendas. The Commonwealth's post-conflict member states, from Sierra Leone to Solomon Islands, deserve the same deliberate investment[22].

[20] This is not a single "pledge" document but a partnership-driven commitment (EDF + Glasgow 2026 + Glasgow City Council) to run the core competition venues on renewable/zero-carbon electricity, as one pillar of the Games' overall sustainability and "reimagined model" branding. On 12 June 2026, EDF, Britain's biggest generator of zero carbon electricity, became the Official Energy and Utilities Principal Partner of Glasgow 2026 and an Official Partner for all Home Nations — Team Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. [Commonwealth Sport](#).

[21] A recent study argued that sport must transition from a lens of reducing environmental impact to one that champions climate adaptation, which is particularly relevant for vulnerable nations (Dingle, G., Arbieu, U., Kenyon, J., Levine, J., Orr, M., Picariello, M., Ross, W., Trendafilova, S., & Ziakas, V. (2026). From environmental sustainability to climate change adaptation. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2026.2662218>). [Accessed 13 July 2026].

[22] Around a quarter of the 1,248 players at the 2026 World Cup were born outside the country they are representing, the highest proportion ever recorded at a men's World Cup. The journeys of players such as Nestory Irankunda and Mohamed Toure highlight how conflict, displacement, and migration continue to intersect with the sport. Born in refugee camps linked to conflicts in Burundi and Liberia, both now represent Australia on football's biggest stage. [Global Peace Index June 15, 2026](#).

38. Sport as the Measurement Standard: The February 2026 Global Sport and SDGs Baseline and Initial Impact Report is the Commonwealth's most important recent contribution to global development thinking. It provides a shared framework for measuring whether sport is delivering on its promise. Every Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting should now be anchored to progress on this framework. Every Commonwealth Games should publish a social development impact report alongside its sporting results. Planned, intentional, legacy outcomes should be measured in lives changed, not just stadiums built. Clear targets should also be set for prospective direction.

39. Sport as Knowledge Exchange: Learning from each other in a multitude of different ways is a Commonwealth strength. Commonwealth sports events provide opportunities for shared knowledge exchange and shared problems and solutions. For example, The Marshall Islands have been facing threats from the encroaching sea. They have built a football stadium that doubles as a sea wall, protecting this part of the coast from disappearing land mass through coastal erosion. Sport may also function as an aid to climate resilience if leveraged strategically. Many island nations are exposed to climate threats. Commonwealth connections as a basis for knowledge exchange and support remain vital.

40. Athletes as Ambassadors: In both implicit and formal ways, Commonwealth athletes provide inspiration and promote aspiration in addition to the Games being emblematic of the value of struggle and resilience. Commonwealth athletes also have opportunities to be seen as agents of change, advocates for integrity and ambassadors for respect, impartiality and non-discrimination.[23] They are active in other non-sporting international advocacy movements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[24] and clean oceans[25] campaign. In addition to formal pathways, Commonwealth Games athletes are involved in advocacy through a number of athlete-driven organisations for planetary health concerns such as emissions reductions[26], climate change impacts in alpine areas[27], beach and waterways clean-ups[28] and many others.

Recommendations: Sport for Commonwealth Resilience

41. This report calls on Commonwealth governments, Commonwealth Sport, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the international sporting community to recognise sport as vital infrastructure for human development; and to adopt the following commitments as the foundation of a Commonwealth Sport Resilience Agenda.

[23] Naidoo, U., & Grevemberg, D. (2022). The role of athlete commissions in addressing sport-related human rights abuses: a case study of the Commonwealth Games Federation Athletes Advisory Commission. *The International Sports Law Journal*, 22(2), 180-185.

[24] <https://unfccc.int/news/young-welsh-sports-star-to-champion-climate-action>

[25] <https://www.commonwealthsport.com/news/4157153/commonwealth-sport-supports-clean-oceans-plastics-campaign>; <https://www.positive.news/environment/the-commonwealth-games-relay-taking-aim-at-ocean-plastic/>

[26] <https://newshub.medianet.com.au/2025/09/game-on-75-australian-athletes-call-for-75-emissions-cut/116423/>

[27] <https://protectourwinters.org.au>

[28] <https://www.ecoathletes.org/collegiate-cup-2026>

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- **RO1:** Strengthen and value the commitment to The Commonwealth Games in recognition of (i) the vital contribution of the sporting advocacy provided by athletes and enable further its impact on local and global physical activity, health and wellbeing; (ii) community based aspiration and understanding of the struggle and effort to creating resilient communities; (iii) building connections between the countries of the Commonwealth of Nations; and activating collaboration beyond sport to achieve common goals.
 - **RO2:** Make stronger, more purposeful and more visible connections between the Commonwealth Games and the aspirations and priorities of the Commonwealth of Nations. Supporting athletes as advocates and activists for shared Commonwealth concerns (such as climate change), has powerful untapped potential. Operational choices made by participating sporting organisations can also activate and elevate system change toward sustainable competition and training venues, greener travel and sustainable sporting equipment.
 - **RO3:** If the Glasgow experiment works then learn from Glasgow 2014 and 2026 and enshrine the Glasgow 2026 Model prioritising adaptation to local needs to reflect: A greener Games treading lighter on the planet; An inclusive Games where everyone belongs; A welcoming Games in a welcoming city or cities; and a financially responsible and place-based event.
 - **RO4:** Mandate Sport for Development and Peace investment in national sport budgets and strategies. Each national sports body should include a strategic pillar supporting international relations and development outcomes.
 - **RO5:** Universalise the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) measurement framework and address implementation gaps. Extend this framework by identifying sport-related SDG targets to activate ambitious action and greater accountability.
 - **RO6:** Extend Glasgow's 2026 legacy to include the creation of a Commonwealth-wide Community Campus through sport network, linking youth development centres around the world as part of the regeneration and renewal legacy of the Games. It is a sustainable choice Commonwealth leaders should enable through co-operation with youth focused organisations.
 - **RO7:** Make Women, Girls and Para sport the Commonwealth's flagship equality investment and statement. Medal event parity for women and integration of para sports in the Games medal tally sets a tone for equality but close monitoring and national target setting will help build a legacy that extends beyond the Games.
 - **RO8:** Establish a Commonwealth Sport Diplomacy Fund and framework recognising the unique positioning and potential of The Commonwealth Games and Commonwealth Sports to systematically engage with, and advance, co-operation and a further enabling the priorities of the global socio-political organisation of which they are a part.
 - **RO9:** Protect free-to-air broadcast access across the Commonwealth. Inclusivity and accessibility are core values to advance.
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- **RO10:** Fund a widening access university and college sports scholarship scheme to enable youth to access sport and national knowledge gaps identified by Commonwealth nations and territories.
- **RO11:** The 2034 Games should be awarded to an African, Caribbean or Pacific nation, supported by Commonwealth Sport's financial and technical assistance, as a matter of deliberate policy. New Zealand being one of three nations expressing an interest in 2034, the others being Nigeria and Wales.
- **RO12:** Jamaica's example of advances in gender empowerment through sport is replicable.

Summary Statement: Sport is the Commonwealth's Best Bet

42. Sport is not a luxury the Commonwealth can afford in good times. It is a necessity the Commonwealth cannot afford to waste. When repurposed from a spectacle into a system — embedded in education, health, peacebuilding and economic development — sport becomes the lowest-cost, highest-reach resilience infrastructure available to Commonwealth governments. The time to act on this is now.

Sports Observation Editors

Professor Grant Jarvie, Minquan Xiong & Chang Su

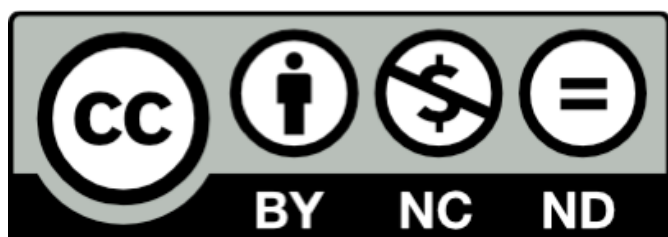
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