

Commonwealth academies statement on climate change, biodiversity and sustainable energy

COVID-19 has had a profound impact across the globe, affecting health and health services, impacting the global economy, and exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Global cooperation and effective policy are essential for tackling the virus and for ensuring a successful economic recovery. But the global pandemic does not change the fact that the world also continues to face an ever-growing environmental emergency. Indeed, COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of governments working together and we must build on this global response to address the climate crisis.

On the occasion of World Environment Day, and in a month when Commonwealth leaders would have gathered in Kigali for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), we therefore call on governments to continue to address the joint challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss, and to ensure that global economic recovery from the pandemic is environmentally sustainable across the Commonwealth and globally. Delivering action on the urgent and interlinked challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and sustainable energy provision presents economic, social and environmental opportunities for the whole Commonwealth.

We call on Commonwealth Heads of Government to:

- Use the opportunities of COP26 and COP15 to coordinate discussions on the joint challenges of climate change and biodiversity and recognise their inherently interlinked nature.
- Work with the global research community to identify scientific and holistic approaches for addressing climate change and biodiversity without causing unintended damage.
- Grasp the opportunity of a decarbonised economy and its benefits for people and life on Earth.
- Ensure a resilient and environmentally sustainable recovery from COVID-19.

The wellbeing of people across the world has improved significantly over the last century. In particular, a reduction in poverty levels, improved technological advancements, and expanded educational and economic opportunities have increased living standards for many – both across the Commonwealth and globally.

However, these improvements in human development have come at a cost and there has been a huge impact on climate change and biodiversity. Global temperature increases are now predicated to be significantly higher than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels on current emissions trajectories. Governments face additional challenges in seeking to limit additional warming beyond these levels.¹ These increases in global temperature will be associated with an increase in the occurrence of extreme weather events at the local, regional and global scales. Current extinction rates of known species are at an all-time high, and the abundance of wild organisms is declining worldwide across all observed groups, including fish, corals, birds, mammals, insects, amphibians and plants. This has both a significant impact on ecosystems, the services they provide to humanity, such as food, pollination, and water purification, and to resilience to climate change hazards, such as the prevention of flooding, the mitigation of storms and resistance to novel pests and diseases.

These changes are already well underway. Failure to tackle these combined challenges in the increasingly narrowing timescale required will pose significant risks to human development and welfare, societal inequalities, and impact all Commonwealth countries, particularly those that are most vulnerable. Governments must therefore take urgent action to address these issues.

1 IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. *World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, 32 pp.* See <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/> (accessed 1 June 2020).

Taking these actions now creates strong opportunities for human development within Commonwealth countries. These include: delivering sustainable economic growth in high-productivity sectors and providing cheap, clean energy to off-grid communities; improving public health by addressing the adverse impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss; and greater public engagement through empowering local communities and future generations

In all cases, careful planning and action is needed and this requires movement now, including further research to narrow uncertainties where they remain large; work to translate research and development solutions into policy; and global leadership - which has been clear, but not yet met with the necessary scale of action – across the Commonwealth and beyond.

This decade, the Commonwealth has the opportunity to capitalise on its diversity and scale, and the potential of its young and growing population, to deliver a sustainable and prosperous future. In order to address these critical challenges, the Commonwealth and its member countries will need to work with the other countries of the world – particularly those with the highest political and economic influence such as China, the USA and others – and to call on them to support these essential endeavours. The academies of the Commonwealth stand ready to assist in these crucial efforts, through using our collective knowledge, experience, expertise and convening power to support the necessary action required.

Academy of Science of South Africa

African Academy of Sciences

Akademi Sains Malaysia

Australian Academy of Science

Cameroon Academy of Science

Caribbean Academy of Science

Cyprus Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts

Indian National Science Academy

National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka

Pakistan Academy of Sciences

Royal Society of Canada

Royal Society of Edinburgh

Royal Society Te Apārangi (New Zealand)

Rwanda Academy of Science

The Royal Society

Singapore National Academy of Sciences

Uganda National Academy of Sciences

Zambia Academy of Sciences