

## Foreword

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The Commonwealth Secretariat's social protection work arises from our mandates to address gender inequalities and inequities and work on issues affecting small states. It particularly reflects an outcome of commissioned research on the gender and policy dimensions of unpaid HIV care work. The Ninth Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting in 2010 highlighted the need to focus on social protection for women's empowerment and social justice given their critical role in sustaining the informal, subsistence and care economy sectors.

Commonwealth regions have experienced in varying degrees the aftermath of the 2007 global financial crisis, which triggered other crises, particularly in food, energy and social security. Ensuing budgetary cuts and increased unemployment and under-employment have seen previously paid care being consigned to the unpaid care economy, comprising largely of women carers, with the already disproportionate burden on carers increasing. The current challenges facing member states are deepening poverty, new forms of risk and vulnerability, and the expansion of informal employment. In this context, countries have struggled to meet or expand commitments on social protection.

Many Commonwealth countries have implemented a range of social protection measures over the years. These include the provision of free health care and education, pensions for government employees, as well as policy strategies on food and agriculture. Other policy responses have included expansionary fiscal and monetary stimulus, for example, a one off payment to every low-income family; an increase in indirect taxes and a cut in corporate tax rates; and 'cash for work' development programmes. At the same time, countries have also instituted key measures and programmes that go beyond cash transfers by building on informal institutions in communities and providing education and nutrition among other critical needs, including short-term employment to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Increasingly, international and regional organisations are involved in social protection initiatives as part of their work on food security, vulnerable groups, human rights, HIV and AIDS, and humanitarian crises. The Commonwealth Secretariat advocates for social protection, mindful that for our small states affordability and sustaining outreach to vulnerable populations are important factors in instituting sustainable social protection measures.

This volume attests to the Secretariat's commitment to contribute to global thinking on policy solutions to addressing poverty and inequality. We hope the anticipatory social protection framework proposed enables meaningful policy solutions.

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