



## **Commonwealth Secretariat**

### **Briefing Note – Small and Medium Enterprises**

#### **The challenge**

The Commonwealth recognises that the contribution of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to economic growth is of great importance. In its endeavour to promote viable and profitable SMEs, the Commonwealth Secretariat faces various challenges:

- Lack of competitiveness due to low productivity.
- Inadequate managerial skills.
- Difficulties in exploiting and gaining access to new technologies.
- Lack of access to new markets.
- Inappropriate policies and strategies.
- Difficulties in accessing finance.
- Dealing with the issue of various agencies responsible for promoting SMEs.

#### **The Commonwealth strategy**

The Secretariat focuses on assisting member countries with the formulation of appropriate policies and strategies to enhance the growth and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises.

We organise training workshops aimed at improving skills and capabilities for both human and institutional capacity-building.

We also assist with the effective application and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

In addition, we help to address financial constraints of member countries by developing micro-credit and financial institutions.

#### **The practical response**

The Secretariat collaborated with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a strategy development project aimed at reducing post-harvest loss due to inadequate storage and processing facilities, and also training people in food safety and quality control.

A Pilot Group Purchasing Scheme was organised in Namibia to assist SMEs look for materials for their work, cut costs for the materials and provide a platform for marketing their products.

The Zambia Chamber of Small and Medium Business Associations received assistance

in improving the effectiveness and functioning of agribusiness centres, with training being provided for centre staff.

Experts were recruited in development and design to work with craftspeople in Kenya. Training workshops were organised for SMEs on costing, pricing and marketing of their products.

Training has also been provided in member countries in business management skills and planning, and to equip people with skills to improve their businesses.

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) provides experts and funding for workshops and training programmes for the development and capacity-building of SMEs.

### **Ministerial meetings or other highlights**

Issues concerning SMEs are highlighted in meetings held by Commonwealth finance ministers.

The Secretariat works towards helping small businesses strengthen and develop effectively. We developed the 'Pan-Caribbean SME-ICT Development Programme', after receiving a request from Caribbean governments, aimed at breaking down barriers to the development of small businesses.

### **Other Commonwealth players and their work**

We work closely with the Commonwealth Business Women's Network to empower women's businesses to benefit from economic opportunities.

### **Relations with other bodies involved in the sector**

The Secretariat works with the FAO, the Export Promotion Council of Kenya, the Zambia Chamber of Small and Medium Business Associations, and other bodies involved with the development of SMEs.