



# Commonwealth Secretariat

## Briefing Note – Agriculture

### **The challenge**

Climate change and its impact on agriculture is a cause for concern for the Commonwealth Secretariat. Changes in rainfall patterns, water stress, sea-level rise, extreme temperature rises and an increased intensity of storms are affecting agriculture and food security in Commonwealth member states.

### **The Commonwealth strategy**

- To assist member countries – especially the small states – in agricultural development, targeting agro-industries through poverty reduction programmes.
- To help minimise the negative impacts of climate change on agriculture.
- To carry out research and analysis on how climate change will affect agricultural productivity and find ways of addressing it.
- To develop specialised skills to help understand the changes which are likely to take place and plan accordingly.
- To promote the development of Agricultural Show Societies and share best practice in farming to improve incomes and production of food, in collaboration with the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth.
- To provide assistance in the development of infrastructure for countries to become resilient to the effects of climate change such as water damage and the impact on agricultural productivity.
- To initiate and provide policy advice to policy-makers on designing agricultural competitiveness strategies.

### **Key principles**

The Secretariat works in partnership with other organisations to build capacity and promote investment in the agricultural sector by assisting member countries to formulate effective agricultural policies and strategies.

### **The practical response**

In 2006, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) assisted the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania in investing £112,600 in the Small Industries Development Organisation (SIDO) to increase the number of women-owned manufacturing businesses in the food processing area.

SIDO was able to modernise its food laboratory and developed a new training manual incorporating health and safety and better business management modules. It also provided

training to micro-businesses which was aimed at helping to improve their competitiveness.

CFTC's investment helped SIDO introduce six food products into the local community, namely, cassava, honey, spices, avocado, rice and sorghum. It acquired new technologies for fine filtering and improved storage capacity for grains.

The Secretariat assisted the Zambia Chamber of Small and Medium Business Associations to improve the functioning and effectiveness of agribusiness centres in four provinces. They provide business and market-related services to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and smallholder farmers.

We also assisted seven member countries to improve their regulatory framework, food safety and quality control infrastructure to enable their exporters to meet the food safety standards set by importers and/or supermarkets.

In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), we are training farmers in Eastern and Southern Africa how to manage their produce effectively after harvesting. The training focuses on improving the quality and competitiveness of produce from small farms in Africa. This project was launched in 2006.

A training workshop was also held in Tshwane, South Africa, in June 2006 to look at ways to improve quality and competitiveness of produce from farms. Its core curriculum focused on practical approaches to improve post-harvest operations and assure the safety and quality of horticultural produce. It also looked at ways to organise the supply chain to improve the competitiveness of farmers and small businesses in domestic and regional markets.

A two-volume training manual has been published by the Commonwealth Secretariat and FAO as a result of this project. It provides trainers with the technical background to help farmers improve their fresh produce supply chains across the region.

Commonwealth training conducted by Timothy Williams, former head of the Secretariat's Enterprise and Agriculture Section, took place throughout 2007 in Botswana. The aim of the training was to assist farmers to improve their farm management skills, especially farm business planning and market analysis, which will assist them to identify opportunities to sell various produce in both national and international markets.

A workshop organised by the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences was held in April 2008 at the University of Guyana. It was sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme and FAO. Its aim was to set up a network of professionals to carry out research and analysis on effects of climate change on agriculture in the Caribbean region.

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

The Commonwealth Secretariat works with the Royal Agricultural Society of the Commonwealth (RASC).

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

We collaborate with national governments, United Nations agencies, and the FAO. We also work with the Zambia Chamber of Small and Medium Business Associations, SIDO of Tanzania, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, and the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences.