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**COMMONWEALTH CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON ENVIRONMENT
Third Meeting, New York, 30 April 1996**

**THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT'S WORK ON
ENVIRONMENT**

Note by the Commonwealth Secretariat

This Note, which is relevant to item 4(a) of the draft agenda, is intended to provide the Group with an overview of the strategic orientations of the Secretariat's work programme on environment.¹ Reflecting the priority attached by Commonwealth governments to the pursuit of environmentally sustainable development, the environment programme's chief objectives are to: strengthen national capabilities to achieve sustainable development; promote consensus building and policy development; and assist with the development of the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana. The programme assigns a high priority to the needs of small member states and gender issues are being integrated into its activities wherever possible.

Review of Activities in 1995/96

Strengthening National Capabilities to Achieve Sustainable Development

2. Technical assistance continued to be provided to strengthen environmental management and planning in several countries. This included assisting Seychelles to implement its environmental management plan and Papua New Guinea to strengthen provisions relating to marine pollution in legislation on maritime transport; helping the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) to monitor climate change; implementing a strategy for the protection of the marine environment in the South Pacific region; and strengthening the integration of economic and environmental policies in Jamaica. A workshop on environmental impact assessment techniques was held in February 1996 for East African countries. Preparations were started, jointly with the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development, Jamaica, for a workshop on the transfer and development of environmentally sound technologies in the Caribbean. Assistance was also provided to regional organisations, e.g. the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States

¹ The Note is adapted from the Secretariat's work programme submitted to the April 1996 meeting of the Commonwealth Steering Committee of Senior Officials (SCOSO). SCOSO reviews the Secretariat's entire work programme on an annual basis and provides broad operational policy and resource allocation guidance. More information on the Secretariat's assistance to member countries in the area of marine resources, and on the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, is provided in the paper CCGE(96)1 and the Note CCGE(96)3, respectively.

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(OECS), where an expert is co-ordinating all regional activities relating to maritime boundary delimitation processes in the Eastern Caribbean.

3. In the area of training, support to member countries included the launch in August 1995 of an MSc Programme in Environmental Science, jointly developed with the University of Botswana, for the Eastern and Southern African region. Short-term training attachments were supported in areas such as environmental conservation, disaster management, fisheries management and marine geology. A two-month internship on environmental issues was organised at the Centre for Environmental Education, India, for persons from Malaysia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

4. Under the Commonwealth Science Council's (CSC) flagship programmes on Biodiversity and Genetic Resources and Energy, projects initiated included monitoring biodiversity and its utilisation in Commonwealth small island developing states, and the development of a sub-Saharan network for research on fungal diversity applications in agriculture and industry. A directory of training materials on biodiversity management was also produced and advice provided on designing country projects for funding by the Global Environment Facility. Based on the successful Asia Network on Underutilised Tropical Fruit Trees, a Southern and Eastern African Network on Underutilised Crops was established. In all these activities, greater emphasis was given to information transfer and gender-related issues. In the area of energy, the training of Tanzanian apprentices on the operation of small photovoltaic systems continued and a second edition of a solar training manual was published. Workshops were held in Malawi and Guyana on renewable sources of energy. Waste management issues were addressed by a regional workshop supported by the Environmental Protection Authority of Victoria in Australia.

5. Based on a series of regional training manuals, a pan-Commonwealth training module on women and the environment is being developed. It is intended for trainers, extension workers, policy makers, and NGOs who require more knowledge about environmental policies and programmes of special relevance to women. Commonwealth Health Ministers' priorities on environment and health (identified at their 1992 meeting) continue to be addressed. Earlier work on environmental health impact assessment training materials contributed to the development, by a group of experts, of a framework for ensuring the inclusion of health as an integral part of environmental assessment (this was published in 1995).

Consensus building and policy development on environment

6. Meetings of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) make significant contributions to consensus building and strengthening Commonwealth co-operation on major environmental issues of concern to member countries. In the area of policy development, a workshop on Integrating Economic and Environmental Policies for Sustainable Development in the Commonwealth was held in Malta in January 1996. It exposed policy-makers to the conceptual and practical aspects of integrating environmental considerations in economic decision-making and applying market-based economic instruments

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to promote environmentally sustainable development. The 1995 CCGE meeting had, inter alia, identified these as specific areas to strengthen policy development. Participants in the workshop included several Commonwealth small states. The Secretariat continued to support follow-up to the 1994 Barbados Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Details of assistance to promote sustainable development in small states were provided in background documentation prepared for the second meeting of the Ministerial Group on Small States which was held in the wings of the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Secretariat also continued to monitor, analyse and report on major international policy developments in the area of environmentally sustainable development.

The Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme

7. The Secretariat's policy, scientific and legal guidance expedited the Programme's implementation in several areas. At the 1995 CHOGM the President of Guyana and the Secretary-General signed an Agreement for the establishment of the Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development. The Agreement forms part of a Bill which was enacted by Guyana's Parliament in March 1996. The three CFTC-funded experts on the Interim Programme Management Group completed their assignments (amounting to a total of 63 person months) in February 1995. Starting in April 1996, the CFTC will fund another expert for a 15-month assignment to develop a non-timber forest products project for Iwokrama.

Activities and Priorities for 1996/97

8. The 1995 CHOGM welcomed the important recommendations made by the 1995 CCGE meeting for strengthening co-operation in several areas, particularly in the area of forestry. It urged Commonwealth governments to extend full support to the Iwokrama Programme, particularly after the establishment of the International Centre and a Donor Support Group. CHOGM also expressed support for the Secretariat's ongoing work on environmentally sustainable development, urging it to take account of regional initiatives as well as continue to pay particular attention to the special concerns of small states, including support for the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action. The latter was also stressed by the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States. In 1996/97, the environment programme will be fine-tuned in the light of these mandates as well as recommendations arising from the April 1996 meeting of the CCGE. Gender-related concerns will continue to be integrated in programme activities.

9. In the area of *strengthening national capabilities to achieve sustainable development*, the Secretariat will continue to meet, on request, governments' technical assistance needs for the sound management of the environment. Both short and long term experts will be provided to advise on and help implement environmental management policies and programmes. Regional workshops on environmental impact assessment will be continued in order to strengthen local capacity for environmental management. Similarly, the Secretariat will maintain its MSc Degree Programme in Environmental Science as a regional programme

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for Eastern and Southern Africa, as well as the ongoing programme at the Centre of Environmental Education, India. Attachments and internships will continue to provide individuals and groups with practical exposure in environmental education, biodiversity conservation and disaster management, among other areas. In the area of industrial development, environmental aspects will be incorporated in all projects as an integral part of the technical assistance that is being rendered to developing member countries. It is also proposed to assist countries in developing environmental legislation in support of their national environmental plans and effective implementation of relevant international conventions and agreements on environment.

10. The CSC's flagship programmes on Biodiversity and Genetic Resources and Energy will continue to command a high priority. A pilot project to demonstrate the methodology for the identification and monitoring of biodiversity in small island developing states will be launched. Capacity building for the conservation of mangroves in the Caribbean and Pacific regions will be organised with expertise from India. The networks on Underutilised Fruits in Asia and Underutilised Crops in Southern and Eastern Africa will be further consolidated. In the area of forestry, work on agro-forestry and non-wood forest products will be developed. Under the programme on energy, training in the use of photovoltaic systems will continue and the use of standardised equipment and installation procedures will be incorporated in a practical manual for Eastern and Southern Africa. The establishment of renewable energy centres will also be explored with interested countries. The Secretariat's participation in international fora related to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change will aim to develop strategic partnerships for collaboration.

11. In order to facilitate consensus building and periodic reviews by environment ministers of Commonwealth co-operation on environmental issues, it is envisaged that the CCGE will meet in the wings of the 1997 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The CSD will be reviewing and assessing progress in implementing UNCED's Agenda 21, preparatory to a special session of the UN General Assembly in 1997. The CCGE meeting may wish to take stock of both achievements and failures since UNCED and articulate Commonwealth priorities for achieving Agenda 21 objectives as well as effective implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action. Work initiated at the request of the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States, to update the 1985 Commonwealth Expert Group Report on the vulnerability of small states, will give prominence to ways in which the constraints to the environmentally sustainable development of small states can be mitigated.

12. In the area of policy development, a high priority will be assigned to promoting the use of market-based economic instruments in environmental management, since this area is acquiring increasing significance in policy-making. Building on the recommendations of the Malta Workshop on Integrating Economic and Environmental Policies, it is proposed to hold more specialised workshops tailored to address macro-level as well as sectoral concerns in different groups of countries. A workshop will be convened in Sri Lanka for policy-makers from Commonwealth Asian countries in 1996.

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13. The Secretariat will continue to guide the Iwokrama Programme's strategic development through its representation on the permanent Board of Trustees (which will replace the interim Board). A high priority will be given to promotional efforts and the provision of support to ensure the successful establishment and operation of the Iwokrama Donor Support Group; and the use of Commonwealth networks to facilitate the establishment of a Consortium of Collaborating Institutions for the Programme as well as linkages between Iwokrama and similar projects in other countries. The Secretariat will play a particularly active role in establishing the Donor Support Group and in ensuring a continuing role for Commonwealth institutions in the Iwokrama Programme. In fulfilment of earlier commitments, the CFTC-funded expert on non-timber forest products will complete his assignment by the end of 1996/97. From 1997/98 onwards it is anticipated that long-term technical assistance from the CFTC will no longer be required.

Conclusion

14. The CCGE has an important role to play in providing guidance for the development of the Secretariat's work on environment. It would therefore be helpful if, in its discussions on this item of the agenda, the Group could comment on:

- the extent to which the Secretariat's work programme on environment is consistent with the priorities of member countries; and
- any new priorities it believes should be addressed in the Secretariat's work programme within the financial resources available to implement it.²

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² For the financial year 1996/97, the Secretary-General has proposed to the SCOSO that a total of £1.4mn or 3.5 per cent of overall programme costs, be allocated to the Secretariat's environment programme.

