



# Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment

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## **FOR THE INFORMATION OF DELEGATIONS**

### **Commonwealth Secretariat Programme on Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development**

#### **Introduction**

This paper presents the mission statement, objectives and elements of a programme of work on Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development (hereafter referred to as sustainable development) as agreed by the Commonwealth Secretariat's internal Environment Task Force at its meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2000. The programme is consistent with the work programme for 2000/2002 agreed by SCOSO in June 2000 for B3.6 (Environment) and environment-related elements of B6 (Science and Technology for Development) and B7 (Capacity Building through Training and the Provision of Experts). It recognises that sustainable development is a cross-cutting issue (covering many disciplines/sectors) that should be addressed by the Secretariat through a multi-disciplinary approach at an operational level. The paper takes into account the recommendations on programme focus made in SPEU's Evaluation Study of the Environment Programme, but Divisional arrangements for the delivery and co-ordination of a future work programme on sustainable development fall beyond its scope.

#### **BASIC PRINCIPLES**

It is proposed that three principles should constitute the bedrock of a future work programme:

- it should focus on promoting economic development in the Commonwealth that is environmentally sound and socially sustainable, recognising that economic, environmental and social policies must work together to improve living standards and the quality of life in the Commonwealth;
- it should respond to the mandates from Commonwealth governments and their priorities (the main CHOGM mandates are summarised in Annex 1), as well as to issues related to the

negotiation and implementation of the various international environmental agreements/conventions to which Commonwealth countries are parties; and

- it should exploit the demonstrated comparative advantages of the Commonwealth (e.g. ability to promote constructive dialogue, build consensus, promote the concerns of small states and mobilise networks to facilitate exchange of information and expertise); this is important since the Secretariat has neither the resources nor the capacity to take on all aspects of the global sustainable development agenda.

## **PROGRAMME MISSION STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES**

A future programme should have a mission statement that conveys, in simple and succinct terms, its overarching purpose. The following **Mission Statement** is therefore proposed:

*“To help the Commonwealth to promote consensus on sustainable development issues and to assist member countries to participate effectively in multilateral environmental negotiations and to implement, through the formulation of effective national and regional policies and actions, their commitments under the various international agreements/conventions to which they are parties.”*

Flowing from this Mission Statement, three **Programme Objectives** are proposed:

- To promote consensus on major environmental issues that are of global concern, through constructive international dialogue and co-operation.
- To build capacity in developing countries, especially LDCs and small states, to negotiate and implement international conventions/agreements on sustainable development.
- To build capacity in developing countries, especially LDCs and small states, to formulate and implement effective national policies for sustainable development.

## **PROGRAMME ELEMENTS**

The above Programme Objectives can be operationalised through the following Programme Elements and activities (these are indicative in nature):

### **Programme Element 1: Consensus-Building on Sustainable Development Issues**

*Rationale:* There are a number of outstanding issues that have yet to be resolved under existing multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) and in the run-up to the next UN review, in 2002, of the implementation of Agenda 21 - the global blueprint for sustainable development agreed by the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio. Under

the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), for example, significant differences remain on the use of flexibility mechanisms by industrialised nations (emissions trading, the Clean Development Mechanism, Joint Implementation) to achieve their commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, especially the degree to which these may be employed to supplement domestic actions. There are also strong differences on whether developing countries should take on voluntary commitments in the future to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, and on the adequacy of current commitments by industrialised nations. Under the Convention on Biological Diversity differences remain on benefits sharing arrangements and other issues.

In the area of trade and sustainable development, one particularly contentious subject is the relationship between MEAs and WTO rules and whether WTO rules can be changed to permit discrimination against internationally traded products that are produced through methods judged to be environmentally harmful. A related issue is how the precautionary principle (see p.8), as it applies to environmental and health concerns about certain products, can be reconciled with WTO concerns about facilitating free and non-discriminatory trade. Global mechanisms/instruments for sustainable forest management and the mobilisation of additional resources to finance sustainable development are examples of other areas where there are international differences. Through its own consultative processes and technical work, the Commonwealth can help to promote constructive dialogue and, where possible, international consensus on such issues.

*Activities:* These could include: (i) Meetings of Commonwealth environment ministers in the wings of important fora (notably the new annual global meetings of environment ministers that UNEP is organising) to facilitate dialogue/consensus building at a higher political level. (The informal meeting of Commonwealth Environment Ministers held in Sweden on 30 May agreed that Ministers should meet again a day before the meetings of the Global Environment Ministers Forum/UNEP Governing Council in February 2001); (ii) *Ad hoc* expert groups and workshops (e.g. on trade and environment) that would provide a technical basis for consensus building. Ideally, these activities should be designed and planned as a co-ordinated strategy that would enable the Commonwealth to make a constructive collective contribution to a successful review of Agenda 21 in 2002. Commonwealth consultations at ministerial-level will help us to identify, with a greater degree of precision, the priority concerns of member countries. (iii) Developing an effective mechanism for ensuring that the decisions and recommendations of Commonwealth Environment Ministers are communicated to other relevant Ministerial fora, including Commonwealth Law Ministers and the Commonwealth Science Council.

## **Programme Element 2: Capacity Building to Support the Negotiation and Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements**

Three foci are proposed for this Programme Element:

- (1) *Building the capacity of Commonwealth developing member governments to participate more effectively in the negotiation of international agreements on sustainable development.*

*Rationale:* The number of international environmental agreements has mushroomed since the 1992 UNCED process was instigated, and altogether, over 200 have been concluded since the

1930s. UNCED itself adopted Agenda 21; the UNFCCC; the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD); and a statement of Principles on the sustainable use and management of forests. It also set in motion negotiations that led to new agreements such as those on desertification, straddling and migratory fish stocks, and the sustainable development of small states. All of these agreements continue to evolve through further multilateral negotiations on implementation issues as well as protocols and amendments. Meanwhile, negotiations have begun on new MEAs (e.g. on persistent organic pollutants). Many Commonwealth developing countries, especially LDCs and small states, lack the capacity to take part effectively in these negotiations and keep abreast of all the issues they encompass. As it does in the area of multilateral trade negotiations, the Secretariat can provide support that helps these countries to mitigate this constraint.

*Activities:* these could include the provision of briefing papers on selected topics; in-depth policy studies on key issues; and expertise to help countries or groups of countries to prepare more effectively for negotiations. The recent consultations in New York revealed that many Commonwealth governments (especially developing countries and small states) would welcome more, and timely, background papers from the Commonwealth Secretariat

(2) *Building the capacity of Commonwealth developing member governments to implement the international agreements on sustainable development to which they are parties.*

*Rationale:* The effective and harmonised implementation of the large body of existing MEAs has become a pressing challenge for many countries. If sustainable development is to be attained - which is the overarching goal of all these agreements - governments need to be able to implement their provisions, which are legally binding in the case of global environmental conventions (e.g. those on biodiversity and climate change). This requires them to tackle complex underlying issues to bring about structural changes in their economies and patterns of development. It means integrating environmental considerations in economic decision-making and reducing policy failures (e.g. environmentally harmful subsidies) and market failures (e.g. the destruction of wetlands because the environmental services they provide are not valued since they are not marketed commodities). Legal, scientific and technological capacity needs to be strengthened. Countries also need to adopt strategies for implementation that take account of the linkages between different agreements and integrate economic, scientific, legal, social and gender issues.

For example, the objectives of the CBD are to ensure the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits and knowledge arising from the use of genetic resources. Its obligations include: the development of national strategies for conservation and sustainable use of biological resources and their integration into national decision making; and development of *in-situ* and *ex-situ* conservation measures including the establishment of a system of protected areas, rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems, and the protection of natural habitats. Governments need to establish mechanisms to fulfil their CBD obligations (e.g. develop and implement strategies, integrate them into national decision-making, and report back to the CBD on progress). They also need to integrate economic and environmental policies to ensure that development objectives can be attained without destroying biodiversity.

Many Commonwealth developing countries, especially small states and LDCs, are severely constrained in their capacity to implement MEAs in a harmonised and effective manner. The Secretariat could develop a carefully targeted programme to mitigate this constraint.

*Activities:* These could include the development of a coherent and properly co-ordinated technical assistance and training programme to:

- increase awareness of MEA obligations and facilitate the dissemination of good practice in implementing them; and
- build capacity for the integration of environmental and economic policies to support the implementation of MEAs, with an emphasis on the application of policy instruments grounded in environmental economics.

(3) *Making the Commonwealth-sponsored Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana an exemplar of good practice that can be disseminated to other countries.*

*Rationale:* The Iwokrama Programme is dedicated to research, development and application of innovative methods for the conservation and sustainable use of tropical forest resources. The Programme addresses concerns of the UNFCCC (reducing carbon emissions), the CBD (protected areas, protection of indigenous knowledge, especially that of women, and the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of biodiversity), and Agenda 21 (the alleviation of poverty and sustainable livelihoods for local communities). It is also a practical demonstration of ways to operationalise the forest principles agreed at UNCED and implement the recommendations of the UN's Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. This programme element will support the further development of the Iwokrama Programme in order to make it an exemplar of good practice in the implementation of MEAs.

*Activities:*

- strengthen the governance and management of the Iwokrama International Centre by participating in meetings of its Board of Trustees.
- work with other donors to mobilise additional resources for the Iwokrama Centre.
- provide technical assistance (on request) and support training and fellowship programmes at the Iwokrama Centre.
- disseminate knowledge gained from the Centre's various projects, through the Commonwealth forestry and other networks, to other countries who could use this knowledge to improve the management of their tropical forests.

### **Programme Element 3: Capacity Building through Training and Provision of Experts**

*Rationale:* This section is developed on the premise that in general, there must exist in individual member countries a national capability in key environmental issues to support international action. Numerous Commonwealth meetings have confirmed that environmental concerns, including air pollution, forest management, biodiversity loss, land degradation, marine conservation, waste management, and energy efficiency are exercising governments. Member governments are also very aware of the need for broad based national initiatives to encourage protection of the environment whether or not they are party to any particular existing international agreements.

International consensus building on sustainable development issues and capacity building to support the negotiation and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements will remain theoretical in nature unless supported by relevant initiatives on the environment at the national level. As an illustration, good practice in the use of environmentally sound technologies are central to the Kyoto Protocol, which is currently the subject of negotiations on a timetable for measures to reduce the threat of global warming. Also in forestry the lengthy inter-governmental process has concluded by again bringing national strategies to the centre of the stage. In addition national capacity must be in place to provide a foundation for meaningful participation in any negotiations at the international level. Similar illustrations can be developed for good practice in the realisation of National Environmental Action Plans, Agenda 21 reporting etc, which are essential 'environmental infrastructure' requirements at the national level for international consensus building and agreements.

*Activities:* There is a need for the development of a coherent and properly co-ordinated capacity building programme including technical assistance in selected sectors, the provision of experts, training and institution building, aimed at realising the following:

- raising awareness on key environmental issues impacting on sustainable development;
- formulating options and strategies for national action;
- building a national consensus and increasing understanding on international negotiations on environmental issues.

### **PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION: GENERAL GUIDELINES**

It is proposed that the following general guidelines should apply:

1. Projects implemented under the programme should be designed to have maximum impact on the relevant target group. Like all Secretariat programmes, there should be proper monitoring and evaluation to ensure that programme objectives, outputs and outcomes are achieved, and that the programme is implemented in a coherent manner. Follow-up activities, if appropriate, should be specified at the design stage.
2. After it has agreed a programme framework and detailed operational work programme, the Secretariat should mount a co-ordinated strategy to seek co-funding and partnerships with other international organisations (e.g. Convention Secretariats, UN, UNEP, UNCTAD,

World Bank) and bilateral donors (e.g. DfID, which has already expressed interest in supporting a workshop on trade and environment), where this would be appropriate and desirable. We should consult closely with the Secretariats of the various MEAs in planning projects under Programme Element 2.

3. The programme should be funded from both the ComSec, CFTC, and CSC budgets. While allowance has to be made for the demand-driven nature of technical assistance and training, governments should be encouraged to link their requests for assistance explicitly to their implementation of international agreements/conventions through effective national policies. This is important to achieve coherence in the technical assistance and training programmes proposed in Programme Elements 2 and 3, and maximise their impact.
4. The Secretariat should explore the formation of partnerships with the private sector and non-governmental organisations in designing and implementing projects under a future work programme.
5. Gender issues should be mainstreamed into all programme activities and the project portfolio should include some projects that have an explicit gender focus.
6. Information on programme activities and outcomes should be disseminated widely. Information strategies for this purpose could include use of the Commonwealth Knowledge Network, the Commonwealth Website and other electronically based information exchanges, and published materials (including a regular newsletter if this would be useful and feasible).

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## SUMMARY OF RELEVANT COMMONWEALTH MANDATES

The 1989 *Langkawi Declaration* states that:

“the need to protect the environment should be viewed in a balanced perspective and due emphasis be accorded to promoting economic growth and sustainable development, including eradication of poverty, meeting basic needs, and enhancing the quality of life”. Sustainable development, it said, ‘implies the incorporation of environmental concerns into economic planning and policies....The success of global and national environmental programmes requires mutually reinforcing strategies and the participation and commitment of all levels of society - government, individuals and organisations, industry and the scientific community”.

Heads of Governments committed themselves to:

- support international efforts to address key environmental challenges such as climate change, depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, marine pollution, land degradation, loss of biodiversity); distinct environmental problems arising from poverty and population pressure; and agriculture and forest issues<sup>1</sup>.
- advance policies and programmes to help achieve sustainable development, including the development of new and better techniques in integrating the environmental dimension in economic decision-making, and the promotion of new and innovative instruments, which will attract widespread support for protecting the environment.

Other elements the Declaration focused on were:

- avoidance of unjustified trade barriers or new forms of conditionality on development financing
- the need for mutually reinforcing strategies and the participation of all levels of society
- participation in relevant international agreements relating to the environment
- strengthening of national, regional and international institutions responsible for environmental protection.
- environmental education.

### 1991 Harare Declaration

Among other areas, the *Harare Declaration* pledged action to:

- promote sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty ; and
- protect the environment through respect for the principles of sustainable development, which were enunciated at Langkawi.

### 1997 Edinburgh Declaration

This, *inter alia*, reaffirmed the Commonwealth’s commitment to strengthen co-operation to achieve sustainable development. The CHOGM renewed support for consensus building on environmental issues through the CCGE, and called for the full and effective implementation of environmental conventions and agreements by their signatories, including their strengthening where needed.

### 1999 Durban CHOGM

Heads of Government agreed that the Commonwealth should continue to help to build consensus and strengthen international co-operation in order to avert existing and new threats to the global environment.

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<sup>1</sup> The Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme was initiated at the 1989 CHOGM in Malaysia

