



Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment

Nairobi, Kenya, 7 February 2001

Provisional Agenda Item 3

CCGE(01)2

THE COMMONWEALTH AND THE RIO+10 PROCESS

Note by the Commonwealth Secretariat

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In June 1997, the UN General Assembly decided that the next comprehensive review and assessment of progress made in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) – which took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 – would be made on the tenth anniversary year of the summit. This is sometimes referred to as Rio+10. Formally starting in the Spring of 2001, the review process will culminate in the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The paper has been prepared for the information of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) and its contents are pertinent to item 3 of the provisional agenda. It outlines some issues for Ministers in their consideration of the Commonwealth's role in the Rio+10 process. It also reviews key mandates from Commonwealth Heads of Government on environmentally sustainable development, and gives examples of Commonwealth Secretariat support to the UNCED process, to illustrate effective roles the institution might play with respect to Rio+10. These can be summarised as follows:

- high-level discussions by Commonwealth Heads of Government, and the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) to generate political will and explore areas where Commonwealth countries might make a collective contribution to the Rio+10 process.
- deliberations by the CCGE to build consensus in specific areas, make an early collective contribution to the CSD's discussions, and direct the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat on issues related to the Rio+10 review.
- support to governments, especially small states and least developed countries, in their preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This might be done by:
 - convening seminars to examine and exchange views and experience in specific areas;
 - providing briefs and analysis on specific issues;

- informal information and exchange sessions convened under Commonwealth auspices, for example in the margins of CSD meetings; and by
- responding to requests for technical assistance to assist with the review process.

II. ISSUES FOR MINISTERS

2. The eighth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) considered that 10-year review of UNCED in 2002 would be an opportunity to mobilise the political support of the international community for the further implementation of Agenda 21 and other outcomes of UNCED. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) subsequently decided (Resolution A/RES/55/199 of 20 December 2000) to organise the 10-year review at summit level, in order to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development. The summit, to be known as the World Summit on Sustainable Development, will take place in Johannesburg in mid-2002.

3. The meetings of the tenth session of the CSD will be transformed into a Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In addition to an organisational session, which will take place in New York following CSD-9 in April 2001, there will be three substantive sessions in January, March and May 2002. The May meeting will be at ministerial level and hosted by Indonesia. The Preparatory Committee will, among other things:

- undertake the comprehensive review and assessment of the implementation of Agenda 21 and the other outcomes of UNCED on the basis of, *inter alia*, the results of national assessments and sub-regional and regional preparatory meetings.
- identify major accomplishments and lessons learned in the implementation of Agenda 21.
- identify major constraints hindering the implementation of Agenda 21 and propose specific time-bound measures to be undertaken, and institutional and financial requirements, and identify the sources of such support.
- address new challenges and opportunities that have emerged since UNCED within the framework of Agenda 21.
- address ways of strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development and evaluate and define the role and programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

4. CSD invited all governments to commence national preparations as early as possible and recommended that national level committees be established to facilitate a co-ordinated process at the country level. There will be initiatives at the sub-regional level and international levels to support the review process.

The Commonwealth Contribution

5. The question before Ministers is what contribution the Commonwealth might make to the Rio+10 process. The following points may help Ministers in their consideration of this issue.

- How can the Commonwealth best mobilise political support for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and ensure that the event provides an opportunity to accelerate the further implementation of Agenda 21 and the other outcomes of UNCED?
- Ministers may wish to consider what key priorities the Commonwealth should focus its consensus building work on, in the run-up to the summit, and how in terms of mechanism and timing, a Commonwealth perspective might be effectively brought in to the CSD's discussions.
- Commonwealth Heads of Government will meet in advance of the first substantive session of the Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Ministers may wish to suggest to Commonwealth Heads of Government that they consider the Commonwealth's role in the Rio+10 process, and give high-level political support for it.
- What kinds of assistance do governments, especially those in least developed countries and small states, require in support of their preparations for the summit?

III. COMMONWEALTH MANDATES ON ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Commonwealth Heads of Government

6. The principal mandates from Commonwealth Heads of Government on work related to environmentally and socially sustainable development are the 1989 Langkawi Declaration on Environment and the 1991 Harare Declaration. These mandates place their emphasis on economic development for social benefit within the framework of the sustainable use of environmental resources. Global environmental concerns such as climate change and biodiversity, have been key areas of concern expressed by Heads of Government at successive meetings. At their meeting in Cyprus in 1993, a year after the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), Heads of Government reaffirmed the high priority they attached to the pursuit of environmentally sustainable development, and stressed the need for the Rio commitments to be translated urgently into action. In New Zealand in 1995, Commonwealth Heads of Government concluded that the Commonwealth should focus on those aspects of the international sustainable development agenda where it has a comparative advantage and can have maximum impact.

7. Meeting in Edinburgh after the five-year review of UNCED, Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, which had been agreed by the UN General Assembly Special Session, recognising that new and additional resources would be needed to implement the programme. They agreed to use their best endeavours to provide these resources, and renewed their support for consensus building on environment issues through the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE). At their most recent meeting in Durban in 1999, Heads of Government agreed that the Commonwealth should continue to help to build consensus and strengthen international co-operation towards the conservation of biological diversity to avert existing and new threats to the global environment, especially to small island states and other vulnerable states, from the impact of climate change.

8. Since Langkawi, the Secretariat has received a number of other mandates on sustainable development, for example from law ministers, health ministers, ministers responsible for women's affairs, and the Commonwealth Science Council. These mandates have largely arisen in response to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, but one of the current challenges to the Commonwealth Secretariat (identified in a recent evaluation of the Environment Programme by the Secretariat's Strategic Planning and Evaluation Unit), is to develop a coherent and focused programme in response to these mandates. In June 2000, the Commonwealth Secretariat finalised a new mission statement, objectives and elements of a programme of work on Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development, which recognises the importance of a multi-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary, approach.

The Role of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on the Environment (CCGE)

9. The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) is the Commonwealth's primary intergovernmental forum for consultations and promoting agreement on environment and sustainable development issues. The idea that the Commonwealth should have a mechanism for consultations on environmental matters was originally proposed by Canada, and discussed at the Commonwealth Senior Officials Meeting in Kampala in 1992. The Secretary-General was subsequently asked to establish a Commonwealth Consultative Group on the Environment by the Commonwealth Steering Committee of Senior Officials at its first meeting in London in April 1993. The Committee considered that consultations among member countries in the wings of appropriate international meetings could usefully contribute to the follow-up to UNCED. The implementation of the Rio agreements has been at the best of the CCGE's work since its inception. The Consultative Group's terms of reference are to:

- provide a forum for high-level exchange of views on environmental issues which are of particular concern to member countries;
- exchange views and experiences at national and regional levels in planning for environmentally sustainable development;
- develop proposals for more effective Commonwealth action in priority areas, within the frameworks of the 1989 Langkawi Declaration and programme of action on environment, and the 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declaration;
- contribute to the post-UNCED process by facilitating informal discussions on critical environmental and development issues on which the Commonwealth could contribute to the development of an international consensus; and
- provide strategic guidance to the Commonwealth Secretariat's work programme on the environment.

10. The CCGE first met on 22 June 1993, in the wings of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in New York. Subsequent meetings have focused on a special theme that is of interest to the Commonwealth and is on the agenda of the CSD.

IV. COMMONWEALTH SUPPORT TO THE UNCED PROCESS

11. The Commonwealth Secretariat supports consensus building on major environmental issues that are of global concern. It also supports Commonwealth governments' efforts to implement the agreements reached at Rio¹ through constructive dialogue and exchange of experiences, training and technical assistance. Some examples are given below of ways in which the Commonwealth has been effective in supporting the implementation of UNCED agreements, and which illustrate a number of possible roles that the Commonwealth could play in the Rio+10 review process.

Discussions by the CCGE

12. By convening meetings of the CCGE in advance of the high-level segment of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the Commonwealth has provided an opportunity for member countries to have frank and informal discussions on items on the CSD's agenda for that year. For example, in 1998 the CCGE discussed the sustainable management and use of freshwater resources. Ministers agreed an agenda for action, which was presented to the high-level segment of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) by South Africa's Minister for Water Affairs and Forestry, Professor Kader Asmal. This enabled the Commonwealth to convey its collective views on this crucial subject to the wider international community and contribute towards successful outcomes to the CSD's deliberations. In 1999, the CCGE examined the issue of overcoming vulnerability and accelerating the sustainable development of small states, and was able to influence the CSD's preparations for the UN General Assembly's Special Session in September 1999, which reviewed overall progress in implementing the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

13. In order to increase the effectiveness of CCGE deliberations, it was decided through consultations with governments to explore whether meeting in the wings of the UNEP ministerial forum would strengthen the ability of the CCGE to contribute to CSD discussions, and members' preparations for them, by ensuring that a Commonwealth contribution can be made earlier on in the process. The UNEP forum may potentially also enable a larger group of Commonwealth countries to take part in the CCGE's deliberations. Environment Ministers at their informal meeting in Malmö agreed (May 2000) that they would next meet in Nairobi.

Small States' Presence in New York

14. The Secretariat manages the Commonwealth Joint Office in New York, which enables Belize, Dominica, The Gambia, Grenada, Maldives, St Lucia, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, and Samoa to maintain Permanent Missions to the United Nations. The costs of the Joint Office are met from extra-budgetary resources contributed by Australia, Britain and Canada, as well as by the nine tenant governments. This facility assists the governments concerned to participate in discussions on sustainable development at the United Nations. As small states are also likely to have a larger presence in New York (and the CSD), than Nairobi (and the UNEP Governing Council), a number of governments have requested that some form of Commonwealth presence be maintained at future meetings of the Commission on Sustainable

¹ Rio Declaration; Agenda 21; forest principles (and discussions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests); conventions on biological diversity, climate change, and desertification; and the Barbados Programme of Action on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Development. The nature of such presence and what the Commonwealth could do can be discussed and agreed by Ministers.

Briefing and Reporting

15. The Secretariat monitors major international policy developments concerning environment and development and reports on them through its quarterly journal '*International Development Policies*'. This service is particularly intended to assist those member countries that are not always able to attend international meetings whose deliberations may have implications for their environmental policies. The Secretariat also provides a unique collection of information on trends in socio-economic indicators in small states, through its annual publication *Basic Statistical Data on Selected Countries (with populations of less than five million)*.

Negotiation and Implementation of Multilateral Agreements

16. The Commonwealth Secretariat promotes capacity building in the negotiation and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, including UNCED. In 1991, the work of an Expert Group on Sustainable Development assisted the Commonwealth as a whole to develop its approach to the Rio conference. Among other things, this put forward new ideas on the sustainable development of small states, and issues related to gender and the environment. The Commonwealth Secretariat also provided technical assistance and policy advice to small states to support their preparations for UNCED.

17. Activities related to multilateral agreements have focused on areas where consensus has been difficult to reach. The Commonwealth has a role to play by promoting open and constructive dialogue between a wide range of countries and helping governments to explore areas of mutual concern and interest, where further work might be done collectively. It can also help countries to prepare for discussions under different agreements, and support their effective participation in, and implementation of, multilateral agreements, by exchanging experiences, analysing obligations, and identifying policy, legal, and scientific needs. Recent activities have included seminars, conferences and workshops on: the UN Convention to Combat Desertification; the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol (of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change); the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (under the Convention on Biological Diversity); approaches to intellectual property rights; and trade and sustainable development concerns.

18. The Commonwealth Secretariat has also provided negotiating briefs on issues of key concern to Commonwealth countries, notably in the area of trade. This service could be extended to cover areas related to trade and sustainable development, and issues related to the Rio+10 process.

19. In relation to the implementation of a number of international environmental processes (especially on climate change, biodiversity, forests, and Agenda 21), the Secretariat supports the development of the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, as an exemplar of good practice in sustainable utilisation of forest resources that can be disseminated to other countries. It provides policy advice, technical assistance and the use of its good offices to catalyse international funding for the programme. Launched under the Commonwealth's auspices in 1990, the Programme is dedicated to demonstrating that

tropical forest resources can be both conserved and used in environmentally sustainable ways to promote human development.

Capacity Building Through Training and the Provision of Experts

20. Finally, the Commonwealth Secretariat builds capacity in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small states, to formulate and implement effective national policies for sustainable development. This contributes to implementation of Agenda 21 at the national level.

21. Through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), experts are assigned to key institutions throughout the Commonwealth in response to high priority requests for technical assistance from member governments and regional organisations. Recent assignments have included: a coastal geologist working with the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission to study coastal and near-shore areas to assist with environmentally sustainable resource management and coastal development in the countries of the region; a consultant in environmental waste management working in Malta to prepare and implement a waste management strategy; and an expert in Kenya designing policy measures for forest environmental conservation.

22. The Secretariat assists member countries in drafting legislation for maritime areas and fisheries, and in negotiating fisheries access agreements. Environmental concerns are addressed, as appropriate, in the provision of assistance to governments in drafting legislation and negotiating agreements in the petroleum and mining sectors. Secretariat assistance is also provided on request in a range of industrial sectors. Recent programmes have included work on the gathering, use and trade of wild plants in medicine; the packaging of medicinal herbs in Ghana; tourism development and marketing in Cameroon, Ghana, Jamaica and the Bahamas, and the development of fisheries in Lake Victoria, which is shared by Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

23. Training has been provided in a wide range of areas related to environmental management and environmental law. Examples include programmes on: the integration of environmental and economic policies; waste management; chemical and hazardous waste management; environmental impact assessment; remote sensing; geographic information systems; environmental education; taxonomy and bioprospecting; and the determination of baselines for renewable energy projects. The Secretariat has supported the development of Masters Degree programmes and Diploma courses in Africa and the Caribbean. The Secretariat has also developed a pan-Commonwealth Training Module on women and natural resource management.