



Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment

Cartagena, Colombia, 12 February 2002

Provisional Agenda Item 4

CCGE(02)3

The Commonwealth and the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Note by the Commonwealth Secretariat

Under this agenda item, Ministers are invited to discuss the Commonwealth's preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and ways in which the outcomes of the Summit may be taken forward by the Commonwealth Secretariat in its work programme.

Introduction

2. The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and its implementation has been central to the Commonwealth's work on sustainable development issues.

3. *In preparation for UNCED:* Commonwealth Heads of Government at their meeting in 1989 agreed the Langkawi Declaration on Environment. This set out a comprehensive programme of action for the protection of the global environment and the achievement of sustainable development. It has been the foundation for Commonwealth work on environmentally and socially sustainable development issues throughout the 1990s and beyond, including its response to the challenges set by 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, and the Secretariat was represented at the Summit itself.

4. *In Implementing Rio:* The Commonwealth Secretariat has supported consensus building on major environmental issues that are of global concern, and the efforts of its member governments to implement multilateral environmental agreements, including the Rio outcomes: the Rio Declaration; Agenda 21; forest principles (and discussions of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests); convention on biological diversity, climate change and desertification; and the Barbados Programme of Action on the Sustainable Development of

Small Island Developing States (attending in 1994 SIDS Conference). Through briefings and caucus meetings, the Commonwealth Secretariat has assisted member countries to prepare for negotiations. It has also built the capacity of least developed and small member states to implement agreements by deepening awareness of obligations and approaches, and supporting information exchange and best practice.

5. *In its focus on CSD:* The Commonwealth has the potential to promote open and constructive dialogue between a wide range of countries to explore areas of mutual concern and interest. By convening meetings of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (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 each year. In 1990, Ministers agreed to convene CCGE meetings earlier in the year, in the wings of the UNEP Global Ministerial Environment Forum, to strengthen the ability of the CCGE to contribute early on to CSD discussions.

The Commonwealth and the WSSD

6. *In the context of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the question before Ministers is what preparations might be made by the Commonwealth to voice collectively its key concerns on sustainable development and take forward the Summit's outcomes in a future programme of work. The following points may help Ministers in their consideration of this issue:*

7. It is planned that the Commonwealth Secretariat will be represented at WSSD at the highest levels. Ministers may wish to consider how, in terms of process and timing, a collective Commonwealth perspective might be prepared for reflection by the Commonwealth Secretariat in its statement to the Summit.

- What action might Commonwealth governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat take between February and September 2002 to formulate a forward-looking statement by the Commonwealth for presentation and/or circulation at the Summit?
- It was agreed in January 2002 by a London-based Advisory Group on Small States (London High Commissioners) that the Commonwealth should facilitate the development by small states of an input for the World Summit on Sustainable Development to reflect their concerns. This proposal will be considered by the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States when it meets on 1st March 2002. Ministers may wish to consider whether a broader, collective, Commonwealth perspective might be developed for the WSSD, and how this task might be carried out, for example, through a group of officials working in the margins of WSSD PrepCom meetings.

8. How can the Commonwealth best mobilise political support for the World Summit on Sustainable Development?

- Ministers may wish to consider urging Commonwealth Heads of Government to attend the Summit.
- Ministers may wish to consider whether there are specific proposals or initiatives, which the Commonwealth could support, or on which it might play an advocacy role.

One example could be the new compact for sustainable development that has been proposed by South Africa.

9. How can the Commonwealth take forward the outcomes of the Summit in its future work programme?

a) *Implementation of the outcomes of Johannesburg:*

Ministers may wish to discuss how further work can be initiated on globalisation, poverty and sustainable development, and practical ways in which the Commonwealth Secretariat might mobilise assistance to its developing member governments to implement the outcomes of the Johannesburg Summit through a deeper integration of the three pillars of sustainable development.

b) *Further implementation of outcomes of the 1992 Rio Conference, and other multilateral environmental agreements:*

A recent study entitled 'An Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member Countries with 'Negotiations' (1990-99)' by Percy S Mistry and Lalita Saptagiri (December 2000) concluded that there was a need for the Secretariat to develop a clear set of priorities on assisting developing member countries in their implementation of various multilateral environmental agreements. The Commonwealth Secretariat has decided to gain a clear view of governments' needs in the areas of negotiation, and implementation, of various multilateral environmental agreements by initiating a 'market survey' of members. The results of the survey will be analysed by the Secretariat with a view to building on previous internal discussions on priorities for assistance to government, and to develop a strategy for implementation and a set of targets for assessing the impact of the Commonwealth Secretariat's efforts.

Ministers may wish to take note of the forthcoming 'market survey' on niche areas of assistance in the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements, and are kindly requested to facilitate a full and timely response to it by all relevant departments and ministries.