



Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment

Fifth Meeting, New York, 28 April 1998

CCGE(98)Inf

Promoting Environmentally Sustainable Development: A Review of Current Activities of the Commonwealth Secretariat

The main aims of the Secretariat's current work programme on environmentally sustainable development are to:

- promote consensus-building, policy development and co-operation on environmental issues which are of particular concern to the Commonwealth, primarily through meetings of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE);
- assist member countries to strengthen national capacities for environmental planning and management; and
- support the further development of the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, which is a flagship Commonwealth project.

2. Since the Secretariat's work programme on environment is not an item for discussion on the CCGE's agenda this year, this paper, which reviews some of the major current and planned activities of the Secretariat, is for the information of governments.

Consensus Building and Policy Development

Consensus Building

3. Meetings of the CCGE have helped to build consensus and promote co-operation on major issues such as forests, fisheries and climate change. The June 1997 CCGE meeting's discussions on the implementation of Agenda 21 and on climate change paved the way for further consultations which helped Commonwealth Heads of Government, meeting in Edinburgh later in the year, to agree to:

- endorse the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 as agreed by the 1997 UN General Assembly Special Session, particularly in respect of freshwater, forest resources and the transfer of environmentally

sound technologies to developing countries, recognising that new and additional resources will be needed to implement the programmes;

- underline the importance of a successful outcome at the Kyoto Conference of Parties to the Convention on Climate Change, with all countries playing their part within the 1995 Berlin Mandate, and with developed countries pursuing vigorously an outcome that would produce significant reductions in their greenhouse gas emissions through the adoption of a protocol or other legal instrument; and
- call on the Kyoto Conference to recognise that, after Kyoto, all countries will need to play their part by pursuing policies that would result in significant reductions of greenhouse gas emissions in order to solve a global problem that affected all countries.

4. The Commonwealth position on climate change embodied in para. 10 of the Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration contributed to the attainment of agreement, at the Kyoto Conference in December 1997, on a Protocol for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions after the year 2000.

Policy Development

5. The Secretariat is implementing a series of workshops to support member states' efforts to integrate environmental and economic policies more effectively. The most recent workshop was held in Trinidad and Tobago in March 1998 in collaboration with the World Bank and the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. It helped economic and environmental policy-makers from all Commonwealth Caribbean countries, as well as representatives of regional institutions, NGOs and the private sector, to gain a better understanding of the linkages between the economy and the environment and identify priority areas where market-based economic instruments, such as pollution charges and taxes, can be deployed to implement the 'polluter pays principle' and achieve environmental objectives. It is proposed to hold a similar workshop for the African region in 1998/99. Based on training materials prepared for previous workshops, an overview of the key conceptual, policy and practical aspects of integrating economic and environmental policies was published in 1997 as Economic Paper 28, *'Integrating the Economy and the Environment: Policy and Practice'*.

6. As part of its policy work, 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.

Small States

7. Issues pertinent to the environmentally sustainable development of small states were given prominence in a new report entitled '**A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability**' that was prepared by a Commonwealth Advisory Group. The Report's recommendations for further action at national, regional, international and Commonwealth levels were broadly endorsed by the 1997 meeting of the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States (MGSS). At the request of the MGSS, the Secretary-General is establishing a small Ministerial Committee which will discuss small states' concerns, including environmental ones, with major multilateral agencies and report to Commonwealth governments on the outcome.

8. The Secretariat continues to support the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in a number of ways, including through training and exchange of experience in the integration of economic and environmental policies; the establishment of a Small Island Water Information Network (SIWIN) to help managers and specialists to exchange information and experience in water resources management; and through several technical assistance and capacity building projects described in other sections of this paper. The Secretariat is also completing work on a Vulnerability Index, which will include indices of environmental vulnerability. The index is intended to develop a more robust methodology for assessing vulnerability overall, which can assist in determining the development assistance requirements of small states.

Capacity Building

9. The Secretariat continues to assist governments, on request, in strengthening their capacities to promote environmentally sustainable development in several areas. These are discussed below.

Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements

10. In April 1998, a workshop organised jointly by the Secretariat, the South Pacific Fisheries Agency, the South Pacific Forum and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), will help South Pacific member countries to implement Part XII of the 1982 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* which deals with the protection and preservation of the marine environment. In June 1998, another workshop organised in collaboration with the United Nations Inter-regional Crime and Justice Research Institute (Rome), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and SPREP, will focus on ways of strengthening the enforcement of international environmental conventions affecting South Pacific Commonwealth countries, with particular emphasis on criminal law. These countries are also being assisted with the implementation of the 1992 *Convention on Biological Diversity*. In Southern Africa, training in the phase-out of ozone depleting substances was provided to help governments implement their obligations under the 1987 *Montreal Protocol*.

Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources Management

11. Assistance is being provided in several industrial sectors. In the area of sustainable tourism, the Secretariat is helping Commonwealth East African countries to develop tourism strategies which maximise revenues and local benefits without causing further environmental degradation, especially in unique wilderness areas. In the Caribbean region, the Secretariat has been encouraging the development of premium quality functional craft products which utilise both recycled and naturally occurring materials. These products provide a valuable source of income for grass roots community organisations which employ women. In Guyana, Secretariat assistance has helped to upgrade skills and product design for an industry making furniture from indigenous non-timber forest products which are being harvested sustainably by local communities. The use of solar technology to dry agricultural produce and marketing of wild honey and beeswax are also being promoted in Guyana's hinterland. In Ghana, where the burning and discarding of coconut by-products can cause environmental health hazards, a training-oriented pilot project has been established to produce coir fibre, ropes, mats and pith.

12. In the field of agriculture, on-site training was organised in India for agroforestry practitioners from Zimbabwe and Kenya, to encourage sustainable agriculture and rehabilitate degraded lands. Projects on integrated pest management (focusing on waterweeds and the pink mealy bug in Zambia and the Caribbean, respectively) are promoting the use of biological control methods to combat invasive species. Following a successful series of publications on soil conservation and bioengineering in the Caribbean region, meetings of key staff from agricultural extension services in a number of member countries are being organised to discuss new approaches to prevent soil erosion. A workshop scheduled for Jamaica in late April 1998 may lead to the publication of guidelines or a handbook.

13. Assistance from the Secretariat is helping member countries to conserve and capture value from biological diversity. With a view to promoting small-scale pharmaceutical industries, medicinal plants and herbs were surveyed in Malta and a collection of major specimens established at a local herbarium. Under a pilot project on biodiversity assessment, which emphasises utilisation of important species of flora, work has begun to assess utilisation of plants in Mauritius. In order to assist biodiversity management in member countries, eight teaching manuals on *Biodiversity Information Management* are being prepared in collaboration with the World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UK), and a publication on *Gender and Biodiversity Conservation in Africa* is being developed jointly with the Makerere University's Institute of Environment and Natural Resources, Uganda.

14. The *Commonwealth Forestry Initiative* has resulted in a number of reports which trace the origins and development of sustainable forest management in a number of countries, including India, Ghana, Malaysia, Uganda and Sri Lanka. An illustrated guide to the main timber species in Uganda, prepared at the request of the Department of Forestry in 1997, has been used by the forest service and bilateral donors to arrange a series of training courses which have been welcomed by the timber trade throughout East Africa. Also, the 1997 edition of the *Uganda Source*

Book for Forest Professionals is being revised as an illustrated volume of teaching material which can be used by forestry staff and others in encouraging forest conservation, research and ecotourism in Uganda.

Training

15. Training continues to be provided in several areas related to environmental management. Topics include waste management (for Africa) and hazardous waste management (for the Caribbean). Specialised short training courses have been used to develop skills in environmental impact assessment, remote sensing, geographic information systems and environmental education. The Secretariat has also developed two long-term programmes in collaboration with the University of Botswana (MSc Environmental Science) and the Centre for Environmental Studies at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago (MSc Environmental Engineering). Under the Commonwealth Science Council's Chemical Research and Environmental Needs (CREN) project, training has been provided on cyanobacteria, chemical emergencies, and low-cost instrumentation for environmental monitoring to build capacity to monitor and protect the environment from the impacts of chemical effluents. Several training-oriented publications are also currently being prepared. These include: *'Environmental Management for the twenty-first Century'* (in collaboration with the School for Resource and Environmental Studies, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada); and *'Environmental Education: A Pedagogical Guide'* (in collaboration with the Centre for Environmental Education, India).

16. The Secretariat has completed a dozen training programmes to promote greater use of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in member countries. A workshop for the Indian Ocean region will be held in May 1998, in collaboration with the Institute of Energy and Environment of L'Agence de la Francophonie, to train officials in the commissioning, supervision and analysis of EIAs. The Secretariat will also provide resource persons for a workshop on EIA to be held by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States in April 1998, and is preparing a publication entitled *'Environmental Assessment of Development Projects - A Guide to Planners and Managers'*. The findings of a recent evaluation study on the Secretariat's training programmes in EIA were published in October 1997.

17. The pan-Commonwealth training module on women and natural resources management, published in 1996, has been disseminated widely in the African, Asian, Caribbean and South Pacific regions. Training materials on gender mainstreaming in the environmental sector have also been developed. All these materials will form part of a Gender Management System Handbook and Kit which is being finalised for publication in 1998.

Technical Assistance

18. Through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), the Secretariat continues to provide experts in response to requests for technical assistance from member governments. Examples include: an information specialist attached to the Caribbean Conservation Association; an Environmental Economist to

assist the strengthening of environmental and natural resources management in Jamaica's Planning Institute; a hydrogeologist to help the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission to improve environmentally sound water and sanitation management; and a Marine Pollution Officer to help SPREP to protect the marine environment in the South Pacific region. A CFTC expert is also providing technical support for national and regional capacity building in environmental management through the Caribbean Capacity Building for Environmental Management Project (CCBEM).

19. The Secretariat continues to assist member countries in drafting legislation for maritime areas and fisheries, and in negotiating fisheries access agreements. Relevant provisions included in maritime legislation cover marine parks development, protection of coastal areas, and conservation of mangrove swamps and other wetlands. Environmental concerns also continue to be addressed, as appropriate, in the provision of assistance to governments in drafting legislation and negotiating agreements in the petroleum and mining sectors.

Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme

20. The Secretariat continues to support the development of the Iwokrama International Rain Forest Programme in Guyana through policy advice, technical assistance and the use of its good offices to catalyse international funding. 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. Half of the forest area (360,000 hectares) generously set aside by Guyana is being maintained as a Wilderness Preserve for scientific research. The remainder will be utilised to generate economic benefits in accordance with sound environmental practices. The Programme is managed by the Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development, which is implementing projects in five key areas: sustainable forest management; conservation and use of biodiversity; human development; forest research; and information and communication. As a result of a donors meeting organised by the Secretariat at the European Commission in Brussels in January 1998, new funding commitments amounting to \$8.2 million have been secured to date to support the expansion of the Iwokrama Centre's operations. A detailed progress report on the Iwokrama Programme is provided in the paper CCGE(98)2.

Conclusions

21. On the basis of mandates from Commonwealth governments, the Secretariat continues to be active in supporting consensus building and policy development on environmental issues. Various technical assistance, training and other projects are helping to build capacities for more effective environmental planning and management in member countries. Issues pertinent to the sustainable development of small states figured prominently in a new report, *A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability*, prepared by a Commonwealth Advisory Group in 1997. The Secretariat continues to assist small states with the implementation of the 1994