



**THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT'S WORK ON
ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
London SW1Y 5HX**

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This paper provides an overview of the strategic orientations of the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on environmentally sustainable development and illustrates some of the Secretariat's specific activities in this field.

Introduction

2. The challenge of conserving the environment and promoting sustainable development was addressed by Commonwealth Heads of Government in their 1989 Langkawi Declaration on Environment. The Declaration provided a framework for Commonwealth co-operation for environmental conservation and sustainable development, and set out a comprehensive programme of collective and national action. In Harare, in 1991, Heads of Government made sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty one of their priority goals for the 1990s. The 1993 Cyprus Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) reaffirmed this priority and emphasised the need to see the commitments entered into at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) made operational as soon as possible.

3. In response to these mandates, the Commonwealth Secretariat has built a programme of activities on environmentally sustainable development (ESD) which has the following objectives:¹

- To promote consensus-building and policy development.
- To strengthen national capabilities to achieve ESD.
- To assist with the development of the Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme in Guyana, a major Commonwealth initiative for the sustainable management of forests and biodiversity (see paragraph 16).

4. The Secretariat's work on ESD is focused on areas where it has a comparative advantage and can have maximum impact. The Secretariat has developed expertise in providing assistance - rapidly, cost-effectively, and often through technical co-operation among developing member countries - to build capacities for effective environmental management, especially in small states.

¹ These activities are carried out under Programme C14 (Environment), which is one of the 15 Programmes under which the Secretariat's work has been organised since 1 July 1993.

5. Since many Commonwealth small states face special constraints to their sustainable development, the Secretariat has integrated the concerns of these countries in its environmental projects. Gender concerns are also being mainstreamed in the Secretariat's work and addressed through specific activities on women and the environment.

6. The following Divisions contribute to the Secretariat's work on ESD: Economic Affairs Division, Export and Industrial Development Division, General Technical Assistance Services Division, Human Resource Development Division, Management Training Services Division, Science and Technology Division, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Technology Management (CCGTM),¹ and Women and Youth Affairs Division.

I. Consensus-building and Policy Development for Environmentally Sustainable Development

A. Consensus building

7. The Commonwealth Secretariat plays an important role in promoting consensus building and policy development in the field of ESD. First, it facilitates high-level discussions in a collaborative and constructive setting. This includes CHOGMs, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) and, when appropriate, other Ministerial-level fora (for instance, Commonwealth Health Ministers, who made 'Health and the Environment' the theme of their 1992 meeting). The CCGE was established in 1993 with a mandate to contribute to the post-UNCED process by facilitating informal discussions on critical sustainable development issues on which the Commonwealth could contribute to the development of international consensus, and to develop proposals for more effective Commonwealth action in priority areas of ESD. At its second meeting in April 1995 in the wings of the high level segment of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the Group reviewed progress in strengthening international co-operation for sustainable development. Members suggested several areas for improving Commonwealth co-operation, including greater sharing of experience in environmental management and institutional and policy development; strengthening capacities to undertake environmental impact assessments and exploring the use of economic instruments in environmental management; facilitating the transfer and sharing of environmentally sound technologies; and assisting the sustainable development of small states. The Consultative Group also exchanged views on the sustainable management of forest resources. Members agreed that the Commonwealth was well placed to strengthen international dialogue and co-operation on forestry matters and play a valuable role in consensus building between developed and developing countries. The Group agreed that it would be beneficial to continue to

¹ By July 1995, it is expected that the CCGTM will be replaced by a private company, the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management Limited (CPTM).

have future consultative meetings in the wings of the CSD, as well as other major international meetings, as appropriate.

8. Secondly, the Secretariat promotes debate and a greater understanding of specific issues of concern to the Commonwealth through specially constituted expert groups. The groups' analyses and recommendations are published for wide-scale dissemination. Recommendations are addressed to governments, the Commonwealth Secretariat, international agencies and other actors in the field of ESD. Commonwealth Expert Group Reports of particular relevance to ESD include '**Climate Change**' (1989) and '**Sustainable Development**' (1991).

B. Policy development

9. The Secretariat is in the process of establishing an Expert Advisory Group to guide the future orientations of its work in the area of environment policy development. This will also assist its technical assistance activities. Increasing attention is being devoted to the need to assist member countries in integrating environmental and economic policies and using economic instruments to make development environmentally sustainable. In 1995/96, the Secretariat proposes to organise a workshop on environmental economics for environmental and economic policymakers in small states. Following the completion of the Uruguay Round of international trade negotiations, the Secretariat is paying increasing attention to the link between trade and environment, an issue which is of concern to many Commonwealth countries.

10. As part of its policy development work, the Secretariat monitors major international policy developments concerning ESD and reports on them through its quarterly publication '**International Development Policies**'. This service is intended particularly to assist those small states and least developed member countries which are not always able to attend important international meetings whose deliberations may have important implications for their interests.

C. Assisting small states

11. Because of financial, technical and human resource constraints, many Commonwealth developing countries, particularly small states, find it difficult to participate effectively in the proliferating and increasingly complex negotiations on environment and sustainable development. The 1991 Commonwealth Expert Group Report on '**Sustainable Development**' assisted these countries with their preparations for the UNCED. The Secretariat also organised consultations among small states and provided them with technical advice in order to enhance their participation in the negotiations preparatory to UNCED. In addition, it played an active role in assisting small states' preparations for the 1994 Barbados Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, by undertaking or commissioning technical studies for preparatory technical meetings; providing the Secretariat of the Caribbean Community with a consultant to co-ordinate its preparations; and assigning

a technical expert to assist the Government of Maldives. The Secretariat has taken steps to improve the effectiveness of its assistance to small states in the light of the outcomes of the Barbados Conference. The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Small States considered a report by the Secretariat on this subject at its meeting in London in May 1995. It agreed that there were many areas where the Secretariat was well placed to assist small states with the implementation of the Programme of Action agreed in Barbados.

II. Strengthening National Capacities to Achieve Environmentally Sustainable Development

12. The Secretariat assists member states in building their capacity to undertake more effective environmental planning and management through training and technical assistance, and projects involving the application of science and technology to the solution of environmental problems.

A. Training

13. Training is executed through a mix of workshops, training programmes, attachments and study visits. Major areas of training, reflecting the priorities of member countries, have included environmental management across a wide range of sectors, and environmental impact assessment (EIA). Workshops have been held in West and Southern Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean regions to train officials from planning and infrastructure ministries in the use of EIAs. A handbook on techniques for applying EIAs to project planning has also been developed.

14. Under the Langkawi Awards Scheme, launched in 1990/91 and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (the scheme ended in June 1994), about 400 participants benefited from training programmes and workshops on environmental management, pollution control, environmental assessment and monitoring, marine environmental protection, environmental health, and soil and water conservation, among other areas. Longer-term programmes in environmental education and training have predominantly taken the form of support to individuals undertaking Masters or diploma courses in a range of environmental disciplines. These courses have been of particular benefit to small states. Some 20-25 awards have been made every year for such long-term studies.

B. Improving environmental planning and management capacities in sectoral areas

Biodiversity

15. The Secretariat is developing projects to assist members in meeting their obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity. These include training in taxonomy; techniques for *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation of biological resources;

development of a multi-media training programme on the management of biological diversity; support for the study of the use of biological resources by Amerindian communities in Guyana; and biodiversity resource inventory and monitoring in small island developing states, taking into consideration the economic and ecological values of species and ecosystems. The Secretariat has established a Regional Network for underutilised Tropical Fruit Trees in Asia and is also developing projects on underutilised crops such as cassava.

Forestry

16. The **Iwokrama Rain Forest Programme** was launched under Commonwealth auspices in 1990 to research and demonstrate methods for the sustainable use and conservation of tropical forest resources and biological diversity within an area of 360,000 hectares of virgin forest generously set aside by the Government and people of Guyana. The Secretariat is continuing to support the development of the Programme by providing strategic guidance (through its membership of the Programme's Interim Board of Trustees) and long-term technical assistance for the Programme's management. The Programme is also being supported by the United Nations Development Programme/Global Environment Facility which is providing \$3 mn as seed funding, and other agencies such as Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Britain's Overseas Development Administration. The IDRC is expected to provide assistance in a number of areas including preparing the 1995-2000 Medium Term Plan; organising a Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee, a Scientific Consortium, and a Donor Support Group; and establishing an Environmental Communications and Information Centre for the Programme.

17. The Secretariat launched a Commonwealth Forestry Initiative in 1991 to promote the exchange of the large wealth of knowledge in member countries on the management of forests. Its central objective is to offer forest managers models of sustainable forestry against which they can test their own management regimes. A selected number of countries have been encouraged to document their experiences in the sustainable management of tropical forests. Reports for India, Uganda, and Ghana have been published. Similar ones for Australia and Sri Lanka are under preparation. The reports have been welcomed by forestry professionals and used as teaching materials.

18. At its April 1995 meeting, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment suggested several areas for strengthening Commonwealth functional co-operation. These included support for the Iwokrama Programme by providing funding and personnel as well as sharing expertise and information; establishing a consortium of Commonwealth institutions to support sustainable forest management (SFM); pooling expertise and experience in SFM, increasing awareness of the importance of SFM, and securing greater integration of the industrial sector in SFM; developing inventories of forestry expertise, particularly at regional levels; and establishing closer links between

the Secretariat, the Commonwealth Forestry Association and the Commonwealth Forestry Conference.

Energy

19. The Secretariat has been developing a programme which is identifying economically viable, environmentally sound and efficient sources of energy for sustainable development in developing member countries. A training workshop for policy makers, NGOs and private sector representatives in East and Southern Africa, provided practical experience in the installation and maintenance of small solar energy systems. A follow-up study looked at how solar energy systems could assist women's groups in an isolated area of north-west Tanzania. The Secretariat has published a manual on the theory, installation, and maintenance of small solar electric systems for use in developing countries as well as a handbook on charcoal production. It is assisting with the preparation of a cost-effective strategy for the utilisation of renewable energy technology in rural areas of Swaziland. In the South Pacific, it is undertaking studies on the use of waste-wood and ocean waves as renewable sources of energy.

Water resources

20. In response to Chapter 18 of Agenda 21, the Secretariat is providing assistance to member countries in the following areas: integrated water resources development and management; water resources assessment; protection of water resources, water quality and aquatic ecosystems; drinking water supply and sanitation; and water and sustainable urban development. A major seminar is planned in 1995 on the water resources management problems of small islands, with case studies from the Caribbean and Indian Ocean regions.

21. A project on the Densu River Basin Project in Ghana was followed up with a meeting organised for the Institute of Aquatic Biology in Accra, in September 1994, on Watershed Management in the Densu River Basin. The main concern of the project was the development of mechanisms to reduce pollution and promote co-ordinated watershed management in the Densu River Basin and Weija Reservoir. It looked at the long-term effects of pollution and siltation on the reservoir and the river caused by logging, intensive agriculture and rapid urbanisation. The project resulted in guidelines for rehabilitation of the watershed and a recommendation for the creation of a river basin authority. Among other benefits, the project brought together research institutions, government agencies, and the communities at risk, increased environmental awareness, and brought about institutional strengthening.

Coastal and marine resources

22. Following the successful assignment of a physical oceanographer for over two years and through training of local staff in overseas institutions, a new Physical Oceanography Unit has been established at the Institute of Marine Affairs in Trinidad

and Tobago. This unit is the Caribbean region's leading centre for such expertise and is able to provide technical advice on coastal and marine environments to Trinidad and Tobago and other countries in the region. A request is currently under consideration for a Marine Parks Management Adviser to be based in Tobago. In collaboration with the Canadian Centre for Remote Sensing, the Secretariat is organising workshops on the application of remote sensing and Geographic Information Systems to coastal zone management in Trinidad and Tobago, Mauritius and possibly Papua New Guinea. The Secretariat is also discussing joint activities with the Food and Agriculture Organisation in the sphere of surveillance of marine resources. It has undertaken a number of short training courses on issues related to the management of Exclusive Economic Zones conservation of marine resources, and general maritime administration. These courses have been tailored to meet the specific needs of environmental policy makers and planners.

Agriculture and fisheries

23. The Secretariat has supported projects to encourage environmentally sustainable agriculture in countries such as the Maldives, where assistance was recently provided for the preparation of proposals to be funded by major donor agencies. This preparatory work is also well illustrated by the Secretariat's work with the Dairy Development Board of Zimbabwe to promote small-scale milk production on an environmentally sound basis in communal areas. In Trinidad and Tobago, an expert supported by the Secretariat has recently finished a long-term assignment to research the use of microbial pest control techniques in agricultural production, in order to replace the use of chemical agents. The products which have been developed will be of benefit to other countries with similar agricultural environments. In the area of fisheries, a training manual for aquaculture for the African region was published in 1992. It has been widely used by member countries in the region.

Land resources

24. A systematic review of the Secretariat's environmental management projects on soil and water conservation in the Caribbean region was undertaken in 1992, followed by a study of small farmers' involvement in soil conservation schemes that was published in 1994. These reports will be supplemented with a study on techniques used in Trinidad and Tobago. In the African region, attention has been focused on the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Comprehensive guidelines for improving land husbandry in Commonwealth member countries have been prepared, and existing programmes are shortly to be reviewed at the request of SADC. The Secretariat is supporting a programme to re-vegetate degraded lands in semi-arid regions in Kenya.

Industry

25. The Secretariat assesses the environmental aspects of proposed industrial development assistance projects. If these are expected to have an adverse environmental impact, a detailed analysis of the environmental risks is undertaken. In the area of waste management, the Secretariat has set up a Commonwealth Plastics Network and recently organised a Commonwealth conference, in collaboration with the Government of Malaysia, on the transfer of technology to manage plastic waste. It is also working with Jamaica's Scientific Research Council to develop solutions to the problem of water pollution by effluents from rum distilleries. This is threatening the environmental sustainability of the rum industry. The project will involve the transfer of technology and will be of interest to industries processing sugar molasses in Africa and Asia. Like a number of other Commonwealth countries, St Lucia has a quarrying and construction sector which produces rock and sand aggregates for road and building construction. The Secretariat is providing assistance in the application of best practices to reduce environmental damage in this sector.

26. Technical assistance was given to the Preferential Trade Area Secretariat in Eastern and Southern Africa in the preparation and development of environmental action plans. In Barbados, at a government-owned cement company, the Secretariat carried out an environmental impact assessment for the conversion of a kiln from fuel oil to coal-fired technology. It has also completed a training course on pollution control and environmental management.

27. The Secretariat co-sponsors the Chemical Research and Environmental Needs programme which provides training in chemistry-related aspects of environmental protection including the impacts of fertilizers, agro-chemical and industrial wastes, air pollution monitoring, acid rain, and methane emissions. The Secretariat also has a joint programme with the Royal Society of Chemistry (Britain) which provides training and information to enhance the scientific capabilities of developing countries to manage and dispose of toxic wastes.

Climate change and sea-level rise

28. The 1989 Commonwealth Expert Group on Climate Change focused, inter alia, on the particular vulnerability of Commonwealth small islands and other low-lying states to global warming and consequent sea-level rise. The Secretariat provided support for the first international conference of small states on sea-level rise which was convened by Maldives in 1989. It is looking to assist members' participation in scientific and technological co-operation when arrangements under the Convention on Climate Change are in place. It has assigned a Climatologist/Meteorologist to the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (based in Western Samoa) in order to strengthen the region's capacity to monitor climate change.

Health

29. The Secretariat has commissioned an Australian institution to develop and test draft manuals on Environmental Health Impact Assessment for use by health and other environmental professionals, and by the communities which are exposed to environmental health hazards. In collaboration with the World Health Organisation, a small group of experts was assembled to make proposals for the further development and testing of the draft manuals. To date, testing has been undertaken in small island states in the Pacific. The Secretariat is also working on an integrated approach to urban sanitation through a pilot project in Zambia, following a review of the situation in the African region. This project is intended to serve as a model for other countries in the region. Encouraging local communities to participate in ensuring safe water and proper waste management was the Secretariat's contribution in the Caribbean region, where a review of solid waste disposal in one country was shared with other countries. This led to the preparation of material for a training programme for women in community-based management of safe water and waste disposal.

Environmental legislation

30. In the Seychelles, an environmental lawyer supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat is assisting the Government to implement its environmental management plan, by preparing regulatory and other instruments for new environmental protection legislation.

III. Women

31. The Secretariat has developed a series of training materials for trainers and extension workers on techniques for conservation of natural resources by women. In 1990, a manual on "Women, Conservation and Agriculture" was developed for the African region. Similar manuals were later developed for the South Pacific and Asian regions. The Secretariat is now developing a manual for the Caribbean region (the last in the series) and is planning a trainers' workshop in Guyana in April 1995. It is also formulating a Pan-Commonwealth training module on women and the environment, which will be used by trainers and extension workers, NGOs and women's organisations to sensitise policy-makers to the gender dimensions of environmental policies and programmes. The module, which takes a broad-based and comprehensive view of strategies and techniques used by women for the conservation of natural resources, will be part of the Commonwealth's contribution to the Fourth World Conference on Women in China later this year. The Secretariat organised a workshop on improving rural water quality for women and their communities in the Iwokrama region of Guyana. It introduced trainers from four Caribbean countries with rainforests, to the use of low-cost technologies for improving rural water quality. The Secretariat also organised a workshop on Women and Sustainable Development in Small Island Developing States during the 1994 Barbados Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of these states.

32. To alleviate the negative impacts of poverty on the environment and help generate sustainable development, the Secretariat has been addressing the integrated concerns of food security, poverty and the status of rural women. It recently completed a report highlighting the key issues and areas for action and is commissioning a number of country reports which highlight national policies. The Secretariat is also developing a handbook on 'Food Security Policies and Gender in Africa', in collaboration with other agencies. This will examine the relevance of gender issues and food security policies and suggest options for mainstreaming gender in policy-making using models of good practice. The Secretariat is also hoping to develop a training programme for policy makers on gender issues in the wider field of natural resources management and ESD.

IV. Youth

33. Projects are undertaken to increase the awareness of young people of environmental issues, and enhance their participation in efforts to conserve the environment. A number of Commonwealth Youth Service Awards in 1993 and 1994 focused on the environment. Examples include the 'SOS-Students of Seattle, Canada' for their work in improving the environment through recycling programmes, cleaning up rivers and presenting plays about the environment; 'Self-employment and Orchards, India', a co-operative of young people which encourages planting of fruit trees in the community to improve the environment and to generate income; and 'The White House Women's Project, Sierra Leone', a group of young women who work to improve the environment through tree planting and growing vegetables. The 1994 Youth Exchange Programme, organised by the Commonwealth Youth Programme's (CYP) Caribbean Centre, focused on the management of aquatic resources, sustainable development of rainforests and the use of solar energy. A number of environment-related projects, initiated by young people, have been provided with seed funding by the CYP Regional Centres. These include plant nursery projects in Asia and solar energy projects in the Caribbean. Following the success of the Rainbow Reports television series on young environmentalists, made in collaboration with Britain's Television Trust for the Environment, a series entitled 'Voices of the Rainbow' has been produced in collaboration with the International Youth Development and Environment Network, presenting the views of young people on environmental issues and suggesting action by them to assist the implementation of the 1992 Earth Summit's outcomes.

Conclusion

34. In future the Commonwealth Secretariat's activities in the field of ESD will continue to be designed in order to achieve maximum impact and respond to the priorities of member countries in their pursuit of ESD. Particular attention will be given to the concerns of small states and the integration of gender issues in project activities. It is envisaged that the Secretariat's work in the area of consensus building and policy development will be intensified in response to the increasing emphasis being given to the development of appropriate policy frameworks for ESD. There is expected

to be continued demand from member countries for technical assistance to strengthen national capacities for environmental planning and management. These requests will be met through the provision of experts, and through training activities, particularly in environmental impact assessment techniques and environmental management and pollution control. The Secretariat's flagship programmes in the areas of biodiversity and the development of renewable sources of energy will be given further impetus. A high priority will continue to be given to accelerating the implementation of the Iwokrama Programme in Guyana and mobilising additional Commonwealth and wider international support for its component activities.