



# Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment

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## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT THE HEART OF THE COMMONWEALTH**

Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat  
for the World Summit on Sustainable Development  
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### **Introduction**

The Commonwealth is an exceptional association, whose strength lies in the diversity of its membership, and its ability to network and exchange best practices, based on similar political, legal, administrative and education systems, and a shared working language. The fifty-four independent nation states that make up its membership<sup>1</sup> account for almost a third of the world's population, and encompass many faiths, races, languages and cultures. Commonwealth countries are spread over every continent and ocean. They range from some of the largest in the world to small- and micro- states; from the poorest to some of the wealthiest; and from natural resource-based economies to highly industrialised and knowledge-based ones. The Commonwealth's principles and the equal participation and voice of its member states, have much to offer the international community as it strives to implement the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This paper outlines ways in which the Commonwealth is applying these principles and helping its member states to address sustainable development challenges.

Sustainable development is not a matter of discrete actions on a range of development concerns such as trade, soil erosion or poverty reduction. It is about finding integrated approaches that address potentially multiple impacts and benefits across the three pillars of

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<sup>1</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, The Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Canada, Cyprus, Dominica, Fiji Islands, The Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Kingdom, United Republic of Tanzania, Vanuatu, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) to “find new ways of balancing equity, economics and ecology”<sup>2</sup>. The range of issues addressed in creating sustainable development is so broad that success in ‘Making it Happen’ will demand a clear vision of how development is to be directed and supported. Creating this vision involves open, intense and continuing dialogue with all elements in society and the capacity to assess, monitor, and communicate on risk and the known and unknown thresholds of natural systems. Implementing the vision needs long-term investment in partnerships between nation states, as well as between government at all levels, business, and civil society.

The Commonwealth has played an active role in three key international negotiations that are setting the development agenda for the next decade by addressing critical concerns on trade, finance and sustainable development: the WTO Doha Ministerial Meeting (December 2001); the Finance for Development Summit in Monterrey (March 2002); and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). Johannesburg must build on the considerable achievements of Doha and Monterrey through renewed vision and leadership, and ensure that practical steps are taken, in a true spirit of international collaboration, to create prosperity and equity for all, and reverse the continuing loss of environmental resources and quality that underpin the social, cultural, spiritual and economic foundations of our societies.

### **A Commonwealth ‘Top Ten’ on Sustainable Development**

The Commonwealth attaches high priority to ‘Making Sustainable Development Happen’. In the light of priorities set by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Commonwealth Secretariat will be preparing a programme of work, for the consideration of Commonwealth Environment Ministers early in 2003. The programme will be designed to assist member states in their efforts to achieve internationally agreed development goals, and ensure the full implementation of agreements arising from the UN Conference on Environment and Development, including Agenda 21 and the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21. Priority areas for sustainable development that the Commonwealth is already making progress on, include:

1. **Strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law.** There has been good progress on human rights, but further practical work is needed through an holistic approach with equal priority attached to fundamental political civil rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights.
2. **Eliminating poverty** through multidisciplinary programmes that address Millennium Development Goals, and by examining the ways in which democracies can best be supported in combating poverty.
3. **Empowering women.** The universal goal of sustainable development is inexorably tied to the social, political and economic empowerment of women.
4. **Investing in youth.** Today’s young people are a critical element, both demographically, and as a potential resource for development, that must be factored in to sustainability strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> Trade and sustainable development: time for a fresh start in Johannesburg, by Kevin Watkins. Bridges 6(5), June 2002.

5. **Delivering the Monterrey Consensus.** Continued international co-operation is needed to increase the flow of resources for sustainable development, in particular working towards meeting the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the GNP of developed countries for official development assistance, and by supporting the Cologne Initiative for the reduction of debt.
6. **Forging new opportunities in trade, investment and private sector development.** Fair trade is one of the most powerful tools we have for reducing global poverty and meeting Millennium Development Goals.
7. **Managing globalisation.** Renewed political will and action are needed in making globalisation a positive force in sustainable development through: greater *market access* for developing countries to markets of developed countries; *the removal of perverse subsidies* in sectors such as agriculture and fisheries, since these are creating distortions that impede development and poverty reduction and are leading to an over-exploitation of resources; *diversification of developing country exports*, reducing their dependence on commodities; and ensuring *financial resources for sustainable development*. Levels and effectiveness of aid need to be addressed and the potential of other resource flows realised. Different agreements, for example on Trade Related Intellectual Property (TRIPs) and stipulations under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, need to be compatible and mutually supportive.
8. **Implementing sustainable development in such a way as to benefit least developed countries and small states.** The Commonwealth recognises that the *New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)* has the potential to transform Africa, and has supported this initiative, which highlights the link between sustainable development and democracy, good governance and human rights. The continent needs a generous-spirited response from the international community to support Africa's efforts to help itself. On debt relief, the Commonwealth was the first to draw the attention of the global community to the plight of *Heavily Indebted Poor Countries*, and continues to work for still greater debt reduction to ensure a sustainable exit by these countries from the debt problem. For *small states*, the critical need is to recognise and address their economic, social and environmental *vulnerability*. This will require appropriate policies on trade, investment, graduation and sustainable environmental management. The impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> has been particularly hard on this group of states, and an effective process and international meeting to review implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action will be critical for them.
9. **Reversing the current trends in the loss of environmental resources.** UNEP's Global Environment Outlook-3 Report again highlights that despite great efforts at national and international levels, policy responses to date have not been sufficient to address the negative impacts that poverty and excessive consumption are having on the natural resource base. Strong national capacities, the implementation of national strategies for sustainable development, and enactment of multilateral environmental agreements, are all critical to addressing climate change, desertification, biodiversity, biosafety and forest loss, and impacts on oceans and fish resources.
10. **Providing citizens with sustainable choices** in the way in which they live their lives, through: freedom from famine, poverty and personal insecurity; the sensitive implementation of the Habitat Agenda (including the provision of clean water and

sanitation); support for sustainable rural livelihoods; policy integration; consumer education and information; open and effective communication of sustainable development policies and measures; and the promotion of good governance and tackling of corruption.

## **PART I: HOW THE COMMONWEALTH CAN 'MAKE IT HAPPEN'**

### **Sustainable Development at the Heart of the Commonwealth's Focus**

Sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty stand at the heart of the Commonwealth's work and the fundamental principles that all members of the Commonwealth hold in common<sup>3</sup>:

- the need for international peace and order, global economic development and the rule of international law;
- belief in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief, and in the individual's inalienable right to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in framing the society in which he or she lives;
- the recognition of racial prejudice and intolerance as a dangerous sickness and a threat to healthy development, and racial discrimination as an unmitigated evil; and
- the importance and urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the peoples of the world, seeking the progressive removal of the wide disparities in living standards amongst our members.

It is also elaborated through specific mandates on sustainable development<sup>4</sup>, which initiated a very early commitment to addressing poverty alleviation through an integrated focus on all three pillars of sustainable development. In Langkawi in 1989, Commonwealth leaders emphasised 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 *“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”.*

Most recently, Commonwealth Heads of Government at their 2002 meeting in Coolumb, Australia, stressed their determination to *“work to eliminate poverty, to promote people-centred and sustainable development, and thus progressively to remove the wide disparities in living standards among us and overcome the special challenges facing our small state and less developed members”.* In seeking to realise this vision, the

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<sup>3</sup> Expressed in the 1971 Singapore Declaration and the 1991 Harare Declaration.

<sup>4</sup> 1989 Langkawi Declaration on Environment; the 1991 Harare Declaration; and the 1997 Edinburgh Economic Declaration.

Commonwealth Secretariat works as a trusted partner for all Commonwealth people as a force for peace, democracy, equality and good governance; catalyst for global consensus building; and source of assistance for sustainable development and poverty reduction. Its work is guided by the Commonwealth Secretariat's Strategic Plan, which will assist countries in their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, as well as support the New Partnership for African Development, and the outcomes of the major UN Development Conferences of the 1990s. The following strategic goals endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Governments are particularly relevant to the WSSD:

- help to create the conditions wherein all Commonwealth citizens enjoy the security and benefits of the rule of law and good governance in all spheres.
- assist the empowerment of women in the Commonwealth by eliminating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for women and men; and to create opportunities for young people to gain an education and realise their potential and aspirations.
- help developing member countries to protect and promote their interests and benefit from trade, investment and new information technology; and to provide practical assistance that supports their efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for poverty eradication and sustainable development.
- continue to promote greater international attention to, and provide support for, the special needs of small states arising from the constraints of size, their remoteness and vulnerability to shocks (external and internal).

### **Commonwealth Strengths in Making it Happen**

The Commonwealth brings three valuable resources to the implementation of sustainable development:

- *dialogue* – the Commonwealth facilitates consultations at the highest political levels on issues related to sustainable development<sup>5</sup>. It is effective in the areas of consensus building, policy dialogue, and advocacy for developing countries, bringing together states with different backgrounds and strengths and promoting co-operation based on the principle of equity. As Sir Sridath Ramphal<sup>6</sup>, once said: “the Commonwealth cannot negotiate for the world, but it can help the world to negotiate”.
- *networking* – the Commonwealth is a series of networks that can provide a useful asset-base for implementing the outcomes of WSSD. They include the inter-governmental network (represented by the Commonwealth Secretariat), local government (represented by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum), professional and civil society organisations (represented by the Commonwealth Foundation), and business (represented by the Commonwealth Business Council). The Commonwealth's networks can be harnessed to develop the partnerships needed to deliver sustainable development. Current examples include: the Commonwealth

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to biennial meetings by Heads of Government, the Secretariat convenes consultations by ministers of foreign affairs, women's affairs, finance, law, health, environment, and education.

<sup>6</sup> Commonwealth Secretary-General from 1975 to 1990.

Consultative Group on Human Settlements, which is promoting a multi-disciplinary approach to implementation of the Habitat Agenda; Commonwealth consultations on delivering the Monterrey consensus; initiatives to promote national foresight strategies through collaboration between the public and private sectors and academia; knowledge networking for sustainable development with reference to harmonised implementation of the Rio environmental conventions and related agreements; and the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management.

- *technical co-operation* – as a trusted and neutral development partner, the Commonwealth is well placed to address the sustainable development needs of member countries. Through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) it provides technical assistance and promotes democracy and socio-economic development by enabling countries to share their skills and knowledge. Its relatively small size allows the CFTC to respond rapidly and flexibly to requests for assistance from member countries. It focuses on building the capacity of people, institutions, and governments to devise policies that will aid sustainable development. Close partnership with member governments affords them full ownership of the implementation and outcomes.

## **PART II: COMMONWEALTH ACTION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

This section gives examples of the Commonwealth Secretariat's current work to illustrate its potential as a partner to member governments in their implementation of WSSD's outcomes.

### **Conflict Resolution, Democracy, and Law**

- ***Peace, Security and Democracy.*** On request, the Commonwealth Secretary-General's good offices are brought to work discreetly on internal problems in member states. Recently this has included work in Antigua and Barbuda, Fiji Islands, Lesotho, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Swaziland and the United Republic of Tanzania in relation to Zanzibar. The Commonwealth Secretariat mounts election observer groups, and promotes 'best practice' related to electoral processes and other areas that are important for democracy, and strengthening democratic values and culture. Critical among these initiatives is the work of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group that was instituted in 1995 to address serious or persistent violations of the Commonwealth's fundamental principles. The Commonwealth Committee on Terrorism is implementing a Plan of Action to assist members with meeting their obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1373.
- ***Human Rights*** The Commonwealth is strengthening national human rights institutions and democratic processes, and is actively investigating the delivery mechanisms of a 'rights based approach' to development. The Secretariat implements educational, legislative and administrative programmes; publishes information on human rights developments and jurisprudence; collaborates with governmental and non-governmental organisations working in the field of human rights; and interacts with the UN human rights system. Examples include: the development of mechanisms for combating the trafficking of women and children; guidelines on freedom of expression, assembly and

association; and a large-scale programme to assist countries in establishing and strengthening ombudsmen offices.

- **Legal Frameworks.** The Commonwealth Secretariat develops law as a tool in sustainable development. Its initiatives address issues such as corruption, combating transnational crime, including money laundering and terrorism, the legal aspects of e-commerce and computer crime, business regulation and competition law, data protection, privacy and freedom of information. All of these activities seek to assist in the development of competent and accessible systems of justice that are necessary for development.
- **Consensus Building.** The Commonwealth Secretariat supports member states, especially least developed countries and small states, in multilateral negotiations. It provides legal and scientific advice, technical assistance, and briefing. Examples include: provision of an adviser to Pacific Island Countries during the WSSD negotiations; an online service for trade officials, which addresses highly complex areas of WTO negotiations, law and policy; ministerial meetings and other events such as a one-day 'brainstorming' session at the UN in New York in preparation for the International Conference on Financing for Development; and assistance with the negotiation and implementation of multilateral environmental agreements (see details below).

### **Sustainable Development in a Globalising World**

- **Democracy, Development and Combating Poverty.** There is now considerable knowledge on how we can promote democratic processes and institutions, human rights, the rule of law, independence of the judiciary, and just and honest government, including equal opportunities for all citizens. There is also an understanding of how sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty can be promoted through concerted action at the national and international levels. Despite this knowledge, the record of promoting sustainable development in democracies remains mixed. A Commonwealth Expert Group on Democracy and Development is examining ways in which democracies can best be supported in combating poverty.
- **Finance and Debt.** The Commonwealth will initiate its own high-level consultations on 'Delivering the Monterrey Consensus' this Autumn, when Finance Ministers meet in London to review practical approaches. Their deliberations will be informed by a consultative process with civil society. The Commonwealth Secretariat has constituted a Forum to exchange experiences and formulate proposals for the consideration of the Joint HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Implementation Committee for the World Bank and IMF. It has launched an update of its debt management software for governments (CS-DRM 2000+); undertaken innovative work on leveraging official aid to promote private investment by formulating a proposal which seeks to lower the costs and risks of investing in economies with 'endowed handicaps'; and initiated a new Commonwealth Africa Fund to promote private investment. Collaborative work with the World Bank and the IMF has been on the increase, ensuring high quality participation and creating access to extra funding for consensus building work.
- **Trade.** Policy and technical assistance in all Doha work programme areas, through: direct technical support to regional and national trade negotiators in all Commonwealth regions; briefs; on-line information sharing; and support to developing country negotiators in Geneva. In addition to Doha matters, provides policy and technical assistance to ACP

countries in negotiations with the EU and publishes analytical work on the problems of least developed countries, including for example, on the issue of market access. Specialist studies and workshops have included trade and environment concerns.

- ***Money Laundering and Corruption.*** Concerted strategies are being developed in the Commonwealth based on 'zero tolerance' for all types of corruption at national and global levels. These are grounded in a Framework of Principles on Promoting Good Governance and Combating Corruption, endorsed by Heads of Government in 1999. The Secretariat is assisting countries to implement the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force on Combating Money Laundering, through workshops and the placement of experts with regional anti-money laundering bodies. It is also reviewing Commonwealth model law on combating money laundering.
- ***Small States.*** With over half its membership comprised of countries with a population of some 1.5 million people or less, small and vulnerable states are a priority concern for the Commonwealth. It has an active political agenda addressing small states' concerns, and works on policy issues addressing their economic, social and environmental vulnerability. Examples include: pioneering work on a vulnerability index; support to the Government of Maldives in preparing a Memorandum on the recommendation by the Committee for Development Policy to graduate Maldives from the list of Least Developed Countries; a dialogue on OECD Harmful Tax Practices Initiative; investment initiatives; and the publication of the annual *Small States Economic Review and Basic Statistics*.
- ***The Digital Divide.*** Networks created by advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs) hold potential for strengthening democratic values and institutions, and promoting sustainable development. The Commonwealth is addressing issues related to the uneven levels of access to ICTs through its *Commonwealth Digital Action Strategy*, which will share best practice and build skills on ICT usage and regulatory frameworks.

### **Social Transformation: gender, health, education and youth**

- ***Empowerment of Women.*** Commonwealth Heads of Government have called for further efforts to mainstream gender in all policy and programme initiatives, such as those addressing HIV/AIDS, macro-economic policies, women's human rights, risk management, participation in decision-making processes, conflict resolution, and peace-building. Working at the forefront of this field, the Commonwealth Secretariat provides practical frameworks and tools such as Gender-Responsive Budgets and its Gender Management System manuals and training resources. In Sierra Leone, the Commonwealth Secretariat, has helped to lay long-term foundations for a people-centred sustainable development through the Sierra Leone National Consultation on 'Women and Men in Partnership for Post-Conflict Reconstruction' in May 2001. Following its 'Women in Parliament' Workshop in Freetown in February 2002, the percentage of women parliamentarians in Sierra Leone increased substantially in the 2002 elections, and a Commonwealth gender adviser is providing support to build up capacity of women as policy-makers, political leaders and useful citizens in Sierra Leone.
- ***Health Systems.*** Many developing countries and small states are affected by migration to, and active recruitment by, countries that are better able to provide improved living and working conditions. In some countries, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among health care workers, coupled with the inability to provide necessary medication, has also impacted

negatively on the health sector. Ministers of Health have approved a Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers. The Secretariat is developing a companion document on retention methods; organising in collaboration with the UK-based *Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future*, a meeting in the wings of the WSSD on the international migration of health workers; and is partnering many organisations involved in addressing aspects of the AIDS epidemic, for example in assisting countries to develop and implement the multi-sectoral approach called for at the UN General Assembly Special Session in 2001. Ministers also established a forum to discuss and analyse the effects of globalisation and poverty on health. More broadly, the Commonwealth Secretariat is modelling the effect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on human resources and capacities for public service delivery.

- **Youth.** The social exclusion of young people through unemployment, lack of skills, lack of access to information and resultant poverty, is undermining sustainable development. Governments and the international community must work together to develop young people's participation in democratic processes and make them active participants in sustainable development. This involves recognising youth workers as being as an important profession in their own right. Commonwealth Heads of Government have endorsed a pan-Commonwealth '*Youth for the Future*' initiative that places young people at the heart of sustainable development. It is creating initiatives to reduce youth unemployment and alleviate poverty through wealth creation; strengthening youth structures and NGOs; encouraging youth participation so that young people grow up as full citizens who are sensitive to the dangers of racism, xenophobia, and intolerance; implementing a diploma programme to create a critical mass of professional youth workers; and implementing programmes targeted at checking the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people. The Commonwealth Youth Programme's Diploma on Youth in Development Studies includes a module on sustainable development. This diploma has been delivered by 24 tertiary institutions to over 2000 youth and development practitioners across the Commonwealth.
- **Education.** The Commonwealth Secretariat supports education policy and curriculum development, developing materials related to sustainable development. It runs an essay competition on the Role of Science and Technology Education in Conflict Resolution and in small states, its '*Citizenship Education*' programme is providing resources and a framework for education on multiculturalism, heritage, human rights and Commonwealth values. A code of conduct is being formulated on the recruitment of teachers by developed countries, so that limited but valuable human resources of small states are not depleted.

### **Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development**

- ***Negotiation and Implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements.*** Advice and support is given to developing member states to negotiate effectively, and implement, multilateral environmental agreements, especially those arising from the UN Conference on Environment Development (UNCED)<sup>7</sup>. Just some examples include: caucus meetings in the wings of Conferences of the Parties and subsidiary bodies of various conventions;

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<sup>7</sup> UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Barbados Programme of Action, the Forest Principles, and others.

capacity building in the Caribbean and India to build capacity in determining baselines for Clean Development Mechanisms projects; participation in development of the 'Vision for Water, Life and Environment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' adopted at the World Water Forum (The Hague, March 2000); derivation and testing of a water poverty index; development of a *sui generis* framework to assist countries in West Africa to protect knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities, and to strengthen their intellectual property protection systems; promotion of judicial awareness in the Caribbean on environmental law; and strengthening of implementation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and CARICOM agreements on the Caribbean Sea through support to the Community Ocean Science Network.

- ***Iwokrama Programme.*** The Iwokrama International Centre for Rain Forest Conservation and Development, launched under Commonwealth auspices in 1989, and based on 360,000 hectares of pristine forest in Guyana, was created to provide a practical demonstration of how tropical forests can be managed sustainably, both ecologically and economically, and as an exemplar of good practice related to the implementation of a variety of multilateral agreements, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (reducing carbon emissions), the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (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 will also demonstrate ways to operationalise the forest principles and UN consultations on forests.
- ***Capacity for Environmental Management*** is built through the provision, on request, of Commonwealth experts to address strategic gaps, special advisory services direct to government (including the formulation of development policies and strategies), and the delivery of tailored training programmes and training grants.
  - *Examples of advisory work include:* the formulation of tourism development plans for Cameroon, Ghana and Jamaica that included eco-tourism and health aspects; assistance with legislation for maritime areas and fisheries; drafting of legislation and the negotiation of agreements in the petroleum and mining sectors; and work with small scale fisheries in Lake Victoria that is strongly oriented towards sustainable development, sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation.
  - *Training* is provided in several areas related to environmental management, including a wide range of Master Degree and Diploma courses developed in collaboration with regional institutions.
  - *Experts provided through the CFTC have included:* a marine pollution adviser at the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme responsible for delivering the Pacific Ocean Pollution Prevention Programme; an advisor on Participatory Forestry Management in Kenya to establish appropriate community institutional arrangements; a waste management consultant in Malta to co-ordinate development of a Waste Management Strategic Plan; an adviser in marine and coastal resources in Namibia; a forest biometrician at the Kenya Forestry Research Institute; and an adviser in Namibia to assist the preparation and implementation of an institutional framework for bio-safety.