

Ensuring integrated sustainable development



Above:
The Iwokrama rainforest

Opposite:
Access to clean drinking water and sanitation were key topics of debate at the World Summit on Sustainable Development

The twin goals of sustainable development and poverty alleviation stand at the heart of the Commonwealth Secretariat's work and the fundamental principles that all members of the Commonwealth hold in common. These goals are best achieved not through a variety of discrete actions in diverse sectors, but rather by finding integrated approaches that produce multiple impacts and benefits across all three pillars of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental.

In 2002 at Coolum, Commonwealth Heads of Government 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 states and less developed members”.

Over the past two years, 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 in Qatar (December 2001); the UN International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico (March 2002); and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa (August/September 2002). The Secretariat facilitated discussions by Commonwealth Environment Ministers (Cartagena, Colombia, February 2002) on priorities for the Summit. At WSSD, Commonwealth concerns were then advocated through official background papers, and by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who delivered a forward-looking statement on the critical needs of the Commonwealth's poorest and most vulnerable member states for sustainable development. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation provided technical assistance to Pacific small states in co-ordinating their preparations for WSSD by placing a senior policy adviser within the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. This expert also provided some support to the Chair of the Alliance of Small

Island States (AOSIS) in New York.

WSSD achieved the highest-level global commitment to act on sustainable development expressed in the past decade. It established a strong link between poverty eradication and sustainable development and between the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental), and developed a stronger regional focus on the implementation of sustainable development. An action-oriented outcome, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, was one of the priorities for WSSD that had been highlighted by Commonwealth Environment Ministers in February 2001.

Implementing WSSD

At their 2003 meeting, Commonwealth Environment Ministers highlighted areas where the Commonwealth was well placed to support the efforts of its developing member states in implementing outcomes of the WSSD, including:

- facilitating partnerships announced at WSSD, by mobilising the Commonwealth as a network of networks representing governments, local governments, business, professional and civil society organisations;
- preparing time-bound action plans to operationalise the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, through technical assistance and the exchange of best practice; and
- addressing concerns related to climate change and biodiversity, concentrated on areas of comparative advantage, where the Commonwealth could add value through strategic gap-filling.

Ministers emphasised the importance of strengthening Commonwealth collaboration with regional institutions, and continuing to integrate all three pillars of sustainable development by working closely with economic, trade and development colleagues in implementing sustainable development.

The Secretariat reviewed its programmes in the light of WSSD outcomes. Where appropriate, priorities identified in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation will be reflected in the agendas for discussion by Commonwealth Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Women's Affairs, Finance, Law, Health, Environment, and Education. The Multi-Year Programme of Work in follow-up to WSSD, agreed at the 2003 Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, will also inform the Secretariat's planning over the next five years.

A key outcome of WSSD for small island developing states was agreement on a review of, and international meeting in 2004 on, the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Commonwealth is implementing a substantial programme of assistance to member states and regional organisations to support their preparations for this process. Further initial policy support has included a brief on WSSD partnerships, and the preparation of a straightforward guide to the WSSD agreements, to be launched in 2004, to help mobilise all necessary policy sectors and stakeholders in implementation of the WSSD's outcomes.

Iwokrama – Integrating business, conservation and human development

The Iwokrama International Rainforest Programme, first launched under Commonwealth auspices, is designed to help protect tropical rainforests and show best practice in forest management. The 3,600 sq km Iwokrama forest in central Guyana was contributed by the Government and people of Guyana in 1989 as part of an international effort to show how tropical rainforests can be managed in a manner that will lead to lasting ecological, economic and social benefits. The objective is to show how tropical rainforests can be sustainably used and conserved, demonstrate how multiple goods and services can be captured from forests, forge a pathway for private sector and community involvement in using and conserving forests, and finally transfer models of sustainable forest management to other forest users and owners.

So far, the Programme has developed substantial built infrastructure within the Iwokrama forest including a field station, canopy walkway, a ranger station and satellite stations. These facilities are now managed by rangers and other staff who have been trained through its own programmes. Iwokrama has also begun developing incipient businesses with tourism, aquarium fish, crabwood oil, honey, natural products, training, and information.

In February and March 2003, Iwokrama changed from a research based organisation to a dynamic business oriented institute. It has a new board of trustees, management with a strong business perspective, and is implementing performance driven management systems. It reduced the annual operating budget from US\$2 million in 2002 to US\$1 million for the 2003 financial year, and core operational costs are now less than US\$600,000.

During 2003, Iwokrama will develop effective communications systems to allow decentralisation of forest management decision-making, implement management plan recommendations including patrols and monitoring, further develop collaborative decision-making mechanisms and document Iwokrama's lessons learned. From a business perspective, it will focus on developing the linkages with the private sector and local communities for effective business development. Iwokrama will finalise a timber management plan and a forest inventory presently funded by the International Tropical Timber Organisation. The Programme will also finalise agreements with private sector and community partners for the management of tourism concessions within the Iwokrama forest. In order to fund Iwokrama's core costs, it will be pursuing merchandising and contracts for providing training services. Iwokrama will also explore several innovative funding mechanisms including the development of sponsorship programmes and a trust fund.

