

A changing organisation



No organisation can hope to keep up with the fast pace of change of the world today without enthusiastically embracing change within itself. As mandated by CHOGM 2002, on the basis of the recommendations of the High Level Review Group, the Commonwealth Secretariat has implemented a series of governance, structural and organisational changes over the past two years.

Secretariat governance

Heads of Government at their meeting in March 2002 approved streamlined governance arrangements for the Secretariat, which formally came into effect on 1 January 2003. A new Board of Governors, supported by an Executive Committee, was established to replace the Steering Committee of Senior Officials, the Secretariat's Finance Committee and Finance Sub-Committee, and the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation's Board of Representatives and Committee of Management.

A key feature of the new governance arrangements is enhanced consultation and dialogue between member governments and the Secretariat. This has increased the accountability and transparency of the Secretariat by strengthening governments' direction and oversight of the total resources they contribute to the Secretariat's activities, and enabled them to better assess the Secretariat's progress in implementing the agreed work programme.

Strategic planning and evaluation

A key development during 2001–2003 was the introduction of new arrangements for strategic planning. In the future, the Secretariat's strategic planning will adopt a four-year horizon with two-year operating plans and budgets. The new arrangements have been developed in close consultation with the Executive Committee. In parallel, the Secretariat will move to a results-based management approach. A revised performance-reporting framework is being developed which will assist in managing for results and ensuring forward-planning is in line with the Secretariat's strategic objectives. Staff capacity for adopting results-based management and project management is being improved to strengthen programme design and implementation. These

developments are being supported by extensive programmes for staff training.

Forging partnerships

The new governance structures and consultations with member governments will contribute to stronger strategic planning. Through these processes, the Secretariat will be able to adopt a more holistic and multidisciplinary approach to programme delivery. Partnerships and co-ordination with a range of development partners, including other Commonwealth governmental and civil society institutions and international and regional organisations, are key delivery mechanisms for the Secretariat's work. In line with one of the mandates from the High Level Review, the Secretariat has actively sought to develop more effective strategic partnerships.

The Secretariat has sought to work closely with the United Nations Development Programme on land issues in Zimbabwe; it has collaborated with La Francophonie on trade related issues and the French version of the Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording and Management System (CS-DRMS) software. It works closely with CARICOM on addressing Caribbean regional issues such as harmful tax competition and trade; with the European Union and the ACP on general trade issues and negotiations on the Doha Round, as well as representation in Geneva for Eastern Caribbean and Pacific states; and with the Pacific Islands Forum on good governance issues and the establishment of 'hub and spoke' trade advisers throughout the region. The development of gender mainstreaming strategies and policy briefs was undertaken in partnership with the International Labour Organisation.

The Secretary-General held discussions with the President of the European Commission and other senior EU officials in

Above:

A place at the table: civil society groups have regular consultations with the 'official' Commonwealth

Opposite:

Raising the flags in the grounds of Marlborough House, part of a new initiative to make the Secretariat's headquarters more representative of the Commonwealth's diversity

June 2003, which led to an institutionalised arrangement whereby the two will meet once a year. The Secretary-General also held discussions with the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation in Geneva in June 2003.

Robust evaluation

Evaluations of Secretariat programmes are an essential element of its quality assurance processes. They provide an independent assessment of the extent of achievement of strategic goals and objectives. Evaluation studies also throw light on Secretariat management practices and identify improvements required for enhanced accountability and quality.

Since 2002, four evaluations have been completed: two of regional programmes (the Asia-Mediterranean and the West Africa regions) and two thematic evaluation studies (corporate governance and tourism). Projects and activities were found to have been successful, with an increasing proportion of women participants. The assistance remained extremely popular with all governments because of its accessibility, flexibility and speed of delivery.

In addition, three new studies were started: a review of the implementation of evaluation recommendations; a review of the Joint Office for Commonwealth Small States at the UN in New York; and a review of the strategic gap-filling programme. The study into the follow-up of evaluation recommendations will be especially important to learn lessons from programme design and impact which can contribute towards improvements in organisational and programmatic performance management.

Lessons drawn from these studies will be circulated widely within the Secretariat and among member governments, and follow-up action taken.

Organisational change

A number of significant changes in the organisation of the Secretariat were made during the period under review. These included the merger of four CFTC Divisions into two, implementing a recommendation of the 1999 report, *CFTC: A Rethink*. Together with the merger of two Secretariat Divisions and the reduction in the number of Deputy Secretary-General posts from three to two, this restructuring released resources for priority activities such as good offices and human rights. The staff rotation policy is now having a significant impact on turnover, releasing experienced people to contribute to development in their own countries and



enabling the Secretariat to introduce new skills aligned with current programme demands.

The increased staff turnover has also required an increase in efforts to maintain and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the recruitment process, under the supervision of the Human Resource Planning Committee. The committee was one of the initiatives contained in a new *Human Resource Handbook*, issued in April 2002, which sought to promote a consolidated statement of human resources practice. A review of pay and grading and other terms and conditions of service is under way. The review's terms of reference are essentially designed to produce systems which are consistent with good management practice, fiscal realities and governments' expectations.

Alongside the continuing efforts to improve corporate planning and human resource management, a major project to improve the quality of financial management in the Secretariat is in hand.

During the review period the Secretariat reduced its office buildings from three to two, and completed to budget and schedule a major refurbishment of Quadrant House. The refurbishment includes provision for a Commonwealth Information Centre. The vibrant and varied character of the Commonwealth is now more visible in and around Marlborough House, with images illustrating that diversity to welcome visitors and member countries' flags flying in the garden. A significant effort was made to open Marlborough House to the public on more occasions, and this effort will continue.

Civil society linkages

Considerable efforts have been made over the past year to strengthen partnerships among Commonwealth organisations in order to increase the impact of the Commonwealth's activities. The Coolum Committee (formerly the Co-ordination Committee for

Commonwealth Agencies) comprises the heads of the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth of Learning and the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Chairpersons of the Secretariat's Board of Governors and its Executive Committee. The Coolum Committee has met regularly and is an important forum enabling better exchange of information and co-ordination of activities.

Civil society can and does play a vital role in assisting democratic and development processes at all levels, and the Commonwealth encourages greater engagement and partnership between the official and unofficial Commonwealth. New mechanisms for the accreditation of civil society groups to the Commonwealth have been developed, which will facilitate improved partnerships. A series of consultations between the Secretariat, NGOs and other partner agencies has also taken place on key development issues of concern to the Commonwealth. These consultations will be a regular feature of the Secretariat's strategy to better engage with the unofficial Commonwealth.

The Secretariat enhanced its collaboration with the Commonwealth Foundation, including through the organisation of civil society consultations in the run-up to the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meetings in 2002 and 2003. The Commonwealth Lectures in those years were also organised jointly, with other agencies.

As part of the efforts to develop closer ties between the official Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth civil society organisations, a civil society liaison officer has been appointed. This post is jointly funded by the Secretariat and the Foundation, and will facilitate the sharing of information, expertise and resources in support of Commonwealth programmes and activities focusing on civil society.