

## The Environment

Concern for the environment continues to be integrated into almost every area of the Secretariat's economic and social developmental work. At the root of this is recognition that good environmental practice is a pre-condition for sustainable development. The core of this work is promoting agreement on major environmental issues, the integration of economic and environmental policies, technical assistance and training in environmental management, and support for the Iwokrama International Rainforest Programme in Guyana.

At their summit in 1995, Heads of Government accepted the recommendations of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) that the association could play an important role in environmental matters provided it focused on those areas where it had a comparative advantage. They agreed that forestry in particular was an area where a distinctive contribution could be made through the Iwokrama Programme.

Environment-related aspects of mainstream Secretariat activities are described throughout this Report.

### Promoting Consensus on the Environment

Since the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, international co-operation on environmental matters has increased. However, further discussion and agreement on key issues remains necessary.

*Research projects in the Iwokrama include documentation of indigenous knowledge of biodiversity with the participation of Amerindian women*



## MANAGING IWOKRAMA

The Iwokrama International Centre, which is responsible for the management of the rainforest programme, is governed by a Board of Trustees. The Centre is headed by Mr David Cassells, a prominent environmental specialist on secondment from the World Bank. It has three core programmes: sustainable management of the tropical rainforest, conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity, and sustainable human development. These are supported by research on forests and biodiversity, and a programme of information and communication.

A medium-term plan, strategy statement and business plan have been prepared, and a Donor Support Group constituted. This group consists, at present, of representatives of the Government of Guyana, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the UNDP and Canada's International Development Research Centre.

The Secretariat, which has been a major provider of technical assistance, is co-ordinating preparations for a donors' meeting in October 1997. A consortium is also being formed to enable research institutions with interests in sustainable forest management and biodiversity to contribute to Iwokrama's research and training activities.

In 1996, the CCGE turned its attention from sustainable management of forests to fisheries. It recommended: sharing information and expertise on the sustainable management of fisheries and the reduction of marine pollution from land-based sources; improving countries' abilities to manage coastal zones; providing technical assistance and exchanging information on fisheries management in small island developing states (SIDS); improving surveillance and the monitoring of fisheries in exclusive economic zones, especially in SIDS; and legal assistance for the delimitation of maritime boundaries and the negotiation of agreements on fisheries.

The CCGE also met in June 1997 during the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the review of the implementation of Agenda 21, the global action programme on environment adopted at UNCED in Rio in 1992. The Group concluded that the Commonwealth had made significant efforts to strengthen co-operation on certain environmental issues, and stressed the need to accelerate the transition to environmentally sustainable development through full and effective implementation of existing global conventions and agreements, the integration of economic and environmental policies, and the promotion of greater resource flows to assist the implementation of Agenda 21 in poorer countries.

The Group also identified priority areas for further action through Commonwealth co-operation and technical assistance. These included climate change and sea-level rise, forests and biodiversity, desertification, marine resources and fisheries, transfer of environmentally sound technologies, and the sustainable development of small states.

## The Iwokrama Programme

The basis for the Iwokrama International Rainforest Programme, a Guyana-Commonwealth initiative launched in 1990, is that the tropical rainforest is a form of ecological capital which can be used for economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits while also being conserved for posterity.

The Programme was made possible by Guyana's offer at the 1989 CHOGM to set aside some 360,000 hectares (900,000 acres) of pristine South American rainforest for both conservation and sustainable development. Half of the forest has been demarcated as a Wilderness Preserve where biological diversity (biodiversity) is conserved for scientific research. The remainder will be utilised, in partnership with the private sector, to provide economic benefits on an environmentally sustainable basis.

Following an agreement signed by the President of Guyana and the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the 1995 CHOGM, Guyana's Parliament enacted legislation in March 1996 guaranteeing the autonomy of the forest area and the Iwokrama International Centre which is responsible for its management.

Experts funded by the CFTC in 1994-96 helped the programme's operational development in several critical areas, including resource surveys, research projects including the documentation of indigenous knowledge of Iwokrama's biodiversity with the participation of Amerindian women, and natural resource management. In 1996-97, another expert is providing advice on the identification, extraction and marketing of non-timber forest products as part of an overall assessment of resources in the Iwokrama site.

Additional technical support is being provided by a short-term consultant who prepared research and development projects for external funding.

### Commonwealth Forestry Initiative

Following high-level discussions at UNCED and agreement on a set of Forest Principles, attention was focused on the goal of sustainable forest management, especially in regard to tropical forests. Experienced foresters quickly pointed out that historically there were examples of wise management which needed to be understood and revisited if research was not to repeat past mistakes.

The Commonwealth Forestry Initiative provided a number of countries with an opportunity to record these past experiences in an accessible form, which would perhaps provide pointers for further work. A series of brief reports were published for Karnataka, India (1993), Uganda and Ghana (1994), and Sri Lanka (1996). There was particular interest in Uganda and a training guide for forestry staff was prepared and published in 1996. Its Forestry Department also requested a specific study on timber supplies and the correct use and treatment of wood, and a *Guide to Better Timber Use* was published in 1996. This has been followed by training courses held in Kampala which are based on the guide.

### Environmental Management

The Secretariat helps member countries to develop skills and strengthen the ability of their institutions to deal with a range of environmental programmes. Training programmes have focused on preparing for and handling environmental disasters and hazards, on the preparation of manuals and guidelines for pollution prevention and control, and on workshops to increase awareness of new critical issues

#### INTEGRATING ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

At the national level, economic and environmental policies must work together in order to make economic development environmentally sustainable. Since the cost of inappropriate economic policies on the environment is high, the Secretariat work focuses on helping members integrate environmental considerations in the early stages of economic policy-making.

Workshops were held in Malta in January 1996 and Sri Lanka in November 1996 to help several economic and environmental policy-makers gain a better understanding of the tools required, the practical dimensions of economic and environmental policy integration, and how market-based economic instruments, such as taxes on polluters and charges for resource use, can be used to achieve environmental objectives. The Secretariat has also published handbooks of training materials to assist policy-makers in integrating economic and environmental policies.

*Iwokrama ... experts funded by the CFTC have helped the programme's operational development in several critical areas*





*Environmental-friendly energy ... solar panels being put up*

in environmental management. Short-term training attachments have also been supported in such areas as environmental conservation, fisheries management and marine geology.

A new project, developed since 1995, relates to the identification, transfer and development of environmentally sound technologies. It is aimed at helping decision-makers to take an informed, long-term view of technological and industrial development. In May/June 1997 a regional workshop at the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development (UWICED) in Jamaica sought, among other things, to build national and regional capacities in environmental technology assessment.

Technical assistance funded by the CFTC is being provided to member countries in several areas. For example, a public health adviser is to help St Lucia review and restructure the operations of its Environmental Health Branch; an environmental economist cum policy analyst is strengthening environmental and natural resource management at the Planning Institute of Jamaica; and advisers have been assisting with the management of a Central Environmental Laboratory in Mauritius, the improvement of environmental legislation in Brunei Darussalam, and the development of environmental guidelines for the oil palm industry in Papua New Guinea.

Assistance is also given on a regional basis. An expert will help the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme to implement a strategy for the protection of the marine environment, another has been assigned to UWICED to develop the skills for environmental management in Caribbean small island states, and regional and sub-regional workshops have been held in Kenya and Tonga to help senior planning officers in East Africa and the Pacific to understand better how environmental impact assessment (EIA) techniques can be used in the planning and monitoring of development projects. A handbook on EIA was published to complement the training.