

## The Commonwealth Family

Voluntary associations and NGOs contribute extensively to Commonwealth co-operation and understanding. They are often credited with giving the association its unique character and identity, making it as much an extended family of peoples as it is of governments. NGOs have specialised knowledge and expertise, are familiar with the communities they work in, and are therefore natural partners in the design and delivery of development assistance.

The Secretariat seeks to involve NGOs in its work. Its ties are therefore especially close to the Commonwealth Foundation, the inter-governmental organisation which supports and strengthens links among Commonwealth voluntary agencies and professional associations, but it also collaborates with many individual NGOs in the course of its work.

The 1995 Millbrook Commonwealth Action Programme, for example, acknowledged the role such organisations as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) could play in strengthening democratic culture and effective parliamentary practices. The Secretariat therefore works closely with the CPA and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in advancing fundamental political values through workshops and seminars. CPA members also serve on the various Commonwealth Observer Groups sent to monitor elections in member countries.

In promoting sustainable economic and social development, NGOs also have a role in facilitating the adoption of more successful self-help schemes and in mobilising the energies of citizens in alleviating poverty. The Secretariat enhances its own impact, efficiency and cost-effectiveness by drawing on the experiences and resources of NGOs in socio-economic development.

Since 1995, a large number of specific activities have been undertaken with the co-operation and participation of NGOs. Among these are judicial colloquia for senior judges on human rights, particularly women's human rights, organised in collaboration with the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association and often with the participation of other NGO representatives funded by the Foundation. Another example is the Commonwealth Youth Programme's close co-operation with many local NGOs through its four regional centres, including organisations such as the Malaysian Youth Council, the Guyana Association of Professional Social Workers, the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and the Pacific Youth Council.

One notable project illustrating the benefits of official and unofficial co-operation was the advanced training in 1997 of ten ophthalmologists from India in the skills of intra-ocular lens implantation, a technique for curing partial or total blindness resulting from cataracts. The project, first initiated by an NGO based in Bangalore, India, was supported by the Secretariat and the CFTC, which channelled its funding through another NGO, CAMHADD. It is estimated that more than 500 blind

people in India have already had their eyesight restored through this project.

In mid-1993, the Secretariat established a formal contact and co-ordination point for NGOs to help harmonise its own development activities with those of the unofficial sector. Through the NGO Desk, the Secretariat liaises with the Foundation and the unofficial Commonwealth to ensure programme complementarity. One result is the expanding number of roundtable discussions and other events at the Secretariat headquarters in London involving NGOs – 39 such meetings were held in 1995 and over 50 in 1996.

The unofficial side of the Commonwealth has also played an increasingly high-profile role at CHOGMs. At the 1993 summit in Cyprus, Commonwealth NGOs were officially accredited for the first time, and some 31 representatives from 12 organisations were registered. In Auckland in 1995, this number increased to 66 representatives from 18 NGOs. In Edinburgh in October 1997, about 300 representatives from 60 pan-Commonwealth NGOs are expected to be accredited. They will also benefit from facilities for meetings and displays which the host government has arranged through the provision of a Commonwealth Centre for NGOs.

In 1997, the Secretariat assisted a number of pan-Commonwealth NGOs in the celebration of the UK Year of the Commonwealth, initiated by the Royal Commonwealth Society of Britain and consisting of a series of events, meetings and lectures organised by NGOs, academic institutions and other organisations, and often sponsored by commercial firms. Within the Secretariat, a task force was established by the Secretary-General to co-ordinate the Secretariat's contribution to the events.

Secretariat partnerships with NGOs are described in the relevant chapters on development activities throughout this Report.

### **Benefiting from Sport**

Only a privileged minority of the Commonwealth's one billion young people have access to sport and physical education. Despite extensive evidence of the health, education and social benefits of regular involvement in sport and physical activity, even the most basic sports facilities and equipment are unavailable to the vast majority of today's youth.

In March 1997, leading representatives of sport and governments in Southern Africa, along with international aid agencies and sports organisations involved in development assistance, gathered in Zimbabwe for the Harare '97 Forum on Sport and Youth Development. The two-day forum, the first of its kind, explored the role of sport in the wider development process – particularly its economic and social benefits – and how these related to current international aid priorities such as poverty alleviation, the promotion of participatory democracy and the special needs of women and young people.

The forum was an initiative of the CHOGM Committee on Co-operation Through Sport established by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Harare in 1991 under the chairmanship of Mr Justice Roy McMurtry of Canada. The committee's task is to recommend ways of strengthening Commonwealth sport, and to help develop an appreciation of sport as an intrinsic and indispensable part of national development.



In response to the committee's second report, Heads of Government agreed at Auckland in 1995 to encourage investment in sport and physical education programmes, including the exchange of technical assistance, and to integrate sport in, for example, youth, education and environment planning and policy implementation. The Harare '97 Forum was an outcome of this commitment, and its conclusions and recommendations will form an important part of the committee's 1997 report to CHOGM.

Since 1994, sport and development has also been a distinct programme within the Secretariat. It provides information on developments in sports policy and practice, and supports the study of national sports policies and their links with wider developmental objectives. Increasing women's participation in sport is another priority of the programme.

In 1995/96 and 1996/97, the Secretariat's allocation for sport and development projects was £20,000 each year. With additional funding from outside agencies, including the Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Sport, the British Council, Leeds Metropolitan University in Britain and the Government of Papua New Guinea, total funds available in 1996/97 exceeded £80,000. This allocation has partially funded two main research

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projects: one, a study on opportunities and barriers to women in sport, was completed in April 1997; the other is on linking national sports policies to wider developmental objectives. This latter project commenced in late 1996 and is expected to be completed in 1999.

The report on Commonwealth Women and Sport stems from studies undertaken at the XV Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada, in 1994 as well as on analyses of sports policies for women in selected member countries. Among its major findings was that barriers to women's participation in sport are largely structural rather than social or cultural (though these exist as well). Nearly three-quarters of the more than 300 athletes who took part in the survey said access to financial support, including scholarships, was the most frequent barrier. Poor access to facilities, equipment and coaching also prevented women from reaching their full sporting potential.

The CHOGM committee is also mandated with the task of recommending ways of strengthening the Commonwealth Games. Although plans are well under way for the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and the 2002 Games in Manchester, Britain, the committee has warned that, on the whole, government attention to the Games is waning. It said that action should be taken quickly to move the Games to new levels of achievement and visibility while retaining their character, integrity and distinctiveness in the world of sport. For this to occur, the committee argues, the Commonwealth Games Federation must be strengthened with the support of governments.

The committee, which met in September 1996 and is scheduled to meet again in July 1997, will present its third report to Commonwealth Heads of Government in October 1997.