

## New Challenges for the Secretariat

The Secretariat continues to be sensitive to the changing priorities and developmental needs of member governments, especially as outlined at CHOGMs and various ministerial meetings. Since 1 July 1993, the Secretariat has organised its work within the framework of a three-year strategic plan approved by the Steering Committee of Senior Officials (SCOSO). This Committee, which now meets once in three years, provides broad operational and resource allocation guidance, and strategic direction to the Secretariat's work.

With the establishment within the Secretariat of a central Strategic Planning and Evaluation Unit for thinking strategically about Secretariat work, co-ordinating planning, and commissioning programme reviews and evaluation studies of activities, proposals for future work are informed by where the Secretariat can achieve results in meeting member countries' needs.

### Planning

The annual work programme and the accompanying budgets of the Secretariat are submitted for the approval of the individual governing bodies of Secretariat funds, namely the Finance Committee and the Board of Representatives of the CFTC, the Commonwealth Youth Affairs Council (for the CYP), and the CSC and its Executive Committee (see Appendix VI).

All activities of the Secretariat are grouped under defined programmes and sub-programmes. Under the Third Three-Year Strategic Plan, which came into effect on 1 July 1997, the Secretariat's work is organised under 11 broad programme and 22 programme/sub-programme headings. Prior to this, its work had since 1994 been contained in 15 programme and 43 programme/sub-programme headings (*right*). The simplified framework clarifies areas of responsibility, by division and fund, as recommended in a 1995 review of social and economic programmes by Professor John Toye.

Through careful planning, the Secretariat focuses its work in areas where it has a comparative advantage and can expect to achieve impact, while avoiding duplicating the work of other international agencies. It also identifies activities which can be phased out and replaced by new activities which reflect the changing priorities of member governments.

An additional and significant aspect of the planning process is strengthening gender planning awareness and skills. In 1995 and 1996, in line with the emphasis placed on the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, three sets of workshops were held to familiarise Secretariat staff with gender considerations. More such workshops are envisaged. Attention has also been given to ensuring that assistance to small states features in all Secretariat activities.

Internal organisational and resource strategy meetings are now held

### THE NEW WORK PROGRAMMES

- A POLITICAL**
- A1** Promoting Fundamental Political Values
- B DEVELOPMENTAL**
- B2** Economic Development
- B3** Human Development
- B4** Commonwealth Youth Programme
- B5** Public Sector and Public Service Reform
- B6** Capacity-Building
- B7** Science and Technology for Sustainable Development
- C GENDER EQUALITY**
- C8** Gender Equality: The Commonwealth Plan of Action and Gender Policy Formulation and Implementation on Critical Political, Legal and Developmental Issues
- D SECRETARIAT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**
- D9** Secretariat Governance, Executive Direction, Strategic Planning and Evaluation
- D10** Information and Public Affairs
- D11** Administration, General Services and Information Technology

within the Secretariat before each major Commonwealth meeting or conference. Since the 1995 CHOGM, debriefing sessions have also been held so that outcomes and implications for the Secretariat's work are widely disseminated.

## Evaluation

The findings of evaluation studies and feedback on project implementation and impact play a major role in planning the Secretariat's work. Since 1993, major reviews of programmes in the areas of sustainable development and of economic and social programmes have been conducted by Professor Mike Faber and Professor John Toye respectively.

Both reviews identified particular areas where the Commonwealth was making an impact, and also areas of weakness. Their recommendations have led to a reorganisation and refocusing of Secretariat work, placing more emphasis on ensuring that the assistance offered to member countries is demand- rather than supply-driven and concentrating efforts on areas where the Secretariat has a proven record of quality work and enjoys a comparative advantage.

Two other reviews were commissioned. The review of the information programme, which was conducted by Mr Derek Ingram, a senior British journalist, was completed in March 1997. It made a number of recommendations for sharpening the image of the Commonwealth and promoting awareness of its activities. These were considered by a Steering Group of Commonwealth officials in the first half of 1997 and are being implemented in respect of those proposals which the officials found acceptable. A review of the political programmes is being conducted by Mr Henri Sekyi of Ghana and is due to be completed towards the end of 1997.

Evaluation studies now cover a cluster of projects or programmes relating to a particular sector, country or region. A study of recent CFTC assistance to Uganda was conducted and another on similar assistance to the Caribbean region is now in progress. Other evaluation studies covered such areas as policy advice and assistance to Tonga in the financial sector, administrative law workshops, workshops on environmental impact assessment, the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service, and short training programmes in public administration and managerial reform.

Evaluation studies of procedures or administrative arrangements included the CFTC Memoranda of Understanding on the provision of basic local support, the CYP Memoranda of Understanding on local support for the CYP Regional Centres in Guyana, India, the Solomon Islands and Zambia, and Secretariat procedures in project administration and management. Between 1 July 1995 and 30 June 1997, a total of 15 evaluation studies or major reviews of programmes were either completed or initiated. Their various recommendations are disseminated widely in the Secretariat and among governments.

A cover note system is now in place in the Secretariat to consider and follow up on the implementation of recommendations made by the evaluation studies.