

PROMOTING THE SPECIAL INTERESTS OF SMALL STATES

Small states, which make up more than half the Commonwealth's members, have special characteristics which give rise to particular developmental and security problems. Generally, these states are geographically small, often comprising a single island or group of islands, with populations of less than a million and sometimes as small as 8,000, as in the case of Nauru. Their resources can be meagre, their economies fragile, and their security vulnerable to outside forces. Many have a shortage of the skills required for sustainable development.

For many years, the Commonwealth has paid special attention to promoting the special interests of its small member states. More than half of Secretariat assistance delivered through the CFTC is channelled to small states and in the past two years, it has worked towards further sensitising the international community to their needs.

In 1993, a Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States met in the wings of the Cyprus CHOGM and the Consultative Group of Senior Officials, established to take its deliberations forward, has since met twice. At its second meeting in May 1995, the Group underscored the need for swift implementation of the Programme of Action, arising from the 1994 UN Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and recommended several policy measures to assist Commonwealth small states to minimise the transitional costs of adjustment in implementing the Uruguay Round agreements on trade and tariffs and to maximise the benefits which the Round could bring. It also discussed the security concerns of small states, including their representation at the UN. The Consultative Group's conclusions will be discussed at the second meeting of the Ministerial Group which will be held just before the Auckland CHOGM.

Consideration for the special concerns of small states is reflected in all activities of the Secretariat which in 1995 established an inter-divisional task force to improve the effectiveness of its assistance. These activities concentrate on supporting economic growth and sustainable development. But the Secretariat also monitors and analyses political developments and security issues of particular concern to small states and manages a Commonwealth Joint Office at the UN in New York which enables nine small member states to maintain Permanent Missions to the UN.

Economics and Trade

Among its many activities of assistance, the Secretariat is studying the impact on the economies of small states of the major agreements in the Uruguay Round, particularly the erosion of preferential access to major markets, and the effect of agricultural trade liberalisation on the economies of net food-importing countries. On the practical level, a Trade Policy Adviser in Belize is assisting that country explore new and emerging markets resulting from new trading arrangements.

Small states have benefited from policy advice and assistance on the merits and procedures of



Help for small businesses, here with costume jewellery in Grenada

acceding to the new World Trade Organisation and technical support has been given to the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries in negotiations with the EU on continuing preferential trade terms during the mid-term review of Lomé IV.

The Commonwealth Secretariat Debt Recording and Management System (CS-DRMS) is now installed in more than 25 small member states and five small island dependent territories and assistance has also been given with private sector development, privatisation and with expanding capital markets. A proposal for a Caribbean Investment Fund and a preliminary report on the feasibility of setting up an equity investment fund for the South Pacific are currently being examined. Consultants have helped the Government of Barbados in its effort to privatise the National Oil Company and the National Petroleum Corporation and advised on the possible divestiture of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation.

Technical Assistance

About 70 per cent of the CFTC-funded experts are sent to small states to fill key positions where no nationals are available and provide on-the-job skills transfer to local counterparts. These experts and the Secretariat's consultants play a particularly important role in legal drafting and constitutional advice, economic advice, infrastructure development, human resource development, natural resource management, export market and industrial development, poverty alleviation, the various service industries, including tourism, banking and finance, and a wide range of other areas.

To help countries develop their natural resources for economic growth, the Secretariat offers small states assistance in delimiting maritime boundaries, in negotiating terms for the exploitation of terrestrial and marine resources, with developing their potential as eco-tourism destinations, and in the agriculture and fisheries sectors. For example, advice has been given to the Government of Brunei Darussalam on updating its fisheries legislation and implementing a monitoring control and surveillance system. Expert help has been given to small states



Brunei market scene... diversifying the economies of small states is a priority activity

with the formulation and application of mineral policy and legislation, negotiation of investment agreements and on the promotion and development of the upstream petroleum sector. The Secretariat has involved the regional specialised bodies, such as the Caricom Secretariat and the South Pacific Forum, as a cost-effective way of delivering technical assistance to a range of small states.

Export and Industrial Development

Helping small states produce and sell their goods more successfully is important for their economic diversification and can make a valuable contribution to employment creation, entrepreneurial development and the increased participation of women in economic development. Typical of Secretariat industrial assistance to small states is a project to help Belize develop its food processing sector.

In addition, a range of programmes has been devised covering product and market identification and development and specialised support services. The Secretariat also supports the participation of small states in a training programme in export management in Singapore and facilitates exchanges of experience in export market development. For example, it helped officials from Guyana visit Mauritius to study that country's experience in developing export processing zones. All Caribbean small states will benefit from a study being undertaken for Caricom on the future of its Programme for Agricultural Development.

Environment, Science and Technology

Through some Secretariat programmes, including those delivered through the Commonwealth Science Council (CSC), the best expertise and institutions for implementing a wide range of environmental and science and technology activities are accessible to small states. For countries with small populations and meagre research facilities, appropriate use of science and technology, and assistance in environmental management, is often crucial. An expert in meteorology and climatology based in the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme, for example, assists small states in the Pacific in the crucially



Some Commonwealth programmes help small countries cope with natural disasters such as hurricanes

important area of climate change and sea-level rise.

The Secretariat has a programme of producing case studies and training to assist small island states in the Pacific and the Caribbean to manage their groundwater resources, which are often their main water source, but are very vulnerable to pollution and to salt water intrusion. It is also undertaking a similar programme to help the Caribbean reduce the impact of earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Through the CSC, the Secretariat also helps small states to draw up inventories of their biological resources and by developing a directory of relevant training materials. It has projects on renewable

energy and on groundwater resources in arid areas and is working towards a programme of awareness-raising and capacity-building to help all Commonwealth member states protect the rights to their natural and genetic resources.

Training in remote sensing and Geographical Information Systems is aimed at helping countries gain a better knowledge of natural assets such as marine resources and possible mineral-bearing geological formations. One such project involves the Caribbean and long-term expertise has been provided to establish a new Physical Oceanography Unit at the Institute of Marine Affairs in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Secretariat is also using new technology to establish efficient information-sharing networks. Several small states participate in the Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development (COMNET-IT), through which senior civil service and management development institutions may exchange information and experiences via computers on matters concerning public services. Malta is providing the administrative base for the network which should develop linkages with the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Network, SIDS/NET.

Meanwhile, responding to requests from governments of small states to initiate work on the impact of natural disasters on small states, the Secretariat is to update its 1985 report *Vulnerability: Small States in the Global Society*. This would involve, among other things, the development of a 'vulnerability index' to classify small vulnerable economies.

Human Resource Development and Capacity-building

Secretariat assistance helps to strengthen the capacity of small states to plan and implement human resource development programmes. It does so chiefly by organising or supporting relevant training, study visits and individual attachments and by the provision of expertise in a wide range of areas. Small states have benefited especially from training in legislative drafting, management of ports, entrepreneurial skills, health care manage-

ment and public sector management. Assistance is often given through regional organisations.

The 1994 Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers in Pakistan endorsed the Secretariat's work on education in small states which includes strengthening the capacities of education ministries by assisting in professional development and training in areas such as policy planning and finance. In the Caribbean, examples of such assistance include assisting Chief Education Officers to develop resource materials on the decentralisation of education systems, organising a seminar in January 1995 which identified projects for strengthening teacher-education in the region, supporting long-term courses at postgraduate and undergraduate levels at various institutions and conducting a study on the viability of distance education methods in technical and vocational education training.

Several small states benefit from a wide range of Secretariat activities delivered through the Commonwealth Youth Programme and its regional centres, two of which are in small states (Guyana for the Caribbean and Solomon Islands for the South Pacific). Small states have been assisted with developing youth policies and the regional centre for the South Pacific plans to establish a database on youth issues and programmes to assist member countries in the development of their policies and programmes.

Management and Administration

In undertaking work on the management and training of personnel in small states, the Secretariat's comparative advantage lies in its ability to provide an integrated package of training, consultancy and institutional development assistance.

In the field of public administration and management skills, the Secretariat is supporting Botswana's Work Improvement Teams programme to improve the development of public service officers. In the Caribbean, experts are filling key managerial positions in public utility companies. In Maldives, an expert is providing training in financial management to civil servants.

The Secretariat has also been instrumental in developing a comprehensive framework for administrative reform in the Caribbean and has supported the establishment of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), which encourages networking among senior administrators in small states with responsibility for public sector reforms. The Mauritius civil service is being strengthened with some assistance from the Secretariat through a pilot scheme for performance appraisal and the restructuring of the Ministry of Public Service.



Small and vulnerable... many of the Commonwealth's members have fragile economies and their small populations often lack appropriate skills