

ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Care for the environment and promoting sustainable development are reflected in virtually all Secretariat activities whose objectives are to accelerate the economic growth of member states and improve the welfare of their peoples.

The landmark Langkawi Declaration on Environment in 1989 provided a framework for Commonwealth co-operation on environmental conservation and sustainable development. At the Harare summit in 1991, Heads of Government made sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty one of their priority goals for the 1990s. At the Cyprus CHOGM they reaffirmed this priority and emphasised the need to see the commitments entered into at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) translated into action.

Secretariat activities on environmentally sustainable development aim, therefore, to promote consensus-building and policy development and to strengthen national capabilities to achieve environmentally sustainable development. In particular, the Secretariat supports the development of the Iwokrama Rainforest Programme in Guyana, a major initiative launched under Commonwealth auspices on the conservation and sustainable use of rainforests and biodiversity.

In 1993, the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment was set up in order to give high-level attention to environmental issues of concern to the Commonwealth. In April 1995, the Group took the view that the Commonwealth had an important role to play in environmental matters, provided it was selective and focused on those areas of the international agenda where it had a comparative advantage. The Group suggested several areas for improving Commonwealth co-operation, including greater sharing of experience in environmental

management and institutional and policy development; strengthening capacities to undertake environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and exploring the use of economic instruments in environmental management; facilitating the transfer and sharing of environmentally sound technologies; and assisting the sustainable development of small states.

In addition, the Group discussed the sustainable management of forest resources and agreed that the Commonwealth was well placed to strengthen international dialogue and co-operation on forestry matters.

In the area of policy development, more attention is being devoted to assisting member countries in integrating environmental and economic policies and using economic instruments to make development environmentally sustainable. Following the completion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations in 1993, preliminary analytical work has been started on the link between trade and environment, an issue which is of concern to many Commonwealth countries.

Technical Assistance and Training

The Secretariat focuses on areas where it has a comparative advantage and can have maximum impact. It has developed expertise in providing assistance—rapidly, cost-effectively, and often through technical co-operation among developing member countries—to improve environmental planning and management in several countries, especially small states. It does so through training and technical assistance, and projects delivered through the Commonwealth Science Council involving the application of science and technology to the solution of environmental problems. Assistance is provided largely in such areas as biodiversity,

forestry, energy, water resources, coastal and marine resources, agriculture and fisheries, land resources, climate change and sea-level rise, health and environmental legislation.

The Secretariat assesses the environmental aspects of proposed industrial development assistance projects. If these are expected to have an adverse environmental impact, a detailed analysis of the environmental risks is undertaken. In the area of waste management, the Secretariat set up a Commonwealth Plastics Network, which has now evolved into a Global Plastics Network, on the transfer of technology to manage plastics waste. It is also working with Jamaica's Scientific Research Council to develop solutions to the problem of water pollution by effluent from rum distilleries.

Major areas of training, reflecting the priorities of member countries, have included environmental management across a wide range of sectors, and in EIA. Workshops in West and Southern Africa, the Pacific, and the Caribbean regions have helped officials from ministries responsible for planning and infrastructure gain a better understanding of the use of EIAs.

About 400 participants have benefited from training programmes and workshops in, among other fields, environmental management, pollution control, environmental assessment and monitoring, marine environmental protection, environmental health, and soil and water conservation under the Langkawi Awards Scheme which was launched in 1990/91 and ended in June 1994. The scheme was funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Longer term programmes in environmental education and training have predominantly taken the form of support to individuals undertaking Masters or diploma courses in a varied range of environmental disciplines. These courses have been of particular benefit to small states. Some 20-25 awards have been made every year for such long-term studies.

Conscious that in some regions, women play

important roles in agriculture and aquaculture, the Secretariat pays special attention to activities related to women and the environment. Some of its youth projects, carried out through the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), increase the awareness of young people of environmental issues and encourage their participation in activities to conserve the environment.

The Commonwealth Forestry Initiative

The Commonwealth Forestry Initiative was launched in 1993 to promote the exchange of the considerable wealth of knowledge in member countries on the management of forests. This initiative is complementary to the Iwokrama Rainforest Programme. Where Iwokrama provides an opportunity for experimentation and research in a pristine tropical forest as well as the sustainable development of forests, the Forestry Initiative disseminates experience gained from the wise management of production forests.

Member countries who have documented their experiences in the sustainable management of tropical forests include Ghana, India and Uganda. Similar reports for Australia and Sri Lanka are under preparation.

At its April 1995 meeting, the Consultative Group on Environment suggested several areas for strengthening Commonwealth functional co-operation in forestry. These included support for the Iwokrama Programme by providing funding and personnel as well as sharing expertise and information; establishing a consortium of Commonwealth institutions to support sustainable forest management; pooling such management expertise and experience and increasing awareness of its importance; securing greater integration of the industrial sector in sustainable forest management; developing inventories of forestry expertise, particularly at regional levels; and establishing much closer links between the Secretariat, the Commonwealth Forestry Association and the Commonwealth Forestry Conference.

The Iwokrama Rainforest Programme

In many Commonwealth countries, forests are a critical resource for national economic development and also provide services and livelihoods for forest dwellers. At the same time, forests perform a number of essential environmental functions. As there are no technological 'quick-fixes' to identify successful methods for conserving and using the forests' resources on a sustainable basis for the benefit of present and future generations, further research, learning and experimentation are necessary.

The Iwokrama Rainforest Programme is the Commonwealth's contribution to this research. It was launched in 1990 following the Government of Guyana's offer, at the 1989 CHOGM, to set aside about 360,000 hectares of pristine rainforest for research to demonstrate methods for conservation and sustainable use of forest resources and biodiversity. Seed-funding for this project was provided by the Global Environment Facility through the UNDP, and a number of other institutions, such as Canada's IDRC and

Britain's ODA, make important contributions.

On the Interim Board of Trustees for the Programme, the Secretariat contributes towards policy and scientific guidance. The Interim Director-General in conjunction with the IDRC is drawing up a medium-term plan (1995-2000) for the Programme and also guides the three CFTC-funded experts who are part of the Interim Management Group. These experts are expediting progress in several areas, including surveys of flora and fauna, training of Guyanese nationals in the use of Geographical Information Systems, institution-building, research and training projects focusing on Amerindian communities and the sustainable utilisation of biological resources, and the assessment of the potential for eco-tourism at the Iwokrama site. The Secretariat is also helping to finalise a legal framework for the Programme.

Once the medium-term plan is ready, a donor support group will be established to provide the core funding that is necessary to place the Programme on a sound financial footing. A consortium of scientific research institutions and a scientific and technical advisory committee will also be created in order to support the continued development of the Programme.

DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION: BACKBONE OF ASSISTANCE

Practical assistance is one of the primary means by which the Commonwealth helps member countries advance their economic and social well-being. This assistance is provided by the Secretariat through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC).

At the request of developing member governments, the Secretariat provides specialist skills which are not available, or in short supply, in these countries

through experts, advisers and consultancy services. It also organises the training of nationals in key development areas. In addition, special assistance is given to regional economic, training or other organisations to strengthen their capacities to deliver development services.

In the two years since mid-1993, more than 300 experts and consultants were sent to over 40 developing member countries, a number of dependent