

Chapter 6:

International Linkages

International linkages are generally much more prominent in small states than in large ones. Small states have limited facilities for domestic production, and therefore import a high proportion of their goods and services. Many small states also see great benefit from joining international and regional organisations. Finally, small states are likely to feature prominently in the aid programmes of bilateral and multilateral agencies.

One reason why membership of international organisations is highly prized is that it confers identity. Such membership is a symbol to peoples that they are part of distinct states, rather than being more anonymous occupants of urban suburbs or unimportant provinces in larger countries. International organisations may also be a source of expertise for economic and social development; and small states which group together in regional bodies may thereby achieve economies of scale.

However, international linkages may impose a considerable administrative burden, which is likely to be felt as much in the Ministry of Education as in other organisations. Officers have to attend international meetings, present country papers, and respond to questionnaires. Ministries also have to host external visitors, negotiate aid packages, investigate opportunities for specialist training overseas, and secure accreditation through either local or external examinations. These are among the matters discussed in this chapter.

1. Small States and International Organisations

It is useful to commence with organisations in which, at least in theory, the status of small states is equal to that of medium-sized and large states. Most prominent among these organisations are the United Nations (UN) and its specialist bodies. In absolute (even if not in

proportional) terms, small states contribute little money to these organisations; but the votes of all states are officially accorded equal weight.

In the education sector, the most important UN bodies are:

- the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (Unesco),
- the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef),
- the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and
- the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), more commonly known as the World Bank.

Also, of course, many small states are members of the Commonwealth.

The benefits of membership of international organisations were highlighted in several of the case studies contributing to this book. The Lucia study indicated that the country "has taken its Unesco membership very seriously, and has both contributed to and benefitted from a number of Unesco projects". Many countries also operate projects with Unicef, UNDP and World Bank funds.

Yet some small states have refused to join UN bodies, partly because they feel that they cannot afford the manpower and/or finance required. For example Tuvalu, Niue and Nauru have refused to join Unesco. One reason has been an unwillingness to devote scarce manpower to the many meetings required for effective participation. Such meetings are necessary both for the overall government of the organisations and for development of specific programmes and projects. Also, the Montserrat case study indicated that although the territory has participated in Unesco's Major Project in Education for Latin America and the Caribbean, involvement has been limited, "partly because of lack of finance to attend meetings".

Unesco policy requires member states to establish national commissions which are primarily responsible for the promotion of the ideals of the organisation at country level, but which also undertake liaison and project development functions. However, in small states these commissions may be difficult to support. St. Lucia joined Unesco in 1980, and in its enthusiasm established a national commission with five posts. These were the Secretary General, a secretary, a documentalist/librarian, an audio-visual aids technician and an executive officer. This staffing proved a heavy burden, and created imbalances within the ministry. Within a few years most posts had to be abandoned, and in 1990 only the first two remained occupied.

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* **The Demands of International Organisations: A View from** *
* **Maldives** *
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* *The demands of international organisations may, often* *
* *unwittingly, create a heavy burden for small states. This* *
* *was graphically expressed in the Maldives case study, which* *
* *described the demands as "debilitating and sometimes over-* *
* *whelming". The case study continued by observing that:* *
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* *Some of the most efficient manpower is engaged most of* *
* *the time in providing information for donor agencies. Often* *
* *routine functions are pushed aside due to the pressure of* *
* *urgent external demands. The sudden onslaught of the* *
* *World Conference on Education for All in 1990 is a case* *
* *in point. Preparations had to be made at the expense of* *
* *routine but important functions. Unfortunately, most of* *
* *the large international development organisations are not* *
* *adequately sensitive to small states' special needs in* *
* *educational organisation and management.* *
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2. Small States and Regional Organisations

In addition to the global international bodies, many small states are members of regional bodies. Broadly-focused regional organisations include:

- the Asian Development Bank (ADB),
- the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN),
- the Caribbean Community (CARICOM),
- the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB),
- the Organisation of American States (OAS)
- the Organisation of African Unity (OAU),
- the Organisation of East Caribbean States (OECS),
- the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), and
- the South Pacific Commission (SPC).

This, of course, is only a short list to which many bodies could be added.

A similar comment applies to the regional bodies concerned specifically with education. They include:

- the Caribbean Network of Educational Innovation for Development (CARNEID),
- the Caribbean Regional Council for Adult Education (CARCAE),
- the Consortium on Pacific Education (COPE),
- the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC),
- the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO),
- the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA), and
- the West African Examinations Council (WAEC).

Such organisations are of considerable importance in educational development. As noted by the Barbados study:

These regional bodies provide a forum for discussion by education personnel across the region, thus assisting cross-fertilisation of ideas. The bodies also provide direct or indirect training in key areas, and help develop a regional identity.

However, the Barbados study added a viewpoint which would be widely echoed:

Because proposals have to be endorsed, often individually, by the ... territories involved, the work of the bodies is often slow.

The example presented concerned the Caribbean Examinations Council. Although the Council was set up in 1972, some member states have still not yet produced the legislation necessary to give it legal status. Also, the CXC has not yet been able to develop syllabuses or examinations in religious education, partly because of the number of religious denominations in the region and their sensitivity in this matter.

Perhaps even more serious than the slow pace of work is a point made in the Guyana case study, namely that the regional organisations "make major demands on the time of Ministry personnel". Regional meetings must be held, projects developed, and documentation prepared. As noted in Chapter 4, the fact that ministry personnel often have to travel abroad for regional meetings may cause considerable disruption at home. The Dominica case study added that:

the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) requires that a specific officer use 80 per cent of his time for the Technical-Vocational Project. Also, the SEO (Secondary) spends about 80 per cent of his time dealing with the CXC and other external examination bodies.

Nevertheless, most case studies agreed that on balance the work of regional organisations was strongly beneficial. In the words of the Dominica study, the regional bodies:

can usually perform their functions more effectively than the Ministry could by itself, and they do widen the horizons of officers who work with them.

3. Small States and International Aid

It was noted in Chapter 1 that small states generally receive favourable treatment in international aid. Average per capita aid receipts in small countries are much higher than in large countries. This is partly a function of the visibility of small states in international affairs. It may also reflect recognition that small states have special needs, including in the operation of government bureaucracies.

However, international aid projects may also create a considerable administrative burden. Rarely do aid agencies fully cooperate with each other. They often require governments to provide extensive statistical and other information, but demand this information in different formats and with different degrees of detail. The view expressed in the Guyana case study could be echoed in many other countries:

The varying reporting and monitoring formats of the aid agencies, particularly in circumstances of an already overstretched managerial team in the Ministry, create a counter-productive treadmill in which education managers are so pre-occupied with meeting reporting requirements that they have little time for actual execution.

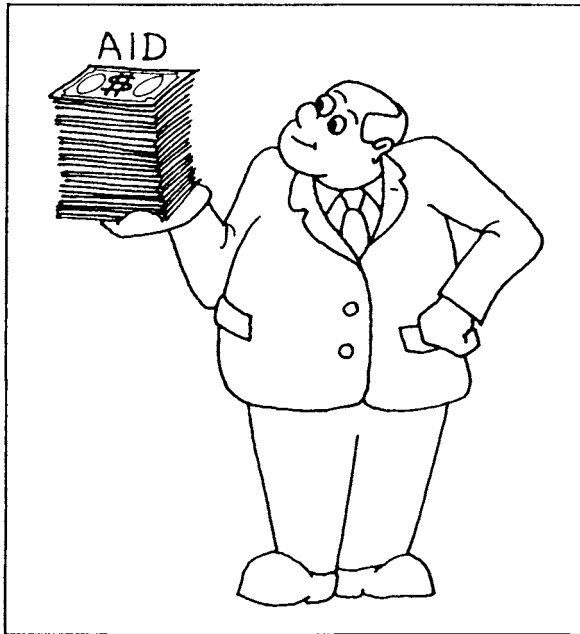
In addition to the demands of reporting, in order to maintain a good flow of resources recipient states have to pay close attention to interpersonal relations. The multiplicity of aid relationships may make this problematic. The potential extent of such a task is indicated by Table 7, which shows the number and range of education projects in The Gambia in 1987. The table shows 34 projects funded by seven bilateral and six multilateral agencies.

Table 7: Aid Projects in the Education Sector, The Gambia, 1987

<u>Nature of Project</u>	<u>Source of Funds</u>	<u>Expenditure (US\$)</u>
Book production equipment	United Kingdom	16,000
Gambia College salaries/equipment	United Kingdom	124,000
Curriculum advisers	United Kingdom	140,000
Gambia Technical Training Institute	United Kingdom	20,000
Technical School salaries	United Kingdom	20,000
Scholarships	United Kingdom	1,000,000
Scholarships (Fulbright)	USA	40,000
Scholarships (Eisenhower Grant)	USA	25,000
Military training	USA	60,000
International Visitors' Program	USA	19,000
Cross-cultural education	USA	1,000
Village education projects	USA	12,000
Peace Corps teachers	USA	106,000
Scholarships	USSR	225,000
Construction projects	Canada	229,000
Gambia Technical Training Institute	Canada	70,000
Gambia College staff development	Canada	167,000
High school teachers	CUSO (Canada)	15,000
Technical training	France	208,000
Teaching and cultural education	France	358,000
Fellowships	Austria	286,000
Adult education	Cebemo (Holland)	23,000
Literacy	WEC	8,000
Secondary Science and English	Unesco	2,000
Project evaluation training	Unesco	8,000
Inventory for school furniture	Unesco	3,000
Nonformal education case study	Unesco	n.a.
Veterinary training	FAO	50,000
Staff resources development	Action Aid	25,000
In-service teacher training	Action Aid	99,000
School construction and furnishing	Action Aid	174,000
Workshops and exchange visits	Action Aid	11,000
Primary and nursery schools	Christian Children's Fund	410,000
Variety small projects	Save the Ch'n Fund (USA)	21,000

Some small states, moreover, deal with an even wider range of agencies. Seychelles has bilateral education projects with Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, Cuba, Germany, France, India, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nigeria, North Korea, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the USA and the USSR. Each agency has its own style and expectations, and the large number of links creates considerable work. Complexities are exacerbated by the lack of diplomatic representation on either side. The small states themselves cannot afford to maintain many embassies abroad; and rarely do small states directly host more than a handful of embassies from other countries.

Three further points are also worth highlighting. They concern:



Foreign aid plays an important role in the education systems of many small states. However, it may also have many administrative and management implications.

- *The size of projects.* Some donors and lenders find it uneconomic to prepare small projects, and therefore press small states to accept large ones. The World Bank, for example, is generally unwilling to countenance projects below US\$5 million. The result is either that large education projects are devised which severely stretch the country's absorptive capacity, or that education is grouped with other sectors in multi-faceted projects. Multi-faceted grouping of course has the advantage of promoting sectoral linkages. However it extends the administrative burdens on ministries which are already hard pressed.
- *The extent to which aid projects are tailored to individual countries.* As noted in the Kiribati case study, aid agencies are not always willing to examine in detail the specific circumstances of every country. In the worst cases, agency staff whose

principal expertise is in large countries simply recommend the transfer of packages from large countries to small ones. In other cases the agencies devise what they consider to be a small-country prototype, which they then propose with little modification to a wide range of target recipients. Agencies are not always willing to devote the time and resources necessary for adequate tailoring of projects for individual small states. If they send staff for preparation, implementation or evaluation, the visits of those staff are often made to fit in with the requirements of neighbouring large states which the staff also wish to visit. Small states do not always gain the individualised attention that they feel they deserve.

- *The distorting effects of aid.* Even in large countries, external aid may create or exacerbate imbalances in development. In small countries the distorting effects are likely to be particularly serious. Aid projects cause both financial and human resources to concentrate in particular sectors, often at the expense of others. The Guyana case study pointed out that:

the amount of time spent in implementing foreign projects, as opposed to routine and locally-funded activity, is often not commensurate with their importance.

Also, the Montserrat case study referred to the temptation to take aid simply because it is available. Then projects:

create new tasks for Ministry officials, and sometimes teachers are taken from their classes. This does sometimes help to keep local educators abreast of new thinking; but in many cases the end value is doubtful. Also, the government does not always have the funds for the new recurrent costs which are required to sustain projects.

However, it is refreshing to find an increasingly critical climate within many small states. This was particularly clear in the Dominica, Barbados, Montserrat, and Solomon Islands case studies. In the words of the Dominica study, it is "necessary for countries to learn to refuse aid that is not in keeping with development plans and goals".

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* **Small States, Large Aid: The Experience of Solomon Islands** *
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* *During the 1980's, the government of Solomon Islands* *
* *embarked on two large projects orchestrated and primarily* *
* *funded through the World Bank. The first project (1982-89)* *
* *focused on primary schools, and had a budget of US\$10* *
* *million. The second project (1986-90) focused on secondary* *
* *schools, and had a budget of US\$12 million.* *
* *Although in large states these sums might not seem particu-* *
* *larly dramatic, they look very different in a small system. In* *
* *1981 the government's total education budget was just US\$7.2* *
* *million. In 1985 it had only risen to US\$7.4 million, but by* *
* *1989, chiefly as a result of the projects, it grew to US\$16.2* *
* *million.* *
* *Whilst the overall objectives were widely welcomed, some* *
* *observers were concerned about the dominance of the projects* *
* *in the system as a whole. Also, implementation encountered* *
* *considerable problems of absorptive capacity.* *
* *Small systems are more vulnerable to distortion, and small* *
* *states lack personnel capacity to take on large projects at* *
* *short notice. Pressures from agencies which dislike small* *
* *projects sometimes lead small states to bite off more than* *
* *they can easily digest.* *
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4. Coping with Demands

(a) A Special Unit?

Views on the best ways to deal with international organisations vary. One strategy is to create a special unit within the ministry of education, which is then made responsible for all external linkages. The ministry in Seychelles, for example, has a Division of International Cooperation headed by an Assistant Director. This division deals with external correspondence and records, keeps track of requests from foreign organisations, responds to offers of aid within the stipulated times, and coordinates the aid needs of other divisions of the ministry. The division also liaises with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Economic Development. Its staff have developed considerable expertise,

and are familiar not only with the general procedures of the international organisations but also with the specific individuals operating the systems.

Similar bodies may be found in other countries. The ministry in Maldives has an External Relations and Scholarships Division; the ministry in Solomon Islands has an Implementation and Planning Unit which is primarily concerned with World Bank and other externally-funded projects; and the ministry in The Gambia has a Projects Implementation Unit which has a comparable task.

However, other ministries avoid this type of model. As noted above, the authorities in Guyana are very concerned about the potentially distorting effects of aid. In the worst instances, they feel, aid has even created problems that it sought to solve. The distortion of managerial time has caused problems elsewhere in the Ministry, thereby creating a need for more external assistance. The Ministry has therefore refused to operate a special unit to deal with international agencies, and individual staff negotiate with external bodies according to need.

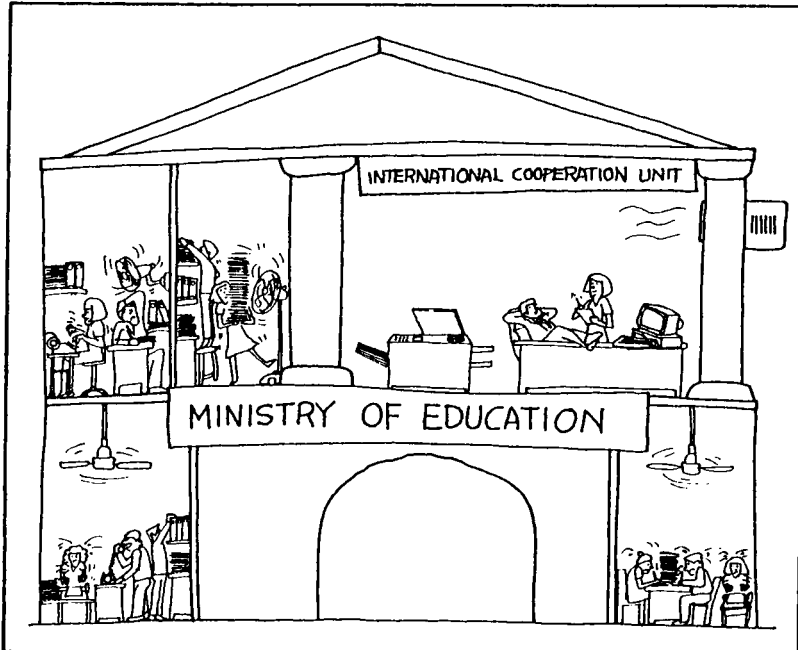
Clearly there is merit in both approaches. The most appropriate model will depend partly on the priority that is attached to external aid, and on the extent to which aid is considered distorting of local priorities. An additional factor of importance in Seychelles is the wide range of external bodies with which the ministry has dealings.

Governments which use the type of model found in Guyana would need to ensure that individuals throughout the ministry are acquainted with the overall policy frameworks. Without this, there would be a danger of individual negotiations with external agencies leading to inconsistencies and contradictions. Authorities would also need to pay attention to individual competencies, remembering that external agencies have access to highly qualified staff and are sometimes aggressive in pushing their own viewpoints. As the Barbados case study noted, projects often bring with them:

the problems of 'strings' and of the sometimes not-so-well-hidden agendas of the agencies. The agencies' agendas do not always match the official agendas of the countries being offered 'assistance'....

Part of the solution must be for countries to have clearly thought-out plans and programmes before assistance is sought. In turn Ministries need training and development of their own people, and they should insist that at least some consultants are local or regional.

A similar viewpoint was expressed in the Dominica case study.



Senior officials in ministries which have special International Cooperation Units should be conscious of the danger of internal inequalities in the distribution of resources. Such imbalances may lead to resentment within the ministry and to distortion of priorities.

(b) Other Strategies

Five further strategies for coping with the demands of international linkages are worth highlighting. They are to:

1. *Educate the international agencies.* Much of the problem lies with the international agencies themselves. Small states should point out that it is unreasonable for the agencies to expect staff to prepare so many statistics and country papers, or to read so many indigestible documents. As noted by the Barbados case study, the agencies should

also be requested to improve coordination among themselves.

Within some organisations, it must be recognised, there have been improvements. For example in 1984 Unesco established a sub-regional office in Western Samoa. Tonga, Fiji and Western Samoa were already Unesco members in 1984, and the activities of the office encouraged Cook Islands, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu to join the organisation.

In general, however, much greater sensitivity is required. Agencies should be willing to devise projects which are tailored to the needs of smaller states, and should not expect Ministry of Education staff to prepare the same amount of initial, interim and project-completion documentation that would be required in larger states.

2. *Develop expertise in negotiation.* All states need expertise in dealing with international organisations. They need staff with knowledge of the procedures, jargon and hidden agendas of such organisations, with ability to draft documents and to challenge the viewpoints of external agents, and with good interpersonal skills for dealing with people of many nationalities.

Small states are again handicapped because they have small populations and therefore small pools from which to recruit staff. One way round shortages of suitable nationals is to employ expatriates. Indeed sometimes the international agencies themselves are willing to help recruit and pay such staff. Employment of talented personnel is as much in the interests of the international agencies as in those of the small states, because it greatly facilitates design and implementation of effective projects.

3. *Establish appropriate internal procedures.* In this connection, two strategies used in the Ministry of Education in St. Lucia to control the demands that international organisations make on the time of senior personnel are particularly worth noting:

- Heads of Department (i.e. the Principal Assistant Secretary, the Director of Culture, the Secretary General of the Unesco National Commission, and the Director of Library Services) are encouraged to represent the Ministry by themselves. The Permanent Secretary meets overseas personnel only when necessary.
- The Ministry has an interdepartmental committee which facilitates the planning of major conferences and seminars requested by overseas organisations. In this way, such requests are met as routinely as possible.

4. *Contract work to others.* As an alternative to trying to do everything themselves, some small states contract work out. For example the

Barbados government has contracted the British Council to administer the Human Resources Development component of a major education and training project. Through such an arrangement the Ministry secures professional expertise. Perhaps even more important, it secures time. Some officers in the Ministry do have the necessary expertise, but they are too busy with other matters.

- 5. Use the Unesco National Commission. It was noted above that Unesco requires all its member states to operate national commissions. It is perhaps fortunate that not all international organisations have the same requirement. But, given that it is a Unesco requirement, small states could consider making their Unesco national commissions the focus for all international relationships.

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* **Small States and Information Flows** *

* *The Guyana case study noted that as the country has become more involved with international agencies, external requests for information have increased correspondingly. On rough analysis, about nine person-months are spent year responding to requests from external agencies.* *

* *On the other hand, external agencies are also providers of information. In most small states, much more information flows in than flows out.* *

* *Yet the inward flow of information may create another problem, for officers may lack the time and skills to digest everything. In Jersey this is said to create a sense of guilt and inadequacy. The case study observed "an anxiety that somehow a vital piece of research, or a report with considerable implications for local schools or teachers, has been missed and that the system has suffered."* *

* *Technology may hold part of the key to these problems, allowing data to be stored and retrieved in varying formats as necessary. Technology also facilitates cataloguing and indexing of incoming publications.* *

* *What else can small ministries do to ensure effective management of information demands?* *

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5. Sharing Expertise

At several points this book has stressed the desirability of sharing expertise. In most contexts, the question is how small states can gain access to external expertise, either by recruiting overseas consultants or by participating in regional organisations whose staff serve several countries.

The corollary of this is that small states should be generous with their own officers. When small states have experts in particular tasks, they should be prepared to share those experts with other states. Such sharing may bring several advantages:

- a) it makes available to other countries the expertise of individuals who are already familiar with the circumstances of small states;
- b) it promotes regional cooperation and reciprocal sharing of expertise; and
- c) it provides professional stimulus for the experts, generating comparative perspectives which may be useful in the domestic context as well as the external one.

In some states civil service regulations are inflexible, requiring individuals to undertake external consultancy work only in periods of recreation leave. Such systems do not promote sharing of expertise. Much more flexible regulations are needed so that professionals can take leave for consultancy work. Such leave might be unpaid (on the assumption that the other state will pay necessary costs). Alternatively, individuals could be seconded on full pay but required to pay a proportion of their consultancy fees into a general pool for staff development or other purposes.

Another way to share expertise is to welcome officers from other small states on professional exchanges. The importance of this sort of arrangement was stressed in the Montserrat case study, which highlighted the value of "short attachments to an education department in the region with a more stable corps of education officers". Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad were specifically mentioned; but there is little reason why such attachments should not be arranged on a much wider scale, between regions as well as within them.

6. Summary

This chapter began by noting that international linkages are generally much more prominent in small states than in large ones. This is partly

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* **Cooperation between Small States: The Jersey Pattern** *
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* *The Jersey government recognises the desirability of sharing* *
* *expertise and experiences with other small states. The most* *
* *structured form of cooperation is with Guernsey, which is* *
* *geographically close. However, the education authorities also* *
* *have links with the Isle of Man, which has a similar relation-* *
* *ship to the United Kingdom. These connections are especially* *
* *important when there is a threat to the Islands' autonomy.* *
* *Jersey also operates a small foreign aid programme.* *
* *Recognising the value of links with countries in comparable* *
* *circumstances, much of the aid has been channelled to other* *
* *small states. The aid programme has included projects in* *
* *Seychelles and Montserrat.* *
* *How much sharing of expertise is there in the small states* *
* *with which you are familiar? How can it be expanded?* *
*

a result of economic structures, but also reflects the extent to which small states find it useful to join international and regional organisations. International linkages also arise from aid flows, which for political and other reasons tend to be proportionately greater in small than in larger countries.

The first three sections enlarged on this, first by highlighting small states' linkages with international and regional organisations, and then by noting some specific aspects of international aid. While the linkages were recognised to be on balance beneficial, the chapter noted that they can create a heavy administrative burden.

One way to deal with this problem is to establish a special unit within the ministry. This approach has been favoured in Seychelles, Maldives, Solomon Islands and The Gambia. However other countries, such as Guyana, have opposed this type of model. The relative advantages and disadvantages were discussed in the first part of Section 4.

The second part of Section 4 turned to other strategies for dealing with administrative burdens. It focused particularly on educating the international agencies, developing the necessary expertise in negotiation, establishing appropriate internal procedures, contracting work to others, and making use of Unesco national commissions.

Finally, the chapter discussed sharing of expertise. Too many small

states are concerned only to acquire expertise from outside, and are unenthusiastic about sharing their own expertise. Major benefits may accrue from sharing, not only for the recipient countries but also for the originating countries. The section pointed out the need for more flexible civil service regulations to permit greater sharing among small states.

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