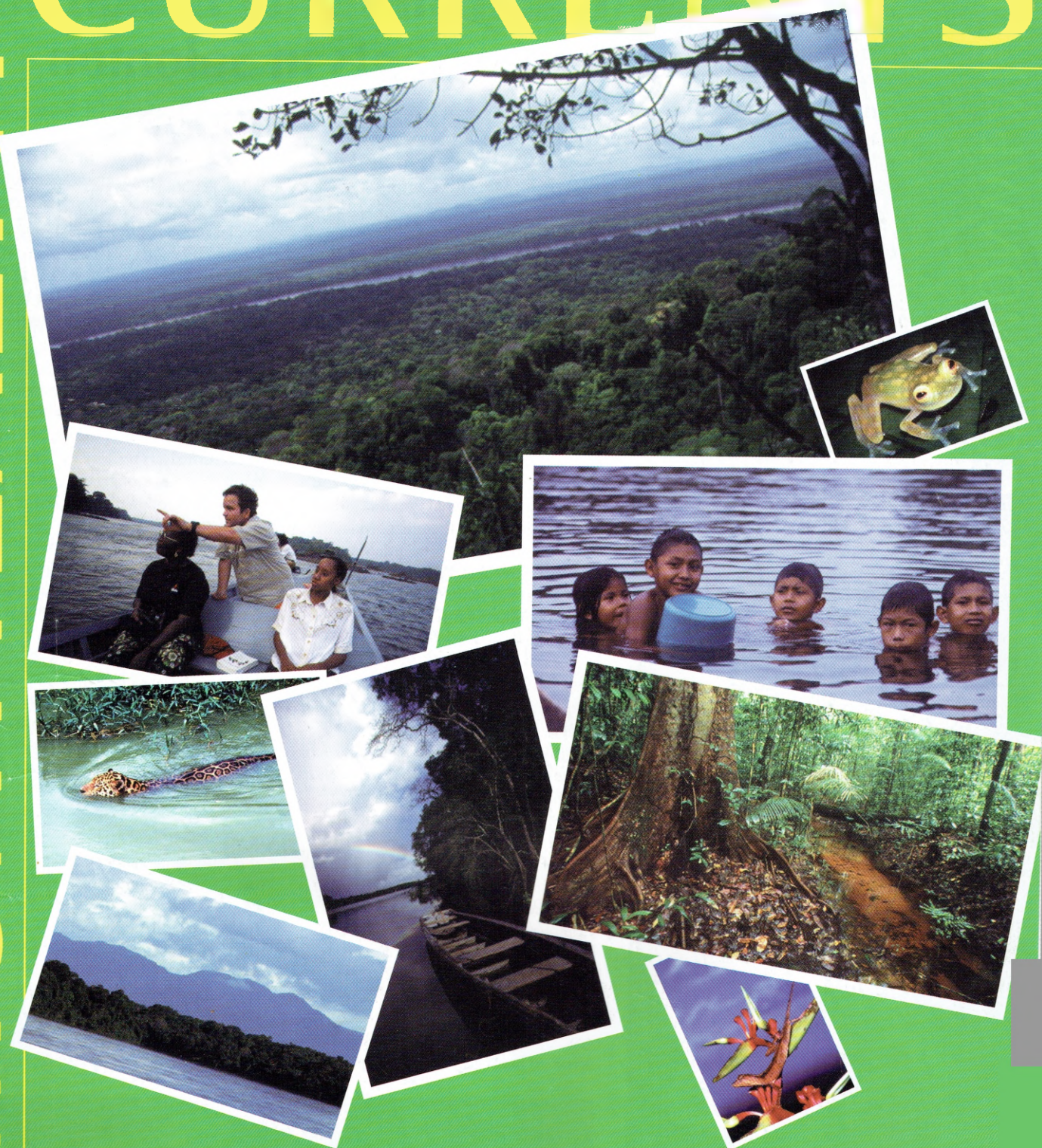




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COMMONWEALTH



Postcards from the rainforest: Iwokrama

The nation state and globalisation

Making music



More than one way to catch a fish – spear fishing in Dominica

region. The situational analysis and white paper were presented at a regional symposium held in St Vincent and the Grenadines in April, the purpose of which was to develop an action plan on implementing a region-wide fisheries management and development initiative.

The symposium discussed a number of possible interventions that could be included in a regional fisheries strategy, including extension and training programmes for fishers, research and monitoring, maximising the added value processing of fisheries resources through import substitution and export promotion, developing clearer national fisheries policy statements, and increasing the participation of fishers themselves in resource management.

The potential exists for reducing operational costs through the use of appropriate technology, such as a reasonably inexpensive four-stroke outboard engine which can cut fuel costs almost in half. Existing resources could be enhanced through the use of fish aggregating devices, which consist of a float or raft from which pieces of wood or vegetation are hung by ropes trailing in the water. These attract small marine life which in turn attract small fishes. The larger fish which prey on these smaller fish can then be caught more easily. The devices, which can be anchored or left to drift with a radar tracking device, are used to catch fish such as tuna, which move through the waters close to the surface of the sea.

These and other issues were raised in the symposium report, which was distributed to OECS member governments. Follow-up activities are likely to include specific projects to implement the recommendations of the report.

Methane, mining and model agreements

Coal bed methane, an explosive gas found in coalfields, can be a pollutant if it escapes into the atmosphere.

Collecting the gas rather than allowing it to escape could benefit the environment and also provide a commercially viable alternative fuel to natural gas.

However, very few countries have so far commercialised their reserves of coal bed methane, for a number of reasons. The wide geographical reach of coal seams, and hence of the methane gas inside them, may make the technically complex extraction procedure unfeasible. Often there is also a major legal issue to be resolved: should these reserves be considered, for regulation and taxation purposes, as falling under petroleum or coal and hard-rock mineral legislation? This question is particularly sensitive because, in order to collect the gas, a company would require full access to the area of land around the coal beds, making the mining of coal difficult or even impossible.

India is believed to have substantial reserves of coal bed methane, which the Government is interested in commercialising as a way of meeting the country's increasing energy demands while at the same time advancing environmental protection. Like many other developing Commonwealth countries, India is seeking to attract the interest of both foreign and domestic private-sector investors in developing its oil, gas and hard-rock mineral resources, and has looked to the CFTC for assistance.

Over the last year, the CFTC has advised the Indian Government on the licensing of the coal bed methane reserves – the first such licensing in India. The Commonwealth Secretariat's

in-house economic and legal advisers helped draft a model contract for the commercial exploitation of the reserves, and prepare promotional material to raise awareness of their potential among prospective investors. Bids are now being invited from the industry.

India's petroleum sector has received similar attention in recent years. Secretariat staff advised on terms for the Government's New Exploration Licensing Policy. They also carried out a comparative analysis of current issues and practices in the decommissioning and abandoning of petroleum installations at the end of their useful life. This is of key importance to the protection of the environment, since a clean-up operation is necessary at the conclusion of the production phase of petroleum development.

The drafting of model agreements for use in negotiations with investors is a major aspect of CFTC technical assistance in the mining and petroleum sectors. Over the years, the Secretariat's in-house advisers have provided policy, legal and economic advice to some 30 member governments. As well as drafting legislation and model agreements, this has included sitting at the table with governments and multinational companies in negotiations for long-term investment agreements.

Empowering landless rural and urban poor women

Women form the largest disadvantaged group in the world. Globally, of the estimated one billion people living in poverty, more than 600 million or about two-thirds are women. Poverty and illiteracy have a distinct gender bias, and



The methane embedded in India's coalfields could provide a new source of energy



Non-formal education could hold the key to empowering rural landless and urban poor women

women perform most of the unpaid labour of production and reproduction. This bias is compounded by the rapid growth of urban populations, which poses complex problems of poverty, illiteracy and deprivation for women who have migrated from rural to urban areas in search of employment. The urban female population forms the largest disadvantaged group in many developing countries. In rural areas, the condition of landless women is also frequently critical.

Many of these women are caught between two different worlds – a world determined by culture and tradition that confines their activities inside the house and around the family, and a world shaped by increasing landlessness and poverty that forces them outside the home in search of employment. Most women in developing countries are ill-equipped to make the transition into the outside world. Their situation is precarious, their economic opportunities are limited, and their position in the household structure and the economy continues to be subordinate.

A workshop funded by the CFTC and organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat's Human Resource Development Division brought together 35 participants from nine member countries in Bangladesh in April to examine how non-formal education (NFE) programmes can be structured to meet the specific needs of rural landless and urban poor women, particularly by providing access to appropriate technology and instruction in its use. NFE is an integrated approach to education and training, organised outside the formal school/university system. It can include literacy training, skills development, group activities, information and training on everyday issues, and work towards improved health, status and sustainable development. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have already successfully demonstrated that such functional NFE and skills

training can improve the socio-economic status of disadvantaged women.

The Commonwealth has noted these successes, but also the fact that there is still a dearth of NFE programmes at both national and international levels. Under its Human Resource Development Initiative, the Secretariat has therefore taken up the challenge of spreading information and formulating strategies on how functional NFE programmes can help solve the urgent and growing problems faced by rural landless and urban poor women.

The workshop participants, who were from Ministries of Education, NGOs and the private sector in their respective countries, were mainly practitioners directly involved in the planning, design and implementation of NFE programmes. Guidelines were developed for the production of training materials for NFE programmes in the participating countries. The training materials focused on clarifying the concept of 'appropriate technology'; understanding gender, gender roles and gender analysis and how they influence women's activities; and understanding indigenous technological skills and the value of women's existing work.

The workshop, which aroused international interest and received widespread media coverage because of the socio-economic significance of the topic, is part of a series of Secretariat activities based on the *Foundation for the Future* report, to promote sustainable human resource development.

Commonwealth seeks volunteer professionals

The Commonwealth Secretariat is calling for all professionals/experts, including women, who want to volunteer their services for technical assistance programmes to register on its roster of experts.

Since 1995, the Secretariat has run a volunteer programme, the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP), to enhance its capacity to meet the short-term technical assistance needs of member governments through the deployment of highly qualified volunteers to supplement existing technical assistance programmes. The programme draws on Commonwealth expertise and covers a wide range of disciplines and professional specialisations. Candidates for assignments under CSAP have considerable experience in their field with necessary qualifications in relevant disciplines.

The duration of assignments under the programme ranges from one week to three months or more. Volunteers are contracted for assignments on a no-fee basis but receive a daily living allowance at UN rates and return economy class airfares (and airfares for a volunteer's spouse, where assignments are for more than six weeks). Specialisations for which volunteer experts are sought and which reflect Commonwealth priorities include information technology, human resource development, public service reform, gender planning, natural resource management and trade promotion.

For further information, please visit the Commonwealth website:

<http://www.thecommonwealth.org>
and/or contact: The Senior Programme Officer/CSAP, General Technical Assistance Services Division, Commonwealth Secretariat, Marlborough House, Pall Mall, London SW1Y 5HX, United Kingdom.
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Women give a voice to the rural voiceless

The latest entrants into cyberspace are women in villages across Africa who are broadcasting the rituals of their daily lives to the world.

"When you go overseas and hear about Africa you think, 'Is this the same Africa we are talking about?'," says Zimbabwean journalist Jennifer Sibanda. "All you hear is negativity – poverty, wars, AIDS. You never hear a positive thing. Now, through the Internet, we are talking to the world. We want women's voices to be heard, we are telling our stories directly and we are giving a voice to the voiceless."

Ms Sibanda is director of the Federation of African Media Women, which in March hosted a training

In the field

The Commonwealth Secretariat, through the CFTC, places experts in the field to assist in the sustainable development of member countries. Between 15 January and 1 July 1999, the following experts began short- and long-term assignments in the following countries:

Cameroon

Professor M L Arora of India has joined the University of Buea, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, as a Visiting Professor in Accounting. Professor Arora's assignment is for two years (14.02.99 to 13.02.01)

Fiji Islands

Mr M Butcher of the United Kingdom has joined the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, as a Distance Education Officer and Training Co-ordinator. Mr Butcher, who was contracted through the British Geological Survey, is on a one-year assignment (01.07.99 to 30.06.2000)

Malawi

Mr S A Sugathasrilal of Sri Lanka has joined the Inland Fisheries Technical Co-ordination Unit of the Southern African Development Community in Lilongwe. Mr Sugathasrilal's assignment is for two years (20.02.99 to 19.02.01)

Sri Lanka

Dr I D Singh of India has joined the Plant Breeding Department of the Tea Research Institute in Talawakelle, as a Consultant in Plant Breeding. Dr Singh's assignment is for two years (18.01.99 to 17.01.01)

Vanuatu

Mr C Blackwood of Canada has joined the Office of the Ombudsman in Port Vila. Mr Blackwood's assignment is for one year (15.05.99 to 14.05.2000)

workshop on 'Electronic Connectivity for Women Workgroups'. The workshop, which took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, gave 11 women journalists from Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe the opportunity to improve their Internet skills.

The workshop was organised in collaboration with the CFTC, the Southern African Development Community, and Sangonet, a Johannesburg-based Internet service provider. The CFTC was interested in facilitating and giving value to the traditional networks women have built in Southern Africa, and in finding a more modern way for the networks to work.

"We are not only developing our own professional capacity, we are linking it to the development of rural women in our own countries," says Ms Sibanda. "We found we were always downloading and never uploading. We needed more content about what is happening in Africa on the Internet, and to popularise our culture. There is so much knowledge in rural communities, and we have to let people know about the work being done at this level."

Problems along the Internet path remain. The main languages of the Internet are English and French, not local African languages, which is a barrier to wider local participation. A further barrier is the skill required. Communications technologies are still taking root in Africa, and the Internet is new to most African women in the media.

"Women always seem to be the last ones to have these technologies and to learn to use them for their development," says Ms Sibanda.

"These networks give us the opportunity of sharing our experiences, developing ourselves and removing ourselves from isolation. Governments in our countries can't do everything. Media has a critical role to play in development and in ensuring that rural communities are heard – and this is one way of doing that."

Taking care of small business

Small businesses are the mainstay of the economies of most small states. Mauritius, a typical Commonwealth small island state with a population of just over 1 million, has a vibrant small business sector, with more than 5,700 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) accounting for almost one-third of all manufacturing employment in the country.

This is a reflection of the market-friendly trade and investment policies Mauritius has pursued since the 1970s, as well as its skilled and literate workforce, relatively good infrastructure and pro-business government policy environment.

Recently the Government of Mauritius has looked increasingly to the small business sector to generate new exports

and employment. Although some Mauritian SMEs have successfully broken into export markets, many others lacked the requisite technological and marketing capabilities to compete overseas. Moreover, the authorities had just begun some initiatives to encourage small firm exports and were actively seeking a new policy framework for SME export development.

In mid-1998, Mauritius approached the Commonwealth Secretariat for technical assistance to boost the competitiveness of its small and medium enterprises. With funding from the CFTC and the Government of Mauritius, a Secretariat team undertook a diagnostic study of SME exports and public policies. The study mapped out the export record of Mauritian SMEs, assessed their technological and marketing capabilities, evaluated the progress of economic reform and deregulation policies, and examined the adequacy of SME support institutions and services. Drawing on best practice, the study also formulated a three-year competitiveness strategy to increase SME exports from Mauritius.

A draft report was prepared by Secretariat staff in collaboration with an external consultant and fine-tuned at a roundtable in Mauritius in February, involving more than 60 senior government officials, heads of private firms, representatives from business organisations and a Secretariat team. Among the key strategies the report recommends are further selective import liberalisation and deregulation, reductions in red tape particularly regarding business start-up regulations, and a reorganisation of the support system for SMEs to create a Business Link along the line of the model developed in the UK.

The recommendations of the report, which is entitled 'Small Firm Exports and Public Policies in Mauritius', will be input into Mauritius's 1999/2000 National Budget. The Secretariat hopes to undertake similar work on small firms in other Commonwealth developing countries.



Richard Gold, Director of the Commonwealth Secretariat's Export and Industrial Development Division (right), formally hands over the CFTC report to Moorthy Sunasse, the Mauritian Minister of Industry and Commerce

ComSec/G Wignaraja