



Technical education,  
Grenada

CFTC structural engineer  
working in Barbados



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Photo courtesy of the Commonwealth Secretariat

### Developing countries help one another

One area in which the Fund has broken new ground is technical co-operation among developing countries. In 1984-5, for instance, developing Commonwealth countries welcomed — and subsidised — about 97% of CFTC trainees at their own training centres, and were the source of nearly 70% of all the experts provided.

This makes sense, since experts from developing countries often have experience which is more relevant to their country of assignment than do experts from the developed countries. Furthermore, training is usually more effective if it is carried out in an environment similar to the one in which the trainee is going to work.

Experts are provided through the CFTC's General Technical Assistance programme. One such expert is Canadian Koit Teng, who has set up a government micro-computer systems programme on the South Pacific Island of Vanuatu. This is a project that calls for considerable versatility. Teng's job is diagnosing and repairing computer faults and developing suitable software. He is also responsible for the selection and training of computer programmers, operators and technicians.

The Fellowships and Training Programme is another CFTC venture. It is at the heart of the CFTC's manpower training activities and now forms part of the Human Resource Development Group of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Since 1972, the programme has sponsored the training of over 15,000 people.

It is currently supporting a large number of projects; these range from a special training programme for Namibian refugees to specialist courses on micro-processors and agricultural statistics in Sri Lanka.

### 'CFTC is more than the sum of its parts'

While these two programmes aim to satisfy long-term needs, the CFTC also maintains a Technical Assistance Group to provide consultancy services in key sectors. One area in which TAG has been extensively involved is the design of the legal and fiscal frameworks within which petroleum exploration and development can successfully take place.

Assistance has also been provided on some 15 projects — in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific — involving mining legislation, exploration and development agreements.

The CFTC also directs substantial resources to an Export Marketing Programme, which is designed to help governments to improve their export performance and thus to earn more foreign exchange. In St Lucia, for example, the quality of local handicrafts is being improved with the help of a Canadian handicraft marketing expert.

In 1980, another new Programme was started. It is the Industrial Development Unit, which was set up to identify and launch new industries and to improve the performance of existing ones. Finally, the CFTC has also started a Food Production and Rural Development Division, which is geared to solving the problems of the agricultural sector.

Speed, flexibility and cost-effectiveness are the hallmarks of the CFTC's operations, and the high esteem in which the Fund is held is reflected in the increased contributions from governments and in the volume of requests it receives. But, as Commonwealth Secretary-General Shridath Ramphal observes, 'The value of the CFTC is more than the sum of its parts. It has come to be the touchstone of caring for the Commonwealth'.

## Structure of Commonwealth: Secretariat supports relationships

The informality which characterises the Commonwealth is a key part of its ability to function effectively. The organisation has no constitution or charter like other international bodies such as the United Nations. Instead, it has a set of Principles, which bind its members together.

The Declaration of Principles was agreed at the Heads of Government meeting in Singapore in 1971. It pledges support for the United Nations in its efforts to secure international peace and order. It affirms the liberty of the individual and opposes racial discrimination. It condemns colonial domination and racial oppression. And it seeks to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth among nations.

It also affirms the belief that 'international co-operation is essential to remove the causes of war, promote tolerance, combat injustice and secure development among the peoples of the world'.

However, regardless of how informal it tries to be,

an organisation still requires some kind of structure. At one time, the British government was responsible for coordinating the work of the association; but in 1965, the Heads of Government decided that this was an anachronistic situation. The Commonwealth needed an agency of its own to organise its various affairs.

This decision led to the establishment of the Commonwealth Secretariat. A Canadian diplomat, Arnold Smith, was elected its first Secretary-General. The present holder of the post is Shridath Ramphal, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice of Guyana.

He is supported by two Deputy Secretaries-General (both elected) and two Assistant Secretaries-General. The Secretariat has a staff of about 400 people drawn from 30 member countries; among them are high-ranking officials on secondment from their governments. The cost of the operations is met



Commonwealth vets  
inspect project, Botswana

Photo courtesy of the Commonwealth Secretariat