

Introduction

Of the 53 members of the Commonwealth, 49 are developing countries, for whom the main challenges are the elimination of poverty and the promotion of sustainable economic and social development. It is not surprising therefore that a central pre-occupation in Commonwealth discussions and programs is co-operation among member countries for development.

The Commonwealth includes some of today's most dynamic economies, as well as those for whom development remains a daunting task. It is made up of both large countries and many small ones with population of less than 1.5 million. The Commonwealth thus provides a rich opportunity for its members to learn from each other's experience and draw lessons for economic and social management.

Co-operation among Commonwealth members is varied including the Commonwealth Science Council, the Commonwealth Youth Program and the Commonwealth of Learning. I will focus today on the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation as the most visible development arm of the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation or CFTC was established over 25 years ago. It was conceived to encourage all member countries, including the smallest and least developed, to contribute to what was then seen as a new operational partnership.

This sense of partnership was also function of the CFTC's mandate and mode of operation, which were to use third party financing to provide for co-operation between all members of the Commonwealth, drawing, where possible, on relevant experience, skills and training facilities in developing countries, and to be highly responsive to the priorities and needs of recipient countries.

Today, the CFTC is frequently cited by developing countries, and particularly the smaller states, as a major and distinctive benefit of the Commonwealth.

What is the CFTC? It is a very small fund - which represents a very small proportion of the aid programmes of the major contributors. Its current budget is £26.3 million (a little over C\$ 60 million)

It is essentially a South-South technical assistance program which utilizes a mix of three assistance instruments: training, the provision of qualified specialists to reside and work in member countries, and the provision of technical advice provided both in-house or through outside resources.

It funds numerous small-scale activities -- the average project size is about C\$100,000. The CFTC is completely responsive and its turn-around time to follow up on requests is very quick.