



Implementing Environmentally Sustainable Development



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IMPLEMENTING ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Report of a CPA Study Group hosted by the National Assembly of Belize, 25 February-2 March 2007

I. INTRODUCTION

The well-being of all persons depends on the natural resources base and the goods and services that it provides, which in their turn constitute the basis for our economic and social development, and for many, the environment also has a strong cultural and spiritual significance.

For more than three decades, countries have turned their focus on environmental issues through three major United Nations conferences: in Stockholm (1972), Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002). These meetings have recognized that the world's natural resources are being degraded through over-use, extraction and pollution, and that a more harmonious relationship needs to be forged between environment and development to secure the health and livelihood of the peoples of the world into the future. While progress has been made in some areas, the general trends remain negative, with there being major concerns over water supplies, coastal and marine ecosystems, the destruction of fragile ecosystems, declining fish stocks, climate change, and biodiversity and the reduction thereof as a result of the declining fertility of soils. In particular, developing countries are struggling to find the necessary resources and technical capacity to address these matters effectively. Although awareness has been heightened significantly, many policy makers and legislators are still not satisfied that sufficient information is available to them to allow for meaningful action, and many countries still have far to go in achieving sustainable development. Following a mandate from the member countries of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) who identified environmental matters as being of major concern, and a commendation from the Twelfth Session of the Ministerial-level Commonwealth Consultative Group on the Environment, the CPA organized a Study Group on Parliamentarians and the Environment, focussing on the following objectives:

- To develop a greater understanding of the role that Parliamentarians can play in addressing specific environmental issues;

- To share lessons learned from parliamentary participation in environmental management;
- To raise understanding of the global struggle for environmental sustainability; and
- To make recommendations that would enable Parliaments, Parliamentarians and the CPA to further address environmental issues.

The Study Group meeting was convened in Belize City from 25 February to 2 March 2007. The meeting was held under the auspices of the CPA in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, with the support of the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community Centre for Climate Change and the Belize Ministry of the Environment.

The Study Group dealt with the following topics:

- Challenges in Sustainable Development in the Commonwealth
- Interaction and Balance between Key Natural Resources
- The Role of Parliamentarians in Addressing – Procurement, Community Relations, Business Concerns
- Information Gathering and Skills Development for Parliamentarians

From the outset, the members of the Study Group honed in on the following issues as matters which they felt should be specifically addressed:

- The current status of environmental management practices and determination of areas which need to be addressed;
- All aspects of climate change;
- Exchange of ideas on environmental management and identification of best practice throughout the Commonwealth;
- Exchange of ideas on how technological advances can be utilized to address the problems;
- The benefits of proper environmental stewardship;
- Strategies which will place an obligation on industries to share in the cost of preserving the environment;
- The means whereby countries may strike a balance between environmental protection and economic development, in particular, where there is the need to address the issue of poverty;

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- The role of Parliamentarians in promoting environmental awareness in seeking to promote a long-term vision among Parliamentarians for dealing with environmental issues;
- Mechanisms for ensuring that the international community is held more accountable in relation to the various treaties, agreements and protocols on environmental issues to which they have subscribed;
- The means by which the Commonwealth may play a more active role in dealing with issues affecting climate change and a charge to the CPA to implement a monitoring system steered by a special committee to keep abreast of new methodologies and provide advice to member countries;
- Collaboration of regional and international organizations and institutions in tackling this vital global issue;
- Formulation of a timetable for putting into practice all the proposals on which consensus has been reached.

2. CHALLENGES IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Study Group participants presented case studies on environmental challenges within their own territories. It was evident from the issues raised that there was a commonality of issues across the continents and the countries representing the different CPA regions, notwithstanding the diverse nature of the countries, in respect of geographical location, size, climate, population size, or whether they were developed or developing countries. These could be summarized as follows:

- Climate change: changing weather patterns; increase in temperatures; water resources and water quality; rainfall; flooding and flood management; rising sea levels, salt water intrusion, and water pollution and its impact on aquaculture, marine life and health, and desertification.
- Deforestation resulting from poor forestry practices; soil erosion and damage to watersheds.
- Energy: there is a need to find alternative sources of energy, such as wind and solar power, both from the point of view of cost, as well as the need to reduce the level of emissions.
- Transport: this is also related to energy and planning issues.
- Solid waste management with the attendant health and spatial concerns.

- The harmful effects of development and industry on the environment.
- The high capital costs of instituting systems to help communities to adapt to climate change.
- The inadequacy of financial resources as a major inhibiting factor in sustainable development which affects countries' ability to adequately equip themselves to deal with environmental challenges. Both developing and developed countries experience funding challenges, the latter mainly arising from the competing interests of federal vis-à-vis state requirements.
- Land use change and infrastructure problems associated with growing populations, migration due to persons being displaced as a result of environmental factors, and poor zoning practices.

Belize highlighted waste management as a major area of concern, the main sources of waste generation being effluent from the aquaculture industry and other agricultural run off, and oil disposal. As there is no landfill, disposal takes place in open dumps, rivers, streams and other environmentally sensitive areas such as mangroves. In Belize City, only 30 per cent of the city is connected to the sewage system, and it is still permitted for sewage to be dumped into the water. This is exacerbated by waste from the cruise tourism industry. The disposal of waste in the water systems results in water pollution and has harmful effects on health, tourism and marine life. Other environmental issues experienced by Belize include the uncontrolled clearing of hills, encroachment in forest reserves and burning for farming resulting in air pollution and damage to the rainforest, and noise pollution resulting from poor zoning practices.

Key issues of concern in the United Kingdom are flooding and flood management, energy and transport. In respect of flooding and flood management, it was reported that flooding had increased in recent years, with the year 2000 being a record year. Flood management now costs the country approximately £2.2 million per year, and the concern was expressed that more money needs to be spent on prevention and mitigation. Energy and transport are also seen as major challenges, as there needs to be a balance between the freedom of individuals to travel and the effects that travel have on climate change, in particular through high levels of carbon dioxide emissions, which are at their highest since the 1970s.

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Notwithstanding, the cost of travel by rail and bus has increased, while the cost of travelling by car has decreased in relative terms. Further, the government's aviation policy calls for the construction of additional runways to deal with increased air travel, which is felt by many to be unsustainable.

In Jamaica, the three major economic industries are tourism, bauxite mining and agriculture, all of which are potentially damaging to the environment, and the challenge is one of maintaining a balance between economic survival and poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability. In respect of tourism, there has been a recent surge in the construction of hotel rooms, which has generated some controversy in respect of carrying capacities. Also at issue is the effectiveness of environment impact assessment studies in addressing the issue of sustainability. Bauxite mining is viewed by some as being unsustainable, and there is currently a debate as to whether mining licences should be granted for the Cockpit Country, an area in Jamaica which is home to a large number of endangered species of birds and insects. For its part, agriculture has contributed to the deforestation of hillsides for farming, resulting in sludging of rivers and flooding of towns, and damage to coral reefs. Special efforts have to be made to ensure that water quality is not compromised, both for consumption, as well as for tourism related activities. Further, with the construction of large housing developments, there is a challenge in ensuring that there are adequate sewage disposal facilities.

India's challenge relates to damage from the demands of development, essential for a growing population, fostering the paradox that the greater the need for development, the greater becomes the challenges for preservation of the environment. In respect of climate change, there has been a dramatic change in weather patterns. The monsoons have changed and the Himalayan Range is being threatened. India has been experiencing severe air pollution from motor vehicle emissions, as the number of vehicles has grown phenomenally over the past six to seven years, despite efforts to reverse the harmful effects by changing to unleaded fuel and promoting a rapid transport system. Water pollution also results from industry-related effluent. In addition, there is the continued exploitation of the forests.

In the Northwest Territories (Canada), environmental chal-

allenges include the management of land and water, pressure for resource development and climate change. In respect of land and water management, there is limited ability to control the pace of development and to deal with the impacts of external factors, which affects stewardship and sustainability. The main impacts of climate change are lower water levels, increased melting of sea ice and permafrost, and the harmful effects of shorter winters on forest and wildlife resources.

In Australia, the challenges are similar, namely, water, climate change and bio-diversity. Of note are the dramatic changes in temperature, with a recorded increase in the average number of extremely cold days, and in recent years, ten of the hottest days ever recorded, an increase in the maximum wind speed, and increased cyclone activity. Over the last ten years there have also been significant changes to the demographic landscape. For example, Melbourne is recording a growth rate of 50 persons per day, which results in infrastructure and environmental issues. Forestry practices are of concern, and the issue of creating a balance between industry and the preservation of the environment is significant.

Samoa, a small volcanic island in the Pacific with a growing population, is confronted with water resource management, land use change and climate change issues. Water is not readily accessible, as there is an unequal distribution of water, and it is anticipated that this could have a deleterious effect on health. As a result of an increase in the population, there is greater human activity, rapid infrastructure development and an increased demand for land. Samoa also experiences salt water intrusion, and some of its coral reefs are dying. In a recently concluded study, it was predicted that there would be marked diurnal temperature changes, increased cyclone activity and sporadic rainfall and flash floods.

Recommendations

There is a clear recognition that sustainable development policies have to be developed and instituted in a cohesive manner throughout government departments. Such policies should seek to influence behaviour through a tax regime which ensures that there is a stronger link between taxation and environmental issues; conversely, incentives should be provided to encourage sound environmental practices.

Ongoing education programmes should be conducted to

educate Parliamentarians, persons in government and the public, to promote environmental awareness among the entire population.

In respect of the role of Parliamentarians, it is imperative for them to obtain a clear and sound understanding of issues confronting countries, and it is recommended that they be equipped with information to stimulate debate and act effectively to promote initiatives towards sustainable development and a more harmonious relationship between environment and development. They should also be encouraged to participate actively in Parliamentary committees and mechanisms such as debates on reports on the state of the environment, pre-budget debates, departmental audits and working groups, as well as maintain dialogue in their constituencies on environmental issues.

In the effort to maintain a balance between industrial development and environmental issues, development plans should include environmental recovery plans for industries, and private sector entities should be encouraged to partner with the public sector in promoting sound environmental policies and practices.

All countries should aim at achieving the millennium development goals on the environment by the year 2015.

3. INTERACTION AND BALANCE BETWEEN KEY NATURAL RESOURCES: ISSUES RELATED TO FORESTS, WATER, CLIMATE, MDGS, TOURISM AND AGRICULTURE

Mr Carlos Fuller from the Caribbean Community Centre for Climate Change (CCCCC) gave a presentation on some of the key features of climate change worldwide, and made observations with respect to recent climate change.

Current Trends

- Dramatic increases in temperature
- Rising sea levels
- Increase in rainfall in some areas and changes in rainfall patterns everywhere
- Increase in weather-related economic damage – displayed over the last 40 years
- Global mean temperatures are rising faster with time – over the last 12 years the warmest temperatures in histo-

ry have been recorded

- Widespread changes in extreme temperatures observed
- The warmer the sea gets, the more hurricanes are expected, and there has been increased tropical cyclone and hurricane activity and changes in the monsoons, all of which have an effect on farming
- The proportion of heavy rainfalls is increasing in most land areas
- Droughts are increasing in most places, primarily in the tropics and sub tropics
- Circulation change with high pressure systems and low pressure systems over the poles resulting in warmer conditions in Europe and cooler conditions in parts of North America; this is generally the case across the world
- From the paleo-climatic perspective, warming has been unusual over the last fifty years
- The drivers of climate change are natural as well as those occasioned by human activity, such as the release of gases into atmosphere

Future Projections

- Temperatures will continue to rise over the next two decades
- Warming will be higher in southern latitudes
- Precipitation will increase
- There is the likelihood of heat waves and more intense tropical cyclones, but it is difficult to predict whether the numbers will be higher
- Global warming and sea level rise will continue for centuries, even if green house gas concentrations were to be stabilized
- Increased temperatures could result in the eventual melt of the Greenland Ice Sheet, resulting in a rise in the sea level of 7m (comparable to what occurred 125,000 years ago)
- The hurricane season may be extended

The activities of the CCCCC seek to define the extent of climate risk, using regional climate models to develop scenarios of future climate regimes. These scenarios identify issues related to coastal development, tourism, agriculture, water and health, the vulnerability of these sectors and the ways in which they will be affected. For 2007, CCCCC Working Groups have been studying impacts, vulnerability and adaptation, and mitigation. It has been observed, however, that adap-

tation measures receive the smallest portion of the resources currently available through the Climate Change Convention.

Recommendations

Parliamentarians should make it a priority to explore common concerns on climate change through their association as members of the Commonwealth and other regional and international organizations, as well as taking advantage of the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference, regional meetings, special seminars, and ministerial meetings.

Parliaments should explore the use of innovative mechanisms to increase funding for adaptation to climate change at the national level, and encourage greater funding from the international community for climate change adaptation in highly vulnerable Member States.

Parliaments should encourage partners in industry and development to ensure that their development assistance does not create negative environmental impacts. In addition, development assistance programmes should be reformed to support mitigation, disaster risk reduction, and climate adaptation measures. They should also seek to ensure that climate change considerations inform the policy decision making process throughout government.

Parliamentarians should play an information and advocacy role on climate issues within their own legislatures. Recognizing the value of continuity, the CPA should establish a contact group of members to ensure follow-up to the work of the Study Group.

The Commonwealth should explore the potential of networking via research institutions, universities and the private sector to address key climate change concerns, drawing on the example of Australia's Co-operative Research Centres.

Parliaments and Commonwealth organizations should address their carbon footprint and consider ways to reduce and offset emissions, including those related to air travel.

4. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADDRESSING PROCUREMENT

In the United Kingdom, a new cabinet committee has been

established, comprising Ministers from all departments, to pursue environmental matters, with a focus on housekeeping within government. It is expected that not only will the committee inform government procurement issues, but it is also intended to give leadership to the rest of the country. The objectives are to provide better stewardship and improved, sustainable procurement practices.

In May 2005 the government established a sustainable procurement task force, and in June 2006 an action plan was presented, which put forward proposals for a change in public procurement. Six major recommendations were made by the task force, namely:

- Government should lead by example;
- Government is to set clear priorities and rationalize current policies;
- Standards must be increased and there must be proper enforcement in procurement practices, in particular in areas such as construction, energy, and the purchase of office furniture;
- The public sector should be encouraged to build capacity, as well as building markets for sustainable development products;
- Barriers to sustainable procurement must be removed;
- The public sector should take advantage of opportunities, with the role of parliamentarians being critical in enforcement.

In order to encourage sustainable procurement practices, suppliers who comply with government policy are given preferential treatment by the government. Further, information is obtained from “whistle blowers”, who report on goods obtained from sources which are not committed to sustainable procurement.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Parliamentarians devise national procurement policies that advance environmentally sound procurement practices in the public sector. This could be promoted through an exchange of current best practices in Member States. Further, Parliaments should seek to ensure that the conditionalities attached to loans and grants from the international community support environmentally-sound and sustainable procurement practices.

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5. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADDRESSING COMMUNITY RELATIONS

It was suggested that although Parliamentarians are normally aware of the concerns of their constituents, they were not always able to carry certain issues forward. Notwithstanding, they have a responsibility to inform and educate their constituents. The issue is therefore one of finding the most effective means of passing on to constituents information garnered in different fora. It was suggested that information be disseminated through smaller groups. An example was cited of a project to sensitize constituents on the concept of grey water usage. Apart from the environmental issues which were addressed, other positive outcomes included the economic value of this type of “greening”, as well as lessening conflicts among constituents. It was felt that sometimes even a small sum of money for such a project could have a long term impact.

Recommendations

It is imperative that the CPA and its partners provide avenues to promote a greater understanding of environmental issues among Parliamentarians to enable them to become true ambassadors for the preservation of the environment and promoting a proactive stance to the issue of climate change. This would work hand in hand with having Parliamentarians adequately equipped with the appropriate skills, knowledge and information, to make them more effective in imparting the message. Further, strong leadership is essential to allow Parliamentarians to show understanding of their constituents’ concerns, without compromising their principles and standards.

6. THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ADDRESSING BUSINESS CONCERNS

The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) methodology was developed in the 1980s to assist countries in predicting the likely impact of certain types of developmental activity on the environment and their relationship with socio-economic issues. Its value has been diminished over time and it has not been as effective as it could be in driving sustainable development, as in many instances decisions are mainly supportive of short-term economic and social benefits, and insufficient attention is paid to the long-term impact on the environment. Notwithstanding this, it has been proven to be one of the

more effective tools for decision-making; however, sound policies must guide its use, and it therefore works best where there is strong governance.

Applying the EIA and challenges to its effective use

Perspectives were shared in respect of some of the challenges to the effective use of the EIA as a tool for sustainable development.

In Jamaica, one of the challenges is that the EIA is paid for by the developer. While not imputing unprofessional conduct on the part of persons carrying out the EIA, it was observed that studies tend to facilitate the objectives of developers, and in many instances adequate attention is not paid to the long-term sustainability of developmental projects and the impact of multiple projects. It is felt that an independent assessor would allow for greater transparency in the process, notwithstanding the fact that EIAs must be reviewed by the National Environment Planning Agency. Further, Jamaica is experiencing massive growth in the construction industry, both for tourism and housing, and it is evident that in the preparation of the EIA for projects of this nature, the pressures for development are brought to bear on the process.

Australia reported having experienced issues of transparency, but these have now been overcome. Their challenge is more of a political nature, namely, decisions taken by the federal government versus decisions of local authorities. Another issue is that terminologies used in EIAs are not clear, and the term “indirect effect” was cited as one such term.

The United Kingdom is subject to European Union legislation and it is a requirement for EIAs to be done for projects above a certain value. The view was expressed that the EIA does not always work as well as it should, as it works best in the framework of other statutory requirements. Terminology is also an issue, with the use of subjective terms such as “substantial” being cited as an example. Another challenge is that there is a flaw in the focus of the EIA itself, as it tends to be land based with a focus on potential damage to landscape and the impact on flora and fauna, but it does not deal with long term devaluations from ongoing activity, for example, grazing and tourism activities.

A major challenge to the effective use of the EIA is that it is

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required to take a long-term view with the best information available, but the issue of monitoring over time is overlooked. Further, social and cultural issues are often not addressed effectively in the EIA.

Recommendations

Parliaments should strengthen the policy and institutional framework within which EIAs are conducted:

- By making the EIA processes more transparent and participatory. They should place them within the wider process of development planning, provide for cumulative impacts of development projects to be addressed, and integrate climate change, mitigation and adaptation needs in the process.
- By promoting the environmental assessment of the impacts of policies and programmes, and providing resources for the assessment of long-term impacts of development projects and policies.
- By paying more attention to monitoring, and making adjustments, based on new information which might necessitate the project being brought to a halt.
- By ensuring that the policy formulation process is more integrated to include social and cultural impacts.

7. INFORMATION GATHERING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS

The main issue relates to the type of information needed to strengthen the capacity of Parliamentarians to respond to environment issues and the ability of the Commonwealth Secretariat and/or the CPA to respond to these needs.

The view was expressed that too many Parliamentarians were participating in debates without adequate information, and members of the Study Group expressed their desire to be further educated and informed on the negative impacts of climate change, as the information received during the course of the Study Group deliberations was eye-opening.

Recommendations

Parliamentarians should take advantage of all means available to obtain information on climate change and sustainable development concerns. It was recognized that Parliaments were operating in a global environment, and as such, informa-

tion needed to be more broad-based and skills levels needed to be higher.

Further, the information deficit between Parliamentarians from developed and developing countries was marked and it was therefore suggested that all Commonwealth Parliamentarians should be in a position to receive uniform information, and emphasis was therefore placed on the need for networks for linking Parliaments, so that they could be kept abreast of legislation and other developments, as well as having a central site for obtaining up to date comprehensive information. The involvement of universities in the network was identified as one means of providing Commonwealth Parliamentarians with access to resources.

In respect of the format and means of conveying information, it was felt that all information should be as succinct as possible to attract the attention of Parliamentarians, and information should be posted on a website for easy access. Pursuing the current practice of carrying out studies and obtaining information through questionnaires was also felt to be an effective means by which CPA could gather data and disseminate information among its Members. Case studies of best practice, policy briefs and policy summaries could also be an effective method of disseminating information.

It was also suggested that Parliamentarians with a special interest in the subject matter could be used as ambassadors and they would be the point of contact in each Parliament to receive information and ensure that it is disseminated.

8. CONCLUSION

Study Group members having been presented with the stark realities of the deleterious effects of unsustainable environmental practices and the projected impact of climate change, committed themselves to returning to their regions and Parliaments as ambassadors, promoting the need for sustainable development.

In their recognition that the long-term effects of unsound environmental practices were not only manifested in physical degradation, but had far reaching and devastating economic implications, it was recommended that everyday issues such as procurement practices in government be addressed, and

that strategies be identified to encourage the private sector to partner with the government in promoting sustainable development practices.

Also, recognizing that physical and infrastructure development activities are part of economic development, it was recommended that all plans and policies be formulated with a view to promoting a greater balance between environmental protection and economic development.

Parliamentarians should be encouraged to take advantage of all information available to them from the CPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat, as well as regional and international organizations and institutions, including universities committed to research on the environment and climate change issues. Such efforts at collaboration would also be advantageous with respect to the use of resources, in particular financial resources and technical support, to ensure that they are utilized efficiently.

Further, Parliamentarians should see their role as being that of advocates for the environmental cause, and ensuring that the information flow between themselves and their constituents is ongoing to create awareness of the issues, as well as to promote changes in attitudes. In order to achieve the latter objective, education had to be wide ranging, reaching all sectors of the society, and this would best be achieved through partnerships between the public and private sector, and through Parliamentary intervention.

In addressing business concerns, Parliamentarians should advocate for environmental impact assessment (EIA) studies to be conducted effectively for all proposed development, to ensure their sustainability. For the EIA to be truly effective, projects must be monitored to ensure continued sustainability.

It is expected that with greater awareness of environmental issues and concerted efforts to adopt sound environmental practices both at the national level and through international cooperation, countries should be able to achieve their millennium development goals by the year 2015.

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