

Multilateral Aid Review: Assessment of the Commonwealth Secretariat

Summary

Organisation: **Commonwealth Secretariat** Date: February 2011

Description of Organisation

The Commonwealth is an association of 54 independent states consulting and cooperating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace. The overall vision of the Commonwealth is the 'promotion of democracy and development'.

The Commonwealth Secretariat, established in 1965, is its main inter-governmental agency. Its role includes organising all the major Commonwealth meetings, giving advice and technical assistance to member states and developing programmes to implement decisions of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. The Secretariat is headed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, who is appointed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government. It has 12 divisions and units which deliver programmes based on mandates set by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Secretariat currently employs 302 full time staff and has a budget for 2010/11 of £49 million.

The Secretariat has three main funding sources: its regular budget, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) and the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP). DFID funds the latter two programmes with contributions of £8.75 million and £0.84m respectively in 2009/10. All of DFID's funding qualifies as official development assistance. The FCO provides core funding to the regular budget, only a portion of which qualifies as official development assistance. UK contributions are assessed at approximately 30% of the total Secretariat funding.

This assessment focuses on the two DFID-funded programmes and the Secretariat as the implementing agency. The Commonwealth also consists of two other intergovernmental bodies and more than 100 associations, networks and organisations, many of which bear the title "Commonwealth". These are in turn connected to several national, regional and international organisations that take an active interest in the work of the Commonwealth. The interplay between these many different associations, which collectively form a family or a network of networks, is one of the Commonwealth's greatest strengths.

Contribution to UK Development Objectives	Score (1-4)
<p>1a. Critical Role in Meeting International Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The Secretariat has a unique place in the international system as a network of networks that allows it to share experience and to influence across and beyond its membership. + Its many associations promote south-south and north-south, practitioner based co-operation. The Secretariat plays a niche role in supporting and representing the needs of small (mainly island) states. - The Secretariat has only a small scale delivery role, and has not yet fulfilled its international influencing and networking potential. - The Secretariat's work is insufficiently prioritised and lacks visibility. = The Secretariat has an international role and has significant potential, but its current performance means it is not a critical international development actor. 	<p>Weak (2)</p>
<p>1b. Critical Role in Meeting UK Aid Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The Commonwealth's international network spanning developed and developing countries is irreplaceable. + Secretariat programmes support DFID objectives in supporting and representing the interests of small states on climate change and upholding democratic values. - The effectiveness of the Commonwealth's mechanisms to uphold democratic values is variable. While the Secretariat's work covers all main DFID priority areas, it is not critical in delivery terms. = The Commonwealth is an irreplaceable network and provides variable support to DFID's objectives. 	<p>Satisfactory (3)</p>
<p>2. Attention to cross-cutting Issues:</p> <p>2a. Fragile Contexts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Secretariat has very limited operations in these contexts. - The Secretariat does not have formal guidance for working in these contexts and its approach is primarily to be led by the policies and procedures of the partner government. = The Secretariat does not have formalised policies and there is limited evidence of delivery in these contexts. <p>2b. Gender Equality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The Secretariat encourages member states to make and implement new gender commitments. There are 	<p style="text-align: center;">Unsatisfactory (1)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Satisfactory (3)</p>

<p>gender-specific Secretariat programmes, but many of these focus on regional/ international action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The Secretariat has a diverse and strong range of partnerships which demonstrate some evidence of gender impact. + A number of external evaluations have been undertaken, looking at the Secretariat and the Commonwealth as a whole. These are informing gender policy. - Evidence of direct gender impact is more limited. - There is a need to strengthen the gender equality results focus. <p>= The Secretariat is committed and active on gender, but needs to strengthen its results focus.</p> <p>2c. Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The Commonwealth played a useful convening/ advocacy role in the run-up to the Copenhagen Climate Change negotiations. - The Secretariat does not yet have a strong policy framework on environmental sustainability. It is developing an institutional climate change policy which will focus on its internal operations. - It could play a higher profile diplomatic and advocacy role on climate change and its effects on small island states. <p>= The Commonwealth has the potential to play a useful advocacy role on climate change, but current activity is sporadic. The Secretariat's internal environmental policy framework is limited.</p>	<p>Weak(2)</p>
<p>3. Focus on Poor Countries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is assessed centrally by comparing each multilateral organisation's country-by country-spend with an index that scores developing countries based on their poverty need and effectiveness (the strength of the country's institutions). The Commonwealth Secretariat spends 29% of its resources in the countries that are in the top quartile of the index. - Although this is close to some of the multilaterals that received slightly higher scores, the Commonwealth Secretariat scores lower because of the amount it spends in small upper middle income countries such as Jamaica and Fiji. 	<p>Unsatisfactory (1)</p>
<p>4. Contribution to Results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + An independent evaluation of the CFTC concluded it had made a significant contribution to development. + Recent evaluations of debt management and maritime 	<p>Weak (2)</p>

<p>boundary programmes have also shown effective delivery.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback on the Secretariat's country-level performance criticises lack of follow-through on interventions. - There is no evidence of benchmarking against other institutions or of major innovation to improve effectiveness. = The positive conclusions from evaluations are not backed up by country level evidence of effectiveness. 	
Organisational Strengths	
<p>5. Strategic and Performance Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The Secretariat has a broad mandate but there is a reasonable line of sight to implementation plans. The Board is broadly effective at holding the management to account. + The Governing bodies of the Secretariat are smaller and less politicised than UN agencies. - The Secretariat's leadership is judged to be conservative and risk averse. - Improvements are evident in human resource management but progress remains limited by geographic allocation and by a rotation system with time limits on postings. - There has been some improvement in results-based management, but this is starting from a low base. Significant further improvement is required. = The Commonwealth has made progress in strengthening its strategic and performance management, but this is from a low base. 	Score (1-4) Weak (2)
<p>6. Financial Resources Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + There is a clear aid allocation system. - There is limited evidence for the pro-active management of poorly performing projects. - The basic elements of an accountability framework are in place but weaknesses have been identified by external auditors and the most recent audit was qualified. = The Secretariat's financial resource management requires considerable strengthening. 	Unsatisfactory (1)
<p>7. Cost and Value Consciousness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Starting from a low base there has been incremental progress in strengthening systems to take account of value for money issues - There is little evidence of the Secretariat challenging and supporting partners on these issues, although 	Unsatisfactory (1)

<p>some of its programmes do provide support to member states in relevant areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administration costs are high. There is limited evidence of senior management leadership in reducing these costs. = The Commonwealth has weak cost control systems and there is only limited evidence of a commitment to improving cost effectiveness. 	
<p>8. Partnership Behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Commonwealth networks offer huge potential for practitioner-based co-operation and for international influencing. + Operational partnerships and co-ordination are strong at a regional and global level. + The Commonwealth can provide examples of bringing beneficiary voice into the policy level. - An evaluation of the CFTC concluded that the quality of Secretariat country-level partnerships is weaker than at regional and global levels, as is the incorporation of beneficiary voice into country-level programming. Limited DFID country-level evidence supports this. - The Secretariat does not rate well on performance against Paris donor harmonisation principles, in part because of the small scale of its operations. = The Commonwealth is a partnership-based organisation and is responsive to partner country needs, but the effectiveness of country-level partnerships is weak. 	Weak (2)
<p>9. Transparency and Accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + There is good beneficiary representation in governance, including mechanisms for redressing grievances. - The Commonwealth endorsed IATI in its 2009 CHOGM Communiqué but has not formally joined. - The Commonwealth does not have a formal disclosure policy. Information is made available on an <i>ad hoc</i> basis (evaluations, communiqués, etc), but this does not include project information. = The Commonwealth has good accountability to its membership, but there remains significant scope for improvement in transparency. 	Weak (2)
Likelihood of Positive Change	Score (1-4)
<p>10. Likelihood of Positive Change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + There are opportunities for reform in the near future, around the Eminent Persons Group, the 2011 CHOGM and the CMAG reform process, but the degree to which 	Uncertain (2)

they will deliver is uncertain.

- The UK is relatively well placed to influence reform, but others have a range of differing objectives.
- Some reforms have been implemented, especially around management reform, but progress is very limited relative to the scale of change that is required.
- = While there is some progress on reform, the degree of positive change may not match the scale of reforms needed.