



COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING 2009

CONCEPT PAPER



INTRODUCTION

In November 2009, the Leaders of the Commonwealth nations will meet in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago for the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM).

CHOGM 2009 is being convened at a time when the world faces an unprecedented combination of profound social, economic and environmental crises. The global financial crisis triggered a wave of domestic recessions in 2008 and 2009, and exposed serious weaknesses in the international financial architecture. This development, combined with extreme volatility in recent years in the price of grains, oil and other major commodities, has highlighted the extent of food and energy insecurity in many countries. There are now about 1 billion undernourished people, primarily because food has become unaffordable to many. In addition, the pace of climate change appears to be accelerating, as some parts of the world are now experiencing the onset of profound and pervasive impacts far earlier than was previously expected. Against this background, there is now a serious risk that the gains made towards achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) could be eroded or lost. Decisive, sustained and collective action is therefore required in order to retain any realistic hope of achieving the MDGs.

The Commonwealth has been exceptionally effective in bridging differences. It has a strong tradition of building consensus and strengthening cooperation. This strength is based on its diversity and shared commitments to democracy, freedom and tolerance. As a microcosm of the wider international community, with member states in five continents, it is home to one-third of the world's population, accounts for one fifth of global trade, and includes some of the world's richest and poorest countries. Commonwealth nations must now draw on these strengths and encourage stronger partnerships among each other and with all development partners including civil society and business, in promoting an enhanced and sustainable quality of life for all their citizens.

The recognition that the current global crises are fundamentally inter-linked points to the urgent need for an integrated approach to their solution and a genuine re-commitment to sustainable development.

CHOGM 2009 therefore provides the opportunity to develop collective and feasible responses to current challenges that reaffirm the Commonwealth's strong commitment to sustainable development, as enshrined in, inter alia, the 1989 CHOGM Langkawi Declaration; the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21; the 2000 Millennium Development Declaration of the United Nations; the 2002 Johannesburg Declaration

on Sustainable Development and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation; and the 2007 Lake Victoria Action Plan on Climate Change.

The theme for CHOGM 2009, 'Partnering for a More Equitable and Sustainable Future' is based on the idea that equity and sustainability are mutually reinforcing goals and are central for achieving accelerated human development and poverty reduction, social and cultural inclusion, and a transition to more sustainable communities. The theme also recognizes the importance of partnerships among Commonwealth nations and therefore calls for the more effective utilization of the Commonwealth's extensive development cooperation networks, a renewed commitment to the adoption and implementation of international accords and a fresh impetus to foster new and more effective partnerships.

Building on previous CHOGM agreements on the path towards sustainable development, Commonwealth nations must now focus on a multi-pronged strategy to realise sustained economic growth, end poverty and implement urgent action on climate change. CHOGM 2009 must advance this development agenda and set the foundation for delivering tangible outcomes that enhance the quality of life of the 1.8 billion people of the Commonwealth.

PROMOTING SUSTAINED ECONOMIC GROWTH

The current economic recession will impact Commonwealth nations in very different ways. While the more competitive and resilient economies may be able to manage the crisis without much long-term dislocation, other nations may experience deeper recessions and the reversal of many developmental gains. This is particularly true for the small and vulnerable economies of the Commonwealth. CHOGM 2009 must develop clear strategies to assist member states in mitigating the impacts of the economic crisis, with particular emphasis on the poorest and those most affected by the current crisis. The real challenge for the Commonwealth is to mobilise the financial resources needed to address the crisis in the weakest and least-resourced countries.

While the current fragility of the global economy presents great risks, it also provides the opportunity to build a foundation for a new phase of long-term, sustained economic growth. In recent years, some Commonwealth nations have been amongst the fastest-growing economies in the world. Yet, for many others, sustained growth has been elusive. While the local environment is always an important factor, there are also some common features that are characteristic of successful economies. These include the implementation of sound macro-economic policies with appropriate and transparent fiscal, regulatory and monetary policies and prudent public expenditures; a culture of innovation, with the

rapid translation of knowledge into economic activity; a stable and functional business environment; good governance; investment, particularly in infrastructure, education and health; and environmental sustainability. These elements must therefore continue to form the basis of a strategy for achieving sustained economic growth for Commonwealth nations.

Although extensive work has already been carried out in these areas, it is now incumbent upon Commonwealth countries to transform their economies, not only through greater investment in Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) but also by fostering innovation in their societies as a key existing asset that could be leveraged to drive bottom-up economic growth. Action to achieve this could include the expansion of the small and medium size enterprise sector and the promotion of knowledge-based and creative industries. To this end, CHOGM 2009 must call for the creation of effective networks and partnerships to facilitate collaboration, the sharing of experiences and best practices among all Commonwealth nations. This type of collaboration can also apply to other economic sectors driven by investment, notably through capacity building in the design of projects and proposals for presentation to foreign direct investors and the International Financial Institutions.

While many governments are now introducing reforms of their financial systems, the current financial and economic crises have underscored the need for even deeper reforms to create a more effective multilateral system and to facilitate global stability. As mandated by CHOGM 2007 in Kampala, a representative group of Commonwealth Leaders has embarked upon the task of advancing a programme for the reform of international institutions, focusing on building a global consensus on the nature of wide-ranging changes and the pursuit of solutions which are both inclusive and comprehensive. CHOGM 2009 will receive the report of the 11 Heads of Government on the reform of international institutions, which will outline the way forward on this issue. Commonwealth nations must make a strong commitment to advance these recommendations in order to restore confidence to markets and to facilitate the transition to renewed, sustainable economic growth. In addition, the Commonwealth is well positioned to become a strategic actor in the global debate on reform of the international financial architecture by building on its work on the issue and calling for urgent and comprehensive reform that responds to the interests of both developing and developed countries. In addition, leaders may wish to give a concerted push to the Doha Round of trade negotiations, given the importance of trade for sustained growth.

ELIMINATING EXTREME POVERTY AND REDUCING INEQUALITY

After almost a decade of sustained economic growth and significant progress in poverty-reduction, the Commonwealth nevertheless remains home to 80 per cent of the world's poorest people. It also has some of the highest rates of inequality in the world; some two-thirds of the very poorest members of these societies are women. These inequalities hinder access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, which in turn exacerbates social exclusion, and perpetuates the cycle of poverty. In the near future, this situation is likely to be compounded by other factors such as climate change, population growth and the demographic transition to ageing societies; the cumulative impact of which will prevent many Commonwealth nations from achieving their development objectives.

In the context of the current global economic crisis, it is critical to ensure that the hard earned gains made towards the achievement of the MDGs are not eroded or lost. Now more than ever it is crucial to focus on development effectiveness and allocate resources to high-impact initiatives with measurable outcomes in the area of poverty reduction. Flows of public and private resources are required to alleviate the effects of the economic crisis and reduce the debt burden of highly indebted middle and low income countries. The Commonwealth's unique global character enables it to facilitate sustained attention to poor and vulnerable nations. The Commonwealth Secretariat itself can play a role in helping members access and use the new resources being made available to them in the face of the crisis.

One of the critical issues to be addressed in eliminating extreme poverty remains the absence of reliable baseline data in many countries, which is crucial to inform policies, the design and execution of targeted interventions and the effective monitoring of progress. There is also a clear need to improve the linkages between policy-making and economic, environmental and social research, in order to ensure the effective application of the findings of robust scientific enquiry in the complex area of poverty reduction. This will also require the mainstreaming of gender into national, regional and international policies and programmes in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres, so that programmes really are focused on the most disadvantaged members of society. This should be accompanied by measures to encourage the full and equal participation of women and men in the political life and decision making structures of Commonwealth countries, so that all views are fully represented and no group remains invisible and voiceless. The Commonwealth is well placed to advance progress in this area through the development and strengthening of networks for the open exchange of relevant information, including policies, programmes, experiences and best practices.

There is also an urgent need for the Commonwealth nations to develop an integrated action plan for poverty alleviation, with a particular focus on the poorest members, especially those which are clearly not on track to achieving the first MDG of eliminating extreme poverty by 2015. This action plan should build on work being done by the Commonwealth, including recommendations from the High Level Report on Democracy and Pro-Poor Growth and the Report of the Commission on Growth and Development. The Commonwealth Secretariat must have a lead role in coordinating and monitoring progress towards the implementation of this integrated action plan. Stronger, more collaborative partnerships must also be forged with United Nations, the World Bank and the Regional Development Banks.

DEVELOPING URGENT RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

The accelerating rate of climate change and its profound implications for agriculture, water, biodiversity, disease, territory, the livelihoods and possibly even the very existence of millions of people is one of the greatest global challenges of our time. Melting icecaps and glaciers, shrinking rainforests, thawing tundra, encroaching desert, the increasing frequency and intensity of hurricanes, rising sea levels, escalating coral bleaching and saline intrusion all confirm that the impacts of climate change are already being felt around the globe.

While no member state will be spared these impacts, two groups are likely to be particularly vulnerable, and amongst the most adversely affected. The first group consists of the poorest inhabitants of poor developing countries that are likely to lose part of their territory to the rising sea, or who will see their agricultural productivity collapse as a result of droughts or floods. The second group comprises the inhabitants of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). In this context, it is especially important to note that the Commonwealth family, with the bulk of the world's poorest citizens, accounts for more than half of all SIDS. These countries are highly vulnerable to the threats that climate change poses to human security, economic well-being and to the environment, and particular attention should be paid to their need for technical assistance and support for adaptation to climate change. Within the context of climate change and the environment, efforts should be made to reduce the social, physical and economic vulnerability of these populations.

The Commonwealth must urgently advance the implementation of the recommendations of the Barbados Plan of Action (BPOA) for Small Island Developing States; the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation of the BPOA; the Gozo Statement on Vulnerable Small States; and the Lake Victoria Commonwealth Climate Change Action Plan. The revitalisation

of the 1989 Iwokrama Experiment is also recommended, as it has encouraged the development of sustainable management of forests, ecotourism, business development, community relations and scientific training and research, and could serve as a model for future initiatives.

CHOGM 2009 must further build on these efforts and call on the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop an action plan to assist member states in dealing with climate change. The emphasis must be on the development of a new energy infrastructure, based on renewable and low-carbon sources. Provision for funding for research, development and adaptation should be integrated into the plan, in accordance with the Monterrey Consensus and the Gleneagles Agreement. Other elements of the plan should include the improvement of early-warning systems and the relocation of human settlements and coastal infrastructure away from vulnerable areas. In addition, priority should be given to the diversification of livelihoods, through such modalities as the provision of appropriate assistance and training, to facilitate the transition to alternative forms of employment and thereby ensure that people are not trapped in vulnerable areas by fear of losing their livelihoods. Particular areas of focus should be the expansion of the small and medium size enterprise sector and the promotion of knowledge-based and creative industries, as these are still very under-developed in many member states. Finally, very close collaboration is required for the development and implementation of strategies to address the emerging issue of environmental refugees. The urgency of the issue is highlighted by the fact that some coastal states may lose a substantial percentage of their total land area, while several countries located in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, all SIDS, may become entirely uninhabitable as a result of rising sea levels.

Mitigation and adaptation to climate change constitute profound challenges, but a number of creative solutions are emerging within the Commonwealth, and must receive the necessary support. These solutions include the development of affordable low-carbon energy technologies and renewable energy sources, as well as energy efficiency and conservation. The geographical, environmental and technological diversity of the Commonwealth, as well as its extraordinary wealth of renewable energy resources, places it in a unique position to pursue ambitious solutions, and CHOGM 2009 offers an opportunity to find a new basis for energy security.

CHOGM 2009 should therefore recommend that the Commonwealth Secretariat enter into strategic partnerships with the World Bank in order to access such new funds as the Climate Investment Funds, including the Clean Technology Fund and the Strategic Climate Fund. Partnerships with the private sector should also be explored with a view to the identification of innovative mechanisms for financing the adaptation plans. The Commonwealth Business Council should play a leading role in the development of these

strategic alliances. Partnerships with universities, science and technology parks and cutting-edge research institutions must be aggressively pursued. This process can also be facilitated by the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning.

The urgency and scale of environmental issues has intensified dramatically, and scientific knowledge and awareness has grown. The number of organizations, policy instruments, financing mechanisms, rules and procedures that govern international environmental protection has therefore increased significantly, but in an uncoordinated manner. This means that global environmental governance now consists of a complex and fragmented system of institutions, treaties, agreements laws and regulations. Many of these initiatives are worthwhile, but they lack overall policy coherence, so the system is currently cumbersome and disjointed, subject to cost inefficiencies and duplication of work and objectives. While there have been efforts at the international level to address the issue of global environmental governance, the uniqueness of the Commonwealth group of countries, with its diverse geographies and differing vulnerabilities to the consequences of climate change, natural disasters and other environmental impacts, places it in a unique position to offer perspectives and constructive suggestions on the issue. CHOGM 2009 offers an opportunity to make the Commonwealth perspective known to the wider world community, at a time when the topic of the environment and the necessary governance structures is the centre of world focus.

Finally, given the Commonwealth's commitment to the adoption of a post-2012 agreement on collective, comprehensive and global action through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and also given that CHOGM 2009 takes place just prior to the UNFCCC meeting in Copenhagen, the Heads' retreat within CHOGM offers a unique opportunity for informal, open and frank discussions on issues related to climate change. Trinidad and Tobago will use this opportunity to attempt to forge a consensus that would reflect the common views of the Commonwealth comprising as it does, both high greenhouse gas emitters and some of the countries most threatened by climate change. CHOGM 2009 will send a strong message to pioneer the way forward to a new global compact in Copenhagen.

STRENGTHENING THE COMMONWEALTH AND CHOGM

As the Commonwealth celebrates its sixtieth anniversary, it must re-assess its structure, priorities and institutions. One of the issues the organisation must address if it is to serve the new generation is its brand strength. Research has indicated that few people understand the Commonwealth and therefore are not in a position to

appreciate the valuable work done by the organization. The Commonwealth therefore needs to ensure that it connects to the people, particularly the one billion young people it represents.

Another issue is bringing the Commonwealth institutions into a stronger and more effective framework of cooperation and partnership. Capable, transparent, accountable and trusted institutions are essential in any development programme, and are equally necessary to ensure that there are tangible outcomes from CHOGMs. CHOGM 2009 must therefore call for all necessary reforms to ensure that there is far greater collaboration and coordination among the Commonwealth's constituent parts and sister institutions, as well as in the wider community of nations. International financial institutions, regional development banks and other international bodies should be also encouraged to integrate CHOGM mandates into their policies and programmes, and to support a more coordinated, coherent and integrated approach to implementation.

As a further step in strengthening the coordination process, the Ministerial meetings should be called upon to implement the mandates of the previous Commonwealth Summits, and to inform the agenda for the following meeting. In this context, it will be necessary to adjust the timing of Ministerial meetings to ensure that there is effective interaction with the biennial Summit. It is also recommended that regular Ministerial meetings be convened to address such key areas as Science, Technology and Innovation and the eradication of extreme poverty.

CHOGM 2009 must also promote greater engagement of member nations prior to the meeting, to ensure that the issues on the agenda are relevant to all and that there is continuity, follow-up and implementation between Commonwealth Summits. This objective could be achieved by regular meetings of senior officials between the Summits, by increased efforts to ensure the participation of civil society, and by engaging the academic, business and labour sectors in order to contribute to the formulation and implementation of practical and sustainable development strategies.

Finally, in this context, the inclusion of five fast-growing emerging economies from the Commonwealth at the historic G-20 Meeting has signaled a major advance in the development of a much more inclusive approach towards the solution of global challenges. Recognizing that the Commonwealth's agenda now resonates very strongly with that of the wider international community, the Commonwealth is exceptionally well positioned to leverage its social capital to forge new partnerships as well as to strengthen existing ones. CHOGM 2009 presents a strategic opportunity for the Commonwealth to secure a wider space in the international arena, to enhance its effectiveness and its image, and to make a leading contribution to the resolution of the great global challenges of our time.

CHOGM 2009 offers a new opportunity to build a stronger, more resilient and progressive Commonwealth of Nations in which all citizens have the opportunity to benefit from sustained economic growth and development and to enjoy greater prosperity and security in their daily lives.