

Creating an enabling environment for development

How the Commonwealth Secretariat is making a difference in the Caribbean region

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Supporting high level retreats for newly elected governments in the Caribbean

How public policy is formulated and implemented is an urgent question for governments everywhere in the developing world (Hill and Hupe, 2009), and small island states in the Caribbean are no exception. Centres of government that function effectively are essential to meet and respond to the critical needs of the population (Ben-Gera, 2004), and as such are fundamental in helping to build legitimate and responsive states. Cabinet offices are crucial institutions at the centre of government because of their role in policy co-ordination and evaluation (OECD, 2011).

Since 2007, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) has been conducting high level retreats for the newly elected governments of Belize, St Lucia, Grenada and St Vincent. This programme was instituted as a result of a request from these four governments to strengthen the effectiveness of Cabinet offices in their co-ordinating role and to support a more enabling environment for policy-making at the centre of government.

The objectives of these retreats include the following:

1. To clarify roles and responsibilities of Ministers and Permanent Secretaries in order to support an effective political-administrative interface and minimise perceived conflicts of interest between political appointees and technical/permanent civil servants.
2. To understand the role of the Cabinet in terms of its collective responsibility and the implications of this for Cabinet members.
3. To strengthen the role of the Cabinet Secretary.
4. To advise on and influence the strengthening of the Cabinet Office as a key institution at the centre of government and a crucial player in policy-making processes.

Over the years, the Commonwealth Secretariat has had one intervention in Belize (2007), two in St Lucia (2007 and 2010), two in Grenada (2008 and 2009) and one in St Vincent (2011). These retreats have been facilitated by a team of experts and practitioners from the Caribbean region, including a former Prime Minister, former Ministers

and Cabinet Secretaries, Commonwealth Secretariat directors and advisers, and the former Secretary to the Privy Council of Canada.

The retreats are designed and structured over the course of a week: two days are spent on the Cabinet; two days on Permanent Secretaries; and one day on the combined group to address issues related to portfolio co-ordination as well as the policy and bill processes. St Lucia and Grenada had follow-up training in policy development. That training was also used to assess and provide feedback on progress made in balancing the political and administrative interface and strengthening institutional processes.

What the Commonwealth Secretariat's interventions have achieved

As a result of the Commonwealth Secretariat's intervention, there is some evidence that there have been improvements in the governance, accountability and management processes at the executive and administrative levels in all of the four countries involved. Among other things, relations between the political and the administrative arms of the centre of government have improved as a result of the clarification of roles and responsibilities between permanent and appointed civil servants. Feedback from Belize indicates that they are satisfied with the recommendations emerging from the retreat held in 2007, and they have been working on inter-ministerial co-ordination and consultation through inter-ministerial committees.



Ministers and Permanent Secretaries meeting in St Vincent and the Grenadines

Building on this important work undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat, Grenada has been able to attract approximately EC\$268 million from the World Bank (WB), the European Union (EU), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Kuwaiti and OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) Fund to undertake a number of capital and social infrastructural projects. The WB and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have begun to engage in discussions with some of these countries and are working with the Grenada Government on providing support for the implementation of more permanent governance structures.

The following developments that have emerged in part as a result of the Commonwealth Secretariat's efforts are worth highlighting.

1. In Grenada, the implementation of governance structures has included:

- The creation of a Monitoring and Evaluation Unit in the Cabinet Office, with officers trained by the Commonwealth Secretariat.
- The restructuring of the Senior Managers Board, consisting of all Permanent Secretaries and heads of non-ministerial departments, and chaired by the Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Public Service. The Board meets monthly to discuss issues relating to the management of Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique, performance improvement in the public services, policy development and co-ordination, and programme and project implementation.
- The appointment of the Cabinet Secretary as Head of the Public Service. This is significant as it is likely to lead to better co-ordination of the public sector reform programme.
- The development of a Code of Good Practice for members of the Senior Managers Board mentioned above (with support from CIDA). This is the first code of its kind and is intended to embed and support the principles and values discussed at the retreats.
- Training for Permanent Secretaries in the relevant areas has commenced with the first cohort of four Permanent Secretaries trained in June 2011 by the staff of the National School of Government, UK. It is expected that all Permanent Secretaries will complete this training by March 2012.

At the request of the Government of Grenada, the Commonwealth Secretariat is now in the process of identifying and supplying a long-term policy analyst for the Cabinet Office, while a short-term consultant under the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) is currently updating the Grenada National Strategic Development Plan.

2. In St Vincent and the Grenadines, Cabinet Ministers and Permanent Secretaries now have a better and deeper understanding of their respective roles and

responsibilities. The Commonwealth Secretariat started the process of strengthening the Cabinet Office in St Vincent by commissioning an expert, the former Cabinet Secretary of Jamaica, to work with the Cabinet Secretary of St Vincent and the Grenadines on streamlining the processes for Cabinet submissions and the general structure of the Cabinet Office. This is also a good example of South-South co-operation.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's unique model of providing technical assistance support through short-term interventions (over a period of three to four months) has helped to strengthen capacity-building through on-the-job training as well as mentoring and coaching. This has worked well to enable domestic stakeholders to use their own initiative and creativity to find more permanent solutions to the challenges they confront. The Commonwealth Secretariat has also found that this arrangement increases the level of trust between both parties, and institutes a stronger level of commitment on the part of the host government to see the reforms through.

A Senior Manager's Board consisting of Permanent Secretaries and heads of statutory departments has also been created and convenes monthly. As in the case of Grenada, this Board is intended to enhance policy development and co-ordination across ministries, departments and agencies. Training for Permanent Secretaries has commenced, and four Permanent Secretaries were trained, together with the four from Grenada, by staff from the National School of Government, UK, in June 2011. The aim is for all Permanent Secretaries to complete this enhanced training by March 2012.

Three programmes are being planned for senior public servants in St Vincent, and will cover strategy development, enhancing ICT infrastructure and public policy. With support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, there is a plan to develop a Code of Ethics for public servants. The Secretariat also carried out a similar intervention for the parliamentary opposition in St Vincent at the end of July 2011.

3. Belize continues to operate a Chief Executive Officer (Permanent Secretary) system that coincides with the tenure of the political administration. This system has survived two changes of government and is still being studied (see Osie and Nwasike, 2011). When the system was implemented in 2002, all of the Chief Executive Officers were hired from outside the public service, and they required training in public service administration. Having learned from this, today almost half of the Chief Executive Officers have experience of working in the public service. However, the challenge of developing a competent and professional public service remains, and the Commonwealth Secretariat is assisting the Belize Government in conducting a feasibility study for the establishment of a Public Service Training Academy.

The capacity of 25 public servants was enhanced in policy development and analysis, and 40 Human Resource Managers were trained by the Institute of Public Administration of Canada (IPAC) in how to update job descriptions. To date, with the assistance of CFTC, the four departments in the Ministry of Finance – Customs and Excise, Income Tax, General Sales Tax, and the Audit department – have completed updating 480 job descriptions and standardising functions across the nine job levels of the Ministry. This has assisted with the appointment and promotion of senior members of staff across departments and, more importantly, has led to increased revenues.

4. **In St Lucia**, the Commonwealth Secretariat plans to continue its work with the Cabinet and Permanent Secretaries, where Permanent Secretaries received online training in Change Management, facilitated by the National School of Government, UK. The knowledge gained from this training is continuously being applied in a number of areas, including the upgrading of systems and processes for land and birth certificate applications. Much of the focus in St Lucia has been on reconstruction after the island state was hit by two hurricanes in 2010, with the immediate priorities being the provision of water and basic services. But in spite of this, work on the retreat recommendations has continued, as evidenced by the ongoing process of the development of a National Strategic Plan for St Lucia, funded by the CDB.
5. **The critical values** that stakeholders listed during these retreats as necessary to foster an enabling policy-making environment and a positive political and administrative interface, include trust, integrity, commitment, loyalty, equity, excellence, accountability and efficiency. Other issues centre on the need for public servants to be sensitive to the time constraints that Ministers operate under. The politicisation of the public service was another issue highlighted by participants as a challenge – a problem also prevalent in other regions of the developing world (O’Neil, 2007). As a result of this concern, in close collaboration with its partners, the Commonwealth Secretariat is thinking of new initiatives to manage public policy formulation and administration processes to ensure that civil servants execute their duties impartially.

A successful partnership

The Commonwealth Secretariat has recognised that success in reforming the public sector hinges strongly on the positive relationship between the political and administrative arms of the public sector at the centre of government. The kind of support the Secretariat has been providing to these Caribbean states (as well as to other regions of the developing world – see Katyola, 2010 and Job, forthcoming) is pioneering and unique among donors. The Commonwealth Secretariat enjoys an important status among member countries as an honest broker, which has been critical in enabling it to work in the most sensitive areas of government with its development partners. Through this kind of sustained engagement that responds to the particular requests and concerns of partner governments, and also relies on South-South co-operation and lesson sharing, the Commonwealth Secretariat has been able to make a palpable difference in the creation of a more conducive environment at the centre of government. The Secretariat’s pioneering engagement has also opened the door for other donors to become involved, which speaks of its ability to serve as a catalyst for further support.

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