

# Governance in vulnerable small states

## Commonwealth assistance to hurricane-ravaged Grenada

Immediately after the devastation of Grenada's infrastructure brought on by Hurricane Ivan in 2004, the Commonwealth Secretariat provided engineering and architectural assistance for the redevelopment of the island's infrastructure. Following this prompt emergency-focused response, the Commonwealth Secretariat began to address more developmental aspects of assistance to the island, including institutional strengthening, policy advice and capacity-building. The serious capacity limitations that Grenada faces, like those of other small states, were further compounded by the substantially increased requirements for engineering expertise to enable the country to undertake the urgently required reconstruction and rehabilitation. The Secretariat therefore sought to fill and close the gaps related to human capacity in response to the government's demands for technical expertise.

As part of its current interventions, the Secretariat has supported a Chief Technical Officer (CTO) in the Ministry of Works (MoW) since April 2009. The MoW is a particularly important ministry because it is the largest engineering organisation on the island. Its mandate to construct and maintain the national infrastructure requires the ministry to design, supervise, subcontract and/or provide project management services where necessary, to ensure that government policy is realised in a timely manner. The broad terms of this four-year technical advice assignment are to provide the Government of Grenada with technical and policy advice on all matters concerning national infrastructure, physical development and public utilities, with a particular focus on building the capacity of domestic staff and transferring expertise. Also included in the CTO activities are some general administrative duties associated with the proper functioning of the engineering department, board membership, as well as ad-hoc assignments that arise from various government entities.

Given numerous constraints related to policy, capacity, resources and systems, the substantive position of the CTO had been either intermittent or absent before the Secretariat became involved, which meant that there was no technical focal point for the ministry's operations.

Since the post of CTO was re-established, the MoW has become more effective. The Secretariat's support has been important in strengthening the ministry's capacity and it has made a significant contribution to improving its operations systems. For example, the CTO has played a key role in:

- Drafting a corporate plan.
- Promoting more effective management structures, which has entailed revising and updating job descriptions.
- Chairing special committees for the hiring of new staff.
- Re-establishing clear lines of communication (between the MoW and line ministries, as well as within the MoW).
- Facilitating technical training.
- Creating an awareness of central oversight by the CTO.

The fact that the CTO is from outside the system has assisted in the initiation of performance appraisal for senior technical staff. The virtue of this approach does not preclude promotion from within, but has helped to focus those aspiring to assume the post of the necessary self-discipline required before judging one's peers. This has also contributed to the improved functioning of the department.

The CTO is also the most senior engineer currently on staff at the MoW with the requisite design experience to provide quality control for the ministry's design output. This experience covers civil and structural work as well as architectural work. Based on this experience, the CTO has been able to offer the kind of guidance and leadership that is needed to direct the operations and strategic direction of the Ministry. The CTO is able to advise on all the major civil works projects and programmes relating to national infrastructure, physical development and public utilities.

Though very small (involving the placement of one expert in the MoW), this Commonwealth intervention is particularly significant because it has not only helped to address a key (capacity) gap, but also has potential to leverage other donor development support for Grenada. Some regional donor agencies have been reluctant to embark on major projects with the MoW in the absence of a CTO in place who can provide dependable technical oversight of these projects. But with greater technical leadership and co-ordination on the ground, larger donor agencies have greater confidence that project collaboration and progress will be more effectively delivered. The position of the CTO is absolutely essential to the functioning of the MoW – and it is precisely the kind of small, targeted intervention that the Secretariat is particularly well suited to provide.

**Pauline Campbell is Adviser, Technical Co-operation, GIDD**