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Commonwealth helps development

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A significant feature of Commonwealth activity in recent years has been the expanding contribution to development made by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation the mutual assistance agency which forms part of the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Fund pools Commonwealth resources—in finance, expertise and training facilities—for the benefit of developing countries within the Commonwealth.

The CFTC differs from the traditional type of aid agency in that its resources are subscribed by both rich and poor countries. Besides contributing funds, developing countries facilitate the training of people from other Commonwealth countries under CFTC sponsorship, and assist the CFTC to recruit experts for service in other countries.

The role of developing countries within the CFTC is enhanced by the fact that almost all training supported by it takes place within other Commonwealth developing countries; it is also CFTC policy to promote the use of experts drawn from developing Commonwealth countries. They now form nearly half of the 280 experts currently on CFTC assignments.

The CFTC's contribution to development is in the form of technical assistance. It provides experts, advice and training. It is concerned with strengthening manpower resources, either by providing qualified personnel from outside the country or assisting the country to have its own personnel trained.

This Commonwealth agency is still small by international standards, but there is wide recognition of its usefulness to developing countries in the Commonwealth, standing at

varying levels of the development ladder from the poorest to middle income countries. This recognition of its utility has led to sustained growth in its resources provided in annual subscriptions by Commonwealth governments. These subscriptions are made on a voluntary basis, there being no fixed scale of contributions.

The CFTC started in 1971 with a modest resource base of 400,000 sterling pounds. Its rapid growth is seen in its ability to plan for expenditure up to 11 million pounds in the current year, 1977/78.

Like other developing members of the Commonwealth, Bangladesh is both a subscriber to CFTC resources and a recipient of CFTC assistance for economic and social development. Developing member nations which have foreign exchange constraints are able to make their subscriptions to the CFTC in their own currency which is then used by the agency for its expenditure within the country, including in some cases the part payment of emoluments to experts recruited from that country for service elsewhere. For the current year Bangladesh has increased its contribution to the CFTC by 37 per cent to the equivalent of 58,000 sterling

pounds to be paid in taka. Assistance provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat through the CFTC comes under three principal programmes. Experts are provided under a general technical assistance programme which also covers the services of consultancy firms to undertake feasibility studies or provide advice in appropriate cases. In Bangladesh, the CFTC has used consultants to make studies of the prospects for deep underground coal mining and for the exploitation of deposits of hard rock, a construction material. A team of consultants from Canada assisted the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation with the management and operation of a freight service based on trucks provided by the UNDP.

Assistance under this programme for the two years 1977/79 was discussed in Dacca recently by the director of the programme who is due to pay another visit to Bangladesh in December. The CFTC has earmarked 330,000 pounds for assistance to Bangladesh under this programme in this period.

Tourism will be an important focus of attention. The CFTC has agreed to provide a tourism adviser to be attached to the

Tourist Corporation as well as a general manager and an assistant to the Cox's Bazar tourist complex. The Tourist Corporation will also have the short-term services of an expert in the preparation of tourist brochures and related promotional activities. To assist in strengthening the management of Bangladesh Biman on its technical side, the CFTC is to provide a general manager (engineering) for the airline.

A feasibility study will be conducted by consultants engaged by the CFTC for the establishment of a brewery under the Tourist Corporation. The tea industry is another field selected for Commonwealth support; a manager and tea taster and an engineer will be supplied for a plantation recently acquired by the Bangladesh Tea Board. Also agreed to is the provision of a master fisherman and an engineer for the Fishing Corporation.

Assistance for education and training is provided under another of the CFTC's programmes, and is of greater value to countries whose own educational systems are less advanced than it is in countries like Bangladesh. At present, three officers of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics are on a ten-month course in Calcutta on CFTC awards, and four

Bangladesh nominees are following 20-month post-graduate courses in engineering at the Asian Institute of Technology in Bangkok.

CFTC awards also cover study visits to other Commonwealth developing countries; assistance to Bangladesh for such activities have included support for a ten-day visit to Malaysia by 24 Union Parishad chairmen to study rural development projects and institutions. Ways in which CFTC support under this programme could further assist Bangladesh to improve its manpower resources have been recently identified.

Export promotion is covered by the third major CFTC-financed programme. Bangladesh Export Promotion Bureau had itself last year the services of a short-term expert to review and make recommendations on its organisational structure. A survey of tourist potential was conducted for Bangladesh under this programme. Surveys conducted for Bangladesh under this programme have covered the use of natural gas resources for earning foreign exchange and the country's potential for attracting tourists. A study of the domestic and export market prospects for forest-based products is now in progress.