

COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION SEYCHELLES CONFERENCE
9-12 OCTOBER 2006

A Summarized Report

The title of the conference was “Preparing for Change: Adaptive Strategies for Climate Change and Disaster Management in the Commonwealth” – a very fitting title considering that man can no longer side-step the inevitability of climate change in the face of indisputable evidence. The emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is but one dilemma – a major one.

Preparing for the impacts of climate change therefore becomes extremely vital if we are to save lives, property and natural resources. Considering the truth and urgency of the foregoing, the conference was rather timely and equally informative. In his opening address, Director of the Commonwealth Foundation, Dr Mark Collins, made clear that the aim of the conference was not to present more evidence of climate change, nor to urge larger nations to speed up their actions towards mitigation. The aim was rather “to promote awareness, preparedness and adaptation so that when ecological changes do occur, as we believe they will, we will be better prepared to take action and save lives and livelihoods”. The participants responded well to the call to assist in building “a comprehensive and strategic programme of work for adaptation to climate change in the small states of the Commonwealth”. This positive reaction was no doubt fuelled by the fact that approximately 3/5 of the 53 member nations of the Commonwealth are classified as small states, who because of their vulnerable nature are prime targets for the disastrous effects of climate change. Several papers (based on research work and personal experiences) were presented and later discussed in different breakout sessions. The main themes were:

- Health and Environment
- Education / awareness / role of media
- Built and Urban Environment
- Agriculture and Forestry

As the CEC representative, I focused on the education aspects. The title of the paper I presented was: *'Post Disaster and Education Maintenance: A Practical Perspective'*. The paper was based on personal experiences from two major disasters – the 1989 category 5 Hurricane Hugo and the ongoing volcanic crisis, Montserrat. It was underlined by this quote:

“None of us can be strong unless we have the support of the community. And unless the community is strong, it’s impossible for us to be strong, no matter how big we become” (Camille Cosby, Wisdom of the Elders).

These were the major themes discussed:

- Maintaining a system of education - post disaster
- Location – a plus
- Size: some benefits
- Status: plus or minus?
- Nature of the crisis
- Some suggestions for education maintenance – post disaster
- Lessons learned
- The ‘Pivoting Self’

The following are some of the main issues discussed in the ‘Education and Awareness’ breakout sessions:

- Think of education in its broadest sense – remember that today’s children are tomorrow’s leaders – also think of today’s adults, including ourselves.
- Think of vulnerability in its broadest sense – include livelihood.
- Size – local authorities / communities, mobile technology, poverty a hindrance, benefits & advantages.
- Indigenous knowledge – VERY IMPORTANT – culturally-based practices, traditional practices, capacity building, using the scientific knowledge alongside the traditional.
- Acknowledge cultural changes – a particular way of doing things may change.
- Curriculum needs an institutional framework – consideration given to the vulnerability of the community – addressing environmental concerns imperative – may be problematic to put ‘climate change’ on the curriculum; explore the possibilities.

- Factor in the language issues – use the common language and common languages across the Commonwealth as strengths.
- Mission statement and mottos of schools and educational institutions should address matters relating to climate change.
- Educational activities / projects should include content relating to climate change – essay, poetry, art, poster and calypso competitions – songs, drama, exhibitions, newsletters – music is a powerful medium, use it to spread the awareness message. See appendix.
- Use media for proactive purposes, preventative measures, for alerting, for warning – media should be represented at local level – climate change may sometimes seem intangible, hence the media become very essential.
- Set principles for effective media.
- Disseminating information to the community – different types of disasters, nature of disasters, nature of hazards - use CSOs and grassroots organizations, independent and other media sources.
- Build trust and understanding between ‘professional’ and grassroots organizations
- Financial resources - need for donors – specific funding made available at local ‘government’ level.
- Commonwealth organizations should use bye-laws for commitments, statutes, charters etc.
- Commonwealth organization (perhaps CEC) should put together a resource pack – can be done in regions tailored to suit local and regional needs.
- Commonwealth organization (perhaps CEC) should organize workshops – ‘Training the Trainers’: journalism, disaster management, dealing with climate change - cost effective, no expenses paid for consultancy, learn as much as you teach – seek financial assistance from government.
- There is need for a monitoring implementation unit at Commonwealth level.
- Exchange of ideas – country to country – volunteers and sponsorship.
- Position all Commonwealth education activities within a global framework.
- Creating awareness may be relatively easy in relation sustaining the awareness over time – MoEs and Commonwealth organizations should be target to assist with the cost factor and other sustainable measures – SUSTAINING awareness is crucial.

The highlight of the conference for me was the students' presentation, 'Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School'. It was indeed instructive to hear issues of climate change presented by the youths who saw education as the medium that can evoke positive reactions in people about climate change. Their message was clear: **"No education, no knowledge, no reasoning, no life!"**

The conference was very enlightening. It ended with a clear mandate from all the participants to actively use the recommendations and suggestions, which would be discussed at the 16th CCEM in Cape Town in 2006 and CHOGM in Kampala in 2007. It was generally agreed that the conference was not a stand-alone academic-type meeting but one that would be integrated into other fora at a political level.

Dr Gertrude Shotte

25/11/2006

Appendix
Climate Change Songs and Poems

Be Prepared For Climate Change (Pantoun)

Let's be prepared for climate change
To minimize the losses
The hazards span a lengthy range
From increasing greenhouse gases

To minimize the losses
And various risks reduce
From increasing greenhouse gases
That burning fossils fuel produce

And various risks reduce
For small-island developing states
That burning fossils fuel produce
As coastal areas deteriorate

For small-island developing states
Vulnerability is a concern
As coastal areas deteriorate
There are many lessons to learn

Vulnerability is a concern
With threats from any natural disaster
There are many lessons to learn
Or the consequences to suffer

With threats from any natural disaster
To be prepared is crucial
Or the consequences to suffer

Economic, physical or social

To be prepared is crucial
Environmental risks are changing
Economic, physical or social
It's about adapting and surviving

Environmental risks are changing
The hazards span a lengthy range
It's about adapting and surviving
Let's be prepared for climate change

Gertrude Shotte

Cinquain

Example 1

Environment
Polluted, abused
Changing, struggling, warning
As ancient as time
Atmosphere

Example 2

Coal
Processed, useful
Cooling, heating, powering
As good as rain
Fuel

Couplet

Example 1

Whether you live in a house or tent
Take care of your environment

Example 2

In all we do, in all we say
Let's think of climate change today

Song

Tune: Clementine

Prepare For Climate Change

Chorus: Let's get moving, let's get moving
Let's prepare for climate change
Let us take some forceful measures
Although some may seem quite strange

It is vital, it is vital
Climate change to understand
Spread this message with all boldness
To all peoples of this land

Education and awareness
Is a route that we must take
To inform the population
Of climate change, let's not be late

Legislation may be needed
To support this worthy cause
Let's seek help from outside agents
To buttress our local laws

Gertrude Shotte

Song

Tune: Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Prepare For Climate Change

For climate change let us prepare
Every day, week, month, year
It is the right thing to do
It will save both me and you
For climate change let us prepare
Every day, week, month, year

Dimante

Fuel
Crude, valuable
Providing, supporting, sustaining,
Livelihood, nations, nations, livelihood
Damaging, devastating, ruining
Ineffectual, disadvantageous
Substance

Gertrude Shotte