

EVALUATION SERIES NO 78 JUNE 2007

EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC GAP FILLING PROGRAMME OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

VOLUME 1
MAIN REPORT AND ANNEXES



COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

Evaluation of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat

Volume 1: Main Report

Heather Baser, Peter Morgan and Julia Zinke

With Joe Bolger, Jan Gaspers, Oliver Hasse,
Volker Hauck and Suzanne Tascherau

European Centre for Development Policy Management

Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division
Commonwealth Secretariat
Marlborough House
London SW1Y 5HX
United Kingdom

Contents

Terminology	iv
List of acronyms	v
Executive Summary	1
1: Introduction	7
1.1. Background, purpose and methodology of the evaluation	15
1.2. Methodology	18
1.3. Limitations of the methodology	19
1.4. Outline of the report	20
2: The past: the context, origins and evolution of strategic gap filling	23
2.1. The context: trends in technical assistance and international development co-operation	23
2.2. The origins of strategic gap filling and its evolution	25
2.3. Financial allocations for strategic gap filling	31
2.4. The Secretariat's management of strategic gap filling	32
2.4.1 The establishment of GIDD	35
3: The present: overview of strategic gap filling today	37
3.1. The diverse perspectives on strategic gap filling	37
3.1.1 Responsiveness/ supply-led, demand-led	37
3.1.2 The original agreement behind the CFTC	39
3.1.3 Ties to the goals of the development community	39
3.1.4 Co-ordination with the activities of other divisions	40
3.2. Focus of strategic gap filling	41
3.2.1 The Strategic Plan – 14 priorities	41
3.2.2 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	42
3.2.3 Small States	44
3.3. Background to the three forms of support provided under strategic gap filling	45
3.3.1 Background: technical assistance through experts	45
3.3.2 Background: training	46
3.3.3 Background: the Commonwealth Service Aboard Programme (CSAP)	48
3.4. Design and assessment criteria	50
3.3.1 Design and assessment criteria used by Commonwealth member countries	50
3.3.2 Design and assessment criteria used by Secretariat staff	52
3.3.3 Design and assessment criteria CSAP	53
4: The present: findings and recommendations	55
4.1. Overview of findings by country/region	55
4.1.1 Findings in Mauritius	55
4.1.2 Findings in Sierra Leone	56
4.1.3 Findings in the Caribbean (Barbados and Dominica)	56
4.1.4 Findings in the Pacific (Fiji)	57
4.1.5 Summary of findings	57
4.2. Strategic gap filling: strengths and issues	58
4.2.1 Strengths of strategic gap filling	58
4.2.2 Issues with strategic gap filling	60
4.3. Findings from the fieldwork for the three forms of support	63
4.3.1 Findings and recommendations: experts	64
4.3.2 Findings and recommendations: training	67
4.3.3 Findings and recommendations: the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme	73
4.4. Contribution of strategic gap filling to capacity development, sustainability and long-term development impact	84
4.4.1 The concept of capacity	84
4.4.2 Strategic gap filling and capacity development	86

4.4.3	Strategic gap filling and sustainability	88
4.5.	Co-ordination	90
4.2.1	Co-ordination with donors	90
4.2.2	Co-ordination among Secretariat divisions	91
4.6.	Management issues in the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD)	93
5:	The future: options for the programme	101
5.1.	The purpose and niche of the programme	101
5.2.	Options for managing technical assistance within the Secretariat	102
5.2.1	Choosing among the options	105
5.3.	Implications for the management of paid and unpaid experts and training	106
5.3.1	Implications for staff roles	106
5.3.2	Implications for the management of paid and unpaid experts	107
5.3.3	Implications for managing training	108
6:	Conclusions	111
	Bibliography	119

List of Boxes:

1:	Strategic gap filling at the Commonwealth Secretariat	1
2:	What is strategic gap filling?	17
3:	Supply and demand	38
4:	The Millennium Development Goals	42
5:	Advice on meeting the demands of globalisation	44
6:	Advice on legal issues	52
7:	Providing impartial advice on sensitive issues	59
8:	Approaches to achieving results	60
9:	The expert-counterpart system, as seen by Elliot Berg	68
10:	Police training for Sierra Leone	69
11:	Training needs assessment (TNA) – public services in Barbados	70
12:	Communities of practice – the Association of Community Colleges of Canada	71
13:	Emergency assistance – The international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami	96
14:	Commonwealth Secretariat reporting mechanisms	96
15:	Why have field offices?	98

List of Tables:

1:	Projects reviewed and meetings held	19
2:	The evaluation team	19
3:	The evolution of Programme 4.4/Programme 15.....	28
4:	CFTC expenditure on strategic gap filling 1995/96 – 2004/05	31
5:	Concentration within the development community	34
6:	Commitments to small states (2002/03 – 2004/05)	44
7:	Commitments to small states in the regions (2002/03 – 2004/05)	45
8:	Long-term experts funded from Programme 4.4/15 per financial year	46
9:	Short-term experts funded from Programme 4.4/15 per financial year	46
10:	Breakdown of training awards under Programme 4.4.....	47
11:	Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme types	49
12:	Technical assistance to small and large countries (2003/2004) – comparison of Commonwealth Secretariat and other donors' assistance	50
13:	CFTC assistance by region (2003/04).....	52
14:	Number and profession of long- and short-term strategic gap filling experts 2003/04	64
15:	CSAP projects in the fieldwork countries	75
16:	Overview of CSAP project costs	80
17:	Overview of project costs for short-term technical assistance	81
18:	Options for CSAP	83
19:	Using strategic gap filling effectively.....	86
20:	Building a strategy for change.....	88
21:	Expert identification sources – Secretariat as a whole	93
22:	Options for managing technical assistance within the Secretariat	103
23:	Requirements of the different types of technical assistance	107

List of Figures:

1:	The evolution of Programme 4.4/15.....	16
2:	Objectives and focus of Programme 15	42
3:	Expenditure by Strategic Goal from the CFTC (2003/04)	43

Terminology

Strategic gap filling – free-standing demand-led technical assistance activities funded from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation since 1997/98

Strategic Gap Filling – Sub-Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling in existence from 2002/03-2003/04

Programmes

2004-2008 **Programme 8:** Public Sector Development: the programme providing support to public sector development (training and short-term experts) from 2004/05. One of nine programmes in support of Strategic Goal 2 (Pro-Poor Growth and Sustainable Development) of the Strategic Plan 2004/05-2007/08.

Programme 15: Capacity Building and Institutional Development: the programme providing long-term experts and CSAP volunteers from 2004/05. One of three cross-cutting programmes in support of the two strategic goals (Goal 1: Peace and Democracy; Goal 2: Pro-Poor Growth and Sustainable Development) of the Strategic Plan 2004/05-2007/08.

2002-2004 **(Sub-)Programme 2.2:** Civil Service Reform, Decentralisation, Public Sector Restructuring, E-governance: the sub-programme providing support to public sector development (training) between 2002/03 and 2003/04. Placed in Programme 2 (Good Governance and the Rule of Law) of the Strategic Plan 2002/03-2003/04.

(Sub-)Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling (SGF): the sub-programme providing free-standing technical assistance and training for institutional development between 2002/03 and 2003/04. Situated in Programme 4 (Achieving Millennium Development Goals for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development) of the Strategic Plan 2002/03-2003/04.

2000-2002 **(Sub-)Programme B7.1:** Training to Enhance Skills for Development: the sub-programme for training of middle-level managers and public officials between 2000/01 and 2001/02. Situated in Programme B7 (Capacity Building Through Training and Provision of Experts) of the Strategic Plan 2000/01-2001/02.

(Sub-)Programme B7.2: Provision of Experts for Development: the sub-programme for provision of experts on a free-standing basis and CSAP volunteers between 2000/01 and 2001/02. Situated in Programme B7 (Capacity Building Through Training and Provision of Experts) of the Strategic Plan 2000/01-2001/02.

1997-2000 **(Sub-)Programme B6.1:** Training to Enhance Skills for Development: the sub-programme for training of middle-level managers and public officials between 1997/98 and 1999/2000. Situated in Programme B6 (Capacity Building) of the Strategic Plan 1997/98-1999/2000.

(Sub-)Programme B6.2: Provision of Experts for Development: the sub-programme for provision of experts on a free-standing basis between 1997/98 and 1999/2000. Situated in Programme B6 (Capacity Building) of the Strategic Plan 1997/98-1999/2000.

List of acronyms

ACCC	Association of Community Colleges of Canada
ACP	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BAR	Barbados (project documentation)
BESO	British Executive Service Overseas
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CDF	Country Development Framework
CFTC	Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation
CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
COMSEC	Commonwealth Secretariat
CSAP	Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme
CSD	Corporate Services Division (COMSEC division – present)
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
DOM	Dominica (project documentation)
EC	European Community
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EIDD	Export and Industrial Development Division (COMSEC division until 2002)
ELASD	Economic and Legal Advisory Services Division (COMSEC division until 2002)
EMD	Export Market Development (COMSEC division 1990/91-1992/93)
EU	European Union
FIJ	Fiji (project documentation)
FMIS	Financial Management Information System
FTP	Fellowships and Training Programmes (COMSEC division 1990/91-1992/93)
GBP	Pounds Sterling
GIDD	Governance and Institutional Development Division (COMSEC division from 2002)
GTA	General Technical Assistance (COMSEC division 1990/91-1992/93)
GTASD	General Technical Assistance Services Division (COMSEC division until 2002)
HRS	Human Resources Section (of the Commonwealth Secretariat)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDRC	International Development Research Centre in Canada
IDS	Institute of Development Studies of University of Sussex, UK
IDU	Industrial Development Division (COMSEC division 1990/91-1992/93)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INTAN	National Institute of Public Administration of Malaysia
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
LCAD	Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division (COMSEC division – present)
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
LenCD	Learning Network on Capacity Development
MAU	Mauritius (project documentation)

MBA	Master of Business Administration
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoDEP	Ministry of Development and Economic Planning of Sierra Leone
MRT	Mauritius (project documentation)
MTSD	Management and Training Services Division (COMSEC division until 2002)
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
OSG	Office of the Secretary-General
PCP	Primary Contact Point
PMI	Project monitoring indicator
PMRU	Project Management and Referrals Unit (COMSEC division – present)
PNG	Papua New Guinea
POC	Point of contact
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
RMIP	Record management improvement project
SASD	Special Advisory Services Division (COMSEC division – present)
SGF	Strategic gap filling
SIDS	Small island states
SIE	Sierra Leone (project documentation)
SPAS	Pacific regional project (project documentation)
SPED	Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division (COMSEC division – present)
SPF	Pacific Forum Secretariat (project documentation)
TA	Technical assistance
TAG	Technical Assistance Group (COMSEC division 1990/91-1992/93)
TC	Technical co-operation
TNA	Training needs assessment
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
US	United States
USD	United States dollar
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WTO	World Trade Organization

In early 2004, the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned an evaluation of the effectiveness of its Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling (SGF).

This report responds to that commission over six chapters. The first chapter provides the background to the evaluation and describes the methodology, while also outlining the issues driving the evaluation. The analysis of issues is undertaken over the next four chapters, which are divided chronologically into the past (chapter 2), the present (in two parts, chapters 3 and 4) and the future (chapter 5). Chapter 5 also looks at the options for structuring Strategic Gap Filling and, finally, chapter 6 recaps the recommendations of previous chapters and provides some concluding thoughts.

Chapter 1: Introduction looks at the terms of reference (ToR), which have ‘a specific focus on the conceptual definition of technical assistance for strategic gap filling and the provision of training and skills development as a means to support national capacity building efforts’¹. The evaluation objectives also include examining the rationale, design and assessment criteria used in the development of Programme 4.4 and the management procedures used to deliver the programme and monitor quality. The evaluation is further expected to make recommendations on the following:

- Relevant policy issues and best practice design parameters for programmes with capacity building objectives in the Secretariat;
- Planning design and review criteria to ensure the programme effectively supports capacity building objectives and outcomes;
- Planning and management systems, quality assurance procedures and organisational arrangements to meet efficiency and effectiveness standards; and
- Measures to assess and report on the ongoing effectiveness, sustainability and impact of capacity building projects and programmes.

The evaluation group – the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division (SPED) at the Commonwealth Secretariat – also asked that the evaluation give particular attention to the training activities financed under Programme 4.4.

Box 1: Strategic gap filling at the Commonwealth Secretariat

Strategic gap filling is a form of free-standing, demand-led technical assistance (TA). The terminology ‘free-standing’ suggests that strategic gap filling should not be tied to existing programmes or regional organisations. In the context of the Secretariat, it refers to technical assistance that is driven by the requests of individual countries. In principle, it excludes activities that are driven by the broad work plan of the Secretariat, such as those of the Special Advisory Services Division (SASD), the policy groups or even the public sector development work of the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD), which aim to respond to the needs identified in the governing bodies of the Commonwealth. In practice, the requests coming out of individual countries often converge with those coming out of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings (CHOGMs), the Board and the Executive Committee, but there are some important exceptions.

Continued...

1 Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a), p. 10.

Strategic gap filling has always included two main activities, although these are not always subsumed under one formal budget line:

- The provision of expertise, either short or long term – experts are expected to provide training to counterparts, either through seminars or through formal courses; and
- Training for the development of key skills through in-country training programmes or through support for individuals at specified institutions.

A third activity, volunteer placements under the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP), was added in 1997.

Strategic Gap Filling as a formal programme came into being only in 2002. The authors therefore use the term ‘strategic gap filling’ in lower case to refer in a generic sense to the continuum of free-standing technical assistance activities that began in 1997/98. These continue until the present under Programme 15: Capacity Building and Institutional Development and through some training activities financed by Programme 8: Public Sector Development. The focus is particularly, as the various titles suggest, on institutional and capacity development. The Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) manages strategic gap filling.

Funding for strategic gap filling comes from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), which also finances Programme 8 (Public Sector Development), the Special Advisory Services Division (SASD), which focuses on pro-poor policies for economic growth², and those activities of the Secretariat’s policy divisions that are deemed to be developmental in nature. There are many activities under strategic gap filling that have linkages with other CFTC activities.

The methodology for this study included fieldwork in five countries and one region, a review of documentation and extensive interviews within the Secretariat and with member countries. The biggest limitation was the limited availability of some project documentation and of accurate statistical information.

The outline of the report provides an outline of how the report addresses the various issues.

Chapter 2: The past: the context, origins and evolution of strategic gap filling begins with a look at the trends in thinking in the development community over the last decade. Technical assistance is an ancient mechanism, which originated as an agreement between a user and a supplier of services or an expert (e.g. Peter the Great and European artisans, who came to Russia to design and build St. Petersburg). The addition of a donor-financier has made the layers of accountability less clear, and added the complexity of donor regulations. Understanding the changes made to the original structure and intent of technical assistance helps to clarify why there has been so much criticism of this mechanism over the past two decades. One of the biggest issues is that many technical advisers report to the development agencies rather than to national authorities. These technical personnel have often reflected the ideological and policy biases of their home countries or of particular development agencies. At the same time, donors have often made acceptance of foreign expertise a pre-condition for other assistance. Partly in reaction to these criticisms, the development community has agreed a new aid paradigm with a focus on poverty reduction, partnership, accountability and coherence among

² SASD has four programmes – economic and legal services; debt management; enterprise and agriculture; and trade.

different policies. This, in turn, has laid the foundation for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Paris Declaration. The result is a challenging reform agenda for the development community, calling for major efforts from all organisations involved. This agenda is particularly demanding for a small organisation like the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Influenced by these trends in thinking in the international community, some of the Secretariat's member countries are encouraging strategic gap filling to address a growing list of goals and objectives, some of them contradictory. This has resulted in a situation where the Secretariat is being asked to do more than its resources permit. Despite several favourable reports on CFTC activities in general, some stakeholders have criticised strategic gap filling for not meeting all the demands placed upon it and its credibility has suffered. As a result, the strategic gap filling budget has been cut, organisational changes have reduced the visibility of the programme, and its legitimacy has diminished in the eyes of stakeholders.

Chapter 3: *The present: an overview of strategic gap filling today* begins with a discussion of the meaning of **responsiveness**, which the authors see to be the capacity to meet demand as articulated. This implies a happy marriage of well-articulated demand with appropriate supply in a way that meets the needs of the user.

Two levels of responsiveness are important within the Secretariat: the policy formulation level, which takes into account the requests of the **membership as a whole**; and strategic gap filling, which responds to the requests of **individual** countries and regional organisations. Because of the diversity of interests and conditions among Commonwealth member countries, these two levels do not always coincide. Programmes responding to broad membership requests are not a priority for all individual members. Since, as a recent New Zealand AID report points out, the CFTC was the result of a 'deal' – that developed country members pay for the political participation of developing countries through aid contributions – the developing country members of the Commonwealth expect that their individual needs will be addressed. This creates some tension within the system.

Additional tensions arise because of differences between the views of the developing and developed countries within the Commonwealth – for example, on flexibility of strategic gap filling vs. more planning; on a focus on institutional development vs. poverty reduction; and on free-standing activities vs. donor co-ordination. The **diversity of views about strategic gap filling** reflects different development models. These range from a belief in the importance of planning mechanisms and their ability to produce pre-determined results to a view that looks at the flow, movement and dynamics of a system as it evolves and what emerges from it. The authors believe that this debate has become a proxy for a fundamental disagreement over the purpose of strategic gap filling, how much it should be controlled and by whom – by the major contributors, the Board of Governors, the staff of GIDD, the staff of other Divisions or by the benefiting countries?

Despite the fact that the **goals set in recent strategic plans** focus on the MDGs and the strategic priorities of the Secretariat as outlined in the Strategic Plan, there is little evidence that they have had a marked influence on activities funded under strategic gap filling. These goals seem to have a high symbolic content, designed to satisfy the many stakeholders exerting pressure on the organisation. Tightening up selection criteria to better reflect the strategic priorities would restrict the flexibility of member states and eliminate some important activities financed in past, such as the development of distance education programmes and some interventions in health, such as medical training in Sierra Leone. On the one hand, it is the competence of the Secretariat more than the strategic goals per se that influences the choice of projects. On the other, the Secretariat's long-term emphasis on **small states** continues to be reflected in programming, with a slight increase in the percentage of expenditures in recent years.

Chapter 3 then moves on to basic information about the purpose of, size and functioning of each of the **three forms of support** provided under Strategic Gap Filling (SGF). **Experts** represent the biggest portion of expenditures – 76 per cent – with about 100 long-term personnel and 30 short-term per year, contributing to six different kinds of objectives. The biggest part of the **training** budget (20 per cent of the SGF budget) goes to academic upgrading, but there are another six different kinds of training support. The Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (**CSAP**) represents 4 per cent of the SGF budget and is spread among three sub-programmes – capacity building, strategic gap filling and emergency response. Thus there are in total 16 different streams of activities financed under Strategic Gap Filling.

The **assessment criteria** member countries use to determine what kinds of support they want from Strategic Gap Filling are not surprising and largely reflect the niche which the programme has created for itself over the years – small-scale activities that they define and which other organisations cannot easily fund. As yet, the member countries do not seem to have absorbed the new foci such as the MDGs. Even the strategic priorities are not uppermost in their minds.

From the perspective of the Secretariat, Strategic Gap Filling faces pressures from all sides – different views on what it should be doing, burgeoning demands to do more with a decreasing budget, and continuing requests from member countries who want ‘more of the same’ and for whom some of the broader goals of the international community are not of high priority. This results in a complex programme with many different kinds of activities responding to different stakeholders. In some countries, there is some integration among these activities, in others less so. The administration of this programme is demanding and the burden on staff time heavy.

Chapter 4: *The present: findings and recommendations* begins with the different approaches to Strategic Gap Filling in the countries visited – from high-level cutting edge interventions crucial to national development programmes to gap filling to maintain essential services. The **general results** are favourable to very favourable, and Strategic Gap Filling seems to have had impact beyond what might normally be expected from such a small budget. The programme’s activities are generally rated as being as successful as those of organisations like the World Bank or the Department of International Development (DfID) in the UK. Some activities have had a surprising influence given the size of the budgets available. This success is built on the Secretariat’s comparative advantages such as speed of response, the willingness to finance small-scale technical assistance and a light bureaucratic process.

The **strengths of Strategic Gap Filling** provide food for thought in an era in which there is a great deal of discussion about ownership, empowerment and partnership, but where these goals are often elusive. Here is a programme where such goals do exist and which, in many ways, sets an example for many other donor programmes.

Strategic Gap Filling and particularly the provision of **experts** have a **niche** that cannot easily be filled by other programmes in the Secretariat; that is, SGF supports activities that do not have a natural home in either SASD or the policy divisions, but which can be critical, for example, to reform or restructuring processes in key sectors. There are six objectives to which Secretariat experts are seen as having made a significant contribution and which could serve as the basis for further thinking about how the Secretariat may want to monitor its programmes. On a less positive note, the counterpart model used by the Secretariat has been effective only exceptionally and other approaches seem to have more potential.

In terms of **training**, there is high demand from government agencies and the Secretariat has a comparative advantage in responding quickly in areas not covered by other donors. At the same time, some programmes, particularly those coming out of the old Management and Training Services Division (MTSD), are seen as being supply-driven and are not always perceived as being relevant. Even where training activities were deemed as being relevant by the evaluation, there is still considerable

demand for ongoing learning opportunities, such as through ‘communities of practice’ (see Box 12 on page 71 and associated text).

The authors were able to review only a limited sample of CSAP projects, which presented a mixed picture. Some were successful to very successful, whereas others were somewhat problematic. The programme is highly dispersed and has few linkages to other activities within the Secretariat, and does not build on the Secretariat’s comparative advantages. The evaluation recommends returning CSAP to its original purpose of providing experts on a no-fee basis to existing programmes, rather than operating as a separate programme.

On the one hand, despite the generally favourable record at the country and individual project level, it is still difficult to determine causality between specific strategic gap filling activities and long-term capacity, because of the small size of strategic gap filling interventions. On the other, the **nature of the relationship between developing countries and the Secretariat**, especially in terms of strategic gap filling, has had a significant empowering impact on officials in member countries. This is a critical contribution to developing national capacity. In addition, by allowing member governments to make decisions about strategic gap filling project priorities, the Secretariat also makes a small contribution towards reinforcing intra-governmental negotiation processes, which are an important element in building democratic traditions.

For a small organisation such as the Secretariat, **co-ordination with the donor community** is a double-edged sword. The advantages include less overlap and more synergy, but the danger is that a programme like strategic gap filling could be drowned by larger budgets and lose its character. Nor is **internal co-ordination** an easy issue, since there are strongly inward-looking forces in the Secretariat which make co-operation among divisions difficult. Some Commonwealth members see the need for one identified contact in the Secretariat per country, who would be responsible for all activities in that country³. This would have structural implications within the Secretariat, where this kind of co-ordination is not the norm.

The final section in chapter 4 looks at some of the **management issues** raised that relate to Strategic Gap Filling. There are two that stand out. First, the inadequacy of the roster risks undermining the ability of the Secretariat to provide high-quality personnel. Second is the lack of an adequate field presence, an issue which creates other problems such as limited communications, little monitoring and inadequate responses to problems in the field. Both of these issues have been looked at before, but no action has been taken, largely because of a lack of funds. However, they have affected the credibility and legitimacy of Strategic Gap Filling and require attention if the programme is to improve its performance in the future.

Chapter 5: The future: options for the programme reaffirms the niche for Strategic Gap Filling and presents several options for better structuring of Secretariat support to all technical assistance offered by the Secretariat. The options are as follows:

- **Option 1: Maintain the present structure of GIDD** with Programmes 8 and 15, but with management improvements. Programme 15 would continue to fund the assignments of both paid and unpaid experts. Programme 8 would cover training and short-term assignments related to public sector development. All other short-term assignments would be funded from the budgets of the divisions specialising in the relevant technical area. Senior staff in the division would not be technical assistance specialists, but would be rather technical specialists in different areas, such as money laundering. They would continue to play this role, as well as that of managers of regional programmes including the Caribbean, the Pacific and Africa.

3 Each officer would have to be responsible for several countries.

- **Option 2: Create a separate TA unit within GIDD** to manage paid and unpaid long-term experts and training, as well as those short-term experts whose technical focus does not fit within the programme specialisation and work plans of other units or divisions. These activities would be funded from one line item in the division budget. The management changes suggested in the report would be operationalised, and the unit would have a dedicated staff experienced in technical assistance who would be responsible for the following activities:
 - Supporting governments in developing a longer-term vision of the most effective role for Strategic Gap Filling in each member country;
 - Acting as a resource on technical assistance for the rest of the Secretariat and encouraging learning about what works and what does not work. This would imply holding seminars and writing up experiences for publication; and
 - Enhanced brokering to ensure the best match between the needs of each country and the supply available to the Secretariat.
 - In addition, there would be ‘one-stop-shopping’ for member countries through one officer per country, probably located in the Project Management Referrals Unit (PMRU)⁴, responsible for co-ordinating all TA activities within the Secretariat.
- **Option 3: Create a separate TA division** to manage paid and unpaid experts and training, as well as short-term experts whose technical focus does not fit within the programme specialisation and work plans of other units or divisions. In addition, the PMRU would provide one-stop-shopping for member countries by designating an officer responsible for co-ordinating all TA activities provided from all divisions of the Secretariat. The management changes noted in the report would be necessary. The functions and qualifications of staff would need to be the same as for option 2.
- **Option 4: Disband Strategic Gap Filling and transfer the funding to Public Sector Development (Programme 8).** The budget allotment for public sector development activities would increase dramatically. Technical assistance activities would be managed by sectoral specialists in various divisions within the Secretariat. All the staff within GIDD would be assigned to public sector development activities.
- **Option 5: Disband Strategic Gap Filling and distribute funding among existing CFTC-funded activities.** This would provide SASD and some other divisions with considerably enhanced funding to carry out their work plans. Technical assistance activities would be managed by sectoral specialists in various divisions across the Secretariat. All the staff within GIDD would be assigned to public sector development activities.

The pros and cons of these options are discussed in detail in the text, ending with a recommendation in favour of Option 2, but with a view to converting the TA unit thus created into a full division when resources permit, i.e., moving to Option 3. The benefits of choosing this option would include:

- A group of staff specialised in technical assistance would provide a more solid knowledge base on the subject for the Secretariat as a whole and would help to increase its credibility on one of its key products – technical assistance.
- A specialised group would be more able to develop a status equivalent to that of other professional groups, which the staff in GIDD now working on Strategic Gap Filling within a broader context of public sector development and governance have not been able to do. This has affected staff morale as well as the ability of GIDD to defend the budget for Strategic Gap Filling (see section 4.3.1 The establishment of GIDD).

4 Each officer would have to be responsible for several countries.

- There would be fewer competing priorities for the management of the new unit, because they would have a single rather than a double role as now. The unit could focus solely on improving technical assistance, no longer having to provide advice on a specific sector – public service development.
- A group of specialists could develop a public credibility and legitimacy in technical assistance for the Secretariat through publications and participation in appropriate events in the development community.
- A dedicated group would have a vested interest in maintaining the successful activities for which Strategic Gap Filling is appreciated. As of 2007, for example, the only provision for short-term expertise other than CSAP will be under Programme 8 (Public Sector Development), yet there have been successful assignments that have been outside the public sector.

Chapter 6: Conclusions recaps the recommendations which appear earlier in the text and groups them thematically. It also gives an indication of which group in the Secretariat should be responsible for carrying those recommendations through. The recommendations are as follows:

A. Experts

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 3: Move away from the focus on a one-on-one expert-counterpart relationship Remove any reference to training one-on-one counterparts from the ToR of experts in favour of requiring a broader responsibility to build capacity in general within the host organisations through various means, including seminars, coaching, use of local consultants and on-the-job training.	4.3.1	GIDD, PMRU and HRS
Recommendation 12: Review the Experts Roster Review the structure and composition of — along with the eligibility criteria for entry in — the Experts Roster. This will require an assessment of the purpose and use of the Roster and the associated Experts Database, and allocation of sufficient resources to create a more efficient and cost-effective source for the identification and management of high-quality CFTC-funded technical assistance.	4.6	CSD/ HRS
Recommendation 13: Seek professional advice on a performance assessment system The Secretariat should engage outside professional expertise to advise on how to develop a fair and transparent approach to performance assessment for experts and contractors.	4.6	GIDD and all divisions, CSD/ HRS
Recommendation 15: Inform experts of Secretariat activities in their host country and facilitate exchange between them When visiting a member country, GIDD programme staff should organise an informal meeting with all in-country and regional experts posted by the Secretariat to ensure that they have a chance to get to know each other and to provide them with an updated briefing on recent policy and programme development across the country portfolio. To facilitate contact and sharing of information between experts in general, the Secretariat should also endeavour to provide experts with each others' contact details.	4.6	GIDD

B. Training

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 4: Improve co-ordination with training institutes Improve the co-ordination with training institutes that receive CFTC-funded trainees, so that all institutes involved are fully aware of who their responsible officers are. These officers should also take responsibility for monitoring the training programmes offered for quality and continued relevance to the needs of member countries.	4.3.2	GIDD, PMRU and SPED (for quality and review of impact)
Recommendation 5: Use a broad range of approaches to adult continuous learning Put more emphasis in programme design and country responses on a broad range of approaches to adult continuous learning, including follow-up courses with practical assignments on the job, mentoring and development of communities of practice. Explore innovative ways in which this can be achieved in countries and regions through Internet connections and learning approaches.	4.3.2	GIDD
Recommendation 6: Evaluate long-standing training programmes Evaluate long-standing degree, diploma and certificate programmes to provide the kind of empirical grounding that would be required to determine the effectiveness of these programmes and their continued relevance to evolving member country needs. The evaluation should determine the effectiveness of the overall approach to capacity building through such courses, which to continue and which to stop offering.	4.3.2	SPED
Recommendation 7: Develop corps of legal drafters in the regions Consider negotiating regional agreements to establish corps of legal drafters within appropriate regional institutions — such as university law faculties — to respond to the needs of smaller Commonwealth member states without the means to hire and retain full-time specialised personnel. The regional agreements would have to be underpinned by an analysis of how current and future needs can be met on a pooled basis, which countries per region are most in need and what percentage of the cost they should be expected to assume. Such legal drafting facilities should be financed primarily through national and regional contributions, but the Secretariat should consider providing some additional funding. Work in this area could build on the experiences of the Commonwealth of Learning, which has offered long-distance legal drafting courses in the past. Other aspects of the broader legal drafting training strategy mentioned in the report should also be implemented, i.e. the introduction of legal drafting in law degrees, the establishment of a regular programme of short advanced courses and using the drafting facilities that exist to provide attachments.	4.3.2	GIDD, LCAD

C. Commonwealth Services Abroad Programme (CSAP)

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 8: Return the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme to its original purpose Return CSAP to its original purpose of providing less expensive expertise for ‘regular’ activities rather than being managed as a separate volunteer programme. Carry out an independent cost-benefit analysis of the assistance provided by experts working on a no-fee basis to determine the level of savings generated (including Secretariat overheads) and to compare the quality of personnel attracted with those in regular assignments, either short- or long-term.	4.3.3	a) OSG, GIDD b) SPED

D. Strategic gap filling and capacity development

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 9: Use typology of TA activities to assess requests for assistance At the broad planning level, use the typology outlined in table 18 (Using strategic gap filling effectively): • to help define the relationship between the assistance requested and broader capacity goals; • to develop the overall approach to address particular country or regional needs in a logical, coherent and integrated manner; and • to define the specific mix of interventions to address that need, including where projects can make a contribution.	4.4.2	GIDD, PMRU
Recommendation 10: Gap filling to ensure sustainable services Recognise that judicious filling of gaps where it is a question of keeping essential services going may be a necessity in some states facing de-capacitation, but that there needs to careful analysis of these situations to be sure that there are genuinely global shortages in the sector concerned and that the assistance is not undermining local capacity. This also applies to the use of legal drafters as discussed in recommendation 7.	4.4.3	GIDD
Recommendation 17: Use the following set of questions for assessing the success of Strategic Gap Filling projects Use the answers to the following set of questions as the basis for determining the success of a Strategic Gap Filling project: • Did the activity funded represent a critical gap or need? • To what extent did strategic gap filling respond to this gap or need?	4.6	GIDD, all divisions, SPED, OSG

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
- To what extent was the member state involved in the activity or showed commitment to it, for example through a financial contribution, by dialoguing on the original request or by monitoring implementation? - Were the experts supplied both technically competent and personally suitable? Were they able to adjust to local customs and the working environment? - What results came out of the assignments of experts and the training of member country nationals? How did these relate to the purpose and results defined in the theory of change (table 19) and in table 18 (Using strategic gap filling effectively)? - Were there spin-offs or leveraging of other activities that occurred as a result of strategic gap filling activities? - Was the professional supervision by the Secretariat adequate? Was there a turn over of responsible staff either in the Secretariat or in the member country during the expert's assignment? If so, what effect did it have? - To what extent was the strategic gap filling provided able to respond to the opportunities for change originally defined in the theory of change (table 19)? How could the Secretariat have responded more effectively?	4.6	GIDD, all divisions, SPED, OSG
Recommendation 19: Use the following definition of the purpose of strategic gap filling Define 'the purpose of strategic gap filling' as follows: To respond to the requests of individual member countries – particularly small states – and of regional bodies for speedy technical assistance to address their priorities, with an emphasis on institutional development.	5.1	OSG, GIDD, SPED, all divisions

E. Management of strategic gap filling

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 1: Review Protocol 15 Review Protocol 15 to ensure that it is consistent with new guidelines being developed in the Secretariat and with any recommendations in this report that are accepted by the governing bodies of the organisation.	2.2	GIDD
Recommendation 2: Pilot multi-annual allocations to a few member countries - Set up two or three pilots for multi-year country allocations with selected member countries. The pilot would allow the country to do more strategic forward planning of Secretariat assistance based on an agreed annual allocation. - At the end of the financial year, review these experiences and decide on the value of extending this approach to a larger number of countries.	4.2.2	GIDD, SPED, PMRU and CSD

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 11: Designate a staff member responsible for co-ordinating all Secretariat assistance to each member country Designate one Secretariat staff member per country to be responsible for co-ordinating all of the organisation's assistance going to that country. Each staff person would have to manage more than one country and perhaps even a whole region. Responsibility for such co-ordination would probably need to be assigned to a central unit such as the Project Management and Referrals Unit (PMRU). To enable the unit to meaningfully carry out a co-ordination — as opposed to just an information gathering — role, this would imply an increase in staff numbers in the unit.	4.5.2	OSG
Recommendation 14: Compile up-to-date lists of Secretariat activities in each country Compile up-to-date descriptions of all Secretariat activities in a country and make this information available to Secretariat staff, experts in post and member governments. One Secretariat division would have to take responsibility for compiling this information and regularly updating it; all divisions would have responsibility for submitting the relevant information.	4.6	GIDD, SPED, PMRU, all divisions
Recommendation 16: Improve paper and electronic records management Under the auspices of the RMIP (record management improvement project), GIDD should give priority to reviewing its approach to file classification and management and undertake a review of its file structure and holding to improve programme efficiency and information management. The relationship between electronic and paper-based information also needs to be considered and cost efficiencies introduced to enhance co-ordination and information sharing.	4.6	GIDD
Recommendation 18: Explore low-cost solutions to providing a Secretariat field presence Explore some low-cost solutions to providing a field presence on a regional basis, particularly in the Pacific, to focus on developing a vision of where Secretariat assistance is most useful and to strengthen national capacity to define requests, monitor ongoing activities and resolve problems in implementation. In areas that are more accessible from London, investigate the costs and benefits of having a field presence versus more staff travel to the area for broad programming and review purposes, rather than just for project management.	4.6	OSG, SPED

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 20: Create a unit responsible for the co-ordination of all technical assistance Adopt Option 2 — the creation of a dedicated unit responsible for the professionalisation and co-ordination of all technical assistance. The aim would be to over time convert this into a full division as resources permit, effectively moving to Option 3.	5.2.1	OSG, CSD, SPED
Recommendation 23: Refine a methodology for assessing needs and appropriate responses Refine a methodology for assessing needs and an appropriate Secretariat response so as to better match requests with the Secretariat's objectives and capability to support development requirements in a member country. Table 22 should be used as a starting point to guide the development of the specific objective for any particular project and the analysis of the form of assistance required.	5.3.2	GIDD or new division
Recommendation 24: Move to an integrated approach for the design and delivery of technical assistance GIDD should move to an integrated approach for the design and delivery of technical assistance, with a clearer focus on institutional strengthening and the associated capacity required. The provision of training and the placement of technical expertise should be one means, among others, of delivering these outcomes rather than ends in themselves.	5.3.3	GIDD

F. Staff skills

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 21: Adopt a new profile for programme staff responsible for Strategic Gap Filling Staff assigned to Strategic Gap Filling activities should meet a defined profile, as outlined in section 7.3.1, which includes previous experience with technical assistance and the demonstrated ability to play a brokerage role between the Secretariat and member country governments.	5.3.1	OSG, CSD
Recommendation 22: Staff to develop a thorough understanding of the objectives of other divisions Staff in the new division should develop a thorough understanding of the objectives of other divisions and the kinds of activities they undertake in order to allow them to broker between the demands of member countries and the capability of the Secretariat to meet those demands.	5.3.1	OSG, restructured GIDD

In addition to the specific recommendations made, the authors hope that this report will generate some discussion about development approaches. The evidence presented shows Strategic Gap Filling and other CFTC-funded activities of the Secretariat to be **generally successful approaches to providing small-scale, but key inputs to encourage broader systemic change**. The findings of this evaluation raise some challenging issues about how these programmes work.

First, much of the success of Strategic Gap Filling depends on an **understanding of the broad context of a country and where small inputs can make a difference**. This systemic approach works on a different logic from that of the logical framework ('log-frame') methodology – it is dynamic, fluid and largely unpredictable, rather than linear, progressive and predictable. More research is needed to better understand the potential of systems approaches in the development context. Is it useful for the Secretariat to think about how it might understand better the ramifications of a systems approach?

Second, the **monitoring of activities** from a systems perspective requires new approaches that **take unpredictability into account**. The Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD, a network linked to but independent of the GOVNET of the DAC⁵) is beginning to think about how it can contribute to better approaches to monitoring capacity development. Would the member countries or the Secretariat like to contribute to this process?

Third, in many ways **strategic gap filling is an example of some of the principles defined in publications like *Shaping the 21st Century*⁶**, especially **partnership and accountability**. How can such a model be expanded and used more broadly? How can the present programme be scaled up, both to ensure that it has the structural support it needs (such as field presence and the revision of the Experts Roster), but also to enable the Secretariat to respond to a greater number of requests? As section 2.3 – Financial allocations for strategic gap filling indicates, funding for strategic gap filling has declined from £11 million in 1997/98 to about 5 million in 2004/05. This restricts what the Secretariat can do. The final recommendation in this report therefore suggests that funding to the CFTC for strategic gap filling should be increased.

G. Funding for strategic gap filling

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 25: Contributing members to provide additional funding to the CFTC The contributing members of the Commonwealth should provide additional funding to the CFTC to allow for a doubling in the size of strategic gap filling activities over the next five years. Consideration should be given to increasing the budget further if need and performance merit. This would return the funding level back to that of a decade ago, but without any adjustment for inflation.	6	Commonwealth member countries

5 The Network on Governance of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee The Network on Governance of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee

6 DAC (1996) *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation*. Paris: OECD.

1.1 Background, purpose and methodology of the evaluation

In early 2004, the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned an evaluation of the effectiveness of its Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling (SGF).

The terms of reference for this evaluation have ‘a specific focus on the conceptual definition of technical assistance for strategic gap filling and the provision of training and skills development as a means to support national capacity building efforts’⁷. The evaluation’s objectives also include examining the rationale, design and assessment criteria used in the development of Programme 4.4, and the management procedures used to deliver the programme and monitor quality. The evaluation was further expected to make recommendations on the following:

- Relevant policy issues and best practice design parameters for programmes with capacity building objectives in the Secretariat;
- Planning, design and review criteria to ensure the programme supports capacity building objectives and outcomes effectively;
- Planning and management systems, quality assurance procedures and organisational arrangements to meet efficiency and effectiveness standards; and
- Measures to assess and report on the ongoing effectiveness, sustainability and impact of capacity building projects and programmes.

The evaluation group from SPED also asked that the evaluation give particular attention to the training activities financed under Programme 4.4.

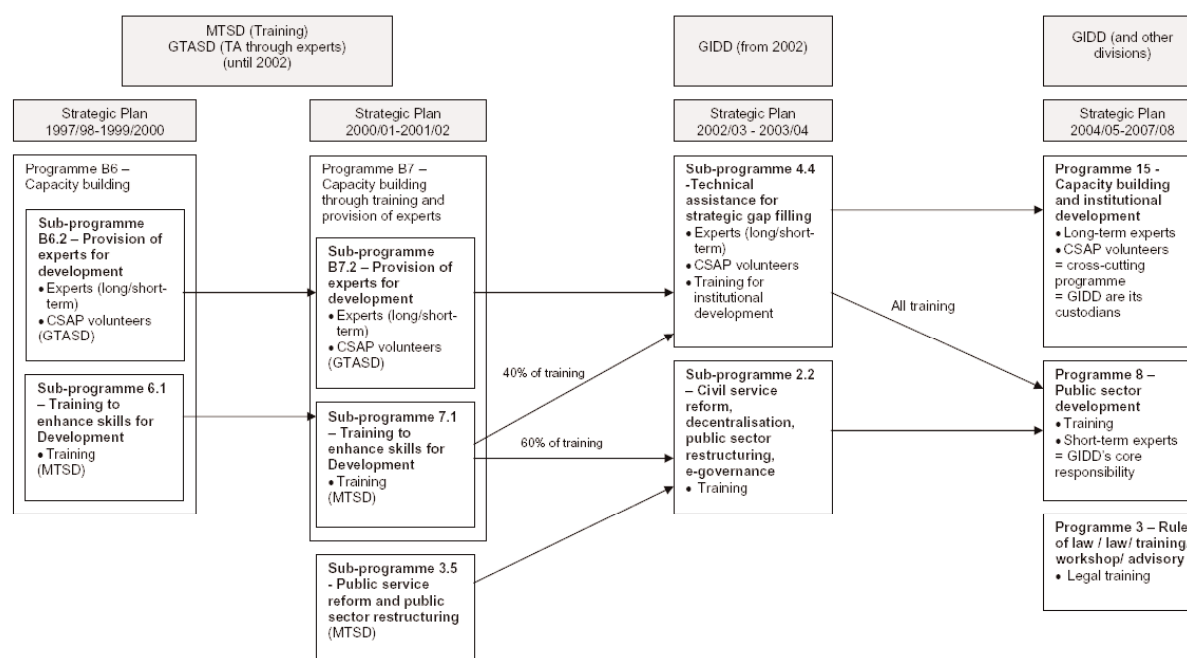
Terminology has been a challenge in carrying out this study. Although the terms of reference focus on Programme 4.4, they specify that the evaluation should look back as far as 1997/8. Because Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling did not exist before 2002, the authors use the term strategic gap filling in lower case to refer in a generic sense to the continuum of free-standing technical assistance activities that began in 1997/98 with a programme entitled Capacity Building (B6) and which eventually became the formal Strategic Gap Filling programme in 2002/03. The authors also use the term to refer to the successor to Programme 4.4, which is Programme 15: Capacity Building and Institutional Development (defined as a cross-cutting programme in the 2004/05-2007/08 Strategic Plan) and to the training activities formerly part of Programme 4.4, but which have now passed to Programme 8: Public Sector Development. The focus is particularly on institutional and capacity development, as the various titles suggest.

Funding for Strategic Gap Filling (Programme 15) comes from the CFTC, which also finances Programme 8 (Public Sector Development) as described in section 2.4.1, the programmes of GIDD and the Special Advisory Services Division (SASD), which focus on pro-poor policies for economic growth⁸, and those activities of the policy divisions that are deemed to be developmental in nature. There are many activities under Strategic Gap Filling that link with other CFTC activities.

Figure 1 below indicates how the various programmes that the authors put under the one title of ‘strategic gap filling’ feed one into the other.

⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a), p. 10.

⁸ SASD has four programmes – economic and legal services; debt management; enterprise and agriculture; and trade.

Figure 1: The evolution of Programme 4.4/15

Two other terms are also used in various reports, often interchangeably with strategic gap filling: 'responsive programming' and 'demand-led projects'. The authors will explore these terms in more depth in section 3.1: The diverse perspectives on strategic gap filling and explain why they should not be used synonymously.

Box 2, below, provides some basic information about strategic gap filling and section 2.2: The origins of strategic gap filling and its evolution, traces its history.

The evaluation has taken place in two phases, with the first resulting in an interim report entitled *Filling the Gaps – Defining the Niche and Assessing the Outcomes of Strategic Gap Filling*. This report is based on extensive discussions in the Secretariat, interviews with several high commissions of member countries in London and with donors, a file review of strategic gap filling activities, and a review of relevant documentation.

The interim report, *Filling the Gaps* situated its analysis in the context of different views on development, means and processes and the respective roles of the stakeholders interested in strategic gap filling: essentially, those who advocate a tighter planning process with more predictability versus those member governments who want to set and meet their own priorities. These different views often come down to a difference in institutional interests between funders and recipients. The report took a preliminary look at the outcomes of strategic gap filling, reviewed its design and management and assessed some of the factors affecting the outcomes. It concluded that there is a niche for a programme such as Strategic Gap Filling and that the approach used under this programme is, in fact, aligned in many ways with new thinking on aid effectiveness in the donor community. Building on this analysis, the report also raised a series of questions to be addressed in the final report in order to respond to the terms of reference for the evaluation. These questions include the following:

- What was the original purpose of strategic gap filling and how did it evolve?
- What forms does it now take? Strategic for what and for whom?
- What design and assessment criteria are used to guide the programme?

- Can it be considered successful and, if so, who benefited, how and why?
- To what extent has it contributed to building capacity, sustainability and long-term development impact? Are these goals realistic given the size and nature of the budgets involved?

Box 2: What is strategic gap filling?

Strategic gap filling is a form of free-standing, demand-led technical assistance (TA). The terminology ‘free-standing’ suggests that strategic gap filling should not be tied to existing programmes. In the context of the Secretariat, it refers to TA that is driven by the requests of individual countries and regional bodies. In principle, it excludes activities that are driven by the broad work plan of the Secretariat such as those of SASD, the policy groups or even the public sector development work of GIDD, which aim to respond to the needs identified in the governing bodies of the Commonwealth. In practice, the requests coming out of individual countries often converge with those coming out of the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings (CHOGMs), the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee, but there are some important exceptions.

The authors discuss the concept of ‘demand-led’ in section 3.1: The diverse perspectives on strategic gap filling.

Strategic gap filling has always included two main activities, although these were not always subsumed under one formal budget line:

- the provision of expertise, either short- or long-term, with experts expected to provide training either to counterparts, through seminars or through formal courses; and
- training for the development of key skills through in-country training programmes or through support for individuals at specified institutions.

A third activity, no-fee expert placements through the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP), was added in 1997. Originally designed as a means of providing no-fee expertise to existing programmes, CSAP has evolved into a separate programme with its own priorities.

The Manual for Points of Contact (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002a, p.25.) defines the purpose of Strategic Gap Filling as:

‘to respond to situations where a country might have a whole project or area of activity that is central to its economic and social development, but it is held back from going ahead with it because of the lack of a key skill. By filling such a gap, the Secretariat enables the project to activity to proceed.

Strategic gap filling is financed from the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), which was established in 1971 to put the skills of member countries at each other’s disposal. Member countries contribute financing and obtain technical assistance as needed. In 2003/4, expenditures on strategic gap filling were £5,020,096 down from £11,082,699 in 1997/8.

- What can be improved in how the programme is managed and reported?
- What specific improvements in policy and management might GIDD consider?

- Should capacity development be adopted as an overall goal for GIDD work? If so, how could GIDD contribution be improved? What are the standards by which it should be judged?

The second phase of the research has taken these questions as a starting point for fieldwork and some complementary desk research and interviews. The purpose of this report is to pull together both phases and to suggest some avenues of action for the Secretariat in the future.

The Commonwealth Secretariat asked the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), a Dutch foundation based in Maastricht in the Netherlands, to take on this evaluation. The Centre has a mandate to improve co-operation between the European Union and the African, Pacific and Caribbean countries and is doing considerable work on capacity, capacity development and technical assistance⁹.

1.2 Methodology

As noted above, this report tries to answer the questions raised in the interim report, *Filling the Gaps*. It draws on both the interim report and several additional sources of information. The first of these additional sources was fieldwork in five member countries and one region: Barbados, Dominica, Fiji, Mauritius, Sierra Leone and the Pacific. GIDD identified the countries to be visited largely based on the availability of a critical mass of projects and knowledgeable people to interview, such as Points of Contact (POC)¹⁰ with a good overview of Secretariat programming. Most of the countries chosen have a successful relationship with the Secretariat, but Fiji and the Pacific were added in order to get a better understanding of why Secretariat activities are proportionately less important there than in other areas.

The fieldwork required a great deal of organisation. An ECDPM research assistant worked with GIDD staff in London to identify a list of projects for each country or region and contacts to be interviewed. She also pulled out pertinent information from the Secretariat files. The lists developed covered projects from 1997 to 2006, although it was often difficult to identify contacts for the older activities. ECDPM liaised with the office of the Primary Contact Point (PCP) in each country to set up meetings, and the field visits took place in May 2005 to Barbados, Dominica and Fiji, in June 2005 to Mauritius and in July 2005 to Sierra Leone. In total, the team responsible for the fieldwork (see table 1, below) had about 85 meetings with 250 people. These protocols varied depending on the category of person being interviewed and some respondents did not answer all of the questions. In addition, the authors tried to get perspectives on any one project from more than one respondent if possible. They also tried to identify the linkages among different activities such as training and the provision of experts and to make an assessment of their total value added. Finally, the authors compared their conclusions to those in other evaluation reports.

The general questions posed in the interviews focused on the following issues:

- What the respondents considered to be strategic gaps or critical needs and the extent to which the Strategic Gap Filling programme had been able to respond;
- The degree to which strategic gap filling was responsive to the needs of the country concerned; and
- The interviewee's assessment of the quality and outcomes of the projects and programmes including strengths and weaknesses, influence on counterparts and any spin-offs or leveraging.

9 The major activity of the ECDPM on this subject is a three-year study on how capacity develops, how it can be sustained and what role outside interveners can play.

10 The Point of Contact is the Government official responsible for liaising with and coordinating the work of the Secretariat in his/her Ministry. The Primary Contact Point is responsible for overall liaison and coordination for all Secretariat support.

Where appropriate, the authors also asked respondents for their assessment of individual training activities and their outcomes. Similarly, interviewees familiar with CSAP were encouraged to give their assessment of the programme, its niche and its comparative advantage with reference to other forms of Secretariat assistance.

Table 1: Projects reviewed and meetings held

	Barbados	Dominica	Fiji	Mauritius	Sierra Leone	Total
Projects reviewed¹¹	9	6	9	13	10	47
Meetings held	13	11	14	22	25	85
People met	35	16	27	70-80	100 (approx.)	248 (approx.)

The second new source of information for this final report was an extensive collection of **documents**, some of them new and some of which the authors reviewed again, such as strategic plans over the past decade, a report from the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and records of internal meetings.

The third source of additional information was a second, but smaller round of interviews with Secretariat staff on specific issues that have arisen during the fieldwork or the documentation.

Table 2: The evaluation team

Name	Role	Activities
Heather Baser	Team leader	Interviews, file review, fieldwork in Mauritius, main author of reports
Peter Morgan	Senior adviser, researcher	File review, fieldwork in the Caribbean, co-author
Volker Hauck	Researcher	Fieldwork in Sierra Leone
Joe Bolger	Researcher	Fieldwork in Fiji and the Pacific Islands Forum
Julia Zinke	Research assistant	File reviews in London, fieldwork in Mauritius, co-author of final report
Oliver Hasse	Research assistant	First file review, desk research for interim report
Suzanne Taschereau	Training/capacity building specialist	Desk review of training, wrote training sections
Jan Gaspers	Student intern	Research support, preparation of annexes

1.3 Limitations of the methodology

In using the methodology described above, the authors encountered a number of limitations. The Secretariat files were often incomplete and statistics on the programme were not always available. This made it impossible, for example, to track the allocation of strategic gap filling funds by sector over the past decade, as figures for this exist only until the financial year 2000/01. It was also difficult to compare the statistics available, as different sources use different data, and there seemed to be some anomalies between some of the statistics provided by the Strategic Planning and Evaluation Division (SPED) and those provided by GIDD and the Secretariat more generally. The authors tried to corroborate the figures with other sources and then chose the set that looked most accurate, for example, the GIDD figures on the number of long-term experts per year.

¹¹ This listing includes paid expert and CSAP projects only, as training projects are more difficult to count.

The incompleteness of project documentation in the Secretariat files proved a further challenge. This was partly as a result of the Secretariat having moved records to the archives, but also reflected the difficulty of collecting reports on project progress, a subject that will be discussed in section 4.6: Management issues in GIDD.

The limited amount of time allocated for each country visit further limited possibilities for such assessment, as did the varying degrees of time allotted by responsible PCPs. In some cases, PCPs had both initial and concluding briefings with the evaluators, which allowed more time to explore their views on both individual project results and the total programme. In other countries, there was only an initial briefing.

The assessment of the training activities financed under Strategic Gap Filling¹² included some additional challenges. The training activities managed by GIDD in recent years (which the authors concentrated on for reasons of availability of interviewees) have been financed from both Programmes 4.4 (SGF) and 2.2 (Public Sector Development), but the distinction between the two was sometimes unclear. The authors concentrated on Programme 4.4 activities, but they also looked at some of the activities that fell under the former Programme 2.2, especially where these were closely linked to the experts in the countries concerned or constituted a large part of the training assistance provided.

Due to the large number of training activities sponsored by the Secretariat, the difficulty of locating former trainees for interviews and the limited documentation available on training activities, the final list of courses discussed in this evaluation represents only a selection of all training activities funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat. A more complete discussion of the training programmes supported may require a separate evaluation (see section 5.3: *Implications for the management of paid and unpaid experts and training*).

Given the shortage of both information and of time, the evaluation authors have been obliged to use their judgement and experience in technical assistance to draw conclusions from limited data. In such areas, their conclusions are qualified. The authors hope that discussions with stakeholders on the draft of this report will provide more data on some of these issues.

1.4 Outline of the report

The various reports and interviews, both in the field and in London, have raised a significant number of issues about strategic gap filling, which the authors address in three categories – past, present and future. The purpose of this approach is to build an understanding of the original purpose of strategic gap filling and of how and why it has evolved, which can then be used as a basis for assessing the options for the future.

As the evaluation moves through the history to the present and the options for the future, the authors explain their understanding of some of the key concepts that come into play in strategic gap filling – technical assistance, supply-led and demand-led, responsiveness, capacity development, strategic, sustainable development and long-term impact.

In chapter 2, **The past: the context, origins and evolution of strategic gap filling**, the authors explore the influences shaping strategic gap filling as a form of technical assistance, how it has evolved and the differing perspectives on what it should be. This chapter has three sections, as follows:

12 The training activities previously covered by Programmes B6.1 (1997-2000), B7.1 (2000-02) and 4.4 (2002-04) are subsumed under the present Programme 8, Public Sector Development in the 2004-2008 Strategic Plan.

- 1 ***The context: trends in technical assistance and international development co-operation*** – the origins of technical assistance, its evolution into an aid mechanism, some of the critiques made of it and how measures to reform it fit into broader donor thinking, including the growing emphasis on ownership, partnership and accountability;
- 2 ***The origins of strategic gap filling and its evolution*** – the development of strategic gap filling, its expanding objectives and its declining funding levels; and
- 3 ***The Secretariat's management of strategic gap filling*** – the effect on the visibility of strategic gap filling of structural changes within the Secretariat and the expanding activities of other programmes within the Secretariat.

The next part of this report, **The present** (consisting of two chapters, 3 and 4, because of its length) synthesises the findings from the fieldwork carried out in five countries and one region. It analyses both specific strategic gap filling activities and the broader relationships between the Secretariat in London and member countries of the Commonwealth.

Chapter 3: **The present: overview of strategic gap filling today** has four sections, as follows:

- 1 ***The diverse perspectives on strategic gap filling*** – differing and often opposing views of the role of strategic gap filling, its impact and its potential for the future;
- 2 ***Focus of strategic gap filling*** – the extent to which the focus of strategic gap filling shown through the research marries with the official objectives;
- 3 ***Background to the three forms of support provided under strategic gap filling*** – some basic data on the three forms of support and how they are managed; and
- 4 ***Design and assessment criteria*** – the criteria used by member countries in defining project requests to the Secretariat and how they relate to the focus of section 3.2 and the filters used by the Secretariat in assessing requests.

Chapter 4: **The present: findings and recommendations**, has six sections, as follows:

- 1 ***Overview of findings by country/region*** – the organisation of the work in five countries and one region and an overall assessment of strategic gap filling by country/region based on the answers to the research questions;
- 2 ***Strategic gap filling: strengths and issues*** – the approaches for which strategic gap filling is recognised and some of the criticisms made;
- 3 ***Findings from the fieldwork for the three forms of support*** – A review of the strengths and problems involved in each form of support;
- 4 ***Contribution of strategic gap filling to capacity development, sustainable development and long-term development impact*** – an assessment of how the projects reviewed have contributed to these goals and of their relevance to strategic gap filling;
- 5 ***Co-ordination*** – the degree of co-ordination that goes on between Secretariat staff and the broader donor community and the implications of increasing it; discussion of co-ordination within the Secretariat; and
- 6 ***Management issues in GIDD*** – issues that affect programme effectiveness and efficiency. These include speed of response, communications between member countries and Secretariat staff, quality of experts, role and qualifications of staff in London, cost effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation and field presence.

The fifth chapter – **The future: options for the programme** – builds on the previous three chapters and looks at the implications of several strategic choices facing the Secretariat. The chapter's three sections are:

- 1 ***The purpose and niche of the programme*** – the comparative advantage of Strategic Gap Filling;
- 2 ***Options for managing technical assistance within the Secretariat*** – the options for how TA might be managed and their pros and cons:
 - Maintain the present structure of GIDD;
 - Create a separate TA unit within GIDD;
 - Create a separate TA division within the Secretariat;
 - Disband Strategic Gap Filling and transfer the funding to Public Sector Development; and
 - Disband Strategic Gap Filling and distribute funding among existing CFTC-funded programmes.
- 3 ***Implications for the management of paid and unpaid experts and training*** – the changes required in the Secretariat and in GIDD to make Strategic Gap Filling more effective.

The sixth and final chapter – **Conclusions** – recaps the recommendations made in other chapters and raises some issues of broader interest to the Secretariat and the development community as a whole.

To assist the reader, the authors have included an introduction of the issues to follow in each chapter as well as a brief resume at the end of each of chapters 2 through to 4. In addition, each section in these three chapters begins with a summary of the text. This should enable the reader to make decisions about which sections are of greatest interest or relevance to his or her work. Recommendations addressing the issues raised in the report are embedded in the text, but are also re-stated in chapter 6 together with an identification of the division or group in the Secretariat responsible for action.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with the history of strategic gap filling in order that s/he can better understand present activities under Programmes 8 and 15, factors that influence these programmes and the constraints that were faced. The report starts with a description of the context in which strategic gap filling was born and discuss its evolution into Programme 4.4 and now Programme 15 and part of Programme 8. Finally, the authors look at how some of the many policy changes have played out within the Secretariat in terms of the organisational structure and the visibility and role of strategic gap filling.

2.1 The context: trends in technical assistance and international development co-operation

This section looks at the definition of technical assistance and its origins as a two-way relationship between user and supplier, which has since been converted into a three-way relationship by the international development community. This resulted in various problems – such as, accountability to donors rather than country partners, policy biases and conditionalities – which have contributed to much criticism of technical assistance over the past 20 years. Partly in reaction to these criticisms, the development community agreed a new aid paradigm with a focus on poverty reduction, partnership, accountability and coherence among different policies. This, in turn, laid the foundation for the Millennium Development Goals and the Paris Declaration. The result is a challenging reform agenda for the development community, calling for major efforts from all the organisations involved. This agenda is particularly demanding for a small organisation such as the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Since strategic gap filling is a form of technical assistance, the section begins with some background information on this aid modality.

There are many **definitions of technical assistance (TA)**, but the one used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is the most frequently quoted:

Technical co-operation encompasses the whole range of assistance activities designed to develop human resources through improvement in the level of skills, knowledge, technical know-how and productive aptitudes of the population in a developing country. A particularly important objective of technical co-operation is institutional development based on human resources development, i.e. to contribute to the strengthening and improved functioning of the many institutions essential for sustainable development through the effective management and operation of an economy and of society more generally, from government ministries, local administrative structures, or hospitals and schools to private enterprises. Human resources development is a prerequisite for institution building, capacity building for improved policy analysis and development management by the core government institutions is of special importance (OECD, 1992, p.51).

In 2004, the DAC recorded about £10.9 billion of technical assistance or 25.1 per cent of the £43.4 billion allocated in 2004 to global official development assistance (ODA).

TA includes the provision of expertise and training as well as the supply of support equipment and the exchange of information. In the sense of the movement of people and skills from one country or region to another, TA is not confined to the development community. It is a human activity practiced

in all countries, and dates back several centuries, if not longer. In the 21st century, technical assistance is an expanding and well appreciated global phenomenon in the private sector, particularly within multinationals. Its reputation is more contested in the international development community.

In a paper for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)¹³, Peter Morgan (2002) traces the **origins of technical assistance** and how its co-option by the development community has distorted some of its basic principles. Technical assistance has, over the centuries, been a form of voluntary exchange, usually in the private sector. Clients or customers were in charge. With the commencement of funding from outside agencies, such as international development organisations, this relationship changed such that:

- The provision of TA was managed as a public sector activity in accordance with government regulations set by the supplier country.
- While the clients lived in developing countries, the key stakeholders were in the supplying countries. There were thus three parties involved – the supplier, the host country and funding agency - rather than two as in the time of Peter the Great¹⁴.
- To maintain domestic support, the international suppliers of TA had to promise unrealistic levels of performance and development benefits;
- Most development agencies emphasised the planning and control of projects, which could be ‘designed’ and ‘delivered’. They also became fixated on policy issues, overlooking institutional issues.
- These development agencies had a concept of knowledge as detachable from context, perception and action. The role of TA was thus seen as transferring generic knowledge to fill gaps that would enable counterparts to improve their performance. This was ‘machine thinking’ from the 1950s and 1960s, which conceived of processes in terms of physical construction and product chains.

Understanding the changes made to the original structure and intent of TA helps to clarify why there has been much so much **criticism** of it **over the past two decades**. One of the biggest issues is that much of the TA reports to the development agencies rather than to national authorities in the host or recipient country. Technical personnel supplying assistance have often reflected the ideological and policy biases of their home countries or of particular development agencies. Donors have often made acceptance of foreign expertise a pre-condition for other assistance. Large salary differentials between national officers and the expatriates has also been an issue, especially where qualified nationals are available and where long-term foreign personnel make little effort to work towards a situation that enables them to hand over to domestic officers or personnel by developing local capabilities.

Since the 1990s, there has been a marked **move away from the provision of long-term expatriates and towards short-term assignments**, sometimes with return visits. Donors are trying to reduce their reliance on European and North American resources by making more use of existing national systems and capacities and South-South co-operation. There is more focus on building capacities rather than filling gaps and on giving partner countries a bigger role in planning and management, so as to increase their sense of ownership.

These measures to improve technical assistance are part of a **new aid paradigm**, which has broadened the development agenda and made it more complex. This new paradigm has evolved gradually through several international agreements. The first of these was the 1996 report of the Development Assistance

¹³ Morgan (2002), pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ In the early 1700s, Peter the Great hired through agents carpenters, engineers, shipbuilders and other trades people from the major cities in Western Europe to help build the new city of St Petersburg. They reported to the Russian authorities, were paid decent wages and were free to return to their home countries when they wished.

Committee (DAC) of the OECD entitled *Shaping the 21st Century: the Contribution of Development Co-operation*¹⁵, which outlines several principles for providing development co-operation – poverty reduction, partnership, accountability and coherence among different policies.

The second defining document was the September 2000 *Millennium Declaration*, which built on *Shaping the 21st Century* to set goals and targets in different sectors for poverty alleviation – the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Then in 2001, the *DAC Guidelines on Poverty Reduction* encouraged donors to work in a closer and more co-ordinated way and to tailor their assistance to partner country priorities and needs. The introduction of *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers* (PRSPs) in most low-income countries has provided a framework for this co-operation.

In parallel with these broad policy changes, there is an **effort to increase the efficiency of the development co-operation system** and especially reduce the management load on developing countries of a multiplicity of projects¹⁶. The objective is to decrease the number of interlocutors for developing country partners by concentrating in a limited number of sectors and channelling funding through multi-donor activities responding to priorities defined in PRSPs. The good practice papers of the DAC Task Force on Donor Practices established in 2000 provide guidance on these issues and others.

The most recent international agreement is the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*, endorsed at the DAC High Level Forum in February/March 2005¹⁷. This document stresses the steps required to make aid more effective and to support developing partner efforts to strengthen governance and improve development effectiveness. It concludes with a set of indicators or targets for 2010.

Most development organisations are trying to address the agenda laid out by the international development community by adjusting their policies and programming approaches. In many, if not most cases, this requires profound changes and few have been able to respond successfully as yet. This challenge is even greater for small organisations with few resources such as the Secretariat.

2.2 The origins of strategic gap filling and its evolution

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) was established in 1972 to respond to requests from members of the Commonwealth for technical assistance. Its aim was to be flexible and fast, rather than to insist on rigid procedures. Strategic gap filling began in 1997/8 when the responsibility for the provision of experts, previously divided among several divisions, was brought under one umbrella. Since then and in response to the priorities of individual member countries (which are often for institutional development), the Secretariat has increasingly piled the goals of the development community onto the original purpose of strategic gap filling – creating a crowded and sometimes contradictory agenda. Despite favourable reports on CFTC activities in general, the level of funding for strategic gap filling has declined significantly over decade leading up to this report. GIDD struggles to meet its commitments and finds it virtually impossible to satisfy all the constituents advocating various priorities.

15 DAC (1996) *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation*. Paris, France: OECD.

16 Some countries had hundreds of individual projects.

17 OECD (2005)

Strategic gap filling has been around for a long time in the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) was established in 1972 to finance technical assistance activities, including education and training but excluding project or programme finance. The emphasis was on technical co-operation between developing countries and the fund was to be responsive to requests from governments, rather than active in promoting its own programmes. The aim was to be flexible and fast, rather than to insist on rigid procedures. Originally CFTC-supported divisions provided all the TA, but from 1975-76 some development activities sponsored by other divisions of the Secretariat began to receive funding¹⁸.

The Faber report, 1994

In 1994, Professor Michael Faber produced the first of four reports¹⁹ on the CFTC, whose strength he saw to be concentrating on initiatives that were distinctive in character – not simply doing more of what other agencies were already doing. He saw one of these distinctive areas as being free-standing, long-term technical assistance and recommended that the numbers of long-term experts being deployed at that time be restored to earlier levels. Faber also expressed concern that the Fund was expected to finance an ever-widening range of activities in the context of shrinking resources²⁰.

The Work Programme of 1994/95 to 1995/96

The Work Programme of 1994/95 to 1995/96 defined two programmes to provide technical assistance and training. The first was entitled Development of Flexible and Responsive Management Structures, Processes and Systems and aimed to improve organisational design and managerial processes. The focus was on enhancing the responsiveness of important public sector and other institutions by improving organisational structures and systems for planning and service delivery²¹. Reform of the public service was key, including decentralisation of service delivery to NGOs and the private sector when appropriate and instilling a merit culture. Services included short consultancies, long-term technical assistance, exposure of senior officials to cutting edge practices, guidance on developing best practice manuals and specialised short-term training programmes.

The second programme under the Work Programme of 1994/5 to 1995/6 was entitled Enhancing Strategic Managerial Capacity, which aimed to develop the capacity of government and other institutions to manage their resources and to achieve policy and service goals effectively, efficiently, economically and equitably²². The range of services was similar to those offered under the previous programme, but also included support to regional and pan-Commonwealth management associations and to key training institutions. The creation of these two programmes was the beginning of a ten-year process to define goals and objectives for strategic gap filling and to increasingly link the programme with the goals set by the international development community. This history is traced in table 3 and is further explained in the text.

The Third Three-Year Strategic Plan 1997/98-1999/2000

The Third Three-Year Strategic Plan 1997/98-1999/2000 divided technical assistance and training activities into two sub-programmes under the programme heading Capacity Building (B.6) according to the services provided rather than according to programme objectives, as in 1994/5-1995/6. The first sub-programme was Training to Enhance Skills for Development (B6.1) and included training ranging

18 This paragraph draws heavily from Faber (1994), p. 1.

19 Faber, M. (1994) *Do Different – Review of the Commonwealth Secretariat's 'C' Programmes Wholly or Partly Funded by the CFTC*. London, UK: Commonwealth Secretariat.

20 Faber's recommendation to bring back the long-term experts was never realised, presumably because of the decline in available resources.

21 Commonwealth Secretariat (1994), p. 2.

22 Ibid., p. 349.

from high-level specialised programmes for senior officials to specific courses needed by middle-level managers and public officials. The Plan saw a reduction in the past support for long-term training in developed Commonwealth countries in favour of creating in-country and regional capacity for specialised long-term courses. The focus was no longer government, but rather capacity building and skills training in all sectors, with a focus on small states.

The second sub-programme was titled Provision of Experts for Development (B6.2), which provided technical co-operation experts on a free-standing basis, not tied to specific programmes or projects. This programme brought under one umbrella the responsibility for the provision of experts, which had previously been divided among a number of different divisions. The purpose was to ensure maximum flexibility and speed, with the objective of increasing the numbers of experts to previous levels in keeping with recommendations of the Faber report. The plan placed no formal restrictions on areas of expertise, but suggested that they would likely be in areas where the Secretariat had had previous experience. It also gave particular attention to public sector reform initiatives, the needs of small states and to gender issues and their mainstreaming.

A Rethink, 1999

The Secretariat paper entitled *A Rethink* firmly supported a role for demand-led strategic gap filling and highlighted the comparative advantage of the Commonwealth in responding to the diversity of needs across its members. It urged the deepening rather than the broadening of the CFTC programme of assistance and the strengthening of support to least developed countries (LDCs) and vulnerable small states²³. At the same time, the paper suggested that there was a need to ensure that gap filling projects were indeed strategic and that they were in areas of comparative advantage for the Secretariat. The report further suggested revisiting terminology.

The AusAID report, 2000

The second report on the CFTC, this one sponsored by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), closely followed *A Rethink*. Although the report recognised that strategic gap filling had helped to strengthen capabilities, its author saw the actual performance of strategic gap filling as mixed. He concluded that long-term impact and sustainability were not yet clearly established, largely because of a lack of strategic focus and weak systems for monitoring and evaluating outcomes²⁴. The report suggested that the proportion of strategic gap filling in the CFTC be reduced to around 50 per cent

The Strategic Plan 2000/01-2001/02

The Strategic Plan 2000/02 continued the programme structure of two separate sub-programmes for training and the provision of experts under one common programme, now termed Capacity Building Through Training and Provision of Experts (B7). The Plan described the new programme as both responsive and proactive in meeting national and institutional human resource needs. As in the previous plan, it particularly mentions the needs of small states and gender equality.

Issues Paper, 2001

In 2001, the Secretariat produced a short *Issues Paper: Strategic Gap Filling and Capacity Building*, which reviewed the recommendations of *A Rethink* and defined some areas for further attention. It called for more short-term rather than long-term experts and greater recruitment of operational experts within regions. It also noted that 'Some of the major contributors are keen to see us give increased emphasis

²³ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004e), p. 5.

²⁴ AusAID (2000), p. viii.

to projects that promote poverty alleviation and equity’, in keeping with the donor agenda described in section 2.1.²⁵ The Project Development Committee discussed this report in August 2001 and suggested the need to decrease the number of requests that did not fit into the strategic work programme and for developing regional strategies, especially for the Pacific and the Caribbean.

Table 3: The evolution of Programme 4.4/Programme 15

Date	Event	Names of programmes established	Focus
1972	Creation of CFTC and the beginning of technical assistance		Respond to requests of member countries
1994	1994/95-1995/96 Work Programme	• Development of Flexible and Responsive Management Structures, Processes and Systems (Programme C12.1) • Enhancing Strategic Managerial Capacity (Programme C12.2)	• Improve organisational structures and systems in the public service • Achieve policy and service goals
1997	1997/98-1999/2000 Strategic Plan	• Capacity Building (Programme B6) • Training to Enhance Skills for Development (Programme B6.1) • Provision of Experts for Development (Programme B6.2)	• Provide training for middle-level managers and public officials across all parts of the economy, not just government • Provide experts on a free-standing basis • Beginning of what would later become SGF
2000	2000/01-2001/02 Work Programme/ Strategic Plan	• Capacity Building through Training and Provision of Experts (Programme B7) • Training to Enhance Skills for Development (Programme B7.1) • Provision of Experts for Development (Programme B7.2): includes TA through long/short-term experts and CSAP • Public Service Reform and Public Sector Restructuring (Programme 3.5)	Consolidate provision of expertise under one umbrella, probably in areas where Secretariat had previous experience
2002	2002/03-2003/04 Strategic Plan	• Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling (SGF) (Programme 4.4) • Civil Service Reform, Decentralisation, Public Sector Restructuring, e-Governance (Programme 2.2)	• Be responsive and proactive • Provide integrated packages for poverty alleviation and sustainable development
2004	2004/05-2007/08 Strategic Plan	• Capacity Building and Institutional Development (Programme 15, cross-cutting) • Public Sector Development (Programme 8)	• Support 15 strategic priorities • Support the MDGs • Programme 15 — Long-term experts, CSAP volunteers • Programme 8 — Training, short-term experts

25 Commonwealth Secretariat (2001a), p. 2.

The Strategic Plan 2002/03-2003/04

The next work plan, the Commonwealth Secretariat Sub-Programmes and Projects for 2002/03, based on the Strategic Plan 2002/03-2003/04, picked up the themes of broadening the focus of strategic gap filling and supporting poverty alleviation. It emphasised the delivery of integrated packages of expertise and training. The purpose was to supplement the institutional capacity of member countries for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The work plan changed the title of the previous sub-programme providing training and expertise to Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling, placed inside Programme 4 (Achieving MDGs for Poverty Reduction for Sustainable Development). The agenda was further broadened with the addition of youth (part of Programme 3), governance (previously part of Programme 2) and human rights (previously part of Programme 1) as additional cross-cutting issues.

The Strategic Plan 2004/05-2007/08

The latest move to link strategic gap filling into the policy goals of the donor community and to increase the focus of the programme came with the Strategic Plan of 2004/05-2007/08. This lays down 16 programmes, 13 of which are to promote the two long-term goals of Peace and Democracy (Goal 1) and Pro-Poor Growth and Sustainable Development (Goal 2), while three are cross-cutting programmes, amongst them the successor to Programme 4.4, Programme 15 (Capacity Building and Institutional Development), and Programme 16 (Secretariat Governance, Management and Communications). There are thus 13 strategic priorities and the one other cross-cutting programme (gender), which the current strategic gap filling programme (Programme 15) is expected to respect. These goals and programmes reflect decisions by the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors. They include:

- Goal 1: Peace and democracy – to be achieved through four programmes:
 - 1 Good offices for peace
 - 2 Democracy and consensus building
 - 3 Rule of law
 - 4 Human rights
- Goal 2: Pro-poor growth and sustainable development – to be achieved through nine programmes:
 - 5 International trade
 - 6 Investment
 - 7 Finance and debt
 - 8 Public sector development
 - 9 Environmentally sustainable development
 - 10 Small states
 - 11 Education
 - 12 Health
 - 13 Young people
- Three cross-cutting programmes
 - 14 Gender equality and equity
 - 15 Capacity building and institutional development
 - 16 Secretariat governance, management and communications

According to this Plan, the cross-cutting programme on capacity building and institutional development 'will contribute to the achievement of objectives and strategies of other programmes'²⁶. This latest plan also foresees using the MDGs, regional and national development priorities and agreed frameworks for action, such as PRSPs, the Country Development Framework (CDF) or the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the basis for CFTC interventions at the national, sub-regional and regional levels²⁷. While this is clearly in line with the thinking of the

²⁶ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004e), p. 10.

²⁷ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004e), p. 6.

international donor community and the DAC, it risks reducing the flexibility of strategic gap filling to respond to the priorities identified by member countries and which may go beyond the goals set for the Secretariat as a whole. This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3 under section 3.2: Focus of strategic gap filling.

The NZAID report, 2004

The most recent report on CFTC – an NZAID review carried out in November 2004 – favourably assesses CFTC activities as a whole and recommends that, subject to further improvements in the Secretariat's management of CFTC projects, funding be increased to 1995 levels in real terms²⁸. It does, however, raise a note of caution about the trend to adopt the MDGs as there is a possibility that these goals may conflict with the interests of the countries. To achieve the goals (outlined in box 4 in Section 3.2.2, below) will require immense investments. Although recent commitments for official development assistance, if respected, would raise total global allocations from US\$79 billion in 2004 to US\$100 billion by 2010, a recent UN report still foresees this as being inadequate to meet the MDGs²⁹. By comparison with these figures, the 2003/4 budget for strategic gap filling of a little more than £5 million is miniscule, no more than 0.01 per cent of the total MDG budget. The authors return to the subject of the MDGs and the Secretariat's role in trying to meet them in section 3.2: Focus of strategic gap filling.

Protocol for Developing and Managing Projects under Programme 15, 2005

In early 2005, GIDD produced a guidance note entitled *Protocol for Developing and Managing Projects under Programme 15*, which specifies criteria for supporting projects; these include that each request must demonstrate 'advancement of client/country development priorities (or regional initiatives)'. It also defines the allocation of funding among three different request types:

- **political projects** – those identified by prime ministers and other high-level government officials and to which they have committed support – not to exceed 10 per cent of allocated funds;
- **lead-division driven projects** – those which directly support the inputs of specialists and interventions to advance the Strategic Plan – maximum of 75 per cent of allocated funds; and
- **stand-alone projects** – those which do not fall neatly under specified programmes of the Secretariat, but which have relevance to requesting country/organisation priorities – maximum of 15 per cent of allocated funds.

GIDD sees this Protocol as a management tool to structure co-operation with SASD and the policy divisions and to ensure that all Programme 15 activities fall within the strategic priorities. At the beginning of each fiscal year, member countries define their priorities including requirements for expertise in various sectors. GIDD then asks SASD and the policy divisions to help refine the requests. These divisions write up the proposals for funding and help to monitor activities in the field.

Although GIDD does not see the Protocol as being restrictive and is not now applying it in a limiting fashion, its wording puts a cap on the free-standing activities of Programme 15 of a maximum of either 15 per cent or 25 per cent, depending on the nature of the requests coming under 'political projects'. Were the Protocol to be applied in the way it is written, this would be a major change in policy for the Secretariat and a distinct limit on the scope afforded to individual member governments and regional bodies in defining requests. It is important that there be no inconsistency between the Protocol and any of the recommendations in this report subsequently accepted by the Secretariat, most notably recommendations 10 (on strategic gap filling) and 25 (on funding levels) as well as table 18. Given new guidelines on design, management and monitoring of activities, this Protocol may be redundant in any case.

28 NZAID (2004) MARAAF Review 2003 – *The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation*, p.21. Mimeo.

29 United Nations (2005), p. 37.

Recommendation 1: Review Protocol 15

Review Protocol 15 to ensure that it is consistent with new guidelines being developed in the Secretariat and with any recommendations in this report that are accepted by the governing bodies of the organisation.

2.3 Financial allocations for strategic gap filling

Although all four reports on the CFTC recommended continuing with free-standing, demand-led³⁰ provision of experts, training and advisory services, the level of funding projected declined over time and the target is now officially 45 per cent of the CFTC budget, the figure that came out of A Rethink. A comparison of budget figures covering the period from 1995/96 to 2004/05 shows that a decline has occurred and has gone well beyond those targets (see table 4, below). From a high of £11,082,699 in 1997-98, the strategic gap filling budget has decreased to £5,143,630 in 2004/05 (adjusted to include training now funded under Programme 8), representing just over 70 per cent of the average sum allocated to strategic gap filling between 1995/96 and 2004/05 (£7,003,504)³¹. Even more significant is the fact that since 2002/03, the overall CFTC budget has noticeably increased, while the sum allocated to strategic gap filling has decreased. Hence, **the proportion of strategic gap filling expenditures from the CFTC budget has dropped from about 52 per cent in 2001/02 – already a comparatively low share compared to previous years – to about 33 per cent in 2004/05.**

Table 4: CFTC expenditure on strategic gap filling 1995/96-2004/05³²

Financial Year	Strategic gap filling		Non-strategic gap filling		Total / 100% (Direct Costs £)
	£	%	£	%	
1995/96	7,606,634	53.2%	6,694,067	46.8%	14,300,701
1996/97	10,092,099	54.5%	8,441,384	45.5%	18,533,483
1997/98	11,082,699	67%	5,458,823	33%	16,541,522
1998/99	7,506,851	66.9%	3,712,205	33.1%	11,219,056
1999/2000	5,808,806	57.8%	4,246,637	42.2%	10,055,443
2000/01	6,351,728	56.4%	4,908,565	43.6%	11,260,293
2001/02	6,472,496	52.2%	5,922,769	47.8%	12,395,265
2002/03	5,920,000	38.7%	9,395,490	61.3%	15,315,490
2003/04	5,020,095	32.5%	10,418,918	67.5%	15,439,013
2004/05	4,173,630	26.8%	11,423,790	73.2%	15,597,420
2004/05 adjusted (incl. training)	5, 143, 630	33.0%	10,453,790	67.0%	15,597,420
Average	7,003,504	50.6%	7,062,265	49.4%	14,065,769
Average adjusted	7,100,504	51.2%	6,965,265	48.8%	14,065,769

Note: The authors use two figures for 2004/5. The first is for Programme 15 (Capacity Building and Institutional Development), which is solely the supply of expertise; and the second includes both Programme 15 and an estimate of the training that is now part of Programme 8 (Public Sector Reform) based on expenditure levels for training in 2003/4. This allows comparison with other years.

³⁰ A discussion on supply versus demand can be found in section 3.1: The diverse perspectives on strategic gap filling.

³¹ This calculation (72%) neglects the impact of inflation and therefore the indicated percentage would be even lower in real terms.

³² The data for this table was provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The history described in this section above shows that the Secretariat has created a crowded and sometimes contradictory agenda by loading the goals of the development community onto the original purpose of strategic gap filling, in order to respond to the priorities of individual member countries, which are often for institutional development. At the same time, GIDD is facing calls from some stakeholders to deepen the programme and decrease the number of priority areas, while benefiting countries want to retain the flexibility to make requests that fall outside the Secretariat's work plan. GIDD struggles to meet its commitments and finds it virtually impossible to satisfy all the constituents advocating various priorities. GIDD, as the manager of strategic gap filling, is in a similar position to that of the World Bank, which is pushed by many lobby groups to do more than it can possibly manage³³.

2.4 The Secretariat's management of strategic gap filling

There have been a number of factors coming together within the Secretariat that have served to reduce the legitimacy of strategic gap filling. Other divisions have stepped into the breach and expanded the scope of their activities. Less visibility for strategic gap filling has resulted in less funding, which has meant fewer activities and even lower visibility – a vicious circle of declining expectations fuelling declining activities.

According to Faber, the main programmes of the CFTC during the period of 1990/91 to 1992/93 were:

- Fellowships and Training Programmes (FTP)
- General Technical Assistance (GTA)
- Technical Assistance Group (TAG)
- Export Market Development (EMD)
- Industrial Development Division (IDU).³⁴

At that time, the term 'technical assistance' referred only to the provision of expertise and did not include training. It was only in 1997 that Training to Enhance Skills for Development (B6.1) and the Provision of Experts for Development (B6.2) were joined under the same programme, Programme B6: Capacity Building, though they were still managed by two separate divisions (GTASD and MTSD). This structure was replicated in 2000 with Programme B7: Capacity Building for Training and Provision of Experts (also split into two sub-programmes, B7.1 and B7.2). Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling, which was created in 2002 after the merger of the two divisions, subsumed both training and expertise for strategic gap filling under one sub-programme.

Within this structure, there was high visibility for technical assistance and training, reflecting the large proportion of CFTC expenditure on free-standing programmes. This visibility was reduced by the subsequent joining of FTP with another division to make the Management and Training Services Division (MTSD). The new title dropped the reference to technical assistance, probably reflecting the general unpopularity of the mechanism within the donor community during the 1990s.

³³ Wade (2001), p. 2.

³⁴ Faber (1994), p. 29.

Five years later in 2000, the AusAID report showed four divisions under the Deputy Secretary-General responsible for development co-operation³⁵, with technical assistance somewhat downplayed compared to the previous organisational structure:

- Economic and Legal Advisory Services Division (ELASD)
- Export and Industrial Development Division (EIDD)
- Management and Training Services Division (MTSD)
- General Technical Assistance (GTA), which later became the General Technical Assistance Services Division (GTASD)

In 2002, MTSD and GTASD were merged to create the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD), which today is one of five groups reporting to the Deputy Secretary-General, who is now responsible for development co-operation and most areas previously covered by a Deputy Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs³⁶. Technical assistance in the sense of both experts and training has entirely disappeared in the division titles, which are as follows:

- Economic Affairs Division (EAD)
- Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) – former GTASD and MTSD
- Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD)
- Special Advisory Services Division (SASD) – former ELASD and EIDD
- Project Management and Referrals Unit (PMRU)

The increasing number of policy groups eligible for CFTC funding puts more pressure on the budget, which was, as the figures in section 2.2 show, decreasing in real terms for most of the decade. This was exacerbated by a tendency, described by Faber, for all technical programme areas to want to be represented in as many member countries as possible. He noted that in the 1990-93 period, FTP operated in all 47 beneficiary countries, GTA in 42, IDU in 40, TAG in 36 and EMD in 33³⁷. The great majority of beneficiaries received TA products from at least four of five divisions. Now most member countries receive assistance from two or three divisions, but sometimes on several different topics from any one of them. The wide scope of TA activities puts huge demands on a small staff and budget and severe limits on what any one country can expect in terms of support. It also runs counter to the trend in the development community, which is moving towards greater concentration of programmes. Most donors today concentrate in a limited number of countries and sectors (see table 5).

35 There were two other Deputy Secretary-Generals at the time, one covering political issues and the other responsible for economic and social affairs. Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (1999a) *A Rethink*, p. A4.

36 The second Deputy Secretary-General is responsible for the Human Rights Unit, the Youth Affairs Division, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division (LCAD), the Political Affairs Division (PAD) and the Corporate Services Division. Source: Commonwealth Secretariat website: <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=20728&int1stParentNodeID=20596&int2ndParentNodeID=20635> [last accessed 26 November 2007]

37 Faber (1994), p. 7.

Table 5: Concentration within the development community³⁸

Donor	Budget in 2004	Countries assisted	Sectors of concentration
UK (DfID)	£4.6 billion ³⁹	90	• Poverty reduction • Education • Sexual equality • Health • HIV/AIDS • Environment protection
Denmark	£1.1 billion	20	• Social and economic development • Human rights, democratisation and good governance • Stability, security and the fight against terrorism • Refugees, humanitarian assistance and regions of origin • Environment
New Zealand	£116 million	19 and certain regional programmes in the Pacific, Asia, Africa and Latin America	• Poverty elimination • Strengthening governance • Trade development assistance • Health • Gender • Conflict resolution and peace building • Harmonisation • Human rights • Environment • Sustainable livelihoods • Education
The Commonwealth Secretariat	£15.6 million ⁴⁰	46 of its members	• 15 priorities listed in section 2.2 • Three CSAP priority areas: - ICT - Poverty reduction - Environment

The consequence of these changes has been **reduced visibility of technical assistance** as a stand-alone unit, in favour of more specialised technical programme groups, which have multiplied. With no programme title reflecting technical assistance, not only is there reduced visibility, but also a **loss of legitimacy** for this mode of assistance. An outsider looking at the organisation chart could easily conclude that the organisation does not see itself as having a key role to play in either analysing experience with technical assistance or thinking about improvements to it.

³⁸ All budgets are for 2004 unless otherwise indicated. Where they were not initially quoted in GBP, they have been converted according to exchange rates as of August 2005.

³⁹ Budget figures are for 2005/06.

⁴⁰ Budget figures from the Commonwealth Secretariat are for 2004/05.

2.4.1 *The establishment of GIDD*

In January 2002, the Management and Training Services Division (MTSD) and General Technical Assistance Services Division (GTASD) merged to form the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD). This new division, which came into being six months before the establishment of Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling, has a dual mandate including:

- **Public sector development** – to work with public sector organisations to strengthen their institutional capacities through the provision of expertise and training. Within GIDD, there are various experts providing policy and advisory roles on issues such as public sector reform, leadership and human resource management, governance and anti-corruption, public expenditure management and private-public partnerships. There are specific Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) mandates for public service development; and
- **Long-term and volunteer experts** – to manage and co-ordinate requests for these forms of support from member countries. The programme is open to other divisions of the Secretariat to help them respond to emerging issues within their professional areas of expertise and to advance the Strategic Plan of the Secretariat.

Staff described the formation of GIDD as highly disruptive and they seemed to have been almost paralysed for more than a year, both before and after the re-organisation. Activities slowed down and expenditures decreased significantly. All of this may have contributed to the perception that strategic gap filling was not fulfilling its role and to setting the stage for funds to be shifted into other programming areas outside GIDD, which were seen as having more professional legitimacy.

This issue of reduced professional legitimacy was probably further exacerbated by the fact that specialised professional staff in the Secretariat, particularly those who have been university professors, command higher status than generalists. This suggests that a group like GIDD with mainly generalist staff faces an uphill battle to defend the technical basis of its programmes, especially strategic gap filling which does not have the cachet of the programmes of either the SASD or the policy divisions that specialise in specific areas. It is seen as a group of generalists.

In addition, discussions in the Executive Committee of the Board in the past two or three years over whether strategic gap filling was producing results and whether certain projects fell within the priorities probably made shifting funding away from the programme more acceptable than it would have been in earlier years.

Summary of chapter 4: The past: the context, origins and evolution of strategic gap filling

This chapter traces the history of strategic gap filling from being a free-standing programme that was not tied to existing projects or programmes to one that is now faced with both a daunting international policy environment and conflicting demands from stakeholders, some calling for more depth in programming, others wanting the flexibility of breadth. Some stakeholders have criticised strategic gap filling for not meeting all the demands placed upon it and its credibility has suffered. As a result, the strategic gap filling budget has been cut, organisational changes have reduced the visibility of the programme and its legitimacy has diminished in the eyes of stakeholders.

The purpose of this section is to provide a description of strategic gap filling today along with an assessment of its results. The authors begin by looking at the different perspectives of various stakeholders on what strategic gap filling should or could be, and then go on to compare the focus of the programme with the policy objectives. They describe the three forms of support used under strategic gap filling – experts, training and the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) – and then review the criteria used to assess projects.

3.1 The diverse perspectives on strategic gap filling

This section looks at the diverse views among the stakeholders interested in strategic gap filling. It begins with a definition of ‘responsiveness’ as being ‘the capacity to meet demand as articulated’. It suggests that there are two levels of responsiveness within the Secretariat: the policy formulation level, which takes into account the requests of the membership as a whole; and strategic gap filling, which responds to the requests of individual countries and regional bodies. The section then looks at the origins of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) and the underlying ‘deal’ it represents: that developed country members pay for the political participation of developing countries through aid contributions. The interests of these two groups – developing and developed countries – do not always coincide, and hence there are some tensions, such as between the desire for flexibility in strategic gap filling versus the desire for more planning of it; between the focus on institutional development versus focus on poverty reduction; and between free-standing activities versus donor co-ordination.

The diversity of views about strategic gap filling reflects different development models. These range from a belief in the importance of planning mechanisms and their ability to produce pre-determined results, to a view which looks at the flow, movement and dynamics of a system as it evolves and what emerges from it. The authors believe that this debate has become a proxy for a fundamental disagreement over the purpose of strategic gap filling, how much it should be controlled and by whom – by the major contributors, the Board of Governors, the staff of the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD), by the staff of other divisions or by the benefiting countries?

Because there is a wide range of stakeholders interested in the future of strategic gap filling, it is not surprising that they hold quite diverse views on its past performance and its niche, views which have sometimes caused disagreements in fora such as the Executive Committee of the Board and the Board of Governors itself. Understanding these different perspectives is the first step towards establishing a base for discussion.

3.1.1 *Responsiveness/supply-led, demand-led*

Because of its status as a membership organisation, the Secretariat **aims to ensure that all of its programmes are responsive**. In some cases, ‘responsive’ is used to mean ‘demand-led’, but the authors suggest that the two terms are not synonymous (see box 3, below, for more on supply and demand.) The authors see **responsiveness** as the **capacity to meet demand as articulated**. It is thus the happy

marriage of well-articulated demand with appropriate supply in a way that meets the needs of the user. It is possible for an organisation to be demand-led without being responsive if it is not able to meet the request made effectively.

GIDD is trying to better balance supply and demand with the 2005 *Protocol on Managing Programme 15* (see section 2.2: The origins of strategic gap filling and its evolution) to ensure responsiveness. Bringing in Special Advisory Services Division (SASD) and the policy divisions early helps to ensure that approved projects take into account the capabilities of the Secretariat and hence its capacity to match supply and demand.

Box 3: Supply and demand

Supply and demand in the development community have to do with the way countries formulate requests by comparison with what funders are willing or able to supply. Supply and demand are thus not independent one from the other, but rather exist along a continuum. The problem comes in when there is an imbalance and the supplier is providing something the country does not want or need (supply driven), but often feels it cannot refuse. This raises the issue of who is leading the process of deciding on priorities – the funding institution or the receiving country?

There has been increasing criticism over the past decade or more of development assistance that is supply-led, in the sense of its being led by the interests and priorities of the donors rather than by those of the recipients. Conventional good practice now calls for programmes to be demand-led. However, a completely demand-led process, without consideration for the capacity of the supplier to deliver, is not likely to be effective. International funding organisations must be equipped to meet demand. Their structures and systems must be appropriate. Sufficient resources, both in terms of funding and people, must be available. Staff must have the right skills. The norms, values, motivations and incentives must be in place. These organisations must also have the ability to adjust to changing demands, either in terms of volume or type of assistance.

This suggests that international funding organisations need to define their niche and stick to it if they want to meet the demands made on them effectively. This may require a creative tension between supply and demand, which adapts over time and with changes in conditions. Such adaptation, in turn, builds the capacity for responsiveness.

Responsiveness can operate at different levels and views on whether programmes are responsive or not vary depend on the perspective of the stakeholder. Where Secretariat activities are concerned, there are at least two constituencies:

- The Board and its Executive Committee, which approve overall policy and the strategic plans developed by Secretariat staff to implement Board decisions. These plans thus reflect the requests of the broad membership, although in general some members are better able to influence decisions than others. This is certainly true in the Commonwealth where, as the interim report pointed out, the smaller member states often have difficulty defending their perspectives. Because of the differences in development priorities among members of the Commonwealth, the details of the strategic plans do not always respond to the priorities of a particular country. Thus, when GIDD advertises a specific programme to member countries, it may appear to be supply-led and top-down in nature.

- The **individual members and regional bodies** who, because of their diversity, may have interests that are not always reflected in the broad membership demands. Strategic gap filling allows a bottom-up expression of the needs of individual members and regional bodies.

There is another aspect of responsiveness that was raised in the course of the fieldwork – whether or not programme allocations for member countries should be defined in advance. Some countries felt that they could better plan and define their priorities if they knew in advance what level of funding they could expect in any one year or even over a longer period, say three years. This approach would also reduce the number of interactions during the course of the year between the Secretariat and active member countries such as Mauritius, which submit a number of requests during a year in expectation of assistance. In the past, the Secretariat has preferred not to fix country allocations, because it would commit funds and restrict its ability to respond to emergencies, such as in 2004 with the tsunami⁴¹. The question is again **responsive to whom and for what purposes?** In this regard, it is useful to look at the origins of the CFTC.

3.1.2 *The original agreement behind the CFTC*

The NZAID report points out that the **CFTC** was a **developmental add-on to the Commonwealth**, which had previously been solely a political grouping. This has been largely forgotten and ‘many developing countries today regard the Commonwealth primarily as a development organisation – with a bit of the ‘Commonwealth values’, good governance and human rights, etc. attached⁴². The report further points out that the developing countries have essentially made a ‘deal’ with the developed ones who ‘pay for acceptance of these “political” objectives with their aid contributions⁴³.’ The developing countries want to retain the original purpose of the CFTC – to respond not only to the requests of the members as a group, but also the requests of individual countries and regional bodies. This “deal” is reinforced by the contributions member countries make to the fund and to specific activities, such as paying travel costs for training courses and housing for experts. .

The difference between the needs of groups of countries versus those of individual countries and regional bodies creates a tension, again pointed out in the NZAID report⁴⁴, between the recent adoption of the MDGs and the fact that most Commonwealth members rely on the CFTC to provide support for institution building rather than for poverty alleviation. The more the Secretariat takes on overarching goals such as poverty alleviation, the more it limits the range of requests which individual member countries feel comfortable submitting. On the other hand, not adhering to the goal of poverty alleviation could make the Secretariat vulnerable to criticism from the international development community, some of whose members are major contributors to the CFTC.

3.1.3 *Ties to the goals of the development community*

This raises the issue of the extent to which the strategic gap filling should be tied into the goals and processes of the development community, another area where there are differing views. To many developing countries, the Secretariat is not a donor in the usual sense of the term. Member countries see strategic gap filling not as assistance, but as technical and strategic support that helps to make a ‘total relationship with the Secretariat’, one of solidarity and partnership with no expectation of something in return⁴⁵. Many of these countries would not see converting the Secretariat into a donor as a positive move.

41 See Recommendation 2 on piloting multi-annual allocations in Section 4.2.2: Issues with strategic gap filling.

42 NZAID (2004), p. 9.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 From field interviews

On the other hand, some of the large contributors to the CFTC feel that the common agenda that is increasingly being developed in the donor community provides a framework for significant improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the aid system. They have actively promoted the goals of poverty alleviation, the MDGs etc. and some of the management systems which support them, such as adherence to PRSPs and more donor co-ordination. The AusAID report recommended, for example, that the staff of the Secretariat identify mutually beneficial areas for co-operation and collaboration and attend aid co-ordination meetings⁴⁶.

This leads to another set of disagreements about strategic gap filling. To developing countries, the comparative advantage of strategic gap filling is its flexibility and lack of bureaucracy. It is like a mini-line of credit that countries can call down for unexpected activities, without pre-approval. In the eyes of users, these characteristics make strategic gap filling demand-led or responsive, relatively fast and uncomplicated. Such an approach sits awkwardly, however, with some of the large contributors who support a results-oriented approach with more focus⁴⁷. For them, strategic gap filling has little potential for effectiveness and impact due to what they see as its dispersed and unfocussed nature. Furthermore, its contribution to poverty alleviation and the MDGs is difficult to trace. The Secretariat has reacted by defining strategic priorities, which help to control allocation decisions and provide a framework for monitoring. At the same time, these priorities offer a kind of legitimacy to the Secretariat in an environment where, to be seen as good managers, an organisation must show that it supports a results-oriented approach characterised by more planning, prediction and focus.

3.1.4 Co-ordination with the activities of other divisions

A final area of different perspectives relates to co-ordination between GIDD and other parts of the Secretariat in managing strategic gap filling. The strategic priorities largely parallel the different divisions and groups within the Secretariat and represent areas of developed expertise. These groups would like to see stronger links between their activities and the activities funded under strategic gap filling. This is the issue of deepening assistance or concentrating it on a few areas, as opposed to supporting a broad range of activities, for many of which the Secretariat does not have back-up expertise. The underlying question here is **to what degree and how should the Secretariat be responsive to the needs of individual member countries, as opposed to the broad membership demands mentioned earlier?**

On the one hand, closer linkages with the activities of SASD and the policy divisions would have mutual advantages – it would support the Secretariat's policy objectives as well as provide expert back-up to GIDD when activities run into implementation problems. On the other, there is a risk that such closer links would mean the needs of individual members would not be addressed. One of the reasons why benefiting member countries support strategic gap filling is because it gives them space to request assistance for key needs that do not clearly fit the priorities of the Secretariat, and they can get support for activities which most donors will not fund. These stand-alone activities can have significant influence, especially in small economies.

46 AusAID has championed this in its report of 2000; see AusAID (2000), p. xi and p.56.

47 The Secretariat has been under considerable pressure, particularly from AusAID, to adopt results-oriented planning and management of CFTC. See AusAID (2000), particularly p. xi.

3.2 Focus of strategic gap filling

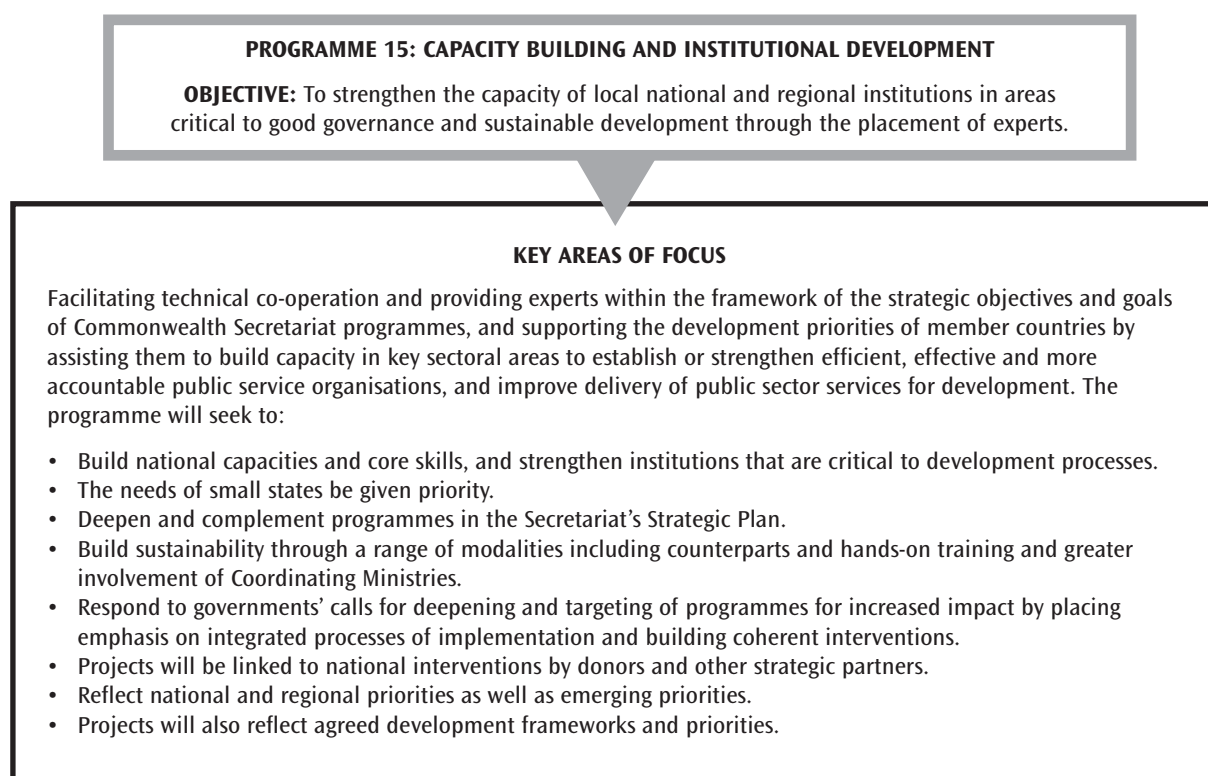
There is little evidence to suggest that the goals set in recent strategic plans to focus on the MDGs and the 14 strategic priorities of the Secretariat have had a marked influence on activities funded under strategic gap filling. These goals seem to have a high symbolic content, designed to satisfy the many stakeholders exerting pressure on the organisation. Tightening up selection criteria to better reflect the strategic priorities would restrict the flexibility of member states and eliminate some important activities financed in the past, such as developing distance education programmes and some interventions in health such as medical training in Sierra Leone. It is the competence of the Secretariat more than the strategic goals per se that influences the choice of projects. Nonetheless, the Secretariat's long-term emphasis on small states continues to be reflected in programming, with a slight increase in the percentage of expenditures in recent years.

The previous chapter discussed how the Secretariat gradually defined priority areas, which apply to strategic gap filling as well as to other programmes. In this section, the authors discuss the extent to which these priorities have made a difference in terms of programming and whether or not this has affected the responsiveness of strategic gap filling.

3.2.1 *The Strategic Plan 2004/05-2007/08 — 14 priorities*

The first area of official focus is on the 14 sectoral priorities defined in the Strategic Plan, which Programme 15 is designed to address as a cross-cutting programme. All the projects reviewed, both for the interim report and in the evaluation fieldwork, with one exception, made at least nominal links to one or more of the strategic priorities and even this one, which dates back to 1993, could be justified under these priorities. In recent years, some members of the Executive Committee of the Board have identified projects that they felt did not fall within the priorities and, indeed, there were a number of projects that did not coincide with the detailed policy objectives. However, tightening up the selection criteria, as some members of the Executive Committee of the Board have suggested, would risk eliminating some kinds of activities which have been important to member countries, especially small states. Examples of such activities include developing distance education (Barbados, BAR/73), advice on water pollution (Mauritius, MRT/003V), and some activities in health such as medical training in Sierra Leone.

The authors of this report found no evidence to suggest that the 14 priorities have changed the composition of activities funded under strategic gap filling. The Secretariat's *Operational Plan and Budget 2004/05-2005/06* defines the specific objectives and focus areas of Programme 15, as indicated in the figure below.

Figure 2: Objectives and focus of Programme 15⁴⁸

3.2.2 The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

The MDGs are another area of focus. In line with the Commonwealth Aso Rock Declaration of 2003⁴⁹, the current Strategic Plan defines the MDGs as one set of priorities for the Secretariat⁵⁰, and programmes 8 and 15 (the latter as a cross-cutting programme) both support the corresponding Goal 2 – Pro-Poor Growth and Sustainable Development. In the previous strategic plan (2002/03-2003/04), Programme 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling was one of the four sub-programmes in support of Programme 4: Achieving Millennium Development Goals for Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development, and, as a result, the Secretariat reported all of strategic gap filling as a contribution against these goals (see figure 3, below)⁵¹.

Box 4: The Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals lay out eight main goals. These are:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger | 5) Improve maternal health |
| 2) Achieve universal primary education | 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases |
| 3) Promote gender equality and empower women | 7) Ensure environmental sustainability |
| 4) Reduce child mortality | 8) Develop a global partnership for development |

⁴⁸ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004c), p. 16.

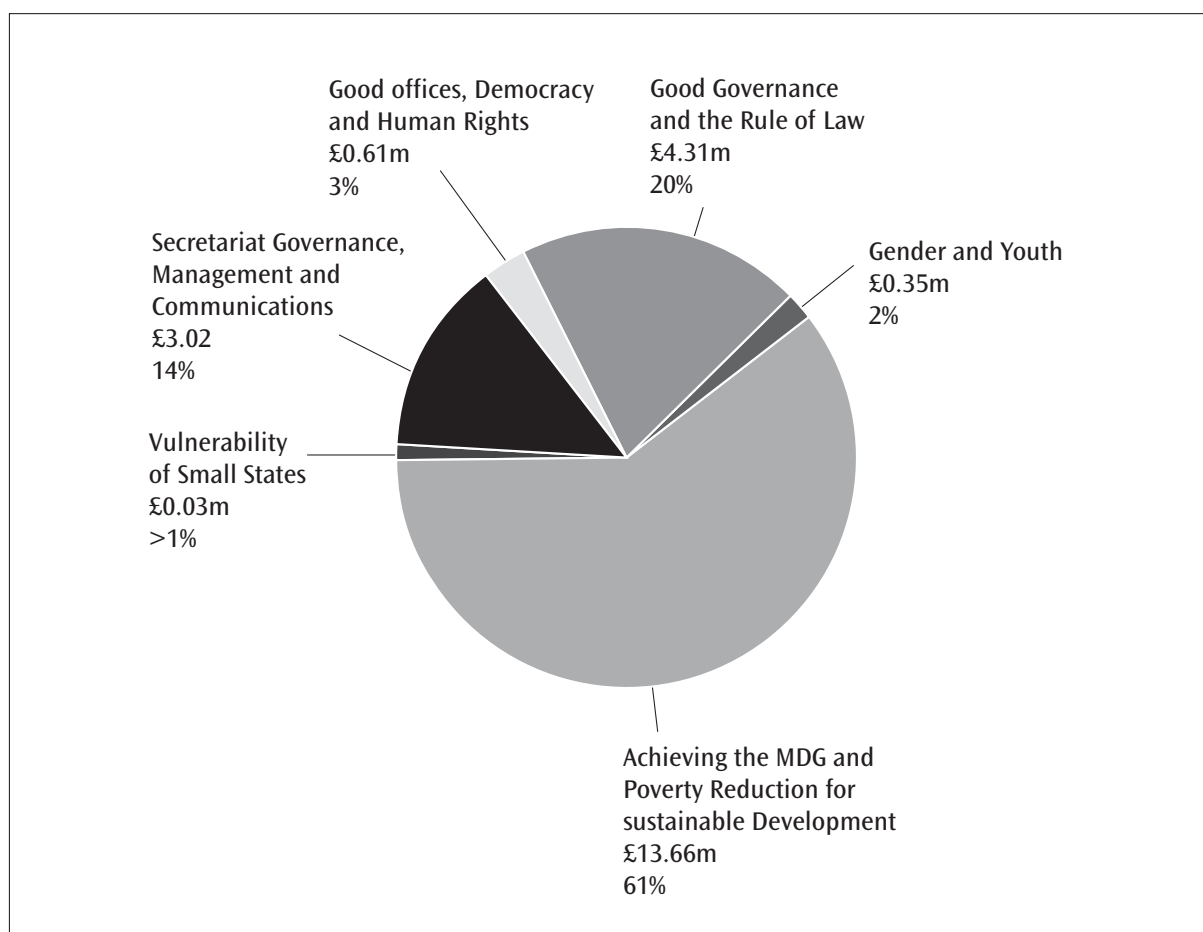
⁴⁹ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004e), p.2.

⁵⁰ 'The MDGs, regional and national development priorities and agreed frameworks of action, such as PRSPs, the CDF or NEPAD, will provide the basis for CFTC interventions at the national, sub-regional and regional levels'. Commonwealth Secretariat (2004e), p.6.

⁵¹ In the 2003/04 *Annual Performance Report*, the Secretariat counted 61 per cent of expenditures from the CFTC as contributing towards the achievement of the MDGs, which breaks down into 37 per cent for strategic gap filling, 55 per cent for responding to globalisation and 8 per cent for human development. Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2004f), p.11.

The impression the authors have is that the Secretariat has adopted these goals more for symbolic reasons – to gain legitimacy for its activities and hence to build its constituency of support – than to provide guidance for programming. This is a common reaction to pressures from stakeholders, particularly in political organisations, as Wade describes in his article on the US role in the World Bank⁵², and would be quite normal in the face of the diverse views described in the previous section.

Figure 3: Expenditure by Strategic Goal from the CFTC (2003/04)⁵³



The NZAID report suggested that the MDGs present another conundrum for the Secretariat – member countries prefer to use CFTC support for institutional development rather than for poverty alleviation, although one does not necessarily exclude the other. Research for this report also indicates that the poverty alleviation agenda is more appropriate for Africa than for other parts of the Commonwealth. The Caribbean is, for example, more concerned about the effects of trade preferences, the Caribbean Single Market Economy, emigration, regional integration and globalisation, areas in which, for the most part, the Secretariat has recognised expertise and does considerable work (see box 5, below). Although some of these activities do fall under the MDGs, there is still a risk that a single-minded focus on these goals could constrain the ability of Caribbean countries to address the problems that most preoccupy them.

⁵² Wade (2001), p.17.

⁵³ Commonwealth Secretariat (2004f).

Box 5: Advice on meeting the demands of globalisation

Strategic gap filling has provided considerable assistance to member countries trying to cope with the demands of globalisation. This has gone particularly to small island states and more particularly to the Caribbean. An expert helped Dominica, for example, to implement a programme of economic stabilisation to avoid imminent economic crisis as a result of economic underperformance (DOM/99). The Barbados Ministry of Economic Development benefited from the services of a telecommunications specialist to design and implement liberalisation policies (BAR/74). Mauritius also has such an expert working in its Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications (MRT/104).

3.2.3 Small states

The final area of official focus for strategic gap filling is small states. Thirty-four of 53 members of the Commonwealth are small states, and they have always been a key priority of the training and expert programmes. They continue to be a major priority for the Secretariat and the last CHOGM spend a half-day on the issue. The approach to small states has varied over the years from being a special priority in the Strategic Plan of 1997/98-1999/2000 to the current policy of mainstreaming across all Secretariat activities, including strategic gap filling. Although monitoring is less intense than it used to be⁵⁴, the issue continues to be a priority and the proportion of funding for experts going to small states as a percentage of total strategic gap filling seems to even have increased slightly in recent years, as tables 6 and 7 show, below. (The available data did not allow a comparison that included training.)

Table 6: Commitments to small states (2002/03-2004/05)

Financial Year	Total TA through experts — commitments (100%)	TA through experts — commitments to small states ⁵⁵	Percentage to small states
2002/03	£4,517,887	£2,891,007	64%
2003/04	£3,827,415	£2,323,685	61%
2004/05	£3,735,530	£2,505,680	67%
Average	£4,026,944	£2,573,457	64%

Technical assistance through experts in small states as proportion of the overall budget for technical assistance through experts under Programme 4.4/ 15 (2002/03-2004/05)⁵⁷

⁵⁴ At one point, the Assistant Secretary-General himself monitored expenditures to small states.

⁵⁵ Regional projects were included in the calculation of commitments to small states for both the Caribbean and the Pacific only, because of the preponderance of small states in these regions.

⁵⁶ Source: GIDD (2005a) 4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2003. Mimeo; GIDD (2005b) 4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2004. Mimeo; and GIDD (2005c) Programme 15 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2005. Mimeo.

Table 7: Commitments to small states in the regions (2002/03-2004/05)

Financial Year	Africa	Asia	Caribbean	Mediterranean	Pacific
2002/03	37.8% (of £1.9m)	68.5% (of £0.3m)	92.7% (of £1.1m)	63.9% (of £0.1m)	96.3% (of £0.9m)
2003/04	36.3% (of £2m)	76.0% (of £0.1m)	91.1% (of £0.9m)	11.2% (of £0.06m)	100% (of £0.7m)
2004/05	41.5% (of £1.7m)	65.2% (of £0.07m)	96.8% (of £1m)	0.0% (of £0.03m)	100% (of £0.8m)
Average (2002/03-2004/05)	38.5%	69.9%	93.5%	25.0%	98.8%

Technical assistance through experts in small states in the different regions as proportion of the total commitments for technical assistance through experts in the regions under Programme 4.4/ 15⁵⁷

3.3 Background to the three forms of support provided under strategic gap filling

This section provides basic information about the purpose, size and functioning of each of the three forms of support provided under SGF. Experts represent the biggest portion of expenditures – 76 per cent – with about 100 long-term personnel and 30 short-term per year. The biggest part of the training budget (20 per cent in total) goes to academic upgrading, but there are another six different kinds of training support. CSAP represents only 4 per cent of the SGF budget, but has three sub-programmes – capacity building, strategic gap filling and emergency response.

3.3.1 Background: technical assistance through experts

The biggest portion of the strategic gap filling programme (£3.83m or 76 per cent in 2003/04) is spent on the provision of either long- or short-term experts. In the three most recent financial years (2002/03-2004/05), on average 104 **long-term experts** supplied through strategic gap filling were in post per year. (As table 8, below, indicates, this average hides a 15 per cent decline from 113 to 96 experts over the same period). These recent figures on long-term experts compare to 270 in January 1984 and 119 in January 1993⁵⁸. About half of the long-term experts were based in Africa, followed by 26 per cent in the Caribbean and 19 per cent in the Pacific, with only 3 per cent in Asia and 2 per cent each in the Mediterranean and in regional/pan-Commonwealth projects. On average, the length of each such assignment is now 2.16 years, which represents a downward trend from 2.5 years in 1999/2000.⁵⁹

57 Source: GIDD (2005a) 4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2003. Mimeo; GIDD (2005b) 4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2004. Mimeo; and GIDD (2005c) Programme 15 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2005. Mimeo.

58 Faber (1994), p.5.

59 From statistics attached to the ToR for this study (Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a) Evaluation Study of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme: Issues Paper and Terms of Reference. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.)

Table 8: Long-term experts funded from Programme 4.4/15 per financial year ⁶⁰

Financial Year	Africa	Asia	Caribbean	Med.	Pacific	C'wealth general	Total
2002-03	55	4	30	3	21	0	113
2003-04	50	2	26	3	20	1	102
2004-05	44	2	25	1	19	5	96
Average%	48	3	26	2	19	2	100

For the same period (2002-2005), as Table 9 indicates, GIDD supplied about 30 short-term experts per year under Programme 4.4 (2002/03-2003/04) and 17 under Programme 15 (2004/05), of whom 38 per cent carried out assignments in Africa, 31 per cent in the Caribbean, 16 per cent in Asia, 6 per cent each in the Pacific and regional/pan-Commonwealth projects and 2 per cent in the Mediterranean. The relatively lower number of short-term experts listed since the new programme structure was introduced (2004/05) may be explained by the fact that, in the future, GIDD wants to use Programme 8 to fund short-term expertise. The division is using Programme 15 for such assignments as a transitional measure only.

Table 9: Short-term experts funded from Programme 4.4/15 per financial year ⁶¹

Financial Year	Africa	Asia	Caribbean	Med.	Pacific	C'wealth general ⁶²	Total
2002-03	12	9	5	1	2	1	30
2003-04	11	4	12	1	2	3	33
2004-05	7	1	7	0	1	1	17
Average %	38	16	31	2	6	6	100

At the beginning of each financial year, GIDD sends out an annual call letter to all developing member countries asking them to identify their priorities for that year. On the basis of the responses to that letter, GIDD, in collaboration with other programme divisions, develops a plan indicating which projects it hopes to finance in the year.

3.3.2 Background: training

A review of training awards under Programme 4.4 for the period 2002-2004 (see table 10) reveals that:

- The biggest proportion of the Programme 4.4 training budget was spent on **academic upgrading** and programmes leading to a diploma or certificate (45 per cent of the training budget and 7.8 per cent of the overall 4.4 budget). The average cost per award was higher than for other training activities.
- **Short courses** (less than three months) at 30 per cent of the budget constituted the second largest investment of funds in GIDD-supported training activities.

⁶⁰ This table is based on data supplied by the Commonwealth Secretariat (GIDD Project List and Commitments 2002/03 [GIDD, 2005d]; 2003/04 [GIDD, 2005e] and 2004/05 [GIDD, 2005f]). Experts in post for more than one year are counted more than once. Some of the figures reflected in this table may be an approximation, as they are based on manual counts of projects in large project lists, which include some entries for previously completed, cancelled or pipeline projects.

⁶¹ This table is based on data supplied by the Commonwealth Secretariat (GIDD Project List and Commitments 2002/03 [GIDD, 2005d], 2003/04 [GIDD, 2005e] and 2004/05 [GIDD, 2005f]).

⁶² GIDD lists include some projects that could be classified as internal/operational and are not counted here, such as a consultant on the GIDD handbook

- **Seminars and workshops** accounted for only 15 per cent of the budget. The average cost of workshops and seminars dropped by nearly a third from £985 in 1998/99 to £708 in 2000/01, largely due to the introduction of cost-sharing (the Secretariat no longer pays airfares for participants).
- A higher percentage of funds was allocated to **long courses** (three months to a year) and to **attachments** in 2003/04 than previously.

Table 10: Breakdown of training awards under Programme 4.4

Activity	Average cost per activity ⁶³ FY 2000/01	% of Programme 4.4 training budget		Cost p.a.	Average % of Programme 4.4 training budget (£960,000 p.a.)	% of overall Programme 4.4 budget (£5,470,000 p.a.)
		FY 2002/03	FY 2003/04			
University degree	£6,185	34%	26%	£288,000	30%	5.3%
Diploma Certificate	£4,800	14%	15%	£139,200	15%	2.5%
Short courses (less than three months)	£745	36%	23%	£283,200	30%	5.2%
Workshops & seminars	£708	11%	19%	£144,000	15%	2.6%
Long courses (three months to a year)	£2,125	3%	7%	£48,000	5%	0.9%
Attachments	Not available	0%	7%	£33,600	4%	0.6%
Others	Not available	1.7%	2%	£17,760	2%	0.3%
Study visits	Not available	0.30%	0.10%	£1,920	0%	0%
Total	/	100%	99%	£955,680	100%	17%

Rank-ordered by cost and percentage of the Programme 4.4 training budget for the Financial Years 2002/03 and 2003/04⁶⁴

Programme Officers drew from both Programmes 4.4: Technical Assistance for Strategic Gap Filling – Training for Institutional Development⁶⁵ and 2.2: Public Sector Reform to respond to training requests from countries in their region. Since the introduction of the new programme structure in 2004/05, all training formerly part of Programme 4.4: Strategic Gap Filling is now under Programme 8: Public Sector Development.

The main thematic areas are:

- **Human resources development in the public sector** – support for design and/or participation in generic professional development programmes for public service managers, as well as for a range of specialised courses and degree/diploma programmes to respond to technical skills gaps and government priorities;
- **Governance, justice and the rule of law** (police training in Sierra Leone, legal drafting in small island states, courses to prevent financial crime);
- **Community economic development** (regional and Pan-Commonwealth courses on micro-credit); and
- **Poverty reduction** – for example, addressing gender dimensions in PRSPs.

63 Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a) Evaluation Study of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme: Issues Paper and Terms of Reference. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, p.20.

64 Source: GIDD (2004d) 4.4 Training costs statistics FY 02-04. Mimeo (16 December 04).

65 This definition is based on interviews with GIDD programme officers.

- Training activities funded under the previous Programme 4.4 and now Programme 8 are planned and developed in a **multi-annual project cycle**. Every two years the responsible GIDD staff member, in collaboration with the points of contact (POC) of a country, develops a training plan which defines indicative amounts to be disbursed to regions or sub-regions for training, including:
 - individual awards: contributions to university degrees, diplomas and certificates;
 - in-country training – long and short courses;
 - support to institutions;
 - regional workshops; and
 - country needs assessments.

Once GIDD has approved funding for training activities and programmes have been proposed, the country takes steps to identify candidates; these it submits to the Secretariat. Potential trainees are required to complete a form outlining their background, training needs and how the course fits with their job, and the head of the nominee's department then fills in a second part of the form supporting the nomination and outlining the expected benefits to the unit. The application is endorsed and passed on to the Secretariat by the point of contact's office.

Many of the training activities offered appear supply driven from the country perspective, such as building skills and capacities for public sector development or helping countries understand and address current developments. They complement the assistance provided by GIDD sister divisions in a country or region or may take the form of pan-Commonwealth programmes, which GIDD hopes to cascade in order to develop critical mass.

Training activities may also be demand-driven: responding to requests for training from member countries in what they consider to be priority areas. GIDD tries as much as possible to respond to demands for training that fall within the Secretariat's mandate. To strengthen the strategic direction of programmes submitted by GIDD and better define priorities, GIDD has set up an internal **Activity Review Committee**. Any new training request is assessed to determine fit with GIDD and country priorities, and to review the objectives of a particular workshop in terms of its contribution to capacity development (see also section 3.4.2: Design and assessment criteria used by Secretariat staff).

Mechanisms for training go beyond courses delivered in institutions. As part of their terms of reference, experts and volunteers for example are usually expected to carry out training and knowledge sharing activities during their assignments. These may take various forms: training of counterparts, on-the-job training of co-workers, conducting in-house seminars and workshops, presenting the results of assignments, writing issues papers and developing various kinds of learning materials.

3.3.3 *Background: the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP)*

The Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) was established following the decision by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Auckland in 1995 to set up a volunteer-based programme to meet the development needs of member countries. Its rationale was to **maximise CFTC funds by using a volunteer-based programme to reduce project expenditures** wherever possible. The CSAP is modelled on the British Executive Service Overseas (BESO) and the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). CSAP officially started in the financial year 1997/98 (with advisers being asked to undertake short-term consultancies on a voluntary basis), but it was not then a stand-alone programme and no effort was made to recruit under it. The programme began in earnest in 2001 (initially in the Eastern Caribbean), when a Chief Programme Officer was appointed and a three-year strategic plan was developed. Following field visits and other marketing efforts by the programme officer, the programme was soon overwhelmed with close to 160 project requests, of which over 50 have been or are being implemented in about 25 countries.

Objectives and focus areas

The stated objective of CSAP is to provide people-centred, demand-driven and mass-impact assistance at grassroots level which contributes to the achievement of the MDGs and is in accordance with national and Commonwealth Secretariat priorities.⁶⁶ The programme's focus areas were defined widely, originally as the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) at grassroots level, innovative approaches to poverty reduction and environment and heritage promotion,⁶⁷ with more recent documentation also highlighting the development of youth and women, the education and health sectors and income generation and small entrepreneurship development.⁶⁸

In response to the Boxing Day 2004 tsunami and following the explicit request by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, an emergency response facility was added in 2005, which was co-funded by NZAID. Now, GIDD staff see three discreet programme types: **capacity building**, which takes place mainly in large NGOs and civil society, **strategic gap filling**, mainly in ministries, and an **emergency response** which has been used in the Maldives and in Pakistan⁶⁹ (see Table 11, below).

Table 11: Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme types

CSAP type	Host organisation
Capacity building	Large NGOs, civil society
Strategic gap filling	Mainly in ministries
Emergency response	Medical facilities in the Maldives and in Pakistan

How CSAP works

The CSAP programme receives an annual allocation of approximately £250,000 from the strategic gap filling budget (ca. 4 per cent),⁷⁰ which was increased to £300,000 for 2004/05. With an average project cost of £10,000-£15,000 for lower cost projects and £15,000-20,000 for projects that also provide facilitation funding for training and workshops, this budget allows GIDD to fund 10 to 15 new activities per year, most of which are operated on a cost-sharing basis.⁷¹ Experts receive no fee, but a daily living allowance at UN rates and economy fare return tickets (a review of their terms of service has just been completed⁷²). So far the maximum duration of CSAP assignments has been three to four months⁷³, often split up into several phases, for projects of a lifespan of up to one year. However, to maximise the outcome and impact of the volunteer's contribution, GIDD envisages a shift towards more long-term projects, lasting from 6 months to a year.⁷⁴

The programme is managed by a designated CSAP adviser, who both publicises the programme throughout the Commonwealth and manages the assignments. He or she is assisted by a programme officer.

66 Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a) *Evaluation Study of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme: Issues Paper and Terms of Reference*. Annex A, pp. 22-23; and Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme – Planting Seeds For Tomorrow – CSAP: 2001-2003*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

67 Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme – Planting Seeds For Tomorrow – CSAP: 2001-2003*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

68 Source: http://www.commonwealthextranet.net/asgg.asp?program_id=8

69 Source: Interviews with GIDD staff.

70 Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a) *Evaluation Study of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme: Issues Paper and Terms of Reference*. Annex A, p.23; and Commonwealth Secretariat (2004) *Annual Performance Report 2003/04*. (EC2(04/05)1). London: Commonwealth Secretariat, p.48.

71 In the sample of projects we reviewed, host governments provided office space and covered local travel (see section 4.3.3).

72 Puri, M. (2005) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme: A review of the terms and conditions of service*. Mimeo.

73 GIDD (2004a) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) – Strategies for Implementation from FY 2004/05 by Julius Kaberere*, CPO CSAP. Mimeo.

74 Ibid.

3.4 Design and assessment criteria

This section looks primarily at the criteria member countries use to decide on what kinds of requests they put forward to the Secretariat. It looks at why member countries come to the Secretariat for support and what they see to be its comparative advantage. These criteria largely reflect the niche that the programme has created for itself over the years. The member countries do not seem to have absorbed the new foci such as the MDGs as yet, and even the strategic priorities are not uppermost in their minds. Instead, they value the fact that strategic gap filling supports small-scale activities, which they define and which other organisations cannot easily fund.

Design and assessment criteria used by Commonwealth member countries

All member states look to the Secretariat for support for small-scale activities, which can be mobilised quickly and which fall between the cracks of programmes financed by donors or by other technical areas of the Secretariat. They value this niche.

Small states in particular value Secretariat assistance. They have fewer other sources to call upon than big states and fewer national resources to enable them to absorb shocks, such as the departure of individuals critical to maintaining essential services. In these states, the Secretariat has a bigger role in comparison to donors than it does in larger countries, where it risks being over-shadowed. Faber (1994) noted this in his report and presented figures showing that Secretariat assistance was as much as 30 per cent of total TA in some member countries. This report presents a more limited survey of seven countries, with the largest Secretariat contribution being in Barbados: 8 per cent of the total TA received in 2003/04 (see table 12 below).

Table 12: Technical assistance to small and large countries (2003/2004) — comparison of Commonwealth Secretariat and other donors' assistance (£) ⁷⁵

	Barbados	Dominica	Fiji ⁷⁶	Mauritius	Sierra Leone	Uganda	Cameroon
All donors (2003) ⁷⁷	1.354m	1.280m	15.531m	11.696m	39.088m	100.685m	78.374m
Commonwealth Secretariat (2003/04) ⁷⁸	0.109m	0.069m	0.024m	0.151.	0.275m	0.279m	0.193m
Secretariat assistance as % of total donor TA	8.1%	5.4%	0.2%	1.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.2%

⁷⁵ This table uses 2003 OECD figures for total reported TA to the countries listed and 2003/04 figures for the volume of expert assistance funded by the Commonwealth Secretariat under Programme 4.4. The figures are not entirely comparable, but serve to give an indication of the relative importance of Commonwealth Secretariat assistance to small countries.

⁷⁶ This neglects funding to Pacific regional projects, of which Fiji is a beneficiary.

⁷⁷ These figures are based on OECD data for 2003 for all donors who report to the DAC (multilateral and bilateral DAC and non-DAC donors). It does not include Commonwealth Secretariat assistance. The figures quoted here reflect a conversion from US\$ into GBP (£) on 6 October 2005 (Exchange rate US\$1 = 0.566412GBP).

⁷⁸ For reasons of data availability, this figure only includes TA provided by experts (long- and short-term) under the former Strategic Gap filling Programme 4.4. This neglects the assistance provided for training and CSAP, where applicable (which as a percentage of total amounted to about 17 and 4 per cent respectively of the total 4.4 budget in 2003/04), and any assistance funded from other Secretariat programmes. Source: GIDD (2005e) *GIDD Project List and Commitments 2003/04*. Mimeo.

Some member countries have a vision of where strategic gap filling is most suitable. In Mauritius, for example, the principal contact point exercises tight control to ensure that assistance is focused on high-level policy issues, often with political implications, such as constitutional reform and setting maritime boundaries. In Sierra Leone, the PCP sees strategic gap filling as a mechanism to promote change and transformation of the government and of society towards transparency, accountability and efficiency. She defined five different purposes:

- to respond to priorities and demands within the government;
- to fill positions the donor community is unwilling to fund;
- to supplement development processes that cannot be picked up by the donor community in the short run;
- to provide legitimacy to the ministry as a development ministry; and
- to place experts into strategic areas of government where the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (MoDEP) would like to see change, such as the prosecutors in the anti-corruption office.

In other countries, such as Dominica and Barbados, the principal contact point forwards the offers made by the Secretariat to ministries as a **general call**. When responses come in, the PCP does relatively little filtering.

For most PCPs and POCs, the details of the priorities of the Strategic Plan were not uppermost in their minds. However, those most familiar with the Secretariat know where the expertise of the organisation lies, expertise which has been reflected in the choice of strategic priorities. They **try to match their needs with the expertise available**. Member governments see the Secretariat as their preferred source of support for these known areas of expertise.

Some countries see **connections with the activities of other donors** as an important design criterion. This is particularly the case in Sierra Leone, which does not see the Secretariat as a donor as such but where the PCP does see the need for co-ordination among funders to avoid the country being pulled in many different directions. In some other countries, this kind of co-ordination is not a factor. In Dominica, for example, there was a donor co-ordination meeting the week after the evaluation field visit, but the Secretariat was not invited because of the small size of its programme and its special niche. Mauritius has a dialogue with funders on a one-on-one basis and there is no donor co-ordination process as in some other countries.

Some member countries try to **link strategic gap filling with other programmes of the Secretariat**. In Mauritius, the PCP and line ministries deliberately make requests that build supportive links among different forms of assistance – training, expertise and support from SASD or the policy divisions in the Secretariat – so that they form an integrated approach to building capacity or institutions in a given area. Often these are areas where Secretariat staff and member countries have built up trust over the years. Civil service reform was hence linked with e-governance and support for revising the law on money laundering was linked with training on money laundering (see box 6, below, on support to legal issues for more examples).

Box 6: Advice on legal issues

CFTC legal assistance has a long tradition. As early as 1974, the Secretariat established a training programme for legislative drafting. Until the beginning of the 1990s, advice on legal drafting represented most of the Secretariat's legal assistance. Since then, legal assistance has become more diverse both in terms of issues and forms of support, and different activities are often integrated into a package over time. In Mauritius, for example, a team of Secretariat legal experts helped to draft legislation, which carried through on the work of a long-term expert defining maritime boundaries (MRT/99), all of this in the context of meeting the requirements of the International Law of the Sea. The Secretariat staff support essentially valorised the earlier work. Some members of the Attorney General's Department have also received training in legal drafting. In Sierra Leone, three judges of the High Court (SIE/83), a Fraud and Corruption Prosecutor and a Special Prosecutor (SIE/82) helped to ensure impartial enforcement of the law in the chaotic aftermath of war.

3.4.2 Design and assessment criteria used by Secretariat staff

Once requests make it to the Secretariat, GIDD staff rejects few if any projects outright; however, funding limitations make it necessary to limit requests. This has long been the case, but the GIDD protocol mentioned in section 2.2 (Protocol 15) defines these limits more clearly, e.g. a maximum of four long-term experts in a country at any one time and two per organisation. These criteria also serve to ensure that most if not all member countries receive some support and that the total assistance from strategic gap filling is divided among countries/regions as equitably as possible. Strategic gap filling is the most visible presence of the Commonwealth in most countries, a presence important to maintaining political support for the organisation. When one region receives proportionately less than others, as is presently the case with Asia and the Pacific, the Secretariat is subject to criticism (see Table 13, below).

The recently established **Activity Review Committee** (also mentioned in section 3.3.2 above), consisting of the Director and Deputy Director of the division, as well as staff from each of the geographical sections and thematic specialists, reviews requests and decides how they can best be addressed.

Table 13: CFTC assistance by region (2003/04)⁷⁹

	Africa	Asia	Caribbean	Mediterranean	Pacific	C'wealth General	Total
Technical assistance through experts	£2.001m 52%	£0.096m 3%	£0.861m 22%	£0.056m 1%	£0.731m 19%	£0.077m 2%	£3.827m 100%
Number of Programme 4.4 projects	87	16	37	-	26	8	174
CFTC expenditure	40%	9%	24%	1%	13%	13%	100%

⁷⁹ Source: GIDD (2005) 4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2004; and Commonwealth Secretariat (2004f) Annual Performance Report 2003-2004. (EC2/04/05)1. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

3.4.3 *Design and assessment criteria CSAP*

CSAP works with a different set of criteria. Although all the CSAP projects the authors covered in their fieldwork fell within the priorities of the Strategic Plan and the three broadly defined CSAP focus areas (environment, poverty reduction and application of ICT at grassroots level), it was less clear that there was any attempt to relate them to other activities within the Secretariat. They were largely stand-alone interventions, designed to solve particular problems, without links to other activities, with the exception perhaps of the two projects in the education sector in Mauritius. This leaves little capability for follow-up support if later there are problems. Hence, the project to produce a report on youth attitudes in Dominica (DOM/001V) had no support to help to ensure that the work was completed. The research was carried out, but the report was never completed. GIDD was aware of the problem and in strategy documents for 2004/05⁸⁰ emphasised the need to develop better and continued links with other GIDD projects and programmes run by other divisions in the Secretariat, especially the Social Transformation and Youth Divisions.

Summary of chapter 5 — The present: overview of strategic gap filling today

Strategic gap filling faces pressures from all sides – different views on what it should be doing, burgeoning demands to do more with an decreasing budget, and continuing requests from member countries who want more of the same and for whom some of the broader goals are not of high priority. This results in a complex programme with many kinds of activities responding to different stakeholders. In some countries, there is some integration among them, in others less so. The administration of these programmes is demanding and the burden on staff time heavy.

80 GIDD (2004c) *Status and future direction of CSAP* by Julius Kaberere. Mimeo; and GIDD (2004a) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP): Strategies for implementation from FY 2004/05* by Julius Kaberere, CPO CSAP. Mimeo.

This chapter reviews the findings from the fieldwork. The first section (4.1) covers the general results and is followed by section 4.2, which is devoted to the strengths of strategic gap filling and some issues that have been raised about it. Next comes a review of the results of each of the forms of support provided through strategic gap filling (4.3). The following section (4.4) assesses the contribution strategic gap filling has made to capacity development, sustainable development and the MDGs, while the penultimate section (4.5) looks at the degree of co-ordination between GIDD and donors in the field and other parts of the Secretariat. The final section (4.6) addresses specific GIDD management issues.

4.1 Overview of findings by country/region

This section synthesises findings for strategic gap filling for each country or region visited. Because of the diversity among the member countries of the Commonwealth, the programmes the authors reviewed were usually quite different one from the other and reflected the conditions of the countries concerned. They varied from high-level, cutting edge interventions crucial to national development programmes to gap filling to maintain essential services. The general results were favourable to very favourable and strategic gap filling seems to have had impact beyond what might normally be expected from such a small budget.

As pointed out in the 2005 annual report of the Development Co-operation Directorate of the OECD, there are few solid efforts at assessing the results of technical co-operation. Some of the most rigorous assessments have been carried out by the multilateral banks using the following determinants of success:

- Engagement by the recipient in terms of financial participation, detailed and continuing dialogue in project implementation, shared understanding of project goals.
- Technical competence of experts: by contrast, bilateral evaluations have found that ability to adjust to local customs and working environment may be more important than skill level.
- Professional supervision by the extending agency, including accompanying experts on planning missions and limiting staff turnover so that the same case officer follows all phases of a project.⁸¹

The authors keep these determinants in mind in the analysis in both this chapter and later ones.

4.1.1 Findings in Mauritius

Mauritius is a high middle-income country with a reputation for competent government, stability and a dynamic population. The PCP, who is the Director-General of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, has **used strategic gap filling for high-level, cutting edge interventions crucial to national development plans**. An example was helping to improve competitiveness in global markets through providing guidelines for benchmarking the country's private and public sectors against international standards (MRT/103). Strategic gap filling also provided experts and training to assist in reform of the civil service (MAU/95) and in setting maritime boundaries as a basis for defining

81 OECD (2006), p.105.

territorial claims and to meet the requirements of the International Law of the Sea (MRT/99, training for counterpart, assistance by staff of the Secretariat).

In most cases in Mauritius, the outputs were quite concrete: The expert in project MRT/101 developed proposals for changes to the court appeals system and to electoral representation, while the expert in project MRT/107 developed a policy on gender which, with some revisions, was approved by Cabinet. Under MRT/104, strategic gap filling expertise helped to liberalise the telecommunications sector in line with World Trade Organization (WTO) requirements.

Although advisers provide technical input, their **work often has significant political implications**; for example, maritime boundaries define mining and fishing rights (MRT/99) and assessing whether pig farming is responsible for ground water pollution had important economic and political consequences (CSAP project MRT/003V). Bringing in experience from other Commonwealth countries can help to provide an unbiased technical base for discussions on sensitive issues, such as civil service reform (MAU/95) or constitutional changes (MRT/101). It thus legitimises the process in the eyes of stakeholders.

4.1.2 Findings in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is in most ways a stark contrast to Mauritius – an extremely poor country just emerging from civil war with many competent people having fled the country. Because of the disruptions caused by the civil war of 1995-2001, the international community, which essentially took control of Sierra Leone, had to put anyone available into government positions. This included incompetent and corrupt individuals, who are gradually being phased out. The first results of intense efforts to develop human resources are becoming more evident, but there is still a **huge demand for training and for qualified personnel**. Salaries are extremely low (US\$500 a month for a minister) and the government has enormous difficulties attracting and retaining staff. Parts of the physical infrastructure also had to be rebuilt.

Where Sierra Leone and Mauritius are similar is in having PCPs with vision. The support provided through strategic gap filling has helped the PCP in Sierra Leone, who is the Development Secretary of the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning, to **promote reform in key areas of government**. Her goal is to see the government become well governed, transparent and accountable and the strategic gap filling assistance is in this vein. The judges provided have, for example, been instrumental in cleaning up a major backlog of cases, which had undermined the credibility of the judicial sector (SIE/83 and SIE/87). The prosecutors have begun to follow-up on corruption cases, although at the time of writing only low-profile ones (SIE/82). The adviser in the position of Director-General for the Ministry of Agriculture has a mandate to bring substantial changes to the sector (SIE/84). Because of the personnel shortages mentioned above, all of the **advisers occupy line positions, often at very senior levels**.

4.1.3 Findings in the Caribbean (Barbados and Dominica)

In the Caribbean, strategic gap filling seems to be a pool of funds to be used by line departments or organisations as they choose, rather than being steered – as in Mauritius and Sierra Leone – by a central ministry into a broader vision. The assistance is often used to **fill gaps that ensure that essential services are maintained**, for example, an adviser with the Barbados Statistical Service (BAR/63). Small states such as Dominica find it all but impossible to create the conditions needed to retain key staff with specialised expertise. The country is still under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme that prevents major salary increases and staff like legal drafters can get a far better salary by simply moving to another island 15 minutes away by plane; as a result, the Secretariat has funded legal drafters under projects DOM/88 and DOM/98.

In other projects in both Dominica and Barbados, the assistance falls more into the category of **addressing globalisation** or at least of trying to help the country or region move to global standards. The Secretariat has, for example, a relationship since 1990 with the Barbados Institute of Management and Productivity, which sees itself as a Caribbean resource helping to prepare the region for the global economy. Its most recent strategic gap filling activity has been the organisation of a regional entrepreneur training programme from May to June 2005. The assistance to Samuel Jackson Prescod Polytechnic to develop a distance education system was focused on fostering the educational and economic development of Barbados and the entire region through equipping a greater proportion of the population with post-secondary education and training (BAR/73).

4.1.4 Findings in the Pacific (Fiji)

In Fiji and the Pacific, the value of strategic gap filling needs to be seen in the light of the particular features of the region – vulnerable, small island states with labour force gaps in areas of strategic importance. There are three areas where strategic gap filling has been particularly appreciated. The first is in filling gaps in the **judicial sector**, such as in the Law Reform Commission, where a former senior Nigerian judge is assuming a lead role in updating legislation that is currently 20 years out of date (FIJ/10). Similarly, a retired Jamaican government lawyer serves as Second Parliamentary Counsel in the Attorney General's Office with an operational role in drafting legislation and advising on it (FIJ/10).

A second area where assistance is particularly valued is **support for political and social stability**, governance and respect for the rule of law in countries such as Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, which have struggled with coups and other types of internal strife. Hence an Australian adviser provides advice to local governments in Fiji and selected other countries in the region (FIJ/13) and an anti-money laundering expert (SPA/16) works with justice sector colleagues to develop new rules, procedures and systems to tackle financial crimes in general. His approach of making extended visits of four to six weeks in each country and then returning after several months has proven so successful that donors such as the UN and US State Department are lining up to support broadening the programme.

The third major area of support to the Pacific is in **developing and strengthening policies and systems, including building capacity**. The regional trade policy expert, for example, advises on key trade policy areas such as WTO, the Cotonou Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and the European Union (SPF/29). He has also helped to establish the region's structures and procedures for the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations with the EU. The gender adviser focuses on strengthening the capacity of the Pacific Forum Secretariat to address gender issues (SPF/30).

4.1.5 Summary of findings

In general, strategic gap filling activities are well or even highly appreciated and most projects are seen as being reasonably to very effective. The selection of projects that the authors reviewed and the outcomes to date would suggest that the success rate among strategic gap filling projects was quite high, indeed beyond what might have been expected from such a small budget⁸². Strategic gap filling thus sets an example for other development organisations in terms of the effectiveness of its programme and the use of its small budget to achieve significant results.

82 The UNDP staff the authors met with were astounded by the high-level policy nature of strategic gap filling activities in Mauritius and commented on the good reputation of the Secretariat in the country.

4.2 Strategic gap filling: strengths and issues

This section looks at the strengths of the Secretariat assistance provided under strategic gap filling, some of the issues that have been raised about it and how these relate to the good practice defined within the donor community. Apart from several well-known advantages, such as flexibility, untying, speed, trust and little bureaucracy, strategic gap filling has also generated a sense of empowerment, which is based on an equality within the partnership that is not often seen in the development community. This provides food for thought in an era when there is a great deal of discussion about ownership, empowerment and partnership, but where these goals are often elusive. Here is a programme where they do exist and which, in many ways, sets an example for many donor programmes.

On the other hand, some of the perceived issues in strategic gap filling, not the least of which is image, have made it difficult for these strengths to be appreciated. Some of these issues are a function of the small size of the programme and its limited capacity in the field and would require major investments to improve.

4.2.1 Strengths of strategic gap filling

The list of strengths of strategic gap filling identified during this evaluation includes the following:

- **Direct relationship** – In section 2.1: The context: trends in technical assistance and international development co-operation, the authors noted that the original concept of technical assistance was a direct relationship between the user (such as Peter the Great) and the expert (such as a Dutch architect), with a clear line of accountability. In most international development activities, on the other hand, the donor tends to demand accountability from the expert, while the responsibility of the developing country is minimised. Secretariat assistance is closer to the original concept, with the expert having a direct relationship with the member country and the Secretariat acting largely as a procurement agency. While it cannot be denied that member countries vary in the amount of responsibility they actually take for the TA provided, this relationship does reinforce the role of the government partner. The notion and spirit of the Paris Declaration and its commitment to ‘respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it’ calls for technical assistance to be under government management⁸³.
- **Flexibility** – Member countries value the willingness of the Secretariat to provide assistance that responds to their needs without being confined to prescribed policy goals. They see strategic gap filling as being ‘country-friendly’ and a mechanism for providing assistance which the donor community cannot; for example, providing an expert to the position of Director of the Policy, Planning and Research Division in the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Sierra Leone.
- **Untied assistance** – Not only is strategic gap filling not tied to any one country, but member countries can make suggestions to the Secretariat about organisations that might be good sources of the kind of expertise they are seeking.
- **Reliability** – The Secretariat is seen as being generally reliable, although limitations on funding sometimes require prioritisation among requests.

83 OECD (2005) *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability*. <http://www.aidharmonization.org> p.3.

- **The nature of the relationship created** – Member countries feel that they can work together with the Secretariat and GIDD on common issues in a co-operative way with the Secretariat really ‘looking at SIDS (small island states) interests’. As several contacts from our fieldwork put it, with the Secretariat, ‘the interests of the Commonwealth come first’. There is a sense of empowerment that comes from this kind of relationship, a sense that is enhanced by the fact that the requests came out of the member countries themselves. Most member countries feel that strategic gap filling projects respond to *their* needs as *they* have identified them.
- **Trust** – The Secretariat and strategic gap filling both have a long tradition of being involved in sensitive issues that require a non-intrusive, discrete approach, often one that takes into account knowledge of experience across the Commonwealth. The non-conditional nature of strategic gap filling assistance is also appreciated in these kinds of assignments.

Box 7: Providing impartial advice on sensitive issues

There is much call for the Secretariat to provide advice on sensitive issues through the strategic gap filling programme, often on issues with major political implications. Strategic gap filling has helped, for example, to strengthen the position of Commonwealth members in international trade negotiations, such as in Fiji (SPF/29), which is negotiating with the WTO. An adviser to the Pacific Islands Forum has been drafting and reviewing appropriate legislation and establishing institutional mechanisms to counter money laundering (SPA/16). In Mauritius, a judge has provided advice on how to reform the constitution and electoral system (MRT/101). In Sierra Leone, GIDD has placed a person in the ministry of trade to assist in trade negotiations (SIE/84).

- **Speed**, which is an element of responsiveness – In general, countries seem to be satisfied with the speed of responsiveness in strategic gap filling, although the interim report had indicated some problems. Satisfaction may be a comparative issue – many donors take years to plan, approve and implement projects.
- The relatively **light structure** of strategic gap filling – This allows the Secretariat to react quickly and with little bureaucracy. As one respondent noted SGF assistance is ‘done within the family’... ‘in a family atmosphere’. This makes it a recipient’s dream⁸⁴.

These factors result in a privileged position for strategic gap filling assistance in the eyes of many respondents. They often prefer strategic gap filling assistance to that of donors.⁸⁵ They see it as ‘for the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries) first’ in a way that the assistance of other donors is not. In many donor-developing country relationships, said one respondent, the two partners are not pursuing the same objectives and the donors have interests that they often impose. This provides food for thought in an era when there is a great deal of discussion about ownership, empowerment and partnership, but where these goals are often elusive. Here is a programme where these goals do exist and which, in many ways, sets an example for many donor programmes.

84 It should be pointed out that limited bureaucracy does not necessarily lead to speedy responses, or even responsiveness in the sense described in section 3.1.1 of matching supply and demand. It may take time to find the appropriate expert. Delays may also occur if office procedures are not supportive of easy tracking or good recording of requests. Management of the Secretariat admits that some requests have been mislaid, although this did not seem to be a major concern of the countries visited for this evaluation. The issue of appropriate document management has been raised in a number of other evaluations carried out for the Secretariat.

85 The EC was surprised that Mauritius sought Secretariat support on EPAs, rather than EC support.

4.2.2 *Issues with strategic gap filling*

Why does a programme that has had many successes face criticism from some quarters? The authors now look at some of the issues raised in reference to strategic gap filling to try to find an answer to that question. These include:

Dispersion of the programme – Some stakeholders see strategic gap filling activities as widely dispersed and suggest that small, scattered activities without a critical mass produce few results. Box 8, below, suggests that this view needs to be adjusted slightly and that systemic change can indeed occur as an effect of an initial, purposeful small intervention. Partly because of its small size and limited resources, the Secretariat as a whole and strategic gap filling more specifically have adopted an approach based on judicious national selection of small interventions focussing on pressure points within the system. This is relatively low cost, considering the number of activities, and administratively light. If the assistance provided is successful, it can have major effects.

In a country like Mauritius with its competent public service, the ability to make an analysis of which interventions are pivotal is probably well embedded in the government. In other countries with fewer resources, such an approach may rely on the skills of one or two individuals whose tenure may be short-lived. In yet other countries, this skill may need nurturing. The alternative is for the Secretariat to make a greater contribution to planning and developing programmes in co-operation with nationals. Taking on such a role would have significant implications in terms of staff time, travel and the planning and analytical skills of personnel. Furthermore, it would reduce the decision-making role of countries themselves and possibly the strong commitment they have to strategic gap filling (see section 4.4). This would not be in keeping with the philosophy espoused in the Paris Declaration of giving developing countries greater leadership.

That said, it is true that the Secretariat is trying to deliver through a large number and very diverse range of aid modalities and sub-modalities. The authors discuss these issues further in the coming sections, as well as the implications for the Secretariat's ability to manage strategic gap filling adequately.

Box 8: Approaches to achieving results

The standard approach to achieving results is based on a philosophy of critical mass – the more money and resources provided in a programme, the more influence can be brought to bear on a situation and the more likely the results will be positive. Assessments are usually based on snapshots of the constituent elements of the system of programme delivery such as leadership, structure and communications, which may be updated from time to time. The approach taken is often linear and staged, assuming a horizontal line from inputs to outputs to outcomes to impact. Activities are focused on constituent parts of the whole. The implications of this approach are significant, with an emphasis on big projects, more concentration on a few activities and more control vested in outsiders – because the management of large interventions is often seen to be beyond local capabilities. The monitoring system often stresses quantitative outputs from each constituent part.

An alternative philosophy is based on systems thinking and the potential for change in a broad programme by focusing on some critical points in the system. These interventions can influence key movements, tipping points and shifts in direction. Thus, in Mauritius, the input of the adviser on public sector reform seemed to give a push to activities already conceived by national public servants such as e-governance and restructuring. Being able to

see these points of entry or windows of opportunity requires a broad view of the system, an intimate understanding of how it works, and an ability to judge the right moment for an intervention to have influence. Rosalind Eyben calls this 'planned opportunism' – the capacity to judge when an intervention can be critical in establishing a new 'path dependency', or setting a new and different course (DfID/Eyben, 2005, p.13). However, at the same time, she cautions against trying to predict all the effects that actions can have on a system, because of the impossibility of ever understanding the totality of a system that is in constant flux (Ibid. p.6). Outcomes remain to a large extent uncertain and unpredictable. Any intervention remains to a considerable extent hostage to systems behaviours, over which an external agent has only limited control. When such activities succeed, however, they can bring substantial change.

Difficulty in showing convincing results from strategic gap filling – The Secretariat has had difficulties in recent years convincing its stakeholders that strategic gap filling has added value. The reports it produces tend to cover a broad range of activities, and thus tend to reinforce the concerns about dispersion mentioned above. There have been some efforts to show how a number of activities fit together over a period of years, but not enough to convince some of the more critical stakeholders. There have been few if any efforts to document situations in which different approaches may actually set an example for the development community.

Proving the effectiveness of the programme is not in itself an easy task. First, it is hard to attribute outcomes, much less impacts to the interventions of the Secretariat. The interventions are simply too small to be distinguishable from other interventions and broad contextual issues. Second, there is no clear agreement in the Secretariat on how to define successful interventions. The authors suggest how this might be clarified in section 4.6 (see especially recommendation 17).

Third, the task raises the issue of who is making the judgements. Since the purpose of strategic gap filling is to respond to requests from individual member countries, it is logical that the arbiters of success should be primarily the people benefiting from the projects concerned and those who are knowledgeable about specific activities. Their feedback is usually available through interviews only, and is mainly anecdotal. Interviews with donors and other third parties can provide triangulation. This is the main approach used in this evaluation and in other Secretariat reports.

The extensive interviews held as part of this evaluation indicate that the results from strategic gap filling have generally been satisfactory to very satisfactory. The analysis made during the field missions suggested that of the 11 strategic gap filling projects in Mauritius, three were problematic and only one could be seen to be a failure. In Sierra Leone, where conditions are exceedingly difficult, four of the 14 projects were very successful, five were quite successful, four were problematic and one was a definite failure. In Barbados, four out of six projects were quite successful and two were problematic, while in Dominica four out of five appear to have been successful and one was problematic.

How does this compare with the track record of donors? Development is a risky business and promoting change has a high failure rate in any area, especially the first attempt at it. Nonetheless, the Secretariat's rate of problematic programmes compares favourably to that of the World Bank, which from the late 1980s to 1997 reported about 30 per cent of its projects as having unsatisfactory development outcomes. General World Bank exit evaluations were less positive and judged close to 66 per cent of the Bank's activities as not having had 'substantial' institutional development impacts. A more recent DfID report on its portfolio performance rated 66 per cent of the technical co-operation

(TC) projects analysed as successful compared to 79 per cent for non-TC interventions⁸⁶. These figures are similar to those coming out of the private sector in North America⁸⁷. The Asian Development Bank in a recent case study on its activities in the Philippines reported a somewhat lower rate of success, with only half of TA personnel being rated as successful or highly successful⁸⁸.

GIDD limited input to the planning and monitoring of strategic gap filling projects – The Secretariat has a limited ability to assess requests, to interact with governments before taking action to fulfil them and to discuss problems in implementation. GIDD officers are not able to visit all the countries they cover even once a year, and they can often do little from London to address issues of project design or implementation. Frequent staff changes on both ends also complicate communications. This makes it difficult to keep assignments on their original track, especially those aimed at building capacity. Presently, such assignments tend to shift rather quickly, and often without the knowledge of the GIDD officer, into operational needs and even into senior line roles in many cases. Some experts learned upon arrival in their countries of assignment that they were to take over line or even managerial functions. It then falls to the expatriate to negotiate the role. GIDD can do little to change or influence the situation from a distance.

Limited ability to track complex and comprehensive processes and dynamics in a post-conflict country like Sierra Leone – The staff of the Secretariat has tried to keep up with what is going on in Sierra Leone, but this is a challenge beyond the capacity of the present structure of the Secretariat as a whole, despite occasional staff visits. Because of the Secretariat's limited presence in the field, the judges in Sierra Leone addressed their concerns to DfID, which was able to provide the complementary support that was not originally programmed. On crucial aspects of the institutional reform process, discussions are presently ongoing among a number of donors, such as DfID, UNDP and Norway, and the Government of Sierra Leone. The Secretariat is largely on the sideline, simply because it is not available for most meetings.

Limited technical support – Projects that have no corresponding technical support within the Secretariat were found to be somewhat isolated, especially when problems arose; one such case is the building codes project in Barbados⁸⁹. The support that Secretariat staff are able to provide is limited given the absence of specialised expertise in the area, and it falls on local authorities to resolve the issue. The authorities may not have the means, with the result that an assignment, once off track, is often irredeemable. For example, in both cases in the Caribbean where support was provided to set up computer systems, the organisations concerned needed help to smooth out the wrinkles and this was not available.

Lack of advance planning – Some of the major contributors to CFTC and member countries both feel that more advance planning would make strategic gap filling more effective. Their perspectives are, however, quite different. The contributors see planning as a means of providing more focus to the programme by defining activities in advance. Users, on the other hand, see it as a means to help them better define their priorities and reduce what they perceive as the supply aspects of strategic gap filling. The question is thus, who does the planning?

GIDD sees the possibility of doing more forward planning, but is uncomfortable about making allocations, largely because of the uncertainty of the financial situation. The authors of this report

86 DFID (2006), p.19.

87 Morgan (2002), p.4.

88 Asian Development Bank (2006) *Special Evaluation Study on the Performance of Technical Assistance – 2nd Position Paper*. Mimeo.

89 It appears as if the dismantling of the Commonwealth Science Council has made it more difficult for the Secretariat to provide technical support to some kinds of projects.

believe that one without the other is not feasible and that a limited number of pilots would help to better define what is workable and what is not. Initially, Secretariat staff would probably have to help some member countries define a vision of where Secretariat assistance would be most appropriate. In terms of activities within a yearly programme, member countries would be expected to address the questions raised in recommendation 17 in section 4.6: Management Issues in GIDD, below.

Recommendation 2: Pilot multi-annual allocations to a few member countries

Set up two or three pilots for multi-year country allocations with selected member countries. The pilot would allow the country to do more strategic forward planning of Secretariat assistance based on an agreed annual allocation.

At the end of the financial year, review these experiences and decide on the value of extending this approach to a larger number of countries.

4.3 Findings from the fieldwork for the three forms of support

This section looks at the results from the field and the files on each of the three forms of support used under strategic gap filling (experts, training and CSAP). The findings indicate that the function of provision of experts has a niche that cannot easily be filled by other programmes in the Secretariat; that niche involves supporting activities that do not have a natural home in either SASD or the policy divisions, but which can be critical, for example, to reform or restructuring processes in key sectors. There are six major objectives to which experts contribute and which could serve as the basis for further thinking on how the Secretariat may want to monitor its programmes. On a less positive note, the ‘counterpart model’ used by the Secretariat has been effective only exceptionally and other approaches seem to have more potential.

In terms of training, there is high demand from government agencies and the Secretariat is seen as having a comparative advantage in responding quickly in areas not covered by donors. At the same time, some programmes, particularly those coming out of the old MTSD, are seen to be supply-driven and not always relevant. Even where training activities were deemed successful, there is a strong demand for ongoing learning opportunities – such as through ‘communities of practice’ to address practical problems. These ongoing opportunities are missing in the current training programmes.

This evaluation includes a review of nine of 50 CSAP projects, which presents a mixed picture. Some projects were found to be successful to very successful whereas others had more difficulties. There are a number of broader issues which make the programme as a whole problematic – its lack of clarity of purpose, limited linkages with other Secretariat programmes and its focus on grassroots development and emergency assistance, none of which are areas of comparative advantage for the Secretariat. These factors suggest that the Secretariat should consider returning the programme to its original purpose of providing no-fee expertise to regular programmes rather than maintaining CSAP as a stand-alone activity with its own objectives.

4.3.1 Findings and recommendations: experts

Strategic gap filling expertise covers a wide range of activities, as table 14 below indicates. In some cases, neither SASD nor the policy divisions work on the areas and hence these activities do not have a natural home anywhere but in GIDD. Furthermore, the emphasis of strategic gap filling is on institutional and capacity development, whereas SASD focuses on poverty reduction and the policy divisions on Secretariat policy issues. Strategic gap filling thus has a comparative advantage for issues such as the distance education planner in Barbados (BAR/73) or the asbestos adviser in Mauritius (MRT/102). Fieldwork has determined that these kinds of interventions are both valued by the member countries and effective in encouraging significant changes in the countries concerned. They represent small interventions, which most donors are seldom able to fund because of the high administrative costs involved. The fact that the Secretariat can respond relatively quickly means that assistance can usually be mobilised within what are sometimes limited windows of opportunity. The approval procedures of many donors do not allow this speed of response.

Table 14: Number and profession of long- and short-term strategic gap filling experts—2003/04⁹⁰

Professional expertise/sector	Number
Legal drafters/legal & constitutional advisers	18
Judges	6
Education (lecturer/specialist teachers in speech)	12
IT/e-governance specialists	6
Telecommunications	3
Election specialists	3
Trade and market experts	9
Medical and hospital administration	6
Public sector reform/management	9
Quality assurance/benchmarking standards	4
Gender specialists	5
Anti-money laundering experts	2
Miscellaneous	50
Total	133

The Commonwealth Secretariat has a brand or a cachet that enables it to attract high-level people from across the Commonwealth to the strategic gap filling programme. It also has a large network to draw on. Based on a review of 47 positions, the authors identified six kinds of objectives to which these experts, both paid and unpaid under CSAP, contribute and which respondents judged to be useful and important in developmental terms. These six objectives were as follows⁹¹:

- **Gap filling**, where the functions are operational and the purpose is to keep essential services going, especially where small states are uncompetitive employers of resources that have a global market. These positions are very important in small, poor states, which are in a constant process of de-

⁹⁰ Source: Commonwealth Secretariat (2004) *Annual Performance Report 2003/04*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

⁹¹ See also table 19: Using strategic gap filling effectively in section 4.4: Contribution of Strategic Gap Filling to Capacity Development, Sustainability and Long-Term Development Impact, below.

capacitation – losing trained people – and where the loss of one person can shut down a whole system. Thus this is not ‘gap filling’ in the traditional sense as criticised by the development community – using expatriates to fill operational positions that nationals could and would like to fill. In these situations, the nationals are not available. The gaps often relate to areas of Secretariat expertise where there is global competition, such as legal drafting in the Caribbean (DOM/98) and the Pacific (Fiji FIJ/10).

- **Advice on political issues**, by bringing in high-calibre people with impartial views. The legitimacy of Commonwealth experience is much valued and helps to assure stakeholders. Examples of such advice and assistance include with the legal system and human rights abuses in Sierra Leone (SIE/82, 83, 87); with money laundering in Fiji (FIJ/13); and with constitutional reform in Mauritius (MRT/101). In some cases, the advice provided does not necessarily coincide with that which would have been provided by donors, such as on Economic Partnership Agreements with Mauritius and other countries (MRT/100).
- **Advice on positioning the country globally**, where recipients need world-class expertise for a defined period to help meet international standards. The telecommunications advisers in Barbados (BAR/74) and Mauritius (MRT/104) fall into this category. The value to the country concerned could be many times greater than the cost of the strategic gap filling assistance in such cases. The negative impact on a country from maintaining an outdated telecommunications policy, for example, which inhibits the growth of industry and trade can be many times higher than the cost of an expert for two to three years.
- **Change agents**. Experts are placed in strategic areas of government, for example, in ministries needing reform such as agriculture in Sierra Leone (SIE/84) or to support gender mainstreaming in the Pacific (for example, the gender adviser placed in the Pacific Forum Secretariat, SPF/30). Again, these assignments have potential for major influence, although this can only be assessed over the longer term.
- **Advice on specific, specialised issues**. These projects are generally short-term and highly focused. Some have been highly successful, such as the projects on handling asbestos in buildings (MRT/102) and finding a source of water pollution (MRT/003V), both of which took place in Mauritius.
- **Short-term training assignments**, where experts are brought in to provide specific skills and knowledge transfer. For example, such an expert was brought into the medical faculty of the University of Sierra Leone, which does not have the required specialists to teach certain subjects. The programmes that the authors looked at of this nature were much valued as a means of keeping broader training programmes going – in this case for doctors – which might otherwise have collapsed.

No one country has all these different needs but, given the varying conditions of the member countries, all would appear relevant to the needs of at least some member countries. The question is how to ensure that proposed assignments are analysed adequately so that they can be staffed appropriately? **Personal qualities** were often highlighted as being of particular importance here and, where there was dissatisfaction, it was often because of a weakness in this area. Table 19 in section 4.4 and table 22 in section 5.3.2 discuss these different forms of support in more detail, including their level of influence on capacity, and suggest what type of expertise may be needed for the different kinds of assignments.

Counterparts

In many cases, the roles defined above also involve some mentoring of staff or even seminars or training sessions, but **real counterparts are rare**. This is in spite of the fact that the contracts issued for the provision of experts by the Secretariat stipulate that each person should be assigned a local counterpart who should collaborate with the expatriate and receive training from him or her. This gap between policy and reality needs some explanation.

The term 'counterpart' was used in two different ways in the various discussions the authors had in the field, as follows:

- A **potential replacement** who needs to acquire skills to take on functions similar to those performed by the outside adviser. This seems to be the meaning implied by the Secretariat; and
- The **main working colleagues** of the adviser who are interested in his/her work and can learn from him/her. This was the meaning used by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in Mauritius and probably applies in other countries as well.

International development literature shows that the counterpart relationship in the first sense has often not been possible. Most development agencies abandoned the focus on this one-on-one relationship some years ago in favour of a more holistic approach to strengthening the organisation. Most are trying to follow the advice of Elliot Berg, outlined in box 9, below.

In all the projects visited, the authors found only three cases where the counterpart system had functioned. In Sierra Leone, there were no counterparts at all and no training was taking place. There was all too often no one with the technical skills available to be remotely able to replace the adviser. In the absence of a plan to improve salaries, all qualified personnel are already in positions. Foreign inputs will need to be mobilised for quite some time if essential services are to continue functioning. Even in much more developed Mauritius, there are no engineers in the part of the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications where the Commonwealth Secretariat telecommunications adviser works (MRT/104). In some other areas, advice is needed for only a finite time span and there may not be a need for expertise once the assignment is completed, as in the project on constitutional reform (MRT/101).

In many other cases, the authors were told that either the interaction between the adviser and the person designated as counterpart officer was not always good, or that no individual with the relevant set of skills was assigned as a counterpart. Sometimes it is difficult to find people willing to take on what are often seen to be subservient roles to outsiders.

Box 9: The expert-counterpart system, as seen by Elliot Berg

According to Elliot Berg (Berg, E. J. [1993] Rethinking Technical Cooperation: Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa. New York: United Nations Development Programme), the expert-counterpart system assumes four conditions:

- each expert must have a counterpart assigned to him/her;
- the counterpart should work full time;
- the expert should not primarily fill a post in the recipient country, but focus on his/her role as an adviser; and
- at the end of the training, the counterpart should be able to carry out his/her duties independently so that he/she can take over the job when the expert leaves.

While most multilateral and bilateral donors have recognised the importance of these conditions, experience has shown that they are often impractical in real life.

The expert 'concentrates on getting the work done rather than on training, is often good at his job but bad as a trainer, upstages the counterpart in influence, and sometimes blocks the counterpart's career progress by staying too long' (p.101). The expert-counterpart

Continued...

arrangement works on the unspoken assumption that the resident expert and the counterpart are professional equals, distinguished mainly by degrees of experience (p.105). In reality, this is seldom the case and the more efficient adviser largely carries out the tasks of the counterpart. However, because the local counterpart understands the organisational and cultural environment of the work place better, the expert's effectiveness and credibility are undermined and consequently his or her effectiveness as a trainer (p.106).

In summary, the expert-counterpart system is an artificial model, which can be found nowhere else but in technical co-operation (p.104). Berg suggests replacing it with:

- an open use of technical assistance personnel for gap-filling;
- a wider adoption of short-term coaching with repeated visits;
- greater utilisation of local consulting capacities; and
- more twinning (p.110).

Two approaches to training and skills development identified during the fieldwork show promise:

- The **in-and-out mentoring model** established by the money laundering expert in the Pacific (SPA/16), who comes to a country for several weeks to accompany development and implementation of rules, procedures and systems. Training is interspersed with practical work to be done, feedback and mentoring. He returns after several months' absence.
- **Training complementing the work of an expert** in an integrated effort to effect change – this can include clearly focused courses or seminars at either an organisational or individual level.

Recommendation 3: Move away from the focus on a one-on-one expert-counterpart relationship

Remove any reference to training one-on-one counterparts from the ToR of experts *in favour of requiring a broader responsibility to build capacity in general within the host organisations through various means, including seminars, coaching, use of local consultants and on-the-job training.*

4.3.2 Findings and recommendations: training

The assessment of training below is based on patterns of effectiveness that appeared during field visits, triangulated with observations from a review of documents; these included project appraisals, application forms, end of course evaluations and two ex-post evaluations, training needs assessments and various correspondence.

The Secretariat niche and comparative advantage in training

There is a **high demand for assistance for training and skills development** in Commonwealth member countries. The Secretariat's support for training activities **requested** by member governments is considered to be reasonably fast, non-intrusive and responsive to the priorities and demands of governments that are not funded through other sources. The Secretariat steps in where other donors cannot, or will not without significant delay or conditionality. There is less demand, at least for training purposes, for some of the programmes **offered** by the Secretariat, such as the regional or pan-Commonwealth training events, which often appear supply-driven.

Similarities existing among Commonwealth member countries in relation to institutional structures, operational systems and the underlying principles and values of a neutral and well-trained public service **give the Secretariat a comparative advantage in the area of public service development.** It can access or facilitate the exchange of relevant expertise and experience, despite the differences in size, values and cultures of the countries in which it operates. There is a less compelling case to be made for the Secretariat's comparative advantage in areas such as micro-credit or the gender dimension of PRSPs, where the field is crowded with donors and NGOs.

Findings for the different types of training activities

University degrees and diploma/certificate programmes

University degrees and diploma/certificate programmes generally focus on providing formal qualifications in management and business, community development or specialised areas of relevance to the region. The Pacific region has the largest number of degree and certificate granting programmes sponsored by strategic gap filling. For example:

- MBA programme, University of the South Pacific, Fiji: The Secretariat used to support 15 individuals at any one time, but this declined to eight in 2002 and two in 2005.
- Certificate in Community Development, Community Education Centre, Fiji: 14 trainees in 2002, two in 2004 and seven in 2005. The Certificate is aimed at women and community workers.
- Certificate in Earth Sciences and Marine Geology, South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, Fiji: three-year programme; 11 of the 17 participants in 2003-2005 were supported by the Secretariat. The programme is unique in the region.

These and other degree and certificate programmes in other countries are driven by training institutions and are offered pan-Commonwealth, with a set number of places for each country (excluding the host). Standards for quality and outcomes are set by the institutions. Course completion is generally considered to be the output, although some institutions such as the Community Education Centre in Fiji do provide follow-up evaluation reports to the Secretariat. The Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) does little monitoring of these programmes and one of the institutions the authors met, the Robert Antoine Sugar Industry Training Centre in Mauritius, did not know who to contact at the Secretariat to talk about programming.

Recommendation 4: Improve co-ordination with training institutes

Improve the co-ordination with training institutes that receive CFTC-funded trainees, so that all institutes involved are fully aware of who is their responsible officer or officers. These officers should also take responsibility for monitoring the training programmes offered for quality and continued relevance to the needs of member countries.

Interviews in the field indicate that the results of these training programmes are mixed. Counterparts (in the classic sense of the term) who have been sponsored by the Secretariat for graduate degrees or for seminars, gained both experience and career progression within the public service of their country; the clearest examples of this were in Mauritius. However, while benefits accrue to individuals in the form of knowledge and skills, credentials and enhanced possibilities for career development, they do not always translate into benefits to the sponsoring organisation. In addition, not all trainees remain with government institutions when they return home.

In-country, regional or pan-Commonwealth courses

The authors received generally positive feedback about the quality of training programmes offered in-country, regionally and pan-Commonwealth and their relevance to trainees' requirements. Individuals found the training they had received useful overall, though not always highly relevant to their day-to-day jobs.

When asked what they found most useful in terms of short courses, regional workshops and conferences, many respondents cited the **opportunity to make contact and exchange with peers** from other Commonwealth countries as well as the **exposure to new ideas and approaches**.

The most highly-rated courses covered high-priority issues for government; examples of such courses included e-governance in Mauritius, anti-money laundering in the Pacific and in Mauritius, and police training in Sierra Leone. Participants reported increased understanding of issues and the ability to apply ideas and approaches to their work. Participants generally valued the opportunity to move from 'conceptual' to practical placements in agencies within the same training programme.

The extent to which benefits captured by individuals translated into enhanced performance and/or their contribution to changes depended on the extent to which:

- Course content was closely **aligned with work responsibilities**;
- Individuals had the **opportunity to apply** the ideas, skills or approaches in practical assignment and/or in their jobs;
- There was **cultural and/or institutional readiness and financial support** for the introduction of new ideas or practices – a key factor of impact (see box, below); and
- The training **activities fit into a broader capacity development strategy**, either for the institution or for the country more broadly – such as the example of police training described in box 10, below.

Box 10: Police training for Sierra Leone

A key priority for Sierra Leone, a country coming out of civil strife, is to build the capacity of its police forces to establish and maintain the rule of law. The police service needed exposure to a new model – community policing – as well as practical training for a critical mass of officers. Under strategic gap filling, the Botswana police force carried out a training needs assessment (TNA) and then delivered training for regular officers. Senior officers were trained in Britain by the British Council.

While they are viewed as being useful, courses in areas that are complex or new to a country or government (e.g. e-government, anti-money laundering, distance education in the Caribbean) do not provide enough depth of experience for practitioners to feel confident in their knowledge or skills. As a consequence, throughout this evaluation's field consultations there were repeated calls for more opportunities to learn through experience – such as through more or longer practical attachments, and more opportunities for exchange among practitioners facing similar issues – and for follow-up communication, advice and mentoring to support practitioners in learning to deal with challenges as they arise.

Need for continuous learning

GIDD operates with a mindset focused on delivering training events. The assessments of training needs performed by the Secretariat tend to focus attention on knowledge or skills gaps (in individuals or groups of individuals) and on training solutions, mostly in terms of formal courses or seminars delivered by experts (see box 11, below). This perspective is short term, activity-based and time-bound, and the operating assumption is that capacity is built once activities are completed. Repeated calls for follow-up to build on skills or embed what has been learned during a training event point to the limitations of this perspective.

Box 11: Training needs assessment (TNA) — public services in Barbados

Undertaken by MTSD with an expert from the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN, Malaysia) in June 2000, the Training Needs Assessment in Barbados used a generic competency profile for senior and mid-level public service managers, drawing on internationally recognised literature on management (for example, Henry Mintzberg and others). Competency profiles were drawn up as a ‘menu’ of knowledge and skills that public service managers needed and should acquire. The emphasis was on different forms of training programmes to be offered to different levels of managers within public services. The TNA also made ‘other recommendations’ on performance management systems and work process improvements, but offered few options for continuous learning beyond training programmes. Much of the literature on adult learning and on leadership/management development suggests that managers in the public sector and private sector alike learn a lot of what they need on the job, through assignments, constructive feedback, accessing peers and building ‘communities of practice’.

A significant proportion of participants and senior government officials alike noted that one time-bound activity, be it a course or the placement of a technical adviser, was not enough to ‘fill the gap’. One activity may provide exposure – ‘a taste’ of what is possible – and limited practice, but in a significant proportion of cases this was not enough for practitioners to act with confidence. Issues inevitably arise as they begin to operate in the reality of the workplace, and they look for a knowledge lifeline to connect them to other practitioners in a network to allow for continued exchange of ideas and experience. This is especially true where the country’s strategic gap is in an area that is relatively new or complex – for example, e-government in Mauritius, anti-money laundering in Mauritius and the Pacific, or distance learning in the Caribbean. **The most effective strategic gap filling interventions typically went beyond one course or TA input, and included a combination or sequence of activities as well as in-and-out mentoring;** these factors offered a way for practitioners to continue learning.

There were also repeated calls across all countries for ways of **keeping in touch with experts and practitioners dealing with similar issues** beyond training events. There is increasing evidence that what practitioners want and need, especially when they are dispersed and somewhat isolated from others in their technical field, is a ‘community of practice’ to connect with, engage in, contribute to and learn from (see box 12, below for an example of communities of practice supported by a membership organisation in Canada). Increasing access to Internet technology throughout the world enhances the possibility of supporting the emergence of knowledge networks, which would link practitioners within the Commonwealth and allow them to exchange practices and experiences and thereby generate knowledge.

Box 12: Communities of practice — the Association of Community Colleges of Canada

The Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC) is a membership organisation that serves over 150 institutions located in urban and rural areas throughout Canada and has institutional connections with colleges throughout the world. The ACCC has helped to establish 65 ‘affinity groups’ of faculty and/or senior officials from similar levels (Presidents, VPs, etc.), who face similar challenges with no easy answers: they need to ‘learn their way through’ those challenges. Following a conference or workshop on a theme in an area identified as a challenge to practitioners, ACCC secretariat officers explain the notion of communities of practice and offer the secretariat’s support. This support generally takes the form of facilitating a few initial meetings and connecting interested practitioners in Intranet knowledge networks. Commonwealth country members appreciate this approach to such an extent that they have increased their contributions to the Secretariat to do more in this area.

GIDD has developed an Extranet, which provides information about some of its programmes and lists past and future training events. However, to turn this into a fully operational community of practice/interactive online forum (and to use the ‘CommuniSpace’ and ‘Knowledge Depot’ provided more fully⁹²) is likely to require additional resources and programme staff time to moderate and manage the discussions and input. Given that Commonwealth member countries are spread out geographically, the Secretariat could **consider establishing a network of learning networks**, supporting some interested institutions within the Commonwealth. This may become a new niche and comparative advantage for the Commonwealth Secretariat. The *Commonwealth of Learning*, which aims to provide access to open and distance learning for development, could become a collaborative partner for creating such communities of practice for Commonwealth practitioners.

The fieldwork has shown that a number of forms of support available from the Secretariat through strategic gap filling (including experts) contribute to developing knowledge and skills, but could be more effective if they were better grounded in the context and embedded in a wider plan for training. In addition, **activities that foster learning and institutional capacity need to go beyond simply technical training**. They need to address other capacity dimensions that are just as important and strategic for individual, institutional and sector performance. Such capacity dimensions include, for example: increasing confidence to implement ideas; increasing credibility and institutional legitimacy; developing a supportive institutional environment in the country and a network of peers through facilitation and exchange of ideas; generating appropriate models; and regional co-operation.

Recommendation 5: Use a broad range of approaches to adult continuous learning

Put more emphasis in programme design and country responses on a broad range of approaches to adult continuous learning, including follow-up courses with practical assignments on the job, mentoring, and the development of communities of practice. Explore innovative ways in which this can be achieved in countries and regions through Internet connections and learning approaches.

92 The ‘CommuniSpace’ and ‘Knowledge Depot’ are systems set up on the GIDD Extranet to share information.

Review long-standing training programmes

Some of the programmes supported under strategic gap filling come out of the former Management and Training Services Division (MTSD). GIDD has not performed a systematic evaluation of the continued relevance of these programmes and their effectiveness to meet the evolving needs of member countries. The fieldwork suggests that member countries see some of these programmes as being supply driven and not always of the highest priority. To determine the effectiveness of the range of activities offered by the Secretariat under Programme 4.4/8 in support of training would require a more substantial empirical base than was possible in this review.

Recommendation 6: Evaluate long-standing training programmes

Evaluate long-standing degree, diploma and certificate programmes to provide the kind of empirical grounding that is required to determine the effectiveness of these programmes and their continued relevance to evolving member country needs. The evaluation should determine the effectiveness of the overall approach to capacity building through such courses, which to continue and which to stop offering.

Developing cadres of qualified personnel in professions such as legal drafting in small island states

The Secretariat and member countries need to be realistic about which capacities can be developed and sustained in countries and which are likely to require long-term support to develop or access skills on a regional basis. For example, the small island states of the Caribbean and the Pacific struggle to keep legal drafters in post. A training needs assessment workshop for the Caribbean, sponsored by the Secretariat and focusing on curriculum development for training of legal drafters, identified possible elements of a strategy to meet this critical need. These included:

- The introduction of legal drafting in law degrees to provide a larger pool of candidates with some notions of the issue;
- Establishing a regular programme of short advanced courses. One possibility is for governments of the region to offer these at meetings of the CARICOM Legal Affairs Committee; and
- Taking advantage of the new drafting facilities at CARICOM and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) to provide attachments for regional drafters after they have acquired a degree of experience in their own offices.

The training needs assessment concluded that 'however effective training schemes may be in imparting required skills, the desired improvements in quality of legislation and its speedy preparation will not take place if drafters are not available in sufficient numbers and with the appropriate experience and if more new drafters are not forthcoming⁹³'.

⁹³ Source: Patchett, Keith (2003) *Report of the workshop on curriculum development for the training of legislative drafters*. 10-12 November 2003, Christ Church, Barbados. Mimeo.

Recommendation 7: Develop corps of legal drafters in the regions

Consider negotiating regional agreements to establish corps of legal drafters within appropriate regional institutions – such as university law faculties – to respond to the needs of smaller Commonwealth member states without the means to hire and retain full-time specialised personnel. The regional agreements would have to be underpinned by an analysis of how current and future needs can be met on a pooled basis, which countries per region are most in need and what percentage of the cost they should be expected to assume. Such legal drafting facilities should be financed primarily through national and regional contributions, but the Secretariat should consider providing some additional funding. Work in this area could build on the experiences of the Commonwealth of Learning, which has offered long-distance legal drafting courses in the past⁹⁴.

Other aspects of the broader legal drafting training strategy mentioned above should also be implemented, i.e. the introduction of legal drafting in law degrees, the establishment of a regular programme of short advanced courses, and using the drafting facilities that exist to provide attachments.

4.3.3 Findings and recommendations: the Commonwealth Services Abroad Programme (CSAP)

CSAP has passed through three phases: the period from 1997 to 2001 when CSAP was a support mechanisms to other programmes, the period from 2001 to 2003 when CSAP was re-launched and became a free-standing programme, and a third period which began in 2004 with the arrival of a new programme officer and saw particular efforts to strengthen the programme through an external consultant. As a result of the selection of fieldwork countries, this review of CSAP looked only at projects that took place or were agreed in the second phase. It did not include any activities designed since GIDD began actively rethinking the programme. Consequently, the findings reflect the programme only in that period, and could be quite different for current projects. Given the relatively small and varied sample (nine projects in four countries – Barbados, Dominica, Fiji, Mauritius – of a total of some 50 projects which have taken place to date) it was difficult to draw general conclusions on the projects. The authors therefore discuss the findings for CSAP **projects** by country. The subsequent section on strengths and issues, in contrast, also reflects their comments on CSAP as a **programme**.

CSAP in Mauritius

In Mauritius, the host organisations for the three CSAP projects the evaluation looked at expressed considerable satisfaction with the outcomes. The principal contact point (PCP) felt that the assignment of a team to identify the source of groundwater pollution (MRT/003V) was especially successful. The Mauritius Institute of Education, the host institution of the two other CSAP projects in Mauritius (MRT/001V and MRT/002V) also felt that the volunteers provided a valuable contribution to the organisation, especially one of the two. The authors' interview contacts in the host organisation for project MRT/003V, the Ministry of Environment, made some suggestions that could have improved the project greatly and reduced the strain on their own resources. These included more information/planning beforehand to allow the ministry to prepare the necessary resources for the volunteer's assignment, more flexibility on the length of the assignment (the volunteers were only available for one continuous three-month period) and the provision of a team of four experts as originally requested by the host ministry, rather than two as agreed on by GIDD and the point of contact (POC).

94 Source: <http://www.col.org/programmes/capacity/index.htm>

CSAP in Fiji

There had been only one CSAP project in Fiji at the time of writing (FIJ/001V), although another request was submitted. The point of contact's office had only limited knowledge of this project, and no interview on it could be arranged. The project consisted of the provision of a resource person for a workshop in the crafts sector. The volunteer did not submit a report and no documentation was available in the Secretariat at the time of this evaluation's file review. Apparently the volunteer received both her allowance and the workshop funding in advance of the project to reduce the administrative burden for the Secretariat. This effectively removed any leverage that could have been applied to induce her to submit a report on her activities.

CSAP in Dominica

In Dominica, although the survey on youth attitudes (DOM/001V) seemed to have been carried out well by the two volunteers, again there was no report. This was a great disappointment to the Dominicans involved, who were very keen to receive the results of the survey.

CSAP in Barbados

In Barbados, respondents for the four volunteer projects were generally happy about the assignments themselves, but were concerned about the lack of follow-up. For the two ICT projects (BAR/002V and BAR/004V), the Secretariat/CSAP was not able to offer the 'after sales' support required to enable the host organisations to make full use of the software. The Barbados Youth Business Trust (BAR/004V) would have liked to have seen the programme used in other similar organisations in the Caribbean, but this would have required formal requests from the countries concerned and these did not materialise. The pilot poverty study for one area of Barbados (BAR/001V) was also completed successfully, but the Secretariat was not able to provide the same volunteer again for a second period of 18 months to carry out a nationwide extension of the survey.

Table 15: CSAP projects in the fieldwork countries

Project No.	Project description / host organisation	Timeframe/ duration	Cost	Sector	Comments
Barbados					
G/BAR/001V	Poverty assessment survey, Poverty Alleviation Bureau, Ministry of Social Transformation	2001-02 3 months (over a 6/7-month period)	£33,000	Poverty reduction	• Pilot study conducted • Extension requested and budgeted for, but GIDD could not provide the same consultant again for a 10-month period.
G/BAR/002V	Establishing computer database for the Barbados Small Business Association	2004 1 month (over a 6-month period)	£15,000	ICT	• Project completed • Lack of follow-up (technical support)
G/BAR/003V	Regional workshop resource person, Caribbean Conservation Association	2001 3 months	£20,000	Environment	• A regional workshop on 'Management of Protected Areas' was held
G/BAR/004V	Design/implementation of computerised FMIS (software) at Barbados Youth Business Trust	2002-03 2 months (over a 6-month period)	£23,000	ICT/Youth	• Project completed • Lack of follow-up (technical support)
Dominica					
G/DOM/001V	Youth skills and attitudes survey, Dominica Association of Industry and Commerce	2001 6 weeks (over a 4-month period)	£15,000	Youth	• Report on survey was never completed • ...though study was apparently well conducted in the field
Fiji					
G/FIJ/001V	Design and marketing trends support to crafts sector	2003	£15,000	Income generation/ Women	• No project report was submitted, and no other project documentation was available to the reviewers
Mauritius					
G/MRT/001V	Strategic reform, higher education system, Mauritius Institute of Education	2002-03 3 months (over a 6-month period)	£38,800	Education	• Volunteer much exceeded terms of reference, much appreciated
G/MRT/002V	Training of trainers in educational management, Mauritius Institute of Education	2002-03 3 months (over a 6-month period)		Education	• Project completed • No documentation available to reviewers
G/MRT/003V	Study on ground water pollution & remedial action, Ministry of Environment	2004 3 months	£27,000	Environment	• Project had high political significance
Sierra Leone					
No CSAP requests received					

The enthusiasm for CSAP expressed in Mauritius was likely a result of the close links of the assignments to national needs and priorities. The water pollution project was high profile, with the Prime Minister himself chairing one of the committees on pig farming. The projects in the Caribbean and in Fiji, on the other hand, seemed less well integrated into national or Secretariat strategies, and there was less long-term support. This may in part be due to the fact that four of the five projects in the Caribbean were based in civil society organisations, where the Secretariat lacks the long track record it has with governments. The poor integration may also be explained by the fact that all five CSAP projects in Barbados and Dominica originated in a 'marketing visit' to advertise the programme by the then acting CSAP manager, which was followed directly by seven requests for volunteer assistance from both countries.

Strengths and issues with CSAP

Focused projects...

- Like 'regular' short-term expert assignments, the CSAP assignments reviewed tended to be carefully targeted and the terms of reference **focused on specific outcomes**. This was much appreciated by the host institutions and clearly contributed to the success of the projects.
- The host organisations of the different projects also valued the **relatively flexible, non-bureaucratic and responsive** nature of the programme, which shortened the approval and fielding processes.
- Overall, CSAP seems to be appreciated as a programme that allows organisations to receive outside technical assistance which otherwise may not be available to them. It is seen as **additional to regular strategic gap filling and thus another source of funds**.
- The **speed of response** seemed to be very good and the authors' initial file review suggested that requests were often filled significantly faster than those for regular Secretariat posts.⁹⁵ Some of the time gained was a result of the shorter approval process required by having smaller project budgets, but there are probably also time gains from a simpler selection process – only one person is nominated for each position, rather than the three under the regular strategic gap filling programme. These factors may have quality implications, however, while also limiting the input of the member country.
- As is the case for paid experts, the success of CSAP projects seems to be closely linked to the **qualities of the individual selected** to provide the assistance, their willingness and motivation to carry out the assignment, the support and monitoring they receive, and the quality of their interaction with the host institution. Experience in the design of technical assistance indicates that the choice of appropriate personnel at the beginning is critical, and that the right person can even turn around a poorly designed programme. On the other hand, a poorly chosen person can undermine a well-designed programme.

...but concerns about the programme

While many of the CSAP projects reviewed were received positively by the recipient organisation, perhaps because they provided assistance that in most cases otherwise would not have been available, the evaluation raises concerns about CSAP as a programme. These include the following:

Dispersion – CSAP is highly diversified not only in terms of its objectives (gap filling, capacity building and emergency response) but also in terms of the sectors in which it works: information technology, health, environment, youth and women, income generation and small-scale entrepreneurship. As a result, the programme is highly dispersed. This adds to the complexity of the strategic gap filling programme as a whole, which is an administratively heavy programme to manage.

⁹⁵ See: Baser, Hasse and Morgan (2005) *Interim Report*, p.24.

One of the reasons for the diversity of CSAP activities is that the programme has become a **quick response mechanism** to provide visibility for the Secretariat, and that as a result there is substantial political pressure on GIDD and its managers to respond to a wide range of demands, such as the Asian tsunami in 2004 and the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005.

The programme does not build on a particular Secretariat comparative advantage or niche – Many CSAP projects are in areas in which the Secretariat does not have a comparative advantage, such as grassroots development, emergency assistance or projects in civil society, where the Secretariat as a whole has few contacts. As a result, CSAP projects often stand somewhat apart from other Secretariat activities, and are isolated with few links to the main programme thrust as outlined in the Secretariat's Strategic and Operational Plans.

While for some highly strategic and often therefore well-supported activities requested by member governments this may not pose a problem (e.g. the study on ground water pollution in Mauritius, MRT/003V), it **reduces the support potentially available to ensure the success of a project**. The fieldwork carried out for this evaluation clearly showed that support from a technical division in the Secretariat can benefit project design and implementation (e.g. the projects in the Mauritius education sector, MRT/001V and 002V). Conversely, the absence of a technical capacity in the Secretariat to provide support to the ICT projects in Barbados (BAR/002V and BAR/004V) limited the impact and sustainability of these interventions.

Closer linkages to other Secretariat activities and greater technical co-operation with other divisions or outside organisations could improve CSAP interventions, as well as reduce the pressure on GIDD staff. This approach has been envisaged by GIDD in recent strategy documents for 2004/05⁹⁶. One example proposed by GIDD was co-operation with the Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) to deliver HIV/AIDS projects through CSAP.

Lack of clarity of purpose – There is a lack of clarity on the purpose of the CSAP programme. CSAP was set up in 1997 as a way for the Secretariat to spread its limited resources more broadly by encouraging experts with other sources of revenue to contribute their time free of charge for short-term assignments. It was not a 'volunteer programme' as such, as are programmes run by organisations like VSO (Voluntary Services Overseas) or the DED (German Development Service), and indeed did not even have a separate mandate. The intent was for the people hired under CSAP to carry out the same kind of activities as those under the regular short-term expert programme, but the programme seems to have had a difficult start as the Secretariat could not find the same quality of experts for assignments. It was only later that CSAP developed as a separate programme with different objectives from the regular short- and long-term assignments and with a separate budget. There has been limited reference in recent years to the original purpose, resulting in a shift in rationale for its use. This has, in turn, led to some lack of clarity about what it should be seeking to achieve or contribute and to expectations which the programme is having difficulty meeting.

No strong philosophy of volunteerism – Probably because of the programme's history, the philosophy of volunteerism, which is based on individuals acting on the basis of personal principles and contributing to civil society⁹⁷, does not appear to be well inculcated into CSAP activities. The wide diversity of economic conditions and hence salaries across the members of the Commonwealth results in a situation where volunteers from low-income member states could see their allowance (per diem) as a reasonable

96 Kaberere. 2004. *Status and future direction of CSAP*. Mimeo; and GIDD. 2004. *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) – Strategies for Implementation from FY 2004/05* by Julius Kaberere, CPO CSAP. Mimeo.

97 VSO. 2005. *The Role of Volunteers in International Development* (VSO Position Paper). London: VSO.

salary. Personal commitment to a cause thus becomes less important. Without an articulated strategy for how volunteerism as a way of providing assistance can contribute to the Secretariat's mandate, CSAP is not in a position to either benefit from the advantages of volunteers placed in appropriate environments or avoid problems related to the complexity of working with them.

No clear niche for CSAP as a separate programme – In keeping with its original purpose of being a means to mobilise expertise free of charge, the decision to use CSAP volunteers as opposed to paid short-term experts often seems to be opportunistic (depending on the availability of personnel in one category or the other). Staff in the Secretariat and in some of the countries visited expressed confusion about this. Apart from the relatively lower cost of a CSAP project compared to regular short-term assistance – due to the saving on professional fees – the lack of clarity on when a CSAP volunteer as opposed to a paid short-term expert is sent makes it difficult to see a particular niche for CSAP as a separate programme, especially where the co-operating organisation is a government institution.

Not a well known programme – In addition, CSAP does not appear to be a well-known programme in many Commonwealth countries. Many organisations in the countries the evaluation team visited were not familiar with it, and even some host institutions of CSAP experts were somewhat unclear about the nature of the programme and its objectives. One country visited, Sierra Leone, has never requested a volunteer project.

Emergency assistance is not a comparative advantage of the Secretariat – While the CSAP emergency response facility recently added clearly has a high level of political backing and in fact originated in a political request, the Secretariat does not have a comparative advantage in this field. Providing emergency assistance is quite different from delivering other forms of international development co-operation. In many emergency situations, assessments have shown that the relief effort has been less effective than it should have been because too many small organisations were trying to participate, with poor co-ordination among them⁹⁸. Moreover, following recent major disaster responses there has emerged a view that provision of ad hoc medical assistance, recruited quickly and placed in the field with limited back-up or a weak supply chain for the necessary medical equipment, may be doing more harm than good, particularly where there are language and cultural differences between the medical personnel and the victims⁹⁹ (see also box 13, below).

The CSAP emergency response facility risks falling into this category, since the Secretariat is not specialised in humanitarian assistance and has no field presence to facilitate co-ordination with other organisations and provide back-up. It cannot act like a medical volunteer programme such as the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Médecins Sans Frontières, which carefully selects its personnel and provides them with extensive training.

98 One of the key recommendations of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda in 1996 was that 'donors should require NGOs to co-ordinate their activities in the social sectors with the government within the framework of national priorities and policies'. Source: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (1996) *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide – Lessons from the Rwanda Experience*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Executive Summary).

99 Thus, the director for emergencies of the WHO is quoted as saying: 'some [foreign medical teams] made demands on the already stretched local health infrastructures that actually did more harm than good'. Source: ODI (2005) *Tsunami: Would we do better next time?* Policy Brief reproduced in the ODI Annual Report 2005. London: ODI. Available at http://www.odi.org.uk/annual_report/ar2005/page13_tsunami.pdf p.13.

Box 13: Emergency assistance — The international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami

The Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), a sector-wide learning and accountability initiative in which over 50 agencies and organisations from the humanitarian sector work together, was constituted in February 2005 to promote a harmonised approach to evaluations of the international response to the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 and to optimise learning. In its initial report of December 2005, based on five joint thematic evaluations, the TEC found that:

The ‘relief responses were generally not based on joint needs assessments and were not well co-ordinated, leading to an excess of some interventions such as medical teams, alongside shortages in less accessible areas or less popular sectors, such as water supply’ (p.3).

The report also finds that ‘during the relief and early recovery stages, many international actors, particularly those who did not have prior experience in the area, tended to undervalue local capacities while overestimating international capacities. In some cases, this led to a situation where inadequately prepared international staff hindered local capacity development’ (p.7-8).

The report further states that ‘Agencies focus too much on promoting their brand and not enough on the needs of the affected populations’ (p.4).

Source: Cosgrave, J. 2005. Tsunami Evaluation Commission: Initial Findings. Available at <http://www.alnap.org/tec>

The future of CSAP

Some important considerations

The discussion above suggests that CSAP has had a difficult history, although it is in the process of renewing itself. Its main claim to legitimacy in the past has been as a low-cost means of providing expertise. This is an important consideration given the limited resources available. However, when considering the **cost effectiveness** of the programme, it is also important to bear in mind the following issues:

- It is unclear to what extent the programme has been able to cut costs, but at the same time maintain the quality of short-term expert assignments.
- While there is a saving on professional fees, other CSAP assignment costs, principally travel and subsistence, are similar to those of regular short-term assistance. As the recent review of the terms and conditions of service for CSAP experts showed, compared to other volunteers agencies ‘the cost per month for CSAP volunteers appears to be on the higher end’, largely due to the fact that host governments do not share the cost of housing and the Secretariat therefore provides UN daily subsistence allowances (DSAs)¹⁰⁰. A quick comparison of the costs of the short-term and CSAP projects reviewed for this evaluation (as outlined in tables 16 and 17, below) shows that:
 - Total project costs for the CSAP and regular short-term assignments reviewed were similar. (In fact, for the sample reviewed the average cost is lower for regular short-term than for CSAP assignments, but this calculation does not take into account the fact that extension phases were agreed for two of the four short-term expert projects, the costs of which are not reflected here.)

100 Puri, M. 2005. *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme: A review of the terms and conditions of service*. Mimeo, p.8.

- For three of the four regular short-term assistance assignments, at least the second phase of the project was cost-shared with the host government, thereby reducing the cost to the Secretariat. For CSAP projects, the contribution of the host organisations was limited to providing office space and covering local travel.
- The subsistence allowance for no-fee experts constitutes the bulk of the cost of CSAP assignments, 67 per cent on average, but ranging from 51 per cent to 87 per cent in the sample for this evaluation.
- The fee most commonly paid to regular short-term experts in the sample (i.e. the potential saving of using a CSAP no-fee expert) was £1,300 per person week.
- Not taking into account the saving for the Secretariat achieved through cost-sharing with the host government for the regular short term assignments, using a CSAP expert rather than a regular paid expert in the sample reduced the average project cost by £98 per person day (that is, by £686 per week).
- Running CSAP as a separate programme with a separate budget and managed by a designated officer implies high overhead costs, given the need for one officer to travel to all parts of the Commonwealth for relatively small activities.

Table 16: Overview of CSAP project costs¹⁰¹

Project No.	BAR/002V	BAR/003V	BAR/004V	DOM/001V	MRT/003V	Average
Subsistence allowance	£7,600 51%	£15,200 76%	£12,450 53%	£10,000 67%	£23,500 87%	67%
Travel	£4,500 30%	£2,800 14%	£6,500 28%	£3,000 20%	£2,000 7%	20%
Contingency	0%	£1,000 5%	£850 4%	£1,000 7%	£1,500 6%	4%
Equipment/documentation	£2,900 19%	£1,000 5%	£3,500 15%	£1,000 7%	0%	9%
Total project cost	£15,000	£20,000	£23,300	£15,000	£27,000	£20,060
Person days	60	120	100	70	90	88
Cost per person day	£250	£167	£233	£214	£300	£233

Note: Host governments/ organisations usually provide office space and pay for local travel.

¹⁰¹ These tables are based on information taken from GIDD project files. They aim to compare project costs for regular short term assistance and CSAP projects for a sample of the projects reviewed during this evaluation (projects were included on the basis of availability of data). The tables are not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of project costs.

Table 17: Overview of project costs for short-term technical assistance

Project No.	MRT/100 (Phase I)		MRT/101		MRT/102		MRT/103 (Phase I)		Average
Fee	£5,300	66%	£16,900	60%	£9,600	56%	£7,800	56%	60%
Subsistence allowance	£900	11%	£9,460	34%			£4,700	34%	26%
Travel	£1,200	15%	£1,000	4%			£1,200	9%	9%
Contingency	£600	8%	£640	2%			£300	2%	4%
Total project cost	£8,000		£28,000		£17,000		£14,000		£16,750
Person days	21		91		56		42		53
Cost per person day	£381		£308		£304		£333		£331
Fee paid per week	£1,767		£1,300		£1,200		£1,300		£1,392
Cost shared?	Phase II 50% cost-shared				Yes. Gov't contributed 35%		Yes, both Phases I and II		

The question of cost-effectiveness is thus complex. The second part of this evaluation's recommendation on CSAP therefore proposes to carry out a costs-benefit analysis of the assistance provided by experts working on a no-fee basis through the programme.

Given the findings of this report, it is also clear that there are some serious issues both with the policy and the past implementation of CSAP activities and the wider rationale for the programme, which should be addressed. These include the following:

- CSAP does not have a clear philosophy about how to use volunteers and has no comparative advantage by reference to organisations with long years of specialisation in the field. Its motivation has been to save money and provide cheaper services than those offered through the regular expert programme.
- The programme focuses on several activities that are clearly not the comparative advantage of the Secretariat, such as grassroots development and emergency response.
- CSAP activities are widely dispersed, with few linkages with other Secretariat activities. With only one programme officer, there is no capacity to resolve problems or provide follow-up.
- Recommendation 13 suggests that the focus of strategic gap filling should be mainly institutional development in keeping with the comparative advantage of past activities and the original purpose of the CFTC. Many if not most of the current activities under CSAP do not fall under this category.
- Some CSAP activities, especially emergency assistance, may undermine broader development goals, as was the case with many of the ad hoc NGO interventions in the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide.

Nevertheless, this report recognises that given the limited resources available, the Secretariat would like to reduce its costs where possible by recruiting experts on a no-fee basis for some assignments.

Options for the future of CSAP

Based on the discussion above and the information available, the authors see three options for the future of CSAP with different pros and cons (as outlined in table 18, below). The options are as follows:

Keep CSAP as a separate programme with some refinements or improvements to management including:

- Clarifying the mandate and comparative advantage of CSAP as a volunteer programme compared to other organisations;
- Better defining the focus of the programme – for example: Is an emergency response facility appropriate? What are the criteria for CSAP versus short-term paid TA?;
- Improving the management and monitoring of projects. Work is well underway on both of these respects;
- Better selection of experts through an improved roster; and
- Collaboration/tying in with other country projects/programmes – for example, more work with regional programme officers on project design and through field visits. This would help to better integrate the three forms of support offered by GIDD and other divisions.

Return CSAP to its original purpose of providing cheaper expertise for ‘regular’ activities rather than being a separate programme. This would imply that:

- The present CSAP staff would play a key role in improving the supply of suitable expertise willing to work on a no-fee basis;
- The staff would also assist in making the match between available expertise and general positions to be filled under strategic gap filling projects;
- Diagnosis and assessment of needs for Secretariat strategic gap filling in general would take into account the possibility of using a no-fee expert; and
- There would be no separate CSAP projects, as all experts provided would be part of other Secretariat projects and programmes.

Disband CSAP entirely and put the funding into the regular strategic gap filling programme. This would eliminate any separate system for identifying expertise available for assignments on a no-fee basis.

Table 18: Options for CSAP

	Pros	Cons
Keep structure of CSAP as it is — as a separate programme, but with some refinements in management	Cost-effective means of supplying short-term TA Assignments typically more targeted than long-term TA (but considering extending duration to a year) Response time can be shorter (= a fast response mechanism) Well-received where projects were good (i.e. clearly defined and well carried out) In-and-out method (where applied) often considered useful — volunteers' expertise provided in several short visits (like support by other Secretariat divisions, but supplied by external professionals) Provides another option which allows/encourages exchange of experiences between Commonwealth countries	Costs: disperses already limited funds even further Volunteerism is not a comparative advantage for the Secretariat compared to organisations such as VSO/BESO and UN Volunteers (UNV) (although the responsible officer is a specialist) Nor are emergency assistance and grassroots activities comparative advantages for the Secretariat One programme manager (small team) managing projects in all countries means high overheads, little ability for extensive regional knowledge and limited ability for monitoring in-country Activities are usually disconnected from other Secretariat projects, lack of coherence CSA is not a very well known or understood programme Objectives often unrelated to strategic priorities or areas of Secretariat expertise, hence no back up when there are problems
Return CSAP to its original purpose of providing cheaper expertise for 'regular' activities, rather than being a separate programme	Reduction in the complexity of strategic gap filling Better integration with regular Secretariat programming and hence with national/regional support One contact person in GIDD per country/region Greater clarity of purpose Activities supported would likely be related to Secretariat areas of expertise Reduced travel costs associated with one programme with funds being available for others Reduced management costs More coherent vision from the outside of what the Secretariat is trying to do	Concept of a separate volunteer programme would disappear Less opportunity to respond to emergency situations Likely improved match between expertise provided on a no-fee basis and the positions to be filled
Disband CSAP and put funds into regular Programme 15 budget	Reduced span of activity for the Secretariat, with reduced management burden and improved coherence of activities Reduced administrative costs Secretariat could concentrate on areas of comparative advantage More coherent vision from the outside of what the Secretariat is trying to do	Would eliminate a means of supplying expertise at low cost Would reduce Secretariat visibility and presence in emergency situations

Making a choice

Taking into consideration the issues with CSAP raised above, as well as the challenges faced by the Secretariat in terms of limited resources but wide ranging demands, the authors of this report recommend the Secretariat opt for Option 2, providing experts on a volunteer basis, but not managed as a separate programme. However, this evaluation also recognise that there are issues of visibility involved for the Secretariat, and that its management may choose to maintain CSAP as a programme for that reason alone.

Recommendation 8: Return the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme to its original purpose

Return CSAP to its original purpose of providing less expensive expertise for ‘regular’ activities rather than being managed as a separate volunteer programme.

Carry out an independent cost-benefit analysis of the assistance provided by experts working on a no-fee basis to determine the level of savings generated (including Secretariat overheads) and to compare the quality of personnel attracted with those in regular assignments, either short or long term.

4.4 Contribution of strategic gap filling to capacity development, sustainability and long-term development impact

The purpose of this section is to review some of the theory around capacity and capacity development and to assess the extent to which strategic gap filling has been able to make contributions to it. Experts funded through strategic gap filling projects have played important roles, but determining causality between many of their activities and the development of long-term capacity at broad levels is virtually impossible because of the small scale of those activities. On the other hand, the relationship of trust and equality between member countries and the Secretariat, especially around strategic gap filling activities, has had a significant empowering effect on officials in these countries. This is a critical contribution to developing capacity. In addition, by allowing member governments to make decisions about strategic gap filling project priorities, the Secretariat also makes a small contribution towards reinforcing intra-governmental negotiation processes, which are an important element in building democratic traditions.

4.4.1 The concept of capacity

The theory of ‘capacity’ and its practice remain puzzling and confusing, especially in international development literature. The study of capacity is not well established as an academic discipline such as economics, sociology or public administration. Few educational institutions teach courses on it¹⁰². It has no professional bodies or associations to push for professional standards. Capacity as a development idea has no cachet with the public, compared to the more easily recognised images of health and education.

¹⁰² The University of Guelph in Canada and the University of Potsdam in Germany are the only ones known to the authors of this report.

Until recently, capacity as a subject attracted almost no research support within the development community¹⁰³ and it is, for example, almost impossible to find a book in the World Bank bookstore with the word ‘capacity’ in the title. Development agencies find it hard to assign budgets and costs to it. There is no one agreed international definition for it, but there are many perspectives.

In this environment of different views, this report suggests the **following definition of capacity**:

‘Capacity is that emergent combination of attributes that enables a system¹⁰⁴ to create development value. Capacity consists of five core elements including¹⁰⁵:

- *The ability to act or to have volition, to choose, to exert influence and to develop with some sort of strategic intent;*
- *the ability to generate development results which can be in two forms – 1) building internal capabilities or helping to develop the capabilities of others, or 2) producing programmatic results such as better maternal health, improved environmental policy, or declining levels of poverty;*
- *the ability to relate to other actors in the system and to build support and protection for activities;*
- *the ability to adapt and self-renew or to master change and the adoption of new ideas; and*
- *the ability to achieve coherence and to find a balance between the need to specialise and differentiate versus the need to rein in fragmentation and find focus.’*

Viewed through this lens, **capacity (organisational or other) ‘emerges’ from the interaction of a complex combination of attitudes, resources, strategies and skills**, both tangible and intangible.¹⁰⁶

What does this imply for small activities like strategic gap filling? It implies a **focus on aggregated outcomes**, rather than on the results of individual activities. This, in turn, encourages thinking about issues of **longer-term relevance** rather than about immediate results. In so doing, it helps to answer the broader question ‘Are we doing the right things?’ rather than the narrower question ‘Are we doing things right?’

Systems thinking helps us distinguish between the need for external reporting to satisfy donor accountability requirements and the need for internal learning as an intrinsic part of any capacity development strategy. A focus on learning would encourage GIDD to move away from strategic gap filling to being strategic about filling gaps in country capacity and considering a range of options to achieve the desired results. It invites the Secretariat member countries, PCPs/POCs and GIDD staff to begin with the question: **what capacity needs developing, whose capacity, at what level, through what mechanism, what mix of approaches to learning, what combination and sequence of technical support and learning or networking activities** in light of the context and government priorities? What can the Secretariat contribute that leverages other donor efforts?

103 The study on Capacity, Change and Performance which ECDPM is doing presently under the aegis of the GOVNET of the DAC/OECD is the only major multi-donor financed research activity on capacity. See: <http://www.ecdpm.org/capacitystudy> for more information.

104 The Oxford Dictionary defines a ‘system’ as a ‘complex whole or part’. All organisations are, for example, systems. So are ethnic and tribal groups, soccer teams, church choirs, restaurants and banking systems.

105 Morgan, P. (2006).

106 The notion of ‘emergence’ used in systems thinking implies an unpredictable and non-linear development of capacity or other organisational properties. It ‘suggests that capacity development outcomes cannot be simply engineered through the delivery of inputs, but results from a complex and less controllable interplay of variables, influenced in time and space. Outcomes remain to a large extent uncertain and unpredictable. Any intervention remains to a considerable extent hostage to system behaviours over which an external agent has only limited control.’ See: Land, A. (2005) *Workshop on Systems Thinking and Capacity Development*. Maastricht: ECDPM, p.4. For more information on systems thinking, see Morgan, P. (2005) *The Idea and Practice of Systems Thinking and their Relevance for Capacity Development*. Maastricht: ECDPM (forthcoming).

The definition above sees **capacity as both an end in itself and as a means** to other development goals. This allows us to see **effective institutions and organisations as important development goals**. They house the collective ingenuity and capacity that a country needs to survive, and need to be seen as ends in themselves. The NZAID report (2004) suggests that many of the members of the Commonwealth are concerned about the viability of their organisations and institutions and, hence, would share this view.

Capacity is also about **collective empowerment and identity**, properties that allow a system to survive, grow, diversify and become more complex. This suggests the need to **look beyond traditional technical training to the development of soft skills** such as legitimacy and confidence, which contribute to empowerment. This, in turn, has implications for the kinds of activities strategic gap filling should support, not only direct courses but also the training approaches used by experts in the field.

The authors have found three concepts useful in understanding the variety of inputs required to develop broad sectoral or societal capacity, as follows:

- **Competencies** as the skills and abilities of individuals;
- **Capabilities** as the broad range of collective skills that can be both hard (policy analysis, environmental assessment, mechanical engineering) and soft (the ability to earn legitimacy, to create meaning and identity); and
- **Capacity** as the overall ability of a system to exist, adapt and perform.

These can be used as a basis for assessment, mapping, monitoring and evaluation.

4.4.2 Strategic gap filling and capacity development

Section 4.2.1: Strengths of strategic gap filling, provides a broad overview of the results of strategic gap filling and makes a case for the whole of the system being greater than its parts, for example in terms of the contribution to the empowerment of national authorities. In this section, the authors look more at individual activities and return to the six different functions of experts¹⁰⁷ as identified in section 4.3.1: Findings and recommendations: experts. Table 19, below, looks at the results of some examples of strategic gap filling activities from the fieldwork and the main focus of these activities – individual competencies, group capabilities or overall capacity. In addition, the synergies among them need to be taken into account.

Table 19: Using strategic gap filling effectively

Functions/ activities	Purpose	Examples of results	Main focus of activities
Gap filling	Operational support for critical government functions	Essential services maintained, e.g. legal prosecution in Sierra Leone (SIE/82)	Capacity of overall system
Advice on specialised issues	Resolve specific problems	Impartial analysis as basis for discussions among stakeholders, e.g. water pollution in Mauritius (MRT/003V)	One-of-a-kind intervention, not designed to build capacity

¹⁰⁷ The evaluation will not discuss training here because it is covered at length in section 4.3.2: Findings and recommendations: training.

Functions/ activities	Purpose	Examples of results	Main focus of activities
Promoting change	Change attitudes and approaches on key issues	New policy developed or implemented, e.g. implementation of gender policy in the Pacific Forum Secretariat (SPF/30)	Capabilities of the group or organisation
Political advice	Resolve key legal-cum- political issues	Recommendations for public discussions, e.g. for constitutional changes in Mauritius (MRT/101)	Capacity of overall system
Advice on global positioning	Provide advice/ support to meet international standards or address global problems	Updated legislation, e.g. on telecommunications in Barbados (BAR/74)	Capacity of overall system
Training	Provide formal or informal training to change approaches or bring skills levels up to a predetermined level, generally as part of a larger programme of developing capacity in a sector	Adoption of alternative models of delivering services, e.g. the adoption of the community policing model in Sierra Leone as part of a larger programme of maintaining law and order and respect for human rights (SIE/85)	Competencies of individuals, capabilities of organisations

Because of the small scale of strategic gap filling interventions, **defining the actual causality** between the results at the project level and improved capabilities at the group level or increased capacity at the societal level, especially in the longer term, **is not possible**. There are too many other variables, including the roles of other actors, outside influences and the culture of the country. The evidence for influence in these cases remains largely anecdotal and comes from actors knowledgeable about the projects. This finding is in keeping with the conclusions of the 2005 Development Co-operation Report of the OECD mentioned previously, which notes that there is very little data-based analysis of the overall effectiveness of technical co-operation and that the move to institutional development and capacity building has worsened the situation. There is a lack of specific outputs in many organizations, or the outputs that do exist are diverse. 'Measuring their specific contributions in cost-benefit or other financial terms can become an artificial exercise'¹⁰⁸.

This suggests that the **log-frame** with its causality from one step to the next is not the most appropriate instrument for planning and assessing the kinds of small activities supported by the Secretariat. It requires tracking small inputs and attributing outcomes or even impact in a way that is virtually impossible. The assumptions of such current evaluation techniques are increasingly being called into question by books such as *Challenging the Performance Movement* by Beryl A. Radin and even by donors such as AusAID,¹⁰⁹ Sida¹¹⁰ and GTZ. Rather than the log-frame, this report suggests using the typology of TA activities outlined in table 19 to assess requests for assistance.

108 OECD DAC (2005), p.103.

109 Personal communication with AusAID officer, June 2006.

110 Sida (2006), p.25.

Recommendation 9: Use typology of TA activities to assess requests for assistance

At the broad planning level, use the typology outlined in table 19: Using strategic gap filling effectively:

- *to help define the relationship between the assistance requested and broader capacity goals;*
- *to develop the overall approach to address particular country or regional needs in a logical, coherent and integrated manner; and*
- *to define the specific mix of interventions to address that need, including where projects can make a contribution.*

Discipline and rigour in analysis are still required, even in the absence of the log-frame. This report recommends using table 20, below, taken from the Interim Report of this evaluation. The table provides guidance on developing a strategy starting from the desired situation in terms of the sectoral and institutional development goals of member countries, connecting back to the existing situation and then **building a strategy for change**. Emphasis would be on **understanding the context and how inputs can influence change**. This articulation of a theory of change would also imply an assessment of which elements of capacity need strengthening most (see definition of capacity, above). This strategy would take into account not only training, but also the provision of expertise.

Table 20: Building a strategy for change

Existing situation	Building a strategy	Desired situation
Where are we now?	Objective: to move from existing to desired situation	What capacity is required?
What needs improvement?	At which level can the Secretariat make an input?	How will we know when we have succeeded?
What are the opportunities for change?	How can this be best provided?	

4.4.3 Strategic gap filling and sustainability

Among the six different kinds of expertise defined in table 19, above, **gap filling** is somewhat different because the link between the activities of the individual and the capacity of the government of a small state to maintain an essential service is often quite evident. This raises the issue of **sustainability**, which is a particular problem in small and vulnerable states – and one that an organisation like the Secretariat is not going to solve.

The authors see two levels to this debate. The first is the issue of expatriates filling line government positions over extended periods of time. There is an obvious risk that countries will use strategic gap filling to avoid dealing with salary issues and other constraints. A couple of advisers met during the fieldwork suggested this might be the motivation in their cases. Gap filling of this nature could push out nationals who become de-motivated by salary inequities. The provision of outsiders could thus actually undermine capacity.

On the other hand, many small states are not now and will not in the foreseeable future be able to compete on the **international market for scarce resources** such as legal drafters and telecommunications policy experts. Accepting that these countries have the right to independence and autonomy may imply **subsidising basic services** through long-term financial transfers, something that already occurs within many developed states and areas. Canada, for example, provides transfer payments to several of its provinces, as does the European Union to its poorer regions and member states. Strategic gap filling is essentially a transfer mechanism that provides a mini-line of credit for purchasing expertise and thus serves a crucial function in keeping essential services going. This suggests that there needs to be a **distinction between sustainable skills at the individual level and sustainable services for a country at large**. It may not be possible to find a national to replace a strategic gap filling expert, but the provision of those skills may ensure that service to the public is maintained. On the other hand, consideration should be given to trying to find other means, such as regional co-operation to address in the medium-term shortages caused by globalisation as suggested for legal drafters in recommendation 7.

Recommendation 10: Gap filling to ensure sustainable services

Recognise that judicious filling of gaps where it is a question of keeping essential services going may be a necessity in some states facing de-capacitation, but that there needs to be careful analysis of these situations to be sure that there are genuinely global shortages in the sector concerned and that the assistance is not undermining local capacity. This also applies to the use of legal drafters, as discussed in Recommendation 7.

This recommendation raises the issue of **sustainability**. The authors of this report do not feel that it is realistic to look at sustainability from the perspective of individual small projects. The alternative is to look at it **from the perspective of broad systems** and to what extent the Secretariat's programme is helping to build social and the institutional capacity necessary for member countries to improve the quality of life of their citizens. These are big issues. The role of the Secretariat should not be exaggerated, but the **empowerment** derived from a country's relationship with the Secretariat as described in section 4.2.1: Strengths of strategic gap filling certainly contributes. Empowerment can help to increase confidence, institutional credibility and social tolerance, factors which are in short supply in many developing countries and which are essential to finding dynamic solutions for many of the economic and social problems they face.

Another area to which the Secretariat seems to be making a contribution, or where it is at least setting an example, albeit small, is in **helping countries to learn how to set national priorities**. The responsibility for deciding on priorities for drawing on strategic gap filling funds lies squarely in the hands of the national governments. Some PCPs take a stronger role in shaping the requests coming from line ministries and in dealing with the POCs for individual ministries than others, but it always involves a degree of dialogue and negotiation. The process of learning to manage competing priorities within a government and a society more broadly is critical to the development of a modern government structure and is indeed one of the justifications used by some in the donor community for moving into budget support

Putting the responsibility for priority setting with national institutions **reinforces national accountabilities**. In the case of strategic gap filling, PCPs/POCs are accountable to the country through the government for the choices made; in turn, the individual line ministries are accountable to the PCPs/POCs for use of the funds. This contrasts with most externally funded programmes, where the choice of project is, at best, a shared responsibility between donor and recipient and the accountability is largely government-to-donor.

Strategic gap filling is also **closer to the accountability structure of technical assistance as it was originally conceived** – the supplier or expert reporting directly to the buyer/user (see section 2.1: The context: Trends in technical assistance and international development co-operation. This is in contrast to most donor systems where the expert often, if not usually, reports to the donor rather than to the partner country.

4.5 Co-ordination

This section will look at two kinds of co-ordination – with donors and with other parts of the Secretariat. For a small organisation like the Secretariat, co-ordination with the donor community can be a double-edged sword. The advantages include less overlap and more synergy, but the danger is that a small programme such as strategic gap filling could be overshadowed by larger donor budgets and lose its role as representing the Commonwealth in the member countries. Nor is internal co-ordination an easy issue, since there are strong centrifugal forces in the Secretariat which make co-operation among divisions difficult. Some member countries see the need for one specified contact point in the Secretariat who has responsibility for all Secretariat programmes in that country. To create this single reference point would have organisational and structural implications for the Secretariat, as this kind of co-ordination is not the norm.

4.5.1 Co-ordination with donors

There was little evidence of Secretariat involvement in donor-co-ordination activities in the countries or region visited. In Sierra Leone, GIDD liaises with donors on a one-on-one basis, but there the donors would like to see the Secretariat play a more active collaborative role. In Fiji, respondents suggested that more co-ordination would help to ensure greater complementarity between strategic gap filling activities and those supported by other donors. In other countries, however, there seemed to be little desire on the part of the governments for the Secretariat to be involved in donor co-ordination. In the Caribbean, for example, the Secretariat was not invited to the donor co-ordination meeting taking place the week after the field visit for this study. In Mauritius, the government prefers to deal with donors on a one-by-one basis.

While not discounting the need for staff to have a general knowledge of what other donors are doing so as to avoid duplication of efforts, there are **several downsides for an organisation like the Secretariat to fully immerse itself in donor co-ordination**. These include:

- Donor co-ordination is extremely time consuming. In some countries, field representatives are spending a large part of each working week on joint activities, including planning missions, co-ordination meetings, sector-wide approaches, multi-donor budget support and evaluations. These create, in the words of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), ‘a danger of diverting attention from the practical implications of treating administrative capacity as a scarce resource’. The present staff resources of the Secretariat could not carry such a burden.
- In many countries, donor co-ordination results in considerable pressure on all funders to subscribe to the broad development programme outlined in the partner country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). This often involves pooling efforts and funding to support major national goals such as universal primary education in Uganda. The strategic gap filling budget of £4 million per annum for all member countries would be dwarfed completely by the tens of millions of pounds that large donors like DfID often contribute in any one country. The strategic gap filling programme would disappear as a tangible form of representing the Commonwealth in its member countries.
- Because of the many funders involved and the resultant complexities of the decision-making process, joint donor efforts normally take years to get off the ground. Such a delay would eliminate

the comparative advantage of strategic gap filling, which lies in small timely interventions.

- Donor co-ordination efforts aim for consensus. In order to get all participants on side, contentious issues are dropped. This can mean that innovative or risky approaches may be put aside. It might well eliminate some of the highly political activities that the Secretariat has supported quite successfully.
- Although PRSPs are meant to be national plans, the conditionality associated with them¹¹¹ has, in some countries, resulted in shaky commitment to their implementation. Strategic gap filling activities, on the other hand, attract a high degree of ownership and, as mentioned in section 4.2: Strategic gap filling: strengths and issues, governments feel empowered by their relationship with the Secretariat.

Despite these reservations about co-ordination, a **general knowledge of the activities of donors and of the member country's macro priorities as laid out in the PRSP would be useful to Secretariat officers**, to avoid overlaps in activities and to encourage synergies where appropriate. Better knowledge of country priorities and other activities could also assist the Secretariat to become more catalytic and to generate greater leverage. It is possible to collect information without getting involved in the elaborate ritual of donor co-ordination meetings, missions and discussions. The country strategy papers prepared by the European Commission, for example, include a list of donor activities.

Post-conflict countries, where the situation on the ground is very fluid, present a particular problem. In Sierra Leone, for example, the Secretariat might have benefited from having someone in the country for a short period of perhaps six months to assess the situation and get activities off the ground. There is a role for the Secretariat in countries like this, because of its quick response rate. Strategic gap filling can become an advance guard.

4.5.2 Co-ordination among Secretariat divisions

This evaluation research suggests that **co-ordination within the Secretariat as a whole is difficult** and this sometimes limits the effectiveness of strategic gap filling. One reason for this difficulty can be found in the composition of the staff in the Secretariat.

Members of the Secretariat staff come from across the Commonwealth and, while this means that they are all accustomed to similar legal systems and structures of government, it still implies **vast differences in management approaches and styles of working**. It is interesting to note that few multinational corporations have mixed nationality management structures. Even within the European Union, few companies are even bi-national in their executive management structures. Royal Dutch/Shell and Unilever are rare examples of transnational corporations that have maintained their dual nationality managements¹¹². The struggle to make culturally diversified public organisations work is mainly confined to the United Nations, the World Bank and other multilateral public organisations¹¹³.

In such environments, it is difficult for staff members to develop the tacit knowledge of how others can be expected to behave which is, in turn, the basis of trust and alliances¹¹⁴. In the context of strategic gap filling, some respondents saw low levels of co-operation across divisions of the Secretariat as

111 The existence of a PRSP is a condition imposed by the World Bank and the IMF for debt relief.

112 As part of its study on capacity, ECDPM has carried out a case study on the development of IUCN-Asia, which has successfully dealt with the issue of multi-national management. See Rademacher, A. (2005) *The growth of Capacity in IUCN in Asia. Discussion Paper*, 57M. Maastricht: ECDPM.

113 Skapinker, M. (2001).

114 The World Bank also suffers from this. Wade, R.H. (2001), p.7.

undermining the quality of some activities. The fact that the **GIDD country officer has no authority to request inputs from colleagues in other divisions** was also seen as a constraint to a fast response in cases where expertise from more than one division is required. Some respondents would like to have one contact in the Secretariat, who could be responsible for co-ordinating both strategic gap filling and the activities of other divisions. The PMRU is probably the most appropriate division to take on this responsibility, but it would need additional staff and would have to develop a different staffing profile with an orientation more on policy development and programme review. It would also have to play a role of strategic and quality assurance.

Recommendation 11: Designate a staff member responsible for co-ordinating all Secretariat assistance to each member country

Designate one Secretariat staff member per country to be responsible for co-ordinating all of the organisation's assistance going to that country. Each staff person would have to manage more than one country and perhaps even a whole region.

Responsibility for such co-ordination would probably need to be assigned to a central unit such as the Project Management and Referrals Unit (PMRU). To enable the unit to meaningfully carry out a co-ordination – as opposed to just an information-gathering – role, this would imply an increase in staff numbers in the unit.

This kind of country responsibility would have structural implications for the Secretariat. Presently, each division has control over its own budget and considerable liberty in deciding how to manage its activities. The margin for releasing funding for activities not included in the work plan is limited, despite the fact that the strict boundaries on budgets can result in underutilisation at the end of the year¹¹⁵. The strong divisional autonomy at play here creates what one respondent has called centrifugal as opposed to centripetal forces – undermining broad organisational goals as opposed to reinforcing them. **Creating a co-ordinating function would be a small step in breaking down the barriers among divisions and in laying the ground for a common approach to project management.** It could also help to lay the foundation for a more cohesive organisational culture in the Secretariat and more standardised systems.

While the benefits of co-ordination within the Secretariat have been obvious in countries like Mauritius (see section 4.1: Overview of findings by country/region), there is also a risk that the programme and policy objectives of the Secretariat could override the role of individual countries in choosing and implementing strategic gap filling activities. Avoiding this situation requires a **strong mandate for the underlying principle of strategic gap filling** – responding to the needs of individual countries and regional bodies – as well as a **brokering role** of matching requests with ongoing programmes **only** where there is a true fit. Successful brokering would imply a thorough knowledge of ongoing activities in the Secretariat, information that many GIDD staff do not presently possess.

115 Narayanasuwami, C. (2000), p.41.

4.6 Management issues in the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD)

The evaluation team's interim report, *Filling the Gaps*, identified a number of management issues from the interviews and file reviews carried out at that time. The purpose of this section is to look at these issues again in the light of new information from the field and other interviews. Many of the management issues do not relate purely to GIDD, but apply to the Secretariat as a whole. There are two that stand out. First, the inadequacy of the roster risks undermining the ability of the Secretariat to provide high quality personnel. Second is the lack of an adequate field presence, an issue that creates other problems such as limited communications, little monitoring and inadequate responses to problems in the field. Neither of these problems is new, but they have not been addressed largely because of lack of funds.

Speed of response – Member countries see speed of response as one of the comparative advantages of strategic gap filling. At the same time, there were some problems, particularly in the Pacific and perhaps to certain extent in Mauritius as well. The sample for the interim report provided a more troubling result – an average time of 14 months to field a long-term adviser. Delays in identifying suitable candidates were one of the major issues in this lengthy period. Another issue in speed of response is **communications with the field**. The process of clarifying requests is often slow. This is one of the costs of not having a field system.

Recruitment – The quality of the expertise provided is one of the foundations of the legitimacy of the Secretariat's activities. Since, as table 21 indicates, the majority of both long- and short-term experts is identified through the Experts Roster and the related Experts Database, the perception that these sources have been for some time both out of date and short on expertise in certain areas needs to be taken seriously. The Human Resources group is often obliged to use other means of identifying expertise, which greatly increases the time required and often the cost. Several reports have already suggested that the Roster be updated, but this had not been undertaken at the time of writing. To improve and simplify the selection process, time and resources would need to be set aside to review the Roster and the Database.

Table 21: Expert identification sources — Secretariat as a whole

Financial year	Total	Not specified	Head-hunt ^a	Roster	% from roster
<i>Short-term contracts</i>					
1997/1998	260	68	37	155	59.6
1998/1999	165	14	60	91	55.2
1999/2000	279	22	93	164	58.8
2000/2001	293	30	110	153	52.2
2001/2002	298	24	118	156	52.3
2002/2003	392	27	144	201	51.3
2003/2004	309	110	25	174	56.3
2004/2005	2	1		1	50.0
<i>Long-term contracts</i>					
As of July 2004	66		15	51	77.3

a HRS contacts possible experts.
Source: *Figures provided by HRS.*

Recommendation 12: Review the Experts Roster

Review the structure, composition and the eligibility criteria for entry in the Experts Roster. This will require an assessment of the purpose and use of the Roster and the associated Experts Database and allocation of sufficient resources to create a more efficient and cost-effective source for the identification and management of high-quality CFTC-funded technical assistance.

Quality control – Another issue in the recruitment of expertise is that some advisers seem to be rotated from one assignment to another without adequate assessment of their performance in the previous role and of where they best fit in – if at all. Better assessment is needed, as well as a means of identifying those experts who should not be hired again. This is, however, a sensitive area and needs to be handled carefully. If not done properly, performance feedback can become the subject of contractual grievances and legal disputes. The Secretariat would have to develop clear guidelines for any assessment that is to be documented or to go on an expert's file, and he/she would have to have the opportunity to dispute it. The Secretariat would be wise to seek outside professional advice on how a feedback mechanism could be put into place.

Recommendation 13: Seek professional advice a performance assessment system

That the Secretariat engage outside professional expertise to advise on how to develop a fair and transparent approach to performance assessment for experts and contractors.

Briefing of advisers – Some experts expressed concerns that they were not adequately briefed before their assignments. They did not have an overview of Secretariat activities in the country of assignment, nor any knowledge of other experts assigned to the same country. This weakened their ability to make linkages with other Secretariat activities or to benefit from the contextual knowledge acquired by other advisers. As the Secretariat itself often lacks an overview of all its activities in the member countries, there is a need to centralise information on all activities somewhere in the Secretariat. This could then be shared with experts and member governments.

Recommendation 14: Compile up-to-date lists of Secretariat activities in each country

Compile up-to-date descriptions of all Secretariat activities in a country and make this information available to Secretariat staff, experts in post and member governments. One Secretariat division would have to take responsibility for compiling this information and regularly updating it; all divisions would have responsibility for submitting the relevant information.

Recommendation 15: Inform experts of Secretariat activities in their host country and facilitate exchange between them

When visiting a member country, GIDD programme staff should organise an informal meeting with all in-country and regional experts posted by the Secretariat to ensure that they have a chance to get to know each other and to provide them with an updated briefing on recent policy and programme development across the country portfolio. To facilitate contact and sharing of information between experts in general, the Secretariat should also endeavour to provide experts with each other's contact details.

Staff rotation policy – Member countries were generally satisfied with the support received from programme staff in the Secretariat. Many respondents made highly complimentary comments about their relationships with specific members of the Secretariat and on how responsive GIDD staff members have been. Relationships of this nature take a long time to build up and require a good knowledge of the country. Frequent staff rotations make the building and maintenance of relationships challenging, and staff new to an area are less able to provide the support needed to ensure a good match between the country's needs and the Secretariat's capabilities. With the entire GIDD staff, except for some support staff, changing over a two-year period, the loss of organisational memory will be significant and will likely affect the ability of GIDD to provide appropriate responses to member countries. This is an issue that affects not just GIDD, but other divisions as well.

Record keeping systems – With staff rotation, maintaining institutional memory becomes very significant. Inadequate filing is not a GIDD-specific problem, but occurs right across the Secretariat, with little incentive or commitment to keeping files up-to-date and complete. The fact that insufficient filing space is provided to the divisions for current and recent actives creates a disincentive. Older files are not always easy to access from the archives, and have sometimes been misplaced in circulation.

Recommendation 16: Improve paper and electronic record management

Under the auspices of the RMIP (record management improvement project) GIDD should give priority to reviewing its approach to file classification and management and undertake a review of its file structure and holding to improve programme efficiency and information management. The relationship of electronic and paper-based information also needs to be considered and cost efficiencies introduced to enhance co-ordination and information sharing.

Quality and expertise of experts/advisers – Although, as mentioned in section 4.3.1, the cachet of the Secretariat is such that it is able to attract good people (some of whom have an international reputation), the fieldwork did reveal that not all experts were equally well appreciated. The reputation of strategic gap filling rests heavily on the quality of the experts provided, so the relatively few cases of poor choices assume an important role. Not surprisingly, the most successful assignments were those where the expertise provided was exactly what the assignment required and involved people with international reputations such as in constitutional reform (MRT/101) and Economic Partnership Agreements (MRT/100). Where the expertise of the individual was less directly relevant, the assignment seems to have been less successful. Stop-gap solutions of providing people with more general qualifications to fill slots that demand a high degree of specialisation did not always work.

Cost-effectiveness – Despite a few quality problems, strategic gap filling activities were generally seen to be good value for money and compared favourably to those provided by donors. However, time allocated for this study did not allow the authors to perform a thorough review of this issue and to draw conclusions based on financial assessments. Given the budgetary restrictions, it could be useful for the Secretariat to consider which activities are generally most cost-effective and whether the present balance between training and experts or between short- and long-term experts is appropriate. However, if such an assessment were to be done, care should be taken afterwards to avoid the supply of assistance being driven largely by generalised financial conclusions, rather than by the assessment of needs by member countries. Generalities do not apply very often in individual circumstances, and what is less cost-effective in one situation may well be highly effective in another.

Reporting mechanisms/ project monitoring – As box 14 below shows, GIDD has a large number of reporting mechanisms¹¹⁶ for strategic gap filling in theory; however, most of these are used only infrequently, with the exception of reporting by experts in the field¹¹⁷. In this evaluation sample, for instance, government assessments through end-of-assignment questionnaires were provided in only a minority of cases. It is largely during field trips alone that staff members are able to get feedback from stakeholders, and even then this feedback may not be frank or complete¹¹⁸. The limited information available to staff on how projects are perceived in the member countries is one of the disadvantages of not having a field presence.

Box 14: Commonwealth Secretariat reporting mechanisms

The Commonwealth Secretariat has the following mechanisms for reporting:
For technical assistance provided by experts (the reporting schedule would depend on the length of the assignment):

- Inception reports by the experts;
- Project monitoring indicators (PMIs; to be filled out by the expert and the hosting government);
- Six-monthly reports by the experts;
- Final reports by the experts; and
- End-of-assignment questionnaires to be completed by the:
 - expert;
 - reporting officer; and
 - requesting government/institution (point of contact).

For training activities:

- End-of course / workshop questionnaires (to be completed by the facilitator or the host organisation); and
- Evaluation forms sent to trainees (used for some programmes only).

For CSAP activities:

- End of project reports;
- Short government report;
- End-of-assignment questionnaires;
- Interim reports as agreed and if appropriate; and
- Final report and evaluation form (since 2004).

Continued...

116 Indeed, such is the number that there are even different forms used in different regions for receiving feedback from participants on training activities.

117 There are clear incentives here. Experts do not receive the instalments of their fee unless they submit the required reports.

118 The authors heard about dissatisfaction with one expert that had not been communicated from the host ministry to the PCP, much less to the desk officer in London who had been in the country recently.

For all activities:

- Voluntary comments by hosting institution or requesting government, for example, during visits to London; and
- Visits by Secretariat staff to member countries.

In general, **monitoring and evaluation of strategic gap filling are not carried out systematically**, where they are carried out at all. Follow-up evaluation focuses on the collection of information on activities through reports and pro-forma surveys, rather than on progress towards objectives or results. Most member country governments do not have the systems or staff to monitor the quality or outcomes of training or to follow-up with supervisors of experts. The Secretariat also has serious travel restrictions, which limit the ability of its staff to get feedback on CFTC-funded activities.

As section 4.4 (Contribution of strategic gap filling to capacity development, sustainability and long-term development impact) suggests, monitoring and evaluation of strategic gap filling need to take into account the small size of the activities and the reality that attributing them to any long-term impact is virtually impossible. **Any system to monitor must also recognise the limited resources of the Secretariat.** The criteria defined by the multilateral development banks in section 4.1, together with the typology in table 19 (Using strategic gap filling effectively) and the questions in table 20 (Building a strategy for change), suggest some basic questions to be used for monitoring and evaluation purposes. These would require some adjustment in each case, depending on the purpose of strategic gap filling. The nature of the interventions is such that anecdotal evidence based on the testimony of the people working with strategic gap filling experts or benefiting from training programmes may form the core of an assessment. This study has used this kind of evidence.

Recommendation 17: Use the following set of questions for assessing the success of strategic gap filling projects

Use the answers to the following set of questions as the basis for determining the success of a strategic gap filling project:

- *Did the activity funded represent a critical gap or need?*
- *To what extent did strategic gap filling respond to the gap or need?*
- *To what extent was the member state involved in the activity or showed commitment to it, for example through a financial contribution, by dialoguing on the original request or by monitoring implementation?*
- *Were the experts supplied both technically competent and personally suitable? Were they able to adjust to local customs and to the working environment?*
- *What results came out of the assignment of experts and the training of member country nationals? How did these relate to the purpose and results defined in the theory of change (table 20) and in table 19 (Using strategic gap filling effectively)?*
- *Were there spin-offs or leveraging of other activities that occurred as a result of strategic gap filling activities?*
- *Was the professional supervision by the Secretariat adequate? Was there a turnover of responsible staff, either in the Secretariat or in the member country, during the expert's assignment? If so, what effect did it have?*
- *To what extent was the strategic gap filling provided able to respond to the opportunities for change originally defined in the theory of change (table 20)? How could the Secretariat have responded more effectively?*

Follow-up after projects – Follow-up from the Secretariat after a project is completed is sometimes weak: for example, the unanswered requests for help to get the inevitable kinks out of two computer programmes, one with the Youth Business Trust in Barbados (BAR/004V) and the other with the Small Business Association (BAR/002V). While there may be good reasons for the lack of follow-up in these two specific instances, the comments received from respondents in the field indicate some gaps in communications.

Field presence – The limited monitoring and ability to respond to problems in implementation identified earlier in this report are unlikely to change without field presence involving a Secretariat representative who can build up a relationship with each ministry, help to identify project requests, monitor activities and work out solutions in problem cases. **There are limitations to what can be expected of the principal contact point/point of contact (PCP/POC) system.** The PCPs/POCs that the authors met were senior staff with many other responsibilities. Although they were favourably disposed towards the Secretariat, the strategic gap filling programme is still small and they have to balance the demands of this one programme against all of their other responsibilities. Their functions in terms of strategic gap filling focus largely on processing request documents. After requests are filled, most PCPs/POCs have little involvement with projects¹¹⁹. It is probably unrealistic to expect more from these individuals under the circumstances.

Better field presence would also provide the Secretariat with **more feedback on what works and what does not** in terms of technical assistance, training and capacity development. This could be fed into the system and **would help to strengthen the knowledge base** of the strategic gap filling programme.

Box 15, below, describes some advantages and costs of having a field presence as seen by the International Development Research Centre in Canada (IDRC).

Box 15: Why have field offices?

The International Development Research Centre was set up in 1970 to fund and provide technical support to researchers in developing countries working on problems they identify as being crucial to their communities. For more than a decade, its activities were run solely from Ottawa. However, the Centre began to consider how to make its programme more effective and decided in 1983 to establish its first regional office in Delhi. It saw the following advantages:

- More effective programme delivery – closer to activities, less time spent on travel, etc.;
- Better strategic intelligence – connections with local and regional knowledge bases;
- Better political image, because of faster project approvals;
- Availability of human resources to ensure follow-up on projects; and
- Reduced business costs – lower salary and office costs, savings on travel, etc.

Another five regional offices, located in Cairo, Dakar, Montevideo, Nairobi and Singapore, have been set up since 1983. IDRC feels that the cost of these offices is well worth the expense (about 30 per cent of its operational costs and 10 per cent of its overall budget).

¹¹⁹ This was less true when POCs had been in their positions for extended periods and had long organisational memories. However, since senior public servants in many countries change positions frequently, most PCPs/POCs do not stay long in these roles.

Given these advantages, it is appropriate to think about the **cost of not having a field presence**. The lack of field presence **seriously inhibits the quality of strategic gap filling programming** and probably that of other programmes as well. Without field presence there is little prospect that the Secretariat could improve the match between its supply and the demand of member countries. Staff will simply not be in the countries for which they are responsible for sufficient time to develop an in-depth understanding of issues and how the Secretariat can best assist. The problems in clarifying requests will likely continue, as will the limitations to effective monitoring and resolving bottlenecks in implementation. That being said, this is not the first time that a report has recommended an improved field presence, but financial constraints have always been seen as being too significant and overwhelming.

Any field presence should not be seen as a duplication of a full-scale donor field presence, but rather as an aid to member countries to **help improve the link between the demand in the field and the supply available from the Secretariat**. Member countries need more information on programming possibilities, especially in the Pacific, and more opportunities to engage in the dialogue necessary to develop a longer-term perspective on where Secretariat assistance would be most useful, especially in countries where this does not exist. It is crucial that Secretariat field presence should not diminish the role of member countries in making decisions about their priorities. Instead, field staff should focus on strengthening the capacity of member countries to identify key activities that could have impact on their broader systems and where Secretariat assistance could be helpful.

The following **options** might be considered **for such a field presence**:

- Placement of a national of the region within a regional organisation, such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. There are precedents for this, such as the regional trade adviser to the Pacific. The person chosen would require a significant period of training in the Secretariat in London.
- Placement of a national in the Commonwealth Youth Programme offices. Again the individual would require training.
- Placement of an officer from the Secretariat staff in a regional organisation. This would be a much more expensive option than the previous two.

It should be noted that while Secretariat staff recognise that there is a need for better communications with the field, some feel that field presence will not solve this. They see the solution in increased travel budgets to allow staff to visit the country more frequently. There are two different objectives to increased travel, with both being valid. The first is to improve the knowledge of staff members so as to make them more effective in their work. The second is to provide information to member countries about the comparative advantages of the Secretariat and how it can best support their development objectives. This latter aim requires a longer-term process, with frequent contacts. In some regions, particularly the Pacific, this objective could be carried out more easily by an officer situated in the region, more specifically in the same general time zone, than by someone based in London. The lack of a comprehensive and effective management information system is a limitation and special attention should be given to improving communications, especially until such time as the revised project management information system is fully functional. Increased travel may be sufficient to improve programme management for other less distant areas. The cost benefit of enhancing a field presence in selected regions or areas of Secretariat operations should be explored.

Recommendation 18: Explore low-cost solutions to providing a Secretariat field presence

Explore some low-cost solutions to providing a field presence on a regional basis, particularly in the Pacific, to focus on developing a vision of where Secretariat assistance is most useful and to strengthen national capacity to define requests, monitor ongoing activities and resolve problems in implementation.

In areas that are more accessible from London, investigate the costs and benefits of having a field presence versus more staff travel to the area for broad programming and review purposes rather than just for project management.

Summary of chapter 6: The present: findings at the field level

This chapter suggests that strategic gap filling not only has a well appreciated niche that is recognised by users, but that its activities are generally as successful as those of an organisation such as the World Bank and DfID. Some activities have had surprising influence given the size of the budgets available and some serious management constraints, such as lack of field presence and out-of-date recruitment tools. This success is built on comparative advantages, such as speed of response, the willingness to finance small-scale technical assistance and a light bureaucratic process. However, most important is the fact that member countries see their relationship with the Secretariat to be a partnership between equals and hence as an empowering experience. This is a capacity result that has been elusive in much of the development community. On the other hand, management deficiencies such as inadequate field presence have affected the credibility and legitimacy of strategic gap filling. These deficiencies require attention if strategic gap filling is to improve its performance in the future.

This chapter builds on the previous three chapters and looks at the implications of several strategic choices facing the Secretariat. The first section (5.1) reviews the niche and comparative advantage of strategic gap filling. The second (5.2) proposes five options for how technical assistance might be managed within the Secretariat and discusses the pros and cons of each. The third section (5.3) discusses the changes required in the Secretariat and in the Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) to make strategic gap filling more effective.

5.1 The purpose and niche of the programme

The previous chapters have shown that strategic gap filling has a clear and valued **niche**, not only as a responsive programme, but also as one that provides technical assistance for activities that are not easily funded by other parts of the Secretariat or by the donor community. The main factors contributing to the success of strategic gap filling in general include:

- The focus on responding to the priorities of member countries as they identify them, based on their knowledge of the comparative advantages of the Secretariat;
- The broad systemic influences that sometimes result from the small-scale interventions of the programme;
- The speed of response;
- The high levels of trust between the Secretariat and member countries, which opens the door to address sensitive subjects, with these sometimes having a high political content;
- The willingness to fill gaps in small states where essential services are at risk because of de-capacitation, largely as a result of migration;
- The empowerment felt by member countries as a result of the relationships developed with the Secretariat;
- The ability to attract high-level people with pan-Commonwealth experience;
- The contribution of strategic gap filling to the development of the capacity of member country governments to negotiate national priorities in a peaceful manner; and
- The availability of training programmes, which provide practical opportunities for participants from a variety of Commonwealth countries to share ideas and make new contacts in areas identified as pertinent to broader government programmes and complementary to other kinds of strategic gap filling or broader Secretariat support.

The general success of strategic gap filling projects demonstrates that the Secretariat should recognise that individual member countries have needs that may differ from those defined for the membership as a whole, and that these countries need a flexible mechanism for assistance. If the Secretariat wants to be truly responsive to each country's needs, it should not overload its response with a variety of goals and priorities. The authors therefore recommend lightening the present load by **focusing on the original purpose of strategic gap filling** – responding to the requests of individual countries and regional bodies – rather than on the priorities of the Strategic Plan and the MDGs. This would also mean decreasing the range of training programmes, although the evaluation of long-standing degree, diploma and certificate programmes suggested in recommendation 6 would have to look at this in detail. As already noted, lightening the present load would also imply bringing the focus of the CSAP programme back to its original objectives – to provide qualified personnel on a non-fee basis as a support to existing activities, rather than CSAP having its own separate programmes and areas of activity.

Recommendation 19: Use the following definition of the purpose of strategic gap filling

Define the purpose of strategic gap filling as follows:

‘To respond to the requests of individual member countries – particularly small states – and of regional bodies for speedy technical assistance to address their priorities, with an emphasis on institutional development.’

At the same time, there is a need to **support countries to better understand where the Secretariat has a comparative advantage** – to improve the match and hence the responsiveness. Demand-driven is not necessarily responsive if the supplier cannot provide an adequate solution. Responsiveness depends on the ability of the PCP/POC to articulate the country’s needs and the Secretariat’s capacity to determine appropriate interventions. This would imply that programme officers would have to be better informed about the expertise of other parts of the Secretariat, and would engage in more dialogue with member countries. This **brokering role** would likely ensure that most requests would fall within the strategic priorities, because that is where technical back-up is most readily available.

This would still leave some requests that would not fall within the priorities. The authors’ previous analysis indicates that projects that run into problems and then do not have ready technical back-up have tended to flounder (see section 4.2.2: Issues with strategic gap filling). GIDD does not have the technical expertise to pull them out of a slump. One solution is for the Secretariat to **make arrangements for technical support** through, for example, national or regional organisations that have the required expertise. This might include, for example, the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization for activities in related areas. Such an approach would also encourage these organisations to strengthen their own capacity and hence their legitimacy nationally, regionally and even internationally.

What structure within the Secretariat would best support this restated goal for strategic gap filling?

5.2 Options for managing technical assistance within the Secretariat

We see five options for managing technical assistance within the Commonwealth Secretariat, as follows:

- **Option 1: Maintain the present structure of GIDD** with Programmes 8 and 15, but with the management improvements suggested above. Programme 15 would continue to fund the assignments of both paid and unpaid experts. Programme 8 would cover training and short-term assignments related to public sector development. All other short-term assignments would be funded from the budgets of the divisions specialising in the relevant technical area. Senior staff in the division would not be technical assistance specialists, but would be rather technical specialists in different areas, such as money laundering. They would continue to play this role, as well as that of managers of regional programmes including the Caribbean, the Pacific and Africa.
- **Option 2: Create a separate technical assistance (TA) unit within GIDD** to manage paid and unpaid long-term experts and training, as well as those short-term experts whose technical focus does not fit within the programme specialisation and work plans of other units or divisions. These activities would be funded from one line item in the division budget. The management changes noted above would be operationalised and the unit would have a dedicated staff experienced in technical assistance responsible for the following activities:
 - Supporting governments in developing a longer-term vision of the most effective role for strategic gap filling in each member country;

- Acting as a resource on technical assistance for the rest of the Secretariat and encouraging learning about what works and what does not work. This would imply holding seminars and writing up experiences for publication; and
 - Enhanced brokering to ensure the best match between the needs of each country and the supply available to the Secretariat.
 - In addition, there would be ‘one-stop-shopping’ for member countries through one officer per country, probably located in PMRU¹²⁰, responsible for co-ordinating all TA activities within the Secretariat.
- **Option 3: Create a separate TA division** to manage paid and unpaid experts and training, as well as short-term experts whose technical focus does not fit within the programme specialisation and work plans of other units or divisions. In addition, the PMRU would provide ‘one-stop-shopping’ for member countries by designating an officer responsible for co-ordinating all TA activities provided from all divisions of the Secretariat. The management changes noted in the report would be necessary. The functions and qualifications of staff would need to be the same as for option 2.
 - **Option 4: Disband strategic gap filling and transfer the funding to Public Sector Development (Programme 8).** The budget allotment for public sector development activities would increase dramatically. Technical assistance activities would be managed by sectoral specialists in various divisions within the Secretariat. All the staff within GIDD would be assigned to public sector development activities.
 - **Option 5: Disband strategic gap filling and distribute funding among existing CFTC-funded activities.** This would provide the Special Advisory Services Division (SASD) and some other divisions with considerably enhanced funding to carry out their work plans. Technical assistance activities would be managed by sectoral specialists in various divisions across the Secretariat. All the staff within GIDD would be assigned to public sector development activities.

The pros and cons of each option are outlined in table 22, below.

Table 22: Options for managing technical assistance within the Secretariat

Option	Pros	Cons
1. Maintain present structure of GIDD with Programmes 8 and 15	• Stability — last reorganisation was disruptive • Provides central resource for managing administratively complex TA activities • Probably least-cost solution	• Lack of identity and legitimacy for TA activities • Managers not TA specialists and play two roles—as technical specialists and as managers • Lack of clarity about which activities fall under which programme (8 or 15) • As of next fiscal year, there would, at least in theory, be no funding available in GIDD for short-term assignments outside the public sector other than through CSAP
2. Create a separate unit within GIDD for technical assistance	• Provides central resource for managing administratively complex TA activities • All staff working in unit would be TA specialists, rather than playing dual functions	• Co-ordination role may not sit well with some divisions • Some new staff, particularly experienced managers with TA experience, may be required • Some possible confusion between TA activities and those that fall under public sector development

¹²⁰ Each officer would have to be responsible for several countries.

Option	Pros	Cons
	• Would provide a resource on TA for other parts of the Secretariat—more professionalism • Higher legitimacy for Secretariat TA activities as a whole • Clearer lines of communication for member countries	
3. Create a separate division for technical assistance	• Clearer identity for TA • Provides central resource for managing administratively complex TA activities • All staff working in unit would be TA specialists, rather than playing dual functions • Would provide a resource on TA for other parts of the Secretariat—more professionalism • Higher legitimacy for Secretariat TA activities as a whole • Clearer lines of communications for member countries	• Likely increased costs because of need for more professional staff and a separate division • Co-ordination role may not sit well with some divisions
4. Disband strategic gap filling and use the funding for public sector development	• More coherence with Strategic Plan • All projects would fit into the work plans of a division and would have technical back-up	• Member countries likely not happy with reduction in the flexibility of Secretariat programming • Probably less support to small states (because public sector development is a higher priority for larger states than for small states) • Possible resulting decrease in support for the Commonwealth as a whole • No support for civil society • No central group specialised in technical assistance to provide advice and back-up for fielding experts and to organise training programmes; staff in SASD and policy groups would have to take on this role, resulting in possible inefficiencies
5. Disband strategic gap filling and distribute funding among existing CFTC-funded activities	• More coherence with Strategic Plan • All projects would fit into the work plans of a division and would have technical back-up	• Member countries likely not happy with reduction in the flexibility of Secretariat programming • Possible resulting decrease in support for the Commonwealth as a whole • Probably less support to small states • No central group specialised in technical assistance to provide advice and back-up for fielding experts and to organise training programmes; professionals in SASD and policy groups would have to take on this role resulting in possible inefficiencies • Donors may be concerned about the possibility of more official development assistance (ODA) being used for policy activities

5.2.1 Choosing among the options

The authors' recommendation for choosing among the options is as follows:

Recommendation 20: Create a unit responsible for the co-ordination of all technical assistance

Adopt option 2 – the creation of a dedicated unit responsible for the professionalisation and co-ordination of all technical assistance. The aim would be to convert this into a full division as resources permit, effectively to move to option 3 over time.

The evaluation has demonstrated that strategic gap filling is generally a successful form of technical assistance, although its results and impact could be improved, especially in some countries. The present structure gives little visibility or legitimacy to technical assistance as a speciality and as the most visible presence of the Commonwealth in many of its member countries. The authors believe that a separate unit and eventually a separate division would have the following benefits:

- A group of staff specialised in technical assistance would provide a more solid knowledge base on the subject for the Secretariat as a whole and would help to increase its credibility on one of its key products – technical assistance.
- A specialised group would be more able to develop a status equivalent to that of other professional groups, which the staff in GIDD now working on strategic gap filling within a broader context of public sector development and governance have not been able to do. This has affected staff morale, as well as the ability of GIDD to defend the budget for strategic gap filling (see section 2.3.1: The establishment of GIDD).
- There would be fewer competing priorities for the management of the new unit, because they would have a single rather than a double role as now. They could focus solely on improving technical assistance and not on providing advice on a specific sector – public service development.
- A group of specialists could develop a public credibility and legitimacy in technical assistance for the Secretariat through publications and participation in appropriate events in the development community.
- A dedicated group would have a vested interest in maintaining the successful activities for which strategic gap filling is appreciated. For example, as of next year, it was foreseen at the time of writing that the only provision for short-term expertise other than CSAP would be under Programme 8 (Public Sector Development), yet there have been successful assignments that have been outside the public sector.

The authors acknowledge that creating a new unit is likely to have some cost implications and a new division even more so. They therefore recommend a gradual approach, with the creation of a division being dependent on resources being made available.

5.3 Implications for the management of paid and unpaid experts and training

5.3.1 Implications for staff roles

The implementation of either option 2 or 3 – a separate group dedicated as being responsible for TA – would have a number of implications. Arguably the most important would be in relation to staffing, resources and profile. **Staff skills would need to be strengthened in capacity building and institutional development, as well as in programme design and management**, to meet the functional requirements of the revised unit and division. The authors would see a profile such as the following:

- An excellent knowledge of the region to which they are assigned; the present system of rotating staff among regions should be discontinued;
- Knowledge of how the governments with which they interact function, preferably through having worked in government service;
- Project management skills;
- Good writing skills and the ability to make cogent arguments in writing as well as orally;
- Well-developed analytical capacity;
- Experience in managing technical assistance and training and an understanding of their theoretical foundations and their contribution to capacity development; and
- Ability to dialogue with governments and help them to develop some vision of how to best utilise strategic gap filling and identify priorities within it. This would imply an understanding of strategies of change.

Recommendation 21: Adopt a new profile for programme staff responsible for strategic gap filling

Staff assigned to strategic gap filling activities should meet a defined profile as outlined in section 5.3.1, which includes previous experience with technical assistance and a demonstrated ability to play a brokerage role between the Secretariat and member country governments.

In addition, staff would be expected to develop a solid knowledge of the policies and activities of **other divisions**, so that they can better understand where possible links exist with strategic gap filling. They should also receive **training on systems thinking** to help them understand how small but high-level interventions of the nature of those in Mauritius and Sierra Leone can contribute to change in these societies. The purpose would be to equip them to support officials in member country governments who have an overview of their systems to identify where small interventions can have significant influence.

Recommendation 22: Staff to develop thorough understanding of the objectives of other divisions

Staff in the new division should develop a thorough understanding of the objectives of other divisions and the kinds of activities they undertake in order to allow them to broker between the demands of member countries and the capability of the Secretariat to meet these demands.

5.3.2 Implications for the management of paid and unpaid experts

As has been seen from previous discussion, countries in different regions see the niche for strategic gap filling quite differently. Some of these approaches seem to be more successful than others. It might be useful if GIDD staff had a **shared view of what patterns seem to work best and under what conditions**. One aspect of this is the different kinds of TA assignments and how they might be staffed. Table 23, below, which is an expansion of the typology found in section 4.3.1, could be the beginning of a tool for **more rigorously assessing TA needs with partner countries and defining the kind of response the Secretariat could make**. Such a tool would need, however, to be validated by broader experience within GIDD.

Recommendation 23: Refine a methodology for assessing needs and appropriate responses

Refine a methodology for assessing needs and an appropriate Secretariat response, so as to better match requests with the Secretariat's objectives and capability to support development requirements in a member country. Table 23 should be used as a starting point to guide the development of the specific objective for any particular project and the analysis of the form of assistance required.

Table 23: Requirements of the different types of technical assistance

Functions/ activities	Purpose	Main focus of activities	Type of TA	Nature of expertise required	Level of expertise required	Examples of results
Gap filling	Operational support for critical government functions	Capacity of overall system	Long-term, often recurrent	Operational	Depends on assignment	Essential services maintained, e.g. legal prosecution in Sierra Leone (SIE/82)
Advice on specialised issues	Resolve specific problems	One-of-a-kind intervention, not designed to build capacity	Volunteer or short-term	Technical	Junior to medium	Impartial analysis as basis for discussions among stakeholders, e.g. water pollution in Mauritius (MRT/003V)
Promoting change	Change attitudes and approaches on key issues	Capabilities of the group or organisation	Long- or short-term, sometimes recurrent	Holistic, political, management, process, willingness to work cross-sectorally	Usually senior	New policy developed or implemented, e.g. implementation of gender policy in the Pacific Forum Secretariat (SPF/30)
Political advice	Resolve key legal cum political issues	Capacity of overall system	Short-term	Broad sectoral knowledge, political acumen	Usually senior	Recommendations for public discussions, e.g. for constitutional changes in Mauritius (MRT/101)

Functions/ activities	Purpose	Main focus of activities	Type of TA	Nature of expertise required	Level of expertise required	Examples of results
Advice on global positioning	Provide advice/ support to meet international standards or address global problems	Capacity of overall system	Long- or short- term	Technical, political	Senior	Updated legislation, e.g. on telecommuni- cations in Barbados (BAR/74)
Training	Provide formal or informal training to change approaches or bring skills levels up to a predetermined level, generally as part of a larger programme of developing capacity in a sector	Competencies of individuals, capabilities of organisations	Short- or long- term	Technical, ability to communicate knowledge to others	Junior to medium depend- ing on the audience	Adoption of alternative models of delivering services, e.g. the adoption of the community policing model in Sierra Leone as part of a larger programme of maintaining law and order and respect for human rights (SIE/85)

5.3.3 Implications for managing training

The previous chapters suggest that the training support provided by the Secretariat would benefit from some rethinking. Presently it is approached and planned as a distinct technical area for filling knowledge and skills gaps. This results in a series of time-bound inputs, rather than a more comprehensive approach to addressing the capacity needs of member countries. GIDD needs to **think about training as one of a number of ways of achieving learning and the capacity goals of member countries**, and to clearly establish how training can contribute to achieving those goals, in what sector and at what level.

Members of staff working on strategic gap filling activities face a number of challenges in moving from the current technical approach to more integrated programming. These include:

- The legacy of MTSD: Current ways of thinking and programming emanate from and are anchored in the approach to learning and the products of the 'former MTSD'. Planning documents consistently refer to a continuation of programmes from the 'former MTSD', which contracted institutions throughout the Commonwealth to design training programmes. These courses are still offered today.
- Planning and budgeting for training programmes are largely carried out in parallel, rather than in co-operation, with other GIDD strategic gap filling initiatives and other Secretariat initiatives to strengthen capacity in a given sector. This is in spite of the fact that many expert assignments are intended to support learning in the workplace, for example, training is part of the standard ToR for both long- and short-term experts.

Staff members need to **carefully assess circumstances in which one-off training events constitute a strategic contribution to achieving desired development results** in a given sector or to the

development of a critical mass of individuals, and where other strategies may be more appropriate. This would require a systematic evaluation of the continued relevance of existing training programmes to the evolving needs of member countries, as well as an assessment of their outcomes (See recommendation 6).

Developing a strategic approach to learning and institutional development would require that staff develop a shared understanding of the possibilities and limitations of each type of intervention possible within the parameters of the Secretariat portfolio of support mechanisms. It would also require a strategy for ongoing learning, based on the experience of the Secretariat and other organisations of what works as a combination and sequence of activities over time, in given contexts, sectors, etc. (see recommendation 5).

Based on this, staff may want to **consider alternative ways of programming for training** as a contributing part of strategic gap filling programmes (vs. training activities). Some examples of approaches might include:

- Identifying areas of comparative advantage – what such training has to offer to meet the learning and institutional development needs of member countries, and what it can deliver effectively;
- PCPs/POCs to identify sectoral or institutional capacity development goals that could be refined through exchanges or visits to identify the most appropriate types of interventions, and in what sequence to achieve the objectives. These could include courses and other forms of support to learning and institutional development; and
- PCPs/POCs to develop a plan or action agenda on a particular issue in a regional planning workshop. This could provide the basis for the development of national or regional strategies, which might in turn include workshops, regional advisers and communities of practice.

Recommendation 24: Move to an integrated approach for the design and delivery of technical assistance

That GIDD move to an integrated approach for the design and delivery of technical assistance, with a clearer focus on institutional strengthening and the associated capacity required. The provision of training and the placement of technical expertise should be one means, among others, of delivering these outcomes rather than ends in themselves.

This chapter recaps the recommendations made in the other chapters, groups them thematically and indicates which group in the Secretariat should be responsible for follow-up. It also raises some issues of broader interest to the Secretariat and the development community as a whole.

It is useful to bring together all the recommendations made in this report. The table below clusters the recommendations thematically (into recommendations on experts, on training, on CSAP, on capacity development, on management and on staff skills) and gives an indication of who or which group in the Secretariat should be responsible for carrying through on them.

A. Experts

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 3: Move away from the focus on a one-on-one expert-counterpart relationship Remove any reference to training one-on-one counterparts from the ToR of experts in favour of requiring a broader responsibility to build capacity in general within the host organisations through various means, including seminars, coaching, use of local consultants and on-the-job training.	4.3.1	GIDD, PMRU and HRS
Recommendation 12: Review the Experts Roster Review the structure and composition of, and the eligibility criteria for entry in, the Experts Roster. This will require an assessment of the purpose and use of the Roster and the associated Experts Database and allocation of sufficient resources to create a more efficient and cost-effective source for the identification and management of high quality CFTC- funded technical assistance.	4.6	CSD/ HRS
Recommendation 13: Seek professional advice on a performance assessment system That the Secretariat engage outside professional expertise to advise on how to develop a fair and transparent approach to performance assessment for experts and contractors.	4.6	GIDD and all divisions, CSD/HRS
Recommendation 15: Inform experts of Secretariat activities in their host country and facilitate exchange between them When visiting a member country, GIDD programme staff should organise an informal meeting with all in-country and regional experts posted by the Secretariat to ensure that they have a chance to get to know each other and to provide them with an updated briefing on recent policy and programme development across the country portfolio. To facilitate contact and sharing of information between experts in general, the Secretariat should also endeavour to provide experts with each other's contact details.	4.6	GIDD

B. Training

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 4: Improve co-ordination with training institutes Improve co-ordination with training institutes that receive CFTC-funded and trainees, so that all institutes involved are fully aware of who their responsible officers are. These officers should also take responsibility for monitoring the training programmes offered for quality and continued relevance to the needs of member countries.	4.3.2	GIDD, PMRU and SPED (for quality review of impact)
Recommendation 5: Use abroad range of approaches to adult continuous learning Put more emphasis in programme design and country responses on a broad range of approaches to adult continuous learning, including follow-up courses with practical assignments on the job, mentoring and development of communities of practice. Explore innovative ways in which this can be achieved in countries and regions through internet connections and learning approaches.	4.3.2	GIDD
Recommendation 6: Evaluate long-standing training programmes Evaluate long-standing degree, diploma and certificate programmes to provide the kind of empirical grounding that would be required to determine the effectiveness of these programmes and their continued relevance to evolving member country needs. The evaluation should determine the effectiveness of the overall approach to capacity building through such courses, which to continue and which to stop offering.	4.3.2	SPED
Recommendation 7: Develop corps of legal drafters in the regions Consider negotiating regional agreements to establish corps of legal drafters within appropriate regional institutions — such as university law faculties — to respond to the needs of smaller Commonwealth member states without the means to hire and retain full-time specialised personnel. These regional agreements would have to be underpinned by an analysis of how current and future needs can be met on a pooled basis, which countries per region are most in need and what percentage of the cost they should be expected to assume. Such legal drafting facilities should be financed primarily through national and regional contributions, but the Secretariat should consider providing some additional funding. Work in this area could build on the experiences of the Commonwealth of Learning, which has offered long-distance legal drafting courses in the past. Other aspects of the broader legal drafting training strategy mentioned in the report should also be implemented, i.e. the introduction of legal drafting in law degrees, the establishment of a regular programme of short advanced courses, and using the drafting facilities that exist to provide attachments.	4.3.2	GIDD, LCAD

C. CSAP

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 8: Return the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP) to its original purpose Return CSAP to its original purpose of providing less expensive expertise for 'regular' activities rather than being managed as a separate volunteer programme. Carry out an independent cost-benefit analysis of the assistance provided by experts working on a no-fee basis to determine the level of savings generated (including Secretariat overheads) and to compare the quality of personnel attracted with those in regular assignments, either short or long term.	4.3.3	a) OSG, GIDD b) SPED

D. Strategic gap filling and capacity development

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 9: Use typology of TA activities to assess requests for assistance At the broad planning level, use the typology outlined in table 19 (Using strategic gap filling effectively): - to help define the relationship between the assistance requested and broader capacity goals; - to develop the overall approach to address particular country or regional needs in a logical, coherent and integrated manner; and - to define the specific mix of interventions to address that need, including where projects can make a contribution.	4.4.2	GIDD, PMRU
Recommendation 10: Gap filling to ensure sustainable services Recognise that judicious filling of gaps where it is a question of keeping essential services going may be a necessity in some states facing de-capacitation, but that there needs to be careful analysis of these situations to be sure that there are genuinely global shortages in the sector concerned and that the assistance is not undermining local capacity. This also applies to the use of legal drafters, as discussed in recommendation 7.	4.4.3	GIDD
Recommendation 17: Use the following set of questions for assessing the success of strategic gap filling projects Use the answers to the following set of questions as the basis for determining the success of a strategic gap filling project: - Did the activity funded represent a critical gap or need? - To what extent did strategic gap filling respond to this gap or need? - To what extent was the member state involved in the activity or showed commitment to it, for example through a financial contribution, by dialoguing on the original request or by monitoring implementation? - Were the experts supplied both technically competent and personally suitable? Were they able to adjust to the local customs and to the working environment?	4.6	GIDD, all divisions, SPED, OSG

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
- What results came out of the assignment of experts and the training of member country nationals? How did these relate to the purpose and results defined in the theory of change (table 20) and in table 19 (Using strategic gap filling effectively)? - Were there spin-offs or leveraging of other activities that occurred as a result of strategic gap filling activities? - Was the professional supervision by the Secretariat adequate? Was there a turnover of responsible staff either in the Secretariat or in the member country during the expert's assignment? If so, what effect did it have? - To what extent was the strategic gap filling provided able to respond to the opportunities for change originally defined in the theory of change (table 20)? How could the Secretariat have responded more effectively?		
Recommendation 19: Use the following definition of the purpose of strategic gap filling Define the purpose of strategic gap filling as follows: 'To respond to the requests of individual member countries — particularly small states — and of regional bodies for speedy technical assistance to address their priorities, with an emphasis on institutional development.'	5.1	OSG, GIDD, SPED, all divisions

E. Management of strategic gap filling

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 1: Review Protocol 15 Review Protocol 15 to ensure that it is consistent with new guidelines being developed in the Secretariat and with any recommendations in this report that are accepted by the governing bodies of the organisation.	2.2.1	GIDD
Recommendation 2: Pilot multi-annual allocations to a few member countries Set up two or three pilots for multi-year country allocations with selected member countries. The pilot would allow the country to do more strategic forward planning of Secretariat assistance based on an agreed annual allocation. At the end of the financial year, review these experiences and decide on the value of extending this approach to a larger number of countries.	4.2.2	GIDD, SPED, PMRU and CSD
Recommendation 11: Designate a staff member responsible for co-ordinating all Secretariat assistance to each member country Designate one Secretariat staff member per country to be responsible for co-ordinating all of the organisation's assistance going to that country. Each staff person would have to manage more than one country and perhaps even a whole region. Responsibility for such co-ordination would probably need to be assigned to a central unit, such as the Project Management and Referrals Unit (PMRU). To enable the unit to meaningfully carry out a co-ordination — as opposed to just an information-gathering — role, this would imply an increase in staff numbers in the unit.	4.5.2	OSG

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 14: Compile up-to-date lists of Secretariat activities in each country Compile up-to-date descriptions of all Secretariat activities in a country and make this information available to Secretariat staff, experts in post and member governments. One Secretariat division would have to take responsibility for compiling this information and regularly updating it; all divisions would have responsibility for submitting the relevant information.	4.6	GIDD, SPED, PMRU, all divisions
Recommendation 16: Improve paper and electronic record management Under the auspices of the RMIP (record management improvement project) GIDD should give priority to reviewing its approach to file classification and management and undertake a review of its file structure and holding to improve programme efficiency and information management. The relationship of electronic and paper-based information also needs to be considered and cost efficiencies introduced to enhance co-ordination and information sharing.	4.6	GIDD
Recommendation 18: Explore low-cost solutions to providing a Secretariat field presence Explore some low-cost solutions to providing a field presence on a regional basis, particularly in the Pacific, to focus on developing a vision of where Secretariat assistance is most useful and to strengthen national capacity to define requests, monitor ongoing activities and resolve problems in implementation. In areas that are more accessible from London, investigate the costs and benefits of having a field presence versus more staff travel to the area for broad programming and review purposes, rather than just for project management.	4.6	OSG, SPED
Recommendation 20: Create a unit responsible for the co-ordination of all technical assistance Adopt option 2 — the creation of a dedicated unit responsible for the professionalisation and co-ordination of all technical assistance. The aim would be to convert this into a full division as resources permit, effectively moving to option 3 over time.	5.2.1	OSG, CSD, SPED
Recommendation 23: Refine a methodology for assessing needs and appropriate responses Refine a methodology for assessing needs and an appropriate Secretariat response, so as to better match requests with the Secretariat's objectives and capability to support development requirements in a member country. Table 23 should be used as a starting point to guide the development of the specific objective for any particular project and the analysis of the form of assistance required.	5.3.2	GIDD or new division
Recommendation 24: Move to an integrated approach for the design and delivery of technical assistance GIDD should move to an integrated approach for the design and delivery of technical assistance, with a clearer focus on institutional strengthening and the associated capacity required. The provision of training and the placement of technical expertise should be one means, among others, of delivering these outcomes rather than ends in themselves.	5.3.3	GIDD

F. Staff skills

Recommendations	Section where discussed	Responsible group
Recommendation 21: Adopt a new profile for programme staff responsible for strategic gap filling Staff members assigned to strategic gap filling activities should meet a defined profile, as outlined in section 5.3.1, which includes previous experience with technical assistance and a demonstrated ability to play a brokerage role between the Secretariat and member country governments.	5.3.1	OSG, CSD
Recommendation 22: Staff to develop a thorough understanding of the objectives of other divisions Staff in the new division should develop a thorough understanding of the objectives of other divisions and the kinds of activities they undertake in order to allow them to broker between the demands of member countries and the capability of the Secretariat to meet those demands.	5.3.1	OSG, restructured GIDD

In addition to the specific recommendations made, the authors hope that this report will generate some discussion about development approaches. The evidence presented shows strategic gap filling and other CFTC-funded activities of the Secretariat to be **generally successful approaches to providing small-scale, but key, inputs to encourage broader systemic change**. The findings of this evaluation raise some challenging issues about how these programmes work.

First, much of the success of strategic gap filling depends on an **understanding of the broad context of a country and where small inputs can make a difference**. This systemic approach works on a different logic from that of the log-frame – it is dynamic, fluid and largely unpredictable, rather than linear, progressive and predictable. More research is needed to better understand the potential of systems approaches in the development context. Is it useful for the Secretariat to think about how it might better understand the ramifications of a systems approach?

Second, the **monitoring of activities from a systems perspective requires new approaches that take into account unpredictability**. The Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD, a network linked to, but independent of, the GOVNET of the DAC) is beginning to think about how it can contribute to better approaches to monitoring capacity development. Would the member countries or the Secretariat like to contribute to this process?

Third, in many ways **strategic gap filling is an example of some of the principles defined in publications like *Shaping the 21st Century*¹²¹, especially partnership and accountability**. How can such a model be expanded and used more broadly? How can the present programme be scaled-up, both to ensure that it has the structural support it needs (such as field presence and the revision of the Experts Roster) but also to enable the Secretariat to respond to a greater number of requests? As section 2.2.2 (Financial allocations for strategic gap filling) indicates, funding for strategic gap filling has declined from £11 million in 1997/98 to about £5 million in 2004/05. This restricts what the Secretariat can do. The final recommendation in this report therefore suggests that funding to the CFTC for strategic gap filling should be increased.

121 DAC (1996) *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation*. Paris: OECD.

Recommendation 25: Contributing members to provide additional funding to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC)

The contributing members of the Commonwealth should provide additional funding to the CFTC to allow for a doubling in the size of strategic gap filling activities over the next five years. Consideration should be given to increasing the budget further if need and performance merit. This would return the funding level back to that of a decade ago, but without taking inflation into consideration.

- Asian Development Bank (2006) *Special Evaluation Study on the Performance of Technical Assistance – 2nd Position Paper*. Mimeo.
- AusAid (2000) *Review of the CFTC Programme*. Evaluation Report.
- Baser, H. and J. Zinke (2005) *Strategic Gap Filling in Mauritius – Report on fieldwork*. Mimeo.
- Baser, H., O. Hasse and P. Morgan (2005) *Filling the gaps – defining the niche and assessing the outcomes of strategic gap filling – Interim Report of an evaluation for the Commonwealth Secretariat*. Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).
- Baser, H. and P. Morgan (1997) *Review of Technical Assistance Loans in the World Bank*. Mimeo.
- Berg, E.J. (1993) *Rethinking Technical Cooperation: Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa*. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- Bolger, J. (2005) *Notes from Evaluation of COMSEC Strategic Gap Filling Program – South Pacific*. Mimeo.
- Brinkerhoff, Derick W. (2005) *Organisational Legitimacy, Capacity and Capacity Development*. Discussion Paper No 58A. Maastricht, the Netherlands: ECDPM.
- Chambers, Robert. *Ideas for Development*. IDS Working Paper, 238. Brighton, England: Institute of Development Studies.
- Commonwealth Secretariat Small States: About Commonwealth Small States.
http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/151766/about_small_states/ [last accessed 21 November 2007]
- Commonwealth Secretariat Small States: Framework of Assistance for Small States.
http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/151994/framework_of_assistance_to_small_states/ [last accessed 21 November 2007]
- Commonwealth Secretariat, Economics Department (University Malta), Islands and Small States Institute (University Malta) (2004) *Report on the International Workshop on Economic Vulnerability and Resilience of Small States*. International Workshop on Economic Vulnerability and Resilience of Small States, Malta, 1-3 March 2004. Mimeo.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1994) *Work Programme, 1994/95-1996/97 – Sub-Programme Narratives and Activity Frameworks*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1995) *Assistance for Legislative Drafting in the Caribbean*. (Evaluation Studies, 48). London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1997) *A Future for Small States: Overcoming Vulnerability*. Report by a Commonwealth Advisory Group. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1997) *The Third Three-Year Strategic Plan 1997/98-1999/2000 – Memorandum by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Annex A: Programmes and Sub-Programmes*. Steering Committee of Senior Officials (SCOSO), London, 29-30 April 1997. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1998) *Evaluation of Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) Assistance to the Caribbean 1992/93-1996/97*. (Evaluation Studies, 58). London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1999a) *CFTC: A Rethink*. Paper presented to the Committee of Management and the Board of Representatives Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, London, June 1999. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (1999b) *Evaluation of Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to the South Pacific*. (Evaluation Studies, 63). London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (2000) *Commonwealth Secretariat Work Programme Strategic Plan 2000/02 – Memorandum by the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Annex A: Programmes*. Steering Committee of Senior Officials (SCOSO), London, 22-23 June 2000. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (2001a) *Issues Paper: Strategic Gap Filling and Capacity Building*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (2001b) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme: Making A Difference – Planting Seeds For Tomorrow*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Commonwealth Secretariat (2002a) *Commonwealth Secretariat Programmes of Assistance: Practice and Procedures – A Manual*

for Points of Contact and others in Commonwealth governments and organisations. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2002b) *Commonwealth Secretariat Sub-programmes and Projects 2002/2003*. Resource Week Meetings, London, June 2002. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2002c) *Evaluation study of Secretariat Developmental Programmes of Assistance to Commonwealth Countries in Southern Africa*. (Evaluation Studies, 69). London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2002d) *The Coolum Communiqué*. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Coolum, 2-5 March 2002. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Annual Performance Report 2002/03 (BG2-EC4 (03)3)*. Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors, London, 6-8 May 2003, and at the Meeting of the Board of Governors, London, 9 May 2003. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Commonwealth Secretariat Development Assistance to the West Africa Region 1997-2001*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Commonwealth Youth Programme Strategic Plan 2003-2006*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme: Planting Seeds For Tomorrow – CSAP: 2001-2003*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2003) *Study on the Commonwealth Secretariat's Follow-up and Utilization of Evaluation Findings*. (Evaluation Series, 74). London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2004a) *Evaluation Study of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme: Issues Paper and Terms of Reference*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2004b) *Draft Commonwealth Secretariat's Strategic Plan 2004/05-2007/08*. Meetings of the Board of Governors and its Executive Committee, London, 11-14 May 2004. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2004c) *Operational Plan and Budget 2004/05-2005/06*. Board of Governors, London, 14 May 2004. London: Commonwealth Secretariat

Commonwealth Secretariat (2004d) *Small states: from vulnerability to resilience building and competitiveness*. Mimeo.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2004e) *Strategic Plan 2004/05-2007/08*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2004f) *Annual Performance Report 2003-2004 (EC2(04/05)1)*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *Commonwealth Secretariat Assistance to Member Countries 2003/04*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *Protocol for Developing and Managing Projects Under Programme 15: Capacity Building and Institutional development*. London: GIDD.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *Small states: from vulnerability to resilience building and competitiveness*. Draft excerpt from the Director General's Report 2004.

Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) *Tsunami Disaster Health Relief Project in the Maldives – Progress report for January-June, 2005*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Cosgrave, J. (2005) *Tsunami Evaluation Commission: Initial Findings*. <http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org/home> [last accessed 21 November 2007]

DAC (1996) *Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation*. Paris: OECD.

De Renzio, P. and A. Rogerson (2005) *Power to Consumers? A Bottom-up Approach to Aid Reform*. (ODI Opinions, May 2005). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Department for International Development (DfID)/ Eyben, R. (2005) *High Impact / Low-Cost Aid Initiatives: Preliminary Report submitted to the Aid Effectiveness Group, Policy Division, Department for International Development*. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

DfID (2006) *Technical Personnel for Capacity Development: A Stock Take of DfID's Practice: What are we doing now and what might we be doing differently?* London, UK: Department for International Development, Aid Effectiveness Team.

Faber, M. (1994) *Do Different – Review of the Commonwealth Secretariat's 'C' Programmes Wholly or Partly Funded by the CFTC*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

Governance and Institutional Development Division (GIDD) (2000) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme: Volunteer Professionals for Development*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2003) *Statement on the Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP)*. Mimeo.

GIDD / Kaberere, Julius (2004a) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme (CSAP): Strategies for implementation from FY 2004/05, CPO CSAP*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2004b) *Commonwealth Service Corps: A proposed scheme under CSAP (for implementation from FY 2004/05)*. Mimeo.

GIDD / Kaberere, Julius (2004c) *Status and future direction of CSAP*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2004d) *4.4 Training costs statistics FY 02-04*. Mimeo (16 December 2004).

GIDD (2005a) *4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2003*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005b) *4.4 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2004*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005c) *Programme 15 (Technical Assistance through Experts) Country Summary of Commitments as at 30 June 2005*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005d) *GIDD Project List and Commitments 2002/03*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005e) *GIDD Project List and Commitments 2003/04*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005f) *GIDD Project List and Commitments 2004/05*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005g) *Progress and Status of CSAP Projects: September 2005*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief Barbados*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief Dominica*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief Fiji*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief Forum Secretariat*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief Mauritius*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief Sierra Leone*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *GIDD Brief South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC)*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Barbados FY 2002/03*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Barbados FY 2003/04*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Barbados FY 2004/05*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Dominica FY 2002/03*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Dominica FY 2003/04*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Dominica FY 2004/05*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Mauritius FY 2002/03*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Mauritius FY 2003/04*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Mauritius FY 2004/05*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Pacific FY 2003/04*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Pacific FY 2004/05*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Pacific FY 2002/03*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Sierra Leone FY 2002/03*. Mimeo.

GIDD (2005) *Trainees Sierra Leone FY 2003/04*. Mimeo.

- GIDD (2005) *Trainees Sierra Leone FY 2004/05*. Mimeo.
- Hasse, O. (2004) *Report on the File Review in the Context of ECDPM's Evaluation of the Strategic Gap Filling Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat*. Mimeo.
- Hauck, V. (2005) *ComSec – Mission to Freetown, Sierra Leone: 3 to 7 July 2005, summary report*. Mimeo.
- Independent Sector / United Nations Volunteers (2001) *Measuring Volunteering: A practical Toolkit*. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector.
- Indian Ocean Commission (1998) *The Future of the Indian Ocean Commission: Strategic Reflections on Regional Cooperation in the Next Ten Years*. (White Paper). Maastricht, the Netherlands: European Centre for Development Policy Management/Indian Ocean Commission.
- Jessop, D. (2005) *The Week in Europe – 10 June 2005*. Mimeo.
- Jessop, D. (2005) *The Week in Europe – 18 February 2005*. Mimeo.
- Kaberere, J. (2004) *Status and future direction of CSAP*. Mimeo.
- Land, A. (2005) *Workshop on Systems Thinking and Capacity Development*. Maastricht, the Netherlands: ECDPM.
- Lange, L. (2005) *Commonwealth Secretariat Development Assistance to Member States in the Area of Corporate Governance*. (Evaluation Series, 75). London: Commonwealth Secretariat.
- Mackie, J. (2005) *Governance – Made in Africa*. EPC/KAS/HSS/CPSU Conference, Brussels, 12 July 2005. Mimeo.
- Moock, J.L. *Rockefeller Foundation Capacity Building Review*. Mimeo.
- Morgan, P. (2002) Technical Assistance: Correcting the Precedents in the *Development Policy Journal*, Volume 2, December 2002. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- Morgan, P. (2006) *Capacity: What is it?* Maastricht, the Netherlands: European Centre for Development Policy Management.
- Narayanasuwami, C. (2000) *Review of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation*. Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development.
- NZAID (2004) *MARAAF Review 2003 – The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation*. Mimeo.
- ODI (2005) *Scaling up versus absorptive capacity: challenges and opportunities for reaching the MDGs in Africa*. (ODI Briefing Papers, May 2005). London, UK: Overseas Development Institute.
- ODI (2005) *Tsunami: would we do better next time?* Policy Brief reproduced in the ODI Annual Report 2005. London: ODI, p.13. http://www.odi.org.uk/annual_report/ar2005/page13_tsunami.pdf [last accessed 21 November 2007]
- OECD (1992) *Development Assistance Committee* p.51.
- OECD (2005) *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability*. <http://www.aidharmonization.org> [last accessed 21 November 2007]
- OECD (2006) 'Technical Cooperation' in *Development Co-operation Report 2005 – Efforts and Policies of the Members of the Development Assistance Committee*. *OECD Journal on Development*, Volume 7, Issue 1. Paris, France: OECD.
- Patchett, Keith (2003) *Report of the workshop on curriculum development for the training of legislative drafters*. 10-12 November 2003, Christ Church, Barbados. Mimeo
- Puri, M. (2005) *Commonwealth Service Abroad Programme: A review of the terms and conditions of service*. Mimeo.
- Rademacher, A. (2005) *The growth of Capacity in IUCN in Asia*. Discussion Paper, 57M. Maastricht, the Netherlands: ECDPM.
- Radin, B.A. (2006) *Challenging the Performance Movement: Accountability, Complexity and Democratic Values (Public Management and Change)*. Washington, D.C., USA: Georgetown University Press.
- Sen, Amartya (1999) *Development as Freedom*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (2006) *Time for Rethinking*. (POM Working Paper, March 2006). DRAFT.
- Skapinker, M. (2001) *Worlds Apart – Companies Fail to Go Global*. www.ft.com.

Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (1996) *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide – Lessons from the Rwanda Experience*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Tap, B.S.M. and T. George (2000) *Training Needs Assessment – Report on the public service of Barbados*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat.

UN Volunteers (2002) *Volunteerism and Capacity Development*. Bonn, Germany: United Nations Volunteers.

UNDP (2002) *Development Policy Journal*. (Volume 2, December 2002). New York, USA: United Nations Development Programme.

United Nations (2005) *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2005*. New York, USA: United Nations.

VSO (2005) *The Role of Volunteers in International Development (VSO Position Paper)*. London, UK: VSO.

Wade, R.H. (2001) *The US role in the malaise at the World Bank: Get up, Gulliver!* International Institutions and North/South conflict – American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 28-30 August 2001. Mimeo.

Whyte, A. (2004) *Landscape Analysis of Donor Trends in International Development*. (Human and Institutional Capacity Building Rockefeller Foundation Series, 2). New York, USA: The Rockefeller Foundation.

World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa – An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support*. Washington, D.C., USA: World Bank.

WTO (2005) *Work Programme on Small Economies – An Approach to Framing Responses to the Trade-Related Problems of Small Economies – Revision*. (Communication WT/COMTD/SE/W/13/Rev.1, 20 May 2005). Geneva, Switzerland: World Trade Organization.

WTO (2005) *Work Programme on Small Economies* (Communication WT/COMTD/SE/W/12, 18 February 2005). Geneva, Switzerland: World Trade Organization.

