

P.P. Kanthan (Dev): The impact of the CFTC/EMD assistance on the Commonwealth

My recollection is that the origin of CFTC is to be traced to the CHOGM of 1971 held in Singapore and the resultant 'Agreed Memorandum' that defined its role and status. It started functioning in 1972, initially with the General Technical Assistance (GTA) Division and Education and Training (E&T) Division. Later, the Technical Assistance Group (TAG) and the Industrial Development Unit (IDU) were added.

The foundation for the EMD Division laid in the report of a Commonwealth Task Force, comprising eminent officials of selected Commonwealth countries. This came up with a recommendation for the addition of a new division to the CFTC in order to cater to the export market requirements of Commonwealth developing countries, which badly needed a boost to their foreign exchange earnings for their economic development. I think the CHOGM of 1972 approved the recommendation and decided in favor of a new Export Market Development Division to be part of the CFTC. (You may be able to check up the exact years and quote from the actual decisions of the CHOGM).

The EMD Division came into existence in 1973 and was staffed by a Director and a Project Officer. I joined the EMD Division in 1975, nearly two years after it was set up and its strength then comprised a Director, two Chief Project Officers, who reported to the Director, and two Project Officers.

The *modus operandi* of generating the EMD projects for technical assistance was based on the tours to the respective geographical areas assigned to the professional staff. During these tours, the staff members met the concerned Commonwealth government officials and explained the parameters of CFTC assistance to them. e. g., that the assistance was confined to technical assistance, aimed at expanding technical skills and at capacity development, but did not include capital assistance, as happened in the case of UN or World Bank Assistance. In the formulation and implementation of the projects, there was close interaction between the concerned government officials and the CFTC staff. The Job Descriptions in the cases of advisers, long term and short term, as well as the Terms of Reference for consultancy projects were drafted in close consultation with the Points of Contact nominated by governments, who in turn liaised with the concerned technical departments. This procedure avoided crossing of wires in communications with governments. Selection of advisors were left to the decisions of the governments, out of a short list of competent experts chosen by the Division from the Panel of CFTC Experts maintained at the headquarters. In case of consultancy projects, the selection of the Consultancy Firms was done by an inter-Divisional committee of CFTC. The progress

concerning both types of projects were monitored closely by EMD with periodical, interim, and draft reports got from field experts and consultants. The professional staff in EMD Division ensured that the final reports of the advisers as well as the consultants were in accordance with the job description or the terms of reference, as the case may be. In order to ensure transfer of relevant expertise to concerned government officials, invariably there was provision made to attach a counterpart from the concerned government department to the advisers and the consultants and the transfer of such expertise was monitored by the Division.

The need-based delivery of technical assistance by CFTC/EMD, greater flexibility and interpersonal element in its approach contributed to the popularity of such assistance as compared with technical assistance from UN Agencies. I recall that once when I was on official tour in Guyana in the mid-seventies, a representative of the International Trade Centre (UNCTAD/GATT) remarked: 'You seem to have cornered all projects!' His reference was obviously to CFTC assistance.

Over the years, as the quality and scale of technical assistance requirements by Commonwealth developing countries evolved, the EMD Division modified its technical assistance delivery to suit such evolving requirements. Initially, the emphasis was on developing an appropriate infrastructure for export promotion with provision of expertise to set up and help run export promotion organizations and provision of specific assistance in fields such as export promotion techniques, export packaging, export quality control, costing and pricing, organization of trade fairs and exhibitions, handicrafts development for exports, trade information, trade facilitation, and so on. Later on, market surveys by consultancy firms for selected products in specified markets were undertaken, followed by Contact Promotion Programs, Buyer-Seller Meets, Integrated Marketing Programs, Export Business Intensification Programs, Export Sector Investment Promotion Programs, etc.

For selected projects, evaluation was undertaken, eliciting the views of the concerned governments on the planning, formulation and execution of the projects, the benefits derived out of the projects, and the areas where improvements could be effected in future. Apart from such Project Evaluation, occasionally Program Evaluation was also done, as was done in the late eighties, prior to the expansion of the EMD Division into the Export and Industrial Development Division (EIDD), with the addition of the Industrial Development Unit (IDU) and the Agricultural Development Unit (ADU) to the EMD Division.

A good part of the EMD work also covered regional assistance. A number of regional advisers were provided to the concerned regional organizations to be of benefit to the

countries comprising the Region. This approach enabled economies of scale and a better utilization of the gradually dwindling CFTC resources. The CARICOM Secretariat, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Secretariat, the South Pacific Bureau for Economic Cooperation (SPEC), the economic community of West African states (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), and the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) were all beneficiaries of EMD assistance that had a regional focus.

At the Pan-Commonwealth level, a number of studies were undertaken relating to Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN). A Special Adviser functioned from Geneva, to advise and help Commonwealth developing countries present their cases during the ongoing complex multi-national trade negotiations that led to the Uruguay Round and the setting up of the World Trade Organization (WTO). A number of Seminars of interest to all Commonwealth countries, such as on Multilateral Trade Negotiations, Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), etc, were conducted. Many of these were done jointly with UNDP, ESCAP, The International Trade Centre (ITC) etc. Collaboration with ITC resulted in a number of projects pertaining to tea, jute and spices, helping to promote the production, processing, marketing and consumption of these items.