

Promoting Better Planning: A Priority for the Commonwealth

Mark Collins, Director, Commonwealth Foundation

Commonwealth Association of Planners Americas Regional Workshop

19-20 November 2009

Honorable Minister, President, Vice-President and Officers of the Commonwealth Association of Planners, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning and congratulations to you for organizing this excellent event.

I was really pleased to see that the Commonwealth Association of Planners was holding its regional meeting in advance of the Commonwealth People's Forum, the Commonwealth's largest gathering of professional and civil society actors. We look forward to hearing the outcomes of this meeting, and I am very pleased to hear that you will take your messages forward to the civil society statement that will be finalized in the next few days.

Ladies and gentlemen, since the 2007 People's Forum in Kampala, the world seems to have been turned on its head! It is extraordinary that so many global crises failed to show up on the radar such a short time ago. The economic crisis, the food security crisis and, at the heart of it all an environmental crisis that, surely at last, we can all see is the defining challenge of our generation.

Fully twenty two years ago President Gayoom of the Maldives drew the attention of Commonwealth Heads of Government to the problem of climate change. Inaction has led us into crisis and we are on the eve of one of the most important global conferences ever to take place, in Copenhagen, on climate change. Let's hope we can achieve agreement there. I'm pleased to see that the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon, and Prime Minister Rasmussen of Denmark will be joining the CHOGM to work alongside Commonwealth Heads in the run-up to the Copenhagen meeting.

Big agreements like the one we need on climate change are achievable. Back in 2000 the Millennium Development Goals were agreed by all countries, drawing world attention to the scourge of homelessness, illiteracy and hunger. There have been significant transfers of funds to the developing world as a result. Donor governments have provided some \$117 billion of debt relief since 2000; they agreed to major increases in aid at Gleneagles in 2005, adding \$50 billion to the aid budget by 2010. Civil society mobilized with campaigns like "Make Poverty History" and provided support through countless partnerships, linkages, exchanges and voluntary activities.

As a result, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has fallen from a third to a quarter despite population growth, and there have been important advances in health and education. Nearly 40 million more children are attending school and universal primary education for all is achievable. More than 4 million people receive

antiretroviral treatment for AIDS today compared with just 100,000 in 2000, and anti-malarial bed-nets are, at last, becoming available to everyone.

But this past two years have seen a serious setback. For the poorest of the poor the financial and credit crisis has hit very hard. Higher food prices have trapped a further 130 million people in poverty; and at least 40 million more children will suffer the lasting effects of malnutrition. Those children will not, I am afraid to say, grow up to join the professions as you have, and their countries will be the worse for that.

Private capital flow to developing countries is down from \$1 trillion to less than \$200 billion and world trade flows have dropped 12% this year. While some in the G8 start to talk of recovery, the reality for most of the Commonwealth is that the bottom of this downturn is some way off. A reality made harsher by the fact that aid flows are down and unemployment, particularly among young people is rising.

We should be clear, the global recession has reversed progress towards the first MDG of halving global poverty by as much as three years.

It is in this context that we need to understand the phenomenon of rapid, unplanned and unsustainable urbanization. The Commonwealth's 76 million plus cities continue to grow. 32 of them will double in size by 2025. The number of people in Commonwealth cities grows by almost 24 million a year.

One of the characteristics of globalization is the mobility of people. The search for employment, education and a better quality of life has driven an extraordinary growth in urban settlements. Last year we reached the point where, largely as a result of migration, more people live in urban than rural areas.

Indeed while aid flows from North to South have reduced, remittances from migrants to their dependents have remained relatively stable. Before the downturn this was worth \$300 billion per year. This capital flow is likely to be the mainstay of development assistance in the difficult times ahead.

Cities are clearly an integral part of the livelihood strategies of millions of Commonwealth citizens. This means that we need to make cities work, and there is a heavy responsibility on your profession to achieve this.

The reality at present is that cities are attracting far more people far more quickly than can be accommodated or brought into decent work. A high proportion of them are from the younger generation. Thanks to the work of CAP's Professor Cliff Hague and others in the Commonwealth alliance working on human settlements, which we call ComHabitat, we know that the number of slum dwellers in the Commonwealth is growing by some 10 million people every year, and by this time next year as many as 400 million Commonwealth citizens will be living in a slum.

In truth, the need for better planning and more trained planners has never been greater, and is an essential priority for the Commonwealth. But the plight of slum

dwellers is too often ignored. Let us make no mistake, this phenomenon will reach far beyond the cities where large slums occur. Through the spread of organized crime, drugs, people trafficking, terrorism and other ills, every citizen will be affected.

There are signs of improvement. A growing number of NGOs are raising awareness, adding urgency and assertiveness to the voice of organizations such as Homeless International, one of our partners in ComHabitat. We should also thank director Danny Boyle for using cultural means to sensitise us to what life in slums is really like, through his film “Slumdog Millionaire”.

Now more than ever the time is right for the “State of Commonwealth Cities” report that was called for in Kampala. Some good work has been done on this, but it is my fervent hope that resources will be found to complete the report quickly. A hard-hitting evaluation is needed in order to shift policy-making and priority-setting in favour of addressing the problems of slum dwellers, and mobilizing more professional support for the effort.

The Commonwealth Association of Planners and other groups of professionals engaged in urban development and regeneration have achieved a great deal and have an enormously important part to play. There is an urgent need to train more planners, and to modernize planning systems and practices that are all too often still embedded in colonial legacy, unsuited to today’s challenges.

In the Commonwealth we recognize the importance of professional networks in sharing new ideas, and strengthening professional practices in terms of sustainability, ethics, transparency and accountability. The Commonwealth Foundation was established in 1965 at the same time as the Commonwealth Secretariat specifically to support such professional groups and other civil society sectors, and we will continue to do so.

In our current strategic plan, the Commonwealth Foundation has reiterated its core support for the professions, recognized their work in development and in building the capacity of developing countries. This is why we are strengthening our own staff team to pay more attention to building capacity in professional associations.

We have promised a minimum of £250,000 per year in support of the professions. Goodness knows this is a modest sum and we will increase it if we can, but we also hope that it will foster strengthening of Commonwealth professional groups. We want to use our support to leverage other support through matching funds and partnerships. As an intergovernmental body, we want to give a strong signal that the professions have a key role to play in addressing the challenges of the world.

We need to be objective. The Commonwealth, along with all international institutions, is coming under the microscope, challenged to reform. The Commonwealth has to focus; prioritise; and attract a balanced following of young as well as more experienced people. In our professional and non-governmental sectors

we must lead the way and demonstrate that the Commonwealth, with its combined experience in democracy and nation-building, is not resting on its laurels and is not short of new, vigorous and exciting ideas for the future.

I commend the Commonwealth Association of Planners for its work, including its associations with the ComHabitat partners and the professional bodies that make up the Built Environment Professions in the Commonwealth, or BEPIC as it is known. I hope that your work will go from strength to strength and I look forward to hearing about the conclusions you draw from this conference.

Thank you.

1484 words