



**COMMONWEALTH POLICY STUDIES UNIT: 16**

2005 Commonwealth Tourism Ministers' Meeting:  
Policy Brief

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## **Policy Brief for the Commonwealth Tourism Ministers' Meeting, 26-29 April, 2005, Abuja, Nigeria**

### **Executive Summary**

This second meeting of Commonwealth Tourism Ministers, held at the invitation of Nigeria, will build on the success of the inaugural meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in March 2004. The Commonwealth's unique membership mix includes many countries with substantial tourism economies, and others keen to enter the field. A shared agenda is now firmly established, enabling the Commonwealth to move forward, to build, to learn and to exchange policy. As last year in Kuala Lumpur, this meeting takes place in the context of other Commonwealth gatherings with their focus on development, for tourism continues to permeate all aspects of modern life, impacting on the future growth, prosperity and maturity of member states and their citizens. The meeting is particularly timely, however, in that it brings together representatives of an industry and a number of countries that have been hit in recent months by extreme natural disasters. The Tsunami and recent earthquake in South East Asia have brought chaos to much of the region. In the Commonwealth, Sri Lanka and the Maldives were particularly affected, changing patterns of tourist behaviour -- something that is hopefully of only short-term significance. Caribbean hurricanes in late 2004 caused enormous damage in Granada and other islands. Although aid has been forthcoming, the impact on tourism in those countries most seriously affected will have deep, lasting legacies unless assistance is given on a global scale. Plans need to be formulated to both forecast and warn effectively of future disasters, and to implement recovery programmes. This meeting, therefore, represents a considerable opportunity for Commonwealth Tourism Ministers -- from a position of responsibility -- to adopt a strategic approach to the development and promotion of tourism generally, and to deal with disasters speedily and imaginatively.

### **Executive Summary**

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**Author, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, acknowledgements**

## **1 Status, representation, recent meetings**

The meeting of Commonwealth Tourism Ministers in Abuja, Nigeria between Tuesday 26 and Friday 29 April 2005 will be the second meeting of its kind, building on the success of the inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in March 2004. This meeting provides a further opportunity for ministers to explore the importance and significance of tourism to countries within the Commonwealth, especially in light of the natural disasters that have impacted upon a number of member states and the consequent effect on tourist behaviour across the world. Last year nearly 200 participants from Commonwealth countries attended in Kuala Lumpur and this year, in Abuja, there will again be parallel meetings, including the Commonwealth Travel Mart. Last year's meeting discussed the importance of tourism for export generation, job creation and the promotion of socio-cultural understanding and peace. In addition, there was a focus on the importance of sustainable tourism to small and vulnerable states. The meeting pledged full co-operation with the World Tourism Organization and established, in principle, that a Commonwealth Tourism Centre (CTC) should be set up. The 53 member states of the Commonwealth account for one seventh of all international tourist activity and one fifth of all tourist arrivals, with the global tourism business currently growing at an average 4 per cent per annum. With a population of over 1.8 billion citizens, accounting for nearly one third of the world's population, this and related meetings represent a significant opportunity for Commonwealth Tourism Ministers. They have the strategic responsibility to develop and promote tourism, and to respond to natural disasters. They can use tourism more fully as a vehicle for economic prosperity and socio-cultural well-being in their member states. As with the inaugural meeting, the ministerial meeting in Abuja is expected to continue to exchange good practice, incubate new initiatives, and build intra-regional relationships within the Commonwealth. The conference should lead to more sustainable tourism products in member nations, and across the Commonwealth in its entirety.

## **2 Record for policy**

In his opening address at the inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur, the Secretary General, Don McKinnon, remarked on three principal reasons for the importance of Commonwealth Tourism Ministers coming together in this way. Firstly, that there is huge growth potential for tourism among Commonwealth countries and that strategies can be identified to boost that potential, and follow through to achieve concrete outcomes. Secondly, that the promotion of tourism within the Commonwealth can be an important tool in the alleviation of poverty. Finally, that the bringing together of ministers will help facilitate co-operation on a range of related issues, including security, investment and capacity-building for the mutual benefit of all member countries. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is just one initiative in which tourism has been identified as an important element in addressing current development challenges. Africa has taken the lead. It has developed a tourism action plan for the integrated development of this industry in the continent, and for its use as a tool for poverty reduction.

The Commonwealth continues to offer a wide array of attractive destinations and covers a wide diversity of societies and cultures. Yet it has many common features including language, values, legal and political institutions, similar business practices, traditions and history. Tourism for many Commonwealth nations not only provides an entry into the global economy, but also helps to alleviate poverty, and can assist other economic sectors. This has already been recognised by the Commonwealth in a number of ways. For example, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) has already been deployed to assist tourism in a number of developing member countries and especially those with small populations. With its remit spanning the promotion of public-private sector partnerships, tourism-related policy, and transport planning, along with its particular focus on small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) the CFTC dovetails neatly with tourism, an industry that continues -- despite globalisation and the growth of international hotel chains -- to be dominated by such enterprises.

This has particular relevance to small states, which means that it continues to be of interest to over half of all Commonwealth member nations. With 32 out of 53 members meeting the criteria of small states -- and many of these have economies based on tourism -- the Commonwealth Ministerial Group on Small States (MGSS) is another forum for discussion of the tourist industry. The MGSS meets in the wings of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGM) and is supported by a Commonwealth Consultative Group on Small States (CGSS). Tourism issues are not the exclusive concern of Tourism Ministers, though many Tourism Ministers hold other portfolios as well.

During the past year, the world has witnessed some of the biggest natural disasters in living memory. For the Commonwealth, the hurricanes in the Caribbean and the more recent disasters in South East Asia demonstrate how fragile tourism – and life – is when confronted with disasters of such magnitude. Shortly after the Asian Tsunami, a Commonwealth meeting relating to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) took place in Mauritius. Member states agreed on measures to help alleviate the shock of such disasters in the future. The Secretary General alluded to the fact that a genuine engagement and ‘bankable’ commitments were required from resource-rich nations, to alleviate the problems being encountered by the resource-poor. Rather than being judged on the ‘number of pages of its statements and resolutions’ he called for success to be measured by concrete results.

On a broader platform, the 1997 Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration outlined specific measures to be taken in the areas of trade, investment, development and the environment. This was agreed at the Edinburgh CHOGM and since then a wide range of projects has been completed across a variety of industrial sectors. Similar in format to the CFTC, projects under the post-Edinburgh facility have focused on policy advice and technical assistance, the implementing of legal and regulatory frameworks, and facilitation of greater involvement with international bodies, such as the World Trade Organisation. They also help member nations to meet the requirements of international trade agreements. One particular scheme of note is the “Hubs and Spokes” trade scheme being managed in conjunction with the European Commission and other partners. The €17 million project has already helped many small island states and facilitated open and fairer access to trade. Benefits from such initiatives to tourism are clear, as are they from institutions such as the

Commonwealth Business Council (CBC), whose 2005 meeting is also being held in Abuja. The Commonwealth Private Investment Initiative (CPII) has also benefited tourism. Managed by the UK-based Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) in close collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, this has created numerous investment funds in the four main regions of the developing Commonwealth, many financing areas closely related to tourism.

Ever since the Langkawi Declaration on Environment in 1989, Commonwealth Heads of Government have sought to raise the profile of environmental issues, while recognising the balance needed between environmental protection, economic growth and sustainable development. The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment (CCGE) represents the principal forum for building consensus and strengthening co-operation on environmental issues with particular regard to forestry, fisheries, freshwater, and climate change. These are crucial to the viability and attractiveness of tourist destinations. The 1997 Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration reiterated the shared interest of all member nations in protecting the environment and cooperating for sustainable development. Particular attention has been given by the CCGE to small states and adherence to the Kyoto Protocol for the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Much attention has also been focused on the Commonwealth's flagship environmental programme, the Iwokrama International Rainforest Programme in Guyana, which is beginning to build a reputation for ecological tourism.

Gender equality remains a longstanding goal of the Commonwealth. Equal opportunities for women are clearly important in an industry such as tourism, where so many women seek employment. The recent Commonwealth International Women's Day aimed to publicise the cause and press for further advance. Progress was also recorded at a recent meeting in the United Kingdom to assess the role of education in tackling the impact of HIV/AIDS. Both initiatives are of vital importance to the tourism industry as a whole, but of particular significance to member states of the Commonwealth.

All of these issues remain fundamental to the future development of tourism within the Commonwealth. The challenge for participants at the second Commonwealth Tourism Ministers' Meeting is to bring together the numerous interest groups, and to formulate one policy umbrella. One of the principal outcomes of the inaugural meeting in Kuala Lumpur was an idea for a Commonwealth Tourism Centre. Although its exact scale, and the scope of its activity remain unclear, this initiative is likely to get more detailed attention in Abuja. It demonstrates the ability of the Commonwealth to work together and to pool ideas, experience and best practice, in this case in marketing and brand promotion. It could deliver outputs of considerable value to member states. The Commonwealth Tourism Centre has every chance of becoming a reality following endorsement at the Abuja meeting.

### **3 Agenda for 2005 meeting**

At the time of writing this policy brief ( early April ) no set agenda was made available to the Commonwealth Secretariat. It is thus a challenge to forecast the exact nature of planned discussions at the Abuja meeting. The agenda for the 2004 meeting included four key themes: tourism and the economy, tourism promotion and

information exchange, tourism facilities and common security arrangements, and capacity building for sustainable tourism and quality services.

In view of the anticipated endorsement of the opening of the Commonwealth Tourism Centre, and its likely emphasis on marketing and promotion, four items are likely to be discussed at Abuja:

- 1 Tourism and its linkages to the wider strategic plan of the Commonwealth Secretariat
- 2 Rebuilding confidence post-disaster
- 3 Marketing and branding
- 4 Intra-Commonwealth tourism

In addition to the above, remaining standard items are likely to be:

- 5 Other issues
- 6 Any other business
  - Papers for information
  - Communiqué
  - Acknowledgements
  - Next meeting

## **4 Comments on agenda items**

### **1 Tourism and its linkages to the wider strategic plan of the Commonwealth Secretariat**

The Commonwealth Secretariat's Board of Governors approved the 2004/05-2007/08 Strategic Plan on 14 May 2004. It continues the vision of commitment to democracy and a more equitable sharing of the benefits of globalisation, a theme that is of particular pertinence to the tourism industry. The two main goals of democracy (through rule of law and respect for human rights) and support for pro-poor policies (through economic growth and sustainable development) will be measured and achieved via 13 separate programmes. Interestingly, none of the programmes relate specifically to tourism. Three crosscutting programmes providing 16 programmes in total will further support the original 13. In addition, a Performance Information Framework (PIF) has been developed for improved performance reporting and for the management of results during the plan.

As the primary intergovernmental organisation within the Commonwealth association, deriving its mandates from Heads of Governments, the Commonwealth Secretariat is in pole position to take an active lead in the development of tourism across its member states. It can help economies to develop in a sustainable manner

and in ways which seek to eradicate poverty. Although there is no direct mention of the benefits of tourism in any of the 16 programmes it is clear that, as a force for change, tourism is able to complement at least three-quarters of the programmes mentioned.

Rather than approach the funding, support and development of tourism in a piecemeal manner, the Commonwealth Secretariat could take a strategic lead in advocating for tourism to be an active catalyst for change. Rather than merely responding to the forces of change, opportunities exist to provide a genuine sense of direction, facilitate suitable linkages, advance skills and training, and exert influence on other associated tourism and trade bodies around the world in support of its myriad of tourism economies. Tourism is too important to too many of its member states, both economically and culturally, to leave its destiny to chance and the uncontrolled influence of external forces.

The Secretariat will need to work with the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) and the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) if its contribution to tourism planning after Abuja is to be success. The Secretariat will have to increase its involvement with the wider tourism industry. It will need to understand its dynamics, impacts, problems and challenges. Then the Commonwealth Secretariat can use tourism as an effective and sustainable vehicle to help achieve the objectives of its Strategic Plan in both the medium and long term. Most importantly, by endorsing and supporting the Commonwealth Tourism Centre (CTC), the Commonwealth Secretariat can help to raise the profile of tourism within the wider Commonwealth. With a higher profile and greater acknowledgement of the benefits it can bring to member states, tourism can be a unifying force for change. Clearly, tourism also brings with it many problems and quite considerable challenges, most notably from the ever-expanding globalisation of the industry. However, with a more collective approach and a single delivery vehicle, the Commonwealth Tourism Centre (CTC), progress can be made.

The issue of globalisation is referred to quite specifically in the Secretariat's Strategic Plan. As quoted within Section 3.7 of the Strategic Plan 2004/05- 2007/08:

*“new challenges have arisen which demand new insights and action”.*

Thereafter, Section 3.8 mentions that:

*“with the spread of the benefits of globalisation, the whole international community must adopt a more enlightened view of national political and economic interests”.*

With approximately one third of the Commonwealth's two billion citizens living on less than \$1 a day, it is particularly opportune that the Commonwealth Secretariat is, as articulated in Section 4.14, now in a position to fully:

*“tap in to the knowledge and resources of an extensive and diverse network of Commonwealth professional associations, experts and citizens.”*

The opportunity to capitalise on the benefits of the tourism industry within the Strategic Plan of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and to work closely with the CTC on many programmes, will prove extremely beneficial to the Commonwealth. In addition, working in partnership with other organisations such as the European Union, the African Development Bank, the Caribbean Investment Bank, La Francophonie and NEPAD, will help the Commonwealth to strengthen key tourism relationships. It will lead to further partnerships. These in turn will stimulate consensus on the major tourism issues facing the international community. Developing partnerships with civil society organisations beyond the Commonwealth can also spread the influence of its programmes.

## **2 Rebuilding confidence post-disaster**

Even if one were to exclude the recent earthquake and Tsunami in South East Asia, the past decade has witnessed approximately 7,000 natural disasters that have killed over 500,000 people and which have resulted in an economic loss that exceeds US \$ 800 million. While tourism is without doubt the largest industry in the world, it is also one of the most vulnerable. Tourism is fragile. It relies on the state of the natural environment, on cultural exchange, on ideas of adventure, relaxation, luxury and fun. Rebuilding tourism involves more than just making repairs and promoting areas in the world's media, it also involves looking at the source of the disaster and developing appropriate responses as well as possible early warning systems for the future. It requires looking at human as well as physical factors.

A number of studies have been undertaken specifically to evaluate the economic and demographic impacts of natural disasters. Conclusions to date show that many people, quite predictably, seek to leave areas affected by disaster and move to safer ones. Population redistribution is thus a consequence of natural disasters. This can have an adverse effect on the local economy. This is a particular problem for the tourism economy for many hotels, transport operators, restaurants and attractions rely on the local resident population. At the same time many tradespeople rely on supplying the local tourist industry for their livelihood.

Experience has shown that developing countries are disproportionately affected, with losses sometimes exceeding years of hard won and desperately needed economic development. It is vital that the planning and managing of disaster recovery is as efficient and effective as possible through co-operation between industry, governments and other agencies. The Commonwealth should take the opportunity to formulate, in conjunction with aid agencies and other worldwide bodies, a body of knowledge on best practice to deal with any future disasters and most importantly to encourage the early warning systems needed. Although this encompasses issues beyond the domain of tourism, the Commonwealth Tourism Centre could focus on the impact of disasters on tourism, and the collective strategies needed to alleviate short-term problems and rebuild attractive destinations; significant economies and livelihoods are at stake.

The United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in Japan in January 2005, set out the 'Hyogo' Declaration. Delegates recognised that through the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the succeeding International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the international community has accumulated much

experience. However, they also saw that disasters can wipe out development investments in the short term, undermining sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty. Nonetheless, while human societies have to live with the dangers of nature, the international community is far from powerless to prepare for and mitigate the impact of disasters. The Hyogo Declaration states:

*“We underscore the importance of strengthening cooperative and synergistic interactions among various stakeholders and promoting voluntary partnerships for disaster reduction. We also resolve to further develop information sharing mechanisms on programmes, initiatives, best practices, lessons learnt and technologies in support of disaster risk reduction so that the international community can share the results of the benefits from these efforts.”*

It will be the responsibility of the Commonwealth, reflected in the discussions of the Tourism Ministers, to ensure that political will is maintained. Disaster mitigation and preparedness, through risk management, has to be more than just a passing fad. Following the recent Tsunami, Commonwealth countries in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and the new Commonwealth Tourism Centre, will need to work alongside the UN’s International Oceanographic Commission which is developing a Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System.

### **3 Marketing and branding**

As identified at the inaugural meeting, tourism is and remains a promotion-led industry. Member states are at various stages of tourism development, requiring different degrees of marketing and promotion. But most destinations around the world face competition. In the context of recent disasters, one of the most notable competitive trends is the speed with which markets change their patterns of travel behaviour after a disaster. This is an effect that both developing and developed economies suffer. Tourists are now far more prone to consider safety and security issues before they travel than was the case before September 2001. Destinations now require a delicate balance between short-term value-driven activity on the one hand and long-term brand building activity on the other. One disaster can have numerous different impacts on the different markets which tourists come: these will affect destinations with varying degrees of severity.

One challenge for the Commonwealth Tourism Centre is, therefore, to combine the considerable expertise that lies within the member states of the Commonwealth to monitor and measure travel patterns, and identify a continuum of marketing responses. The aim should be to alleviate the worst damage to destinations which can follow sudden shifts in demand. Clearly, suppliers like hotels and transport operators need to be fully engaged for without them it is unlikely that any of the sophisticated marketing strategies for destinations can succeed.

Although destination marketing is a well-established component of destination management, ‘branding’ as a tool has often been overlooked. It is vital for destinations to recognise the significance of branding in their efforts to increase awareness, and to create positive attitudes in the potential visitor. Often branding is confused with the image of a destination, yet it has a much broader scope. It is part

of a more comprehensive framework for managing the ‘identity’ of a destination, and therefore of its attractiveness to visitors.

Destination branding has now taken further steps forward. It involves the total experience for a visitor, and the marketing of the aesthetics, look, taste, touch, feel and smell of a place or country. For the tourism market, this approach places a greater emphasis on providing high quality experiences rather than just high quality service. There is now a move away from product attributes towards lifestyle and value systems. The following definition of a ‘destination brand’ is particularly useful and is likely to serve as a benchmark for future brand development within the Commonwealth:

*‘A Destination Brand is a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience.’*

#### **4 Intra-Commonwealth tourism**

Although much can be achieved via effective marketing and brand development, they are insufficient alone to develop intra-Commonwealth travel. Expanding tourism from one Commonwealth country to another was a principal theme at the inaugural ministerial meeting in Kuala Lumpur. There are numerous opportunities for member states due to their shared use of the English language, and other ties of history, religion, education, and politics. If intra-Commonwealth tourism is to develop in a sustainable form, member states will need to move beyond traditional approaches to marketing. They must re-examine the infrastructures necessary for tourism to prosper and expand ‘intra-regionally’. For example, improved air links, reduced immigration controls and visa obstacles, and a spirit of openness and co-operation between national tourism bodies would represent a good start. Further collaboration -- to facilitate the freer movement of tourists, and the joint marketing of attractions, facilities, and major events – can then develop. As stated at the previous ministerial meeting however, this presupposes that more tourists will wish to travel across and within the Commonwealth countries, taking advantage of the familiarity and lack of ‘foreignness’ they offer. This theme represents a suitable research agenda for the Commonwealth Tourism Centre; educational and ‘Gap Year’ tourism markets make just one area with real potential for growth.

Last month a meeting was held in Barbados on the trans-national movement of labour and services. Entitled “Training and Temporary Movement – Towards a Trade and Development Approach”, it attracted more than 100 delegates from Caribbean countries, in addition to representation from the governments of Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. It was organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat in co-operation with the Centre for International Services, University of the West Indies, CARICOM Secretariat, the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery, the Pan-American Health Organisation, and the World Bank. The event aimed to promote regulated and mutually beneficial access to the markets of developed countries under Mode IV of the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in

Services. This involves the entry and temporary stay of foreign nationals such as accountants, doctors, nurses and teachers, to provide services in another country. The meeting proposed assistance to developing countries to improve their training capacity in services. This approach will help to reverse the deterioration of key domestic sectors resulting from the loss of human resources – a matter also being tackled by Commonwealth protocols on the mobility of teachers and health workers. This initiative ought now to include the training of tourism professionals, and thus to expand the impact of the tourism market beyond the Commonwealth.

Although intra-Commonwealth travel represents considerable opportunity for growth, the issue has to be examined in a wider context. For example, existing travel flows are ignored at their peril, particularly in the Caribbean where the importance of the American market cannot be overstated. This reinforces another theme highlighted at the inaugural meeting in 2004 -- the exchange of tourism information. The Commonwealth needs to develop and maintain a pan-Commonwealth tourism domain, which facilitates the initiation, implementation, analysis, and dissemination of market and industry information. The new Commonwealth Tourism Centre will be the obvious vehicle to coordinate such activity.

## **5 Interaction with other bodies**

When contemplating each of the conference items it is necessary to consider the work of, and to communicate with, a number of other bodies; some with a specific tourism mission and others with a more general purpose in development, economic growth and environmental protection. Collectively, such institutions help determine the wider agenda for the development of tourism around the world. Organisations with a specific tourism remit include the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the ASEAN Tourism Forum, a regional body which focuses primarily on the collective interest of ASEAN member countries to promote the region to tourists, and the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA). Organisations with a more general agenda include the OECD, EU, World Bank, UNCTAD, G7, G77, UNECE and UNEP. This second meeting of Commonwealth Tourism Ministers must continue to build linkages and foster a spirit of genuine engagement with such bodies. The opportunity to act collectively and deliver real progress is considerable. Unfortunately, so too is the potential for duplication and waste.

## **6 Other issues**

Two other items deserve highlighting for Tourism Ministers, both relating to the likely endorsement of the Commonwealth Tourism Centre. The first relates to leadership and governance, the second to payment and scope of activity. Due to the diversity of its member states, their various stages of economic development and interest in tourism as a force for good, it is recommended that clear governance structures exist that are likely to facilitate real progress in the domain of tourism development within the Commonwealth. Effective leadership will be essential. Tourism permeates so many aspects of the wider strategic plan of the Commonwealth Secretariat that a balance needs to be maintained between individuals with sufficient tourism-specific expertise and individuals with the necessary political and business acumen. This particularly applies to negotiation with those bodies identified in the previous section, with which the Centre will need to work.

With regard to finance and scope of activity, it is essential that the Centre has adequate funds at its disposal. It appears likely that the Commonwealth Tourism Centre will be required to have a strong marketing focus. This seems appropriate at the current moment, especially when countries confront natural disasters on the scale of recent earthquakes and hurricanes. With a tight focus and sense of purpose much can be achieved. However, tourism is vast and it links to most forms of development and economic activity in some way. By spreading itself too thinly, the CTC would fail to meet its high level of expectation, and the aspiration of its founding fathers. The besetting sin of nearly all Commonwealth initiatives is that they are endowed with too many tasks and too little money. Funding, perhaps from governments, parastatals and commercial sources together, needs to be more than adequate. It must also be sustained if tourism is going to help eradicate poverty, and provide opportunities for Commonwealth citizens, in the way that it could.

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