

Executive summary

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom (CSC) has been offering Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships for postgraduate study and research for over 50 years. In the past decade, the CSC has not only established an alumni association and actively sought to trace and engage with alumni, but has also added targeted evaluation activity to its longstanding monitoring work. The CSC's initial approach to impact evaluation involved building on monitoring and alumni work already in place and distributing an impact evaluation survey to almost 6,000 alumni. Over 2,200 responded, and it is their answers that have formed the basis of a number of evaluation reports, which seek to provide evidence that the CSC's scholarship and fellowship programmes have had a lasting impact on development, at both local and national levels. This report forms the seventh in this series of reports, the first of which looked at the overall evidence reported by respondents to the survey, and the remainder of which have focused on specific regions or areas of developmental interest such as health or, in this case, the environment.

The significance of environmental sustainability and related topics such as climate change to international development is reflected in its explicit mention in the Millennium Development Goals, specifically MDG 7. The pledge toward promoting environmental sustainability is further evident in the Commonwealth Secretariat's second goal of 'poor growth and sustainable development' under the Environmental Sustainability Development Programme. With issues such as climate change having a major impact across the globe and a good proportion of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows having held awards in the field, exploring the scheme's impact in this sector was a natural next step.

This report begins by outlining the awards that the CSC has offered to Scholars and Fellows in the area of environment, providing background on the numbers and types of award held and on those who held them. In the following section, the report moves on to its main source of data, namely the responses of a subset of the 2,226 alumni who completed an in-depth impact evaluation survey in 2008. In all, 47% (1,050) reported having an impact in one of three relevant areas: Environment Protection, Physical Infrastructure, and Agricultural/Rural Productivity. Further data was obtained from a follow-up survey sent out in December 2011 to 390 alumni who had reported having an impact on projects and on policy in relation to the aforementioned three environmental priority areas. This survey yielded 65 case studies, some of which are explored in the fourth and fifth chapters of the report.

Overall, the findings support those of previous CSC reports in suggesting that higher education, and ultimately postgraduate scholarship and fellowships, lead to positive outcomes for international development objectives. As with previous reports, we find it clear that Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships not only provide invaluable opportunities for award holders to gain personal skills, but also enable them to contribute to society as a whole. In particular, we note that:

- **Subjects relevant to environmental sustainability are becoming increasingly popular among award holders.** Findings show that 17% of all awards since 1960 have been in areas we define as relevant to the environment or agriculture; this has grown from 12% in the first five years of the programme to over 20% in 2005-2009. There has also been a strong increase in the number of Scholars and Fellows reporting impact in environmental sustainability over the years – 6% of those holding awards in the 1960s did so, compared with 46% of those in the 2000s – demonstrating the increasing relevance of the sector and the ever-growing urgency to address environmental issues.
- **Awards in the sector are benefiting countries that are often disproportionately affected by environmental issues.** In the 2000s, over half of all awards in the sector were offered to applicants from sub-Saharan Africa, with a further third (35%) going to applicants from South Asia. In addition, over two-thirds (over 70%) of respondents reporting an impact in the field of environmental sustainability were from either sub-Saharan Africa (37%) or South Asia (35%), with 93% of them reporting that they were living and working in their home country.
- **Higher education has a key role to play in tackling environmental issues.** The overwhelming majority of respondents involved in the area of environmental sustainability are employed in the education sector (62%), which is roughly the same as for the overall survey population (63%). Of these 62%, almost all (97%) are working in higher education, reflecting the CSC's conviction that higher education has a core role to play in tackling obstacles to development such as environmental sustainability and agricultural issues.
- **Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships can have a catalytic effect in the sector.** Almost all (97%) of the respondents (1,019 people) who reported having impact in the area of environmental sustainability stated that their award increased their ability to have influence and make changes in their work, with even more (98%) reporting that they used specific skills and knowledge gained during their award in their work. In addition, 94% of respondents said that they were able to introduce new practices or innovations in positions, whether voluntary or professional, that they have held since their award, as a result of the skills and knowledge acquired.
- **Impact is often far reaching.** Impact from awards was reported at three levels: through involvement in projects, socioeconomic impact, and through influencing government policy. Our results show that, for almost all three priority areas under review, the highest impact was made through specific projects, followed by socioeconomic impact, and then influence on government policy.

In conclusion, this report provides further evidence to suggest that international scholarships and fellowships have an impact on development, and particularly in the environmental and agricultural sectors. Awards enable individuals to gain skills and knowledge that can be transferred back to home institutions and communities and, as can be seen through the individual stories included in this report, can directly impact on international development in both tangible and intangible ways.