

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION BRIEFING NOTES

Prepared by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education

A grouping of voluntary and professional bodies committed to education development in the Commonwealth

No 5 THE COMMONWEALTH AND EDUCATION FOR ALL

The Commonwealth Commitment

In modern times, Education for All (EFA) has its basis in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It was articulated more comprehensively at the World Conference on Education in Jomtien (1990) and again at the World Education Forum in Dakar (April 2000) when six EFA goals were agreed. Later in the year 2000, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were endorsed, including goals and targets for Universal Primary Education (UPE) and gender parity in schooling.

Commonwealth countries have made their own political commitments to EFA. Following Jomtien, the 1991 *Harare Declaration* pledged 'provision of universal access to education for the population of our countries.' Post-Dakar, in the *Halifax Statement on Education in the Commonwealth* (2000), Commonwealth Ministers of Education reiterated their belief in 'the right of everyone to education'.

More recently, Commonwealth Ministers of Education (Edinburgh 2003) re-affirmed the significance of the MDGs for education, emphasising 'the importance of mobilising a broad range of Commonwealth resources in meeting educational targets by 2015, as a contribution to social reconstruction in the Commonwealth'. And in Malta (2005), Commonwealth Heads of Government, 'encouraged all governments to allocate the resources necessary to meet the education MDGs'.

Jomtien – Dakar – New York

At Jomtien, *The World Declaration on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs* was adopted along with its *Framework for Action*. The Declaration contained 10 articles on:

- **Enabling every person - child, youth and adult – to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs**
- **Promoting an "expanded vision" of basic learning needs.**
- **Universalising access and promoting equity**
- **Focusing on learning**
- **Broadening the means and scope of basic education**
- **Enhancing the environment for learning**
- **Strengthening partnerships**
- **Developing a supportive policy context**
- **Mobilising resources**
- **Strengthening international solidarity**

Jomtien put basic education back on national and international policy agendas. However, progress on access and quality was relatively modest during the 1990s

as the 2000 EFA Assessment, a ten-year review prepared for the World Education Forum, demonstrated clearly.¹ While Dakar re-affirmed Jomtien's objectives, it was agreed that more specific goals and targets should be set. Six EFA goals– both quantitative and qualitative - were agreed and set out in the *Dakar Framework for Action*.²

- **Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;**
- **Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality;**
- **Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;**
- **Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;**
- **Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;**
- **Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.**

The Framework for Action also called for: a) a global initiative aimed at developing the strategies and mobilising the resources needed to provide effective support to national efforts; b) UNESCO to continue its mandated role in co-ordinating EFA partners and maintaining their collaborative momentum including through the creation of a high-level EFA group to be convened by UNESCO's Director-General and c) an international EFA monitoring report. It affirmed too that 'no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources'.

At the Millennium Summit in New York later in 2000, the *Millennium Declaration* was agreed. It included eight goals designed to significantly reduce all major aspects of poverty by 2015.³ In recognition of the importance of a good basic education for reducing poverty, the second goal is to 'ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling'. And the goal to promote

¹http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/efa_2000_assess/index.shtml

² <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001211/121147e.pdf>

³ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

gender equality and empower women includes the target 'to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015'.

The EFA goals and the MDG goals and targets are complementary in their intentions but the EFA agenda is a good deal broader than the education MDGs. This has given rise to some conflict of interest in education-sector and poverty-reduction planning.

Co-ordination and Monitoring

In response to recommendations from Dakar, the UNESCO Director-General has convened the EFA High-Level Group six times (Paris, 2001; Abuja; 2002; Delhi 2003; Brasilia, 2004; Beijing 2005; and Cairo 2006).⁴ In addition, an international EFA working group meets annually convened by UNESCO.

An editorially independent Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) was established in 2002, based at UNESCO in Paris. The GMR has published five reports to date. It monitors and analyses progress towards the EFA goals, assesses the level and the quality of international aid for EFA and in each issue explores a major EFA theme: gender equality (2003/04); quality (2005); literacy (2006); and early childhood development and education (2007).⁵ It works closely with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) which has an international mandate to collect, quality-assure and analyse education data.⁶

Progress towards the MDGs is monitored by the UN Statistics Division through the work of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on MDG Indicators.⁷

Progress and Prospects⁸

The 53 full member countries of the Commonwealth are diverse in terms of population, size, income levels and their place on the ladder of progress towards EFA. Over 50% of the peoples of the Commonwealth live in India while 20 countries have a population below 500,000. Sixty five per cent of the 1.93 billion people (2004) in Commonwealth countries live in rural areas but the percentage is falling. The World Bank classifies 17 Commonwealth countries as low-income, 26 as middle-income and nine as high-income countries. The majority of Commonwealth citizens live in low-income countries with medium or low human-development indices.

An estimated 27 million primary-age children, representing 35% of the global total, are out of school in Commonwealth countries (2004), of whom 63% are girls. In 2004, 85% of the Commonwealth total of out-of-school children lived in six countries: Ghana, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Pakistan.

⁴ See reports at http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/global_co/policy_group/index.shtml

⁵ See GMR website http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=43009&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁶ See http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev_en.php?ID=2867_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC

⁷ See <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/Host.aspx?Content=IAEG.htm>

⁸ This section is restricted to brief consideration of the EFA goals of UPE, gender parity and literacy.

Patterns of **enrolment of primary school age children** vary across the Commonwealth (**Table 1**). For 43 countries for which net enrolment data are available for 2004, 12 have NERs⁹ above 95%, mostly countries with a long tradition of free and compulsory primary education (Australia, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji, Malawi, New Zealand, St Lucia, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom).

Thirteen countries are within five points of 95% enrolment (and four of them have achieved this level in the past: Jamaica, Malaysia, Malta and Mauritius). This group also includes Bangladesh and Tanzania that have both made rapid progress in recent years plus a group of countries that appear to be challenged to reach the last 10% or so of their school-age populations (St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu).

A further 13 countries have NERs between 75% and 90%; eight of this group (India, Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, Kenya, The Gambia and the Solomon Islands) demonstrated positive changes over the five years. In the Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Maldives and South Africa there was a negative trend, which may be explained by inconsistencies in population data. Five countries had NERs of 75% or lower – i.e. more than 25% of their school age children out of school (Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, and Pakistan)

The 2005 **gender parity** target-date was passed with mixed success. Based on 2004 data, globally, two thirds of 181 countries had achieved gender parity in primary education and one third of 177 countries had achieved parity at the secondary level.¹⁰ Half (27) of Commonwealth countries had achieved parity at the primary level, in most cases many years ago, although Lesotho, Malawi and Uganda have made significant advances in recent years. Of the countries that had not achieved parity, seven have been moving in the right direction since 1999. In some countries disparities are now in favour of girls (e.g. Bangladesh and Ghana).

It is estimated that there are 437 million adults in Commonwealth countries aged over 15 years who lack basic **literacy** skills; over 56% of the global total. 90% of these people live in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan but literacy rates dip below 70% in seven sub-Saharan African countries and in Papua New Guinea. Lack of literacy skills is not a challenge in developing countries alone. Recent data from the United Kingdom suggests that up to five million adults cannot read effectively. Of 23 Commonwealth countries with literacy levels below 90% (2001-2004) only Brunei Darussalam will achieve the Dakar literacy goal at current rates of progress.

A number of Commonwealth countries have demonstrated that it is possible to move much faster towards the EFA goals and the education MDGs through major policy reforms. But balancing significant gains in

⁹ The net enrolment ratio is the number of official school-age children enrolled in primary school as a percentage of all children of official school age.

¹⁰ Measured by gross enrolment ratios.

access and equity have to be matched with an equally strong determination to improve efficiency and quality.

Table 1 Primary Net Enrolment in 2004

COUNTRY	PRIMED NER	COUNTRY	PRIMED NER
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA		EUROPE/NORTH AMERICA	
Botswana	82.1	Canada	99.5.
Cameroon	n.a.	Cyprus	96.1
The Gambia	75.2	Malta	94.0
Ghana	65.0*	United Kingdom	98.7
Kenya	76.4	CARIBBEAN	
Lesotho	85.9	Antigua & Barbuda	n.a.
Malawi	95.3	Bahamas	83.7
Mauritius	94.5*	Barbados	97.2
Mozambique	71.0	Belize	95.2
Namibia	73.7	Dominica	87.7
Nigeria	60.1	Grenada	83.9
Seychelles	96.4	Guyana	93.3.
Sierra Leone	n.a.	Jamaica	90.6
South Africa	88.8	St Kitts & Nevis	94.0
Swaziland	76.7	St Lucia	97.6
Tanzania	91.4*	St Vincent and the Grenadines	93.9
Uganda	n.a.	Trinidad & Tobago	92.2
Zambia	79.8	PACIFIC	
ASIA		Australia	95.8
Bangladesh	94.1	Fiji	96.2
Brunei Darussalam	n.a.	Kiribati	n.a.
India	89.7	Nauru	n.a.
Malaysia	93.2	New Zealand	99.3
Maldives	89.7	Papua New Guinea	n.a.
Pakistan	66.2	Samoa	90.4
Singapore	n.a.	Solomon Islands	79.6
Sri Lanka	97.7	Tonga	92.7
		Tuvalu	n.a.
		Vanuatu	93.9

Source: UNESCO 2006 and UIS. NER = Net Enrolment Ratio

* for 2005

Challenges and Opportunities

Virtually all low-income Commonwealth countries (and some others) have developed poverty reduction strategies and education sector plans that give weight to EFA and basic education. These usually address challenges which are common across most Commonwealth countries. Three are mentioned here.

School fees and other charges continue to provide a major barrier to school attendance. One estimate suggests that globally, 20% of all spending on primary education is in the form of direct household payments. Even in countries that constitutionally guarantee free primary education, charges and levies may have to be paid.

The evidence from many Commonwealth countries mostly recently in Kenya and Tanzania, shows that if governments are prepared to grasp the nettle and abolish school fees, a surge of new enrolments follows. This in turn brings significant pressures on government budgets and the attendant problems of maintaining and improving quality. But if the poorest households are to be given the possibility of enabling their children – and particularly their daughters – to benefit from schooling, the abolition of direct costs remains of fundamental importance.

Comparative data on **the quality of schooling** across the Commonwealth is thin. Twenty three Commonwealth countries engage in four different international assessment programmes (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS and SACMEQ), while regional examination bodies (WAEC, CXC and the South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment) facilitate regional overviews of standards.¹¹

As recent Commonwealth Education Conferences demonstrate the issue of quality exercises all governments and education professionals. Proxy measures of quality suggest considerable cause for concern over low levels of learning outcomes. In particular the need for more and better teachers has been a matter of considerable Commonwealth discussion. For example, Mozambique would need to double its primary teaching force to achieve UPE with a pupil-teacher ratio of 40:1 even though it is increasing its teacher stock by 8% per annum. Past rates of teacher recruitment would be insufficient to attain UPE in Uganda, Bangladesh, Kenya, Pakistan and Malawi. The levels of qualifications for primary teachers vary considerably across the Commonwealth, from Tonga whose teachers are all tertiary qualified to Mozambique where 60% of teachers have no more than lower secondary level education.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has destroyed much of what education has tried to achieve in many Commonwealth countries in the last 20 years. In 2005, the number of HIV/AIDS orphans aged 17 years and below living in Commonwealth African countries was estimated to be over 7.9 million (two thirds of AIDS orphans in sub-Saharan Africa and half of the world's AIDS orphans).

The relationship of HIV/AIDS to education is multi-faceted. On the one hand there is the need to safeguard education: protect teachers suffering from HIV; prevent sexual harassment and abuse in schools; meet shortfalls in teacher supply resulting from death and illness; and to ensure that all children are able to go to school. On the other hand, education must play a lead role in limiting the spread of AIDS through formal and non-formal interventions. These may be enshrined in national AIDS and education strategies. One recent international survey found that only 70% of countries with high rates of prevalence have a dedicated AIDS budget.

Ministers of Education from Commonwealth Small States recognised their responsibilities in these regards in the Stoke Rochford Statement (2004). The commitment is made that *'we intend that all our future education sector plans and policies shall take full account of the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the necessity to mobilise education programmes to combat it. This includes preparing projections of learner enrolment and teacher supply that reflect the latest expectations of retention and loss due to HIV/AIDS.*

¹¹ PISA –The Programme for International Student Assessment; TIMSS – The Trends in Mathematics and Science Study; PIRLS – The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study; SACMEQ – The Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality; WAEC- The West African Examinations Council; CXC – The Caribbean Examinations Council.

Aid for Education

Between 2000 and 2004, 45 out of 53 Commonwealth countries have been in receipt of bilateral aid for education which in 2004 totalled just over US\$2.9 billion globally. Approximately US\$1 billion of this went to Commonwealth countries; two-thirds of it to Asian Commonwealth countries (80% to basic education). Sub-Saharan Africa received just under one third of the total (37% for basic education).¹²

The four main donors to education in the Commonwealth are Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Together, in the period 2002-2004, they made average annual ODA commitments of almost US\$7.5 billion of which US\$650 million went to education.

Aid trends and patterns need to be set in the context of recent aid and debt relief commitments. In 2005 the European Union and G8 member countries promised to increase aid by an additional US\$50 billion each year by 2010 (a 60% increase) with further increases thereafter. In addition, it was pledged that debts owed by up to 46 countries to the IMF, IDA and the African Development

Briefing Notes in this series

1. Commonwealth co-operation in education: a profile
2. Conferences of Commonwealth Education Ministers
3. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan
4. Distance education and the Commonwealth of Learning
5. The Commonwealth and Education for All
6. Gender and education: the Commonwealth dimension
7. Commonwealth education co-operation: role of civil society
8. Education about the Commonwealth
9. Science, technology and mathematics education.
10. Commonwealth student mobility: trends and issues
11. Teacher development and mobility in the Commonwealth
12. School and college linking in the Commonwealth

Bank would be paid off.

Basic education would need to get more than its current share of this increase in aid if a recent estimate is accepted that an additional US\$10 billion per annum is needed to deliver UPE by 2015. A further US\$4-5 billion is estimated for secondary education and another US\$1 billion for adult literacy programmes.¹³ All told an extra US\$16 billion per year for five years.

Some Commonwealth countries have received assistance from the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (FTI) based in the World Bank; either directly, as in the case of The Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Lesotho and Mozambique (disbursements of nearly US\$50 million in total) or indirectly through the Initiative's influence with donors. In its report to the Development Committee in September 2006, FTI highlighted the need for long-term predictable funding to support credible education plans, close attention to learning outcomes and the quality of education in external funding and the need to support those large countries which have a high proportion of out of school children.¹⁴

Aid for education is likely to remain important for a significant number of Commonwealth countries, whether as recipients, donors or partners in regional endeavours. This being so the Commonwealth might play a stronger role as an advocate for, and as an assessor of, the quality of aid for education and for basic education in particular.

Commonwealth Response

The Commonwealth Secretariat is pursuing the Edinburgh Plan of Action (2003) which defines Six Action Areas designed to provide the platform for a Commonwealth contribution to achieving the EFA and MDG goals.¹⁵ The Plan identifies quality education as the core objective, essential to the full attainment of UPE and gender equality. Special attention is also given to supporting education in difficult circumstances (natural disasters, wars, civil strife and conflict) and to mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on education systems.

The Commonwealth Foundation focuses on attaining gender equity in access to education. It identifies successful strategies and incentives around the Commonwealth and makes them more widely known; provides small grants to civil society organisations that promote and monitor girls' education; and works to achieve change through ministerial dialogue.

On UPE, the Commonwealth of Learning COL focuses on increasing the number of teachers and improving their quality by promoting distance learning for pre- and in-service teacher education. On the wider EFA goals it fosters the expansion of access to secondary education through open and alternative schooling and the use of technology for learning to improve livelihoods. In the health sector its media empowerment programme enables NGOs and communities to develop and disseminate radio and video health messages.

The UK's Commonwealth Education Fund has helped local civil-society organisations in 16 countries to gain voice and participation in education-sector work. Expenditure to the end of 2004 was £4 million, mainly on coalition-building.¹⁶

More information

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¹² This information is based on OECD-DAC data. It excludes aid that is for budget support and for aid 'to level unspecified'.

¹³ DFID/HM Treasury, 2005. *From Commitment to Action: Education*. London. DFID/HM Treasury.

¹⁴ See *Progress Report for the Education for All Fast Track Initiative*. Paper to the IMF-World Bank Development Committee. DC2006-0015. 7 September 2006.

¹⁵ http://www.thecommonwealth.org/shared_asp_files/uploadedfiles/%7BA17EBB12-2219-4C14-A16B-D49E6BE02AF6%7D_Edinburgh%20Comm%20Flyer%20A4_V1.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.commonwealtheducationfund.org/downloads/CEF%20Global%20Mid-Term%20Review.pdf>

