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The Performance of Commonwealth Countries to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals in Education and Education for All (EFA) goals

Abstract

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The Commonwealth Commitment

1. In the year 2000, 51 Commonwealth countries signed up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) including those on Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary schooling and 41 endorsed the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (EFA) and its six basic education goals.

2. In Edinburgh, in 2003, Commonwealth Ministers of Education reaffirmed the significance of these goals and targets for their countries, 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.*

The Commonwealth Context

3. Commonwealth countries have a total population of 1.93 billion (2004), 30% of the world's population. This figure is estimated to rise to 2.3 billion in 2015. Over 50% of Commonwealth peoples live in India while 29 countries have a population of below two million (20 below 500,000). Sixty five percent live in rural areas.

4. In 19 Commonwealth countries, more than 10% of the population live on less than US\$1 day (more than 30% in 11 countries). Seventeen Commonwealth states are classified as low income countries, 26 as middle income and nine as high income. The majority of Commonwealth peoples reside in low income countries with medium or low Human Development indices.

Out of School Children

5. Twenty seven million primary age children are out of school in Commonwealth countries (2004), 35 % of the world's total. Fifty seven percent are girls. Eighty five per cent of the Commonwealth total - 60% of whom are girls - live in Ghana, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria and Pakistan.

6. Worldwide, 61% of primary age children who are out of school never enrol. Others enrol later than the prescribed age of entry. One out of three children currently out of school will or already has received some primary education.

7. These figures are challenging but some progress is being made. Collectively, Commonwealth countries increased their total primary enrolment from 213 to 253 million from 1999 to 2004. 90% of this figure is accounted for by five countries; India, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and The United Republic of Tanzania.

8. School fees and charges continue to constrain school attendance. Although 24 out of 53 Commonwealth countries provide a legal guarantee to free education, laws on the statute book may not mean that they are enforced. The UN's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education stated that 91 countries charged school fees in 2002, 28 in the Commonwealth.

9. As Amartya Sen stated at the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 2003...*the obstacle of unaffordability must be firmly removed across the Commonwealth - indeed the world some champions of the market system want to leave school fees to the market forces. But this cannot but be a mistake given the social obligation to give the essential opportunity of schooling to all children.*

Prospects for 2015: UPE and Gender Parity

10. While some trends are broadly positive there is much to be done between now and 2015 and as **Table 1** shows. On UPE and using NER data for 43 Commonwealth countries in 2004:

- **Twelve countries** have an primary NER of over 95%: They have achieved UPE or are very close to it.
- **Thirteen countries** are within five points of 95%. **Three** of them, Bangladesh, Guyana and Tanzania have registered significant rates of progress in recent years. They should attain UPE. **Four** countries attained 95% NER or more in 1991 or 1999 or both showing that despite current figures, they clearly have the capacity to reach out to all of their school age population. The remaining **six** countries have maintained this NER level over the last five years (or there is only data for 2004).
- **Thirteen countries** have an NER between 75% and 90%. **Seven** of these have shown a strong positive movement over the past five years. Excepting India these are all African countries. But there are **five** countries which registered a negative trend.
- **Five countries** have more than a quarter of their school age population which is out of school all of which have increased their NERs over the past five years.

11. The picture painted for gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolment (the most basic measure of progress towards gender equality in education) is not dissimilar (**Table 2**):

- **Nineteen countries** had achieved parity in both primary and secondary enrolments in 2004 or were moving towards one or both of the parity targets. This group includes high income countries with low income countries that have made major efforts in recent years to increase levels of enrolment.
- **Thirteen countries** have achieved parity at the primary level or are moving towards parity but have moved away from parity at the secondary level. This is a diverse group of largely middle or high income countries where there are particular issues around retaining boys in the secondary system.
- **Seven countries** are experiencing some move away from parity at the primary level but exhibit a move towards parity at the secondary level.
- **One country**, Kenya experienced a move away from parity at both levels based on 1999-2004 data (although this period excludes the massive upsurge in primary level enrolments at the beginning of 2005).

**Table 1 Progress towards UPE by 2015 in 43 Commonwealth countries
(for which data are available)**

NER Level in 2004		Countries	Commentary	
NER Above 95 % in 2004	Countries that have achieved UPE or are very close to it.	Australia, Barbados, Belize, Canada, Cyprus, Fiji, Malawi, New Zealand, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, United Kingdom (12)	The remaining 5% require carefully targeted policies.	12
NER between 90 and 94.9%	Close to achieving UPE. At most 10% of the school age population are out of school	Bangladesh, Guyana and UR Tanzania (3)	Strong recent performances	13
		Jamaica, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritius (4)	These countries attained 95%+ in 1991 or 1999 or both which shows a previous capacity to deliver UPE.	
		Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu (6)	These countries appear to be 'stuck' at a level of between 92-94% over a number of years. This may require new initiatives to reach out to the remaining school age population	
NER between 75% and 90%	On average these countries have to expand their system to reach out to 17% of their school age population	India, Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Swaziland, Kenya, Gambia, Solomon Islands* (8)	These countries demonstrate positive change in the last five years.	13
		Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Maldives, South Africa (5)	These countries have shown negative change in the last five years	
NER Below 75%	Countries with more than quarter of the school age population still out of school	Ghana, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, (5)	All countries have experienced an increase in their NER	5

Source: Table 7 of the full report.

Table 2 Trends in progress towards achieving gender parity in 40 Commonwealth countries (for which data are available)

		Gender parity in secondary education					Number of countries	
		Achieved in 2004	Moving towards parity		Moving away from parity			
			Disparity at expense of girls in 2004	Disparity at expense of boys in 2004	Disparity at expense of girls in 2004	Disparity at expense of boys in 2004		
Gender Parity in primary education	Achieved in 2004	Barbados, Canada, Cyprus, Dominica, Jamaica, Mauritius, United Kingdom	Malawi Uganda	Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam Fiji, Lesotho	Australia, Vanuatu	Bahamas, Kiribati, Malaysia, Maldives, Namibia, New Zealand, Samoa, Seychelles	24	
		7	2	5	2	8		
	Moving towards parity	Disparity at expense of girls in 2004		Ghana, India, Mozambique, Solomon Islands, Zambia		Cameroon Nigeria		
				5		2		7
		Disparity at expense of boys in 2004					Bangladesh	1
	Moving away from parity	Disparity at expense of girls in 2004	Swaziland Saint Lucia	Papua New Guinea	South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Tonga	Kenya		
			2	1	3	1		7
		Disparity at expense of boys in 2004		The Gambia				
			1					
	Number of countries		9	9	8	5	9	40

Notes: Parity is defined as falling between 0.97 and 1.03 in the Gender Parity Index (GPI).

Source: Statistical Annex Tables 4b and 6 in the full report

12. The 2005 global gender parity target was missed although there is some encouragement from the fact that the majority of Commonwealth countries have achieved the primary parity target or are moving in the right direction. But the rates of change suggest that further strong policy actions will be needed if the 2005 target is to be totally achieved by 2015. There is a substantive body of knowledge and comparative experience regarding the policy measures that make a difference. These need to be followed with some urgency.

A Broader View of Basic Education

13. The MDGs for education are part of a wider set of goals for the elimination of poverty. The six EFA goals are conceived to give a more complete expression to basic education for all.

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)

14. There is growing evidence of the importance of the early years of a child's life for subsequent academic and economic progress. ECCE programmes of good quality have the potential to improve the health and nutrition of young children, develop their readiness for primary schooling and contribute more broadly to social well-being including the empowerment of women.

15. Globally, 123 million children were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2004 of which at least 31% live in Commonwealth countries. In 2004, the median value of the percentage of enrolment in private institutions was almost 60%. In most countries, access to ECCE is dependent on household income. If ECCE is to become more significant enhanced levels of public investment will be needed.

Adult literacy

16. An estimated 437 million adults in the Commonwealth aged over 15 years lack basic literacy skills, by far the majority of whom live in South and West Asia, East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. This represents over 56% of the global total of 780 million.

17. Eighty five per cent of the people without literacy skills in the Commonwealth live in India (61.4%), Bangladesh (12.1%) and Pakistan (11.2%). Numerically the figures are much lower in other parts of the Commonwealth but literacy rates dip below 70% in seven Sub-Saharan African countries and in Papua New Guinea.

18. Although the challenge is formidable some progress is being made. In the three South Asian countries, India has improved by 12 percentage points from 1990, Bangladesh by 8.4 and Pakistan by 4.5 although in total numbers the figures have gone up except in India. This reflects both population growth, the poor quality of the education system and insufficient programmes to meet the learning needs of adults.

19. Current rates of progress will not deliver the goal agreed in Dakar to reduce illiteracy by 50%. For the three South Asian countries alone this would require programmes to enable 185 million people the chance to acquire basic literacy skills in the next ten years. As in most countries adult literacy receives less than one percent of the education budget, a key policy question is the extent to which reliance is going to continue to be placed on improvements in the quality of schooling over time and/or whether there should and can be a significant increase in the level of resources for adult education including literacy.

Ongoing learning opportunities for all

20. The view that education equates to formal schooling is no longer tenable if it ever was. The demands for new skills and skills that change over time, in a world where peoples' economic, social and political expectations are in a state of flux, means that locally relevant

skills delivered in a flexible manner to meet well defined needs will become ever more important. Such is the diversity of definitions and programmes in adult education that monitoring comparable information across Commonwealth countries is currently well-nigh impossible. But this is a topic deserving of much more attention.

Improving the quality of education

21. Improving the quality of education is important for individuals and for the societies of which they are members. Apart from education's intrinsic merits, the extensive evidence of links between good education and economic and social benefits is a strong imperative to improve and sustain quality. Globalisation, an emphasis on competitiveness and the premium placed on knowledge in the labour market all point to the need for good quality education.

22. An adequate number of qualified, professional teachers is particularly important whether in schools or for adult learning but few Commonwealth countries can point to a totally satisfactory position in this regard. A recent UNESCO study suggests that most of the countries in West, Central and East Africa require significant numbers of additional teachers. In some countries in East and Southern Africa and the large South Asian countries retaining teachers is the critical issue, especially in systems where there are major increases in enrolment.

Education and the Millennium Development Goals

23. The eight Millennium Goals provide a framework for the global attack on poverty. Education – especially a basic education for all – is an essential part of this global agenda. Without education, progress towards the other Millennium goals is constrained if not impossible. At the same time, unless there is economic growth, better health and nutrition and stronger national and international partnerships education will not prosper.

24. Over the past decade the volume and the quality of the evidence of the direct social and economic benefits that accrue from investing in education has become a good deal more compelling. For example, the work of the Task Force on Education and Gender Equality under the Millennium Project Reports that:

- More education, particularly of girls and women, is strongly associated with better family health, improved capacity to plan and time births and long term benefits for the education of future generations
- Educated women are better able to increase household earning potential, bargain for resources, control their own fertility and participate in public life
- Better educated people earn more and are likely to be more productive,
- A workforce that is more skilled and has more knowledge contributes to higher economic growth
- Mothers with primary education have better access to the information that they need to keep their children healthy
- Education which is universal brings private benefits to the poor and disadvantaged that in turn reduce inequalities and discrimination.

25. These relationships are necessarily context specific. They are not a given in all circumstances, especially in countries where there the quality of education is poor, economic,

labour market and political distortions are at work and there is pronounced gender stratification in society. Investment is required in all of the areas covered by the Millennium goals if the virtuous circle of development is to operate. As the Millennium Project puts it ... *the achievement of universal primary education must be supported by both positive actions within the sector on the one hand and a progressive political environment and sound economic and social policies on the other.*

Education and HIV/AIDS

26. While the 53 countries of the Commonwealth have 30% of the world's population, 60% of people living with HIV have their homes in Commonwealth countries. In 2005, eight Commonwealth countries for which there is data had more than 10% of 15-45 year olds living with HIV. These are Swaziland (33%), Botswana (24%), Lesotho (23.2), Namibia (19.6), South Africa (18.8%), Zambia (17%), Mozambique (16.1), Malawi (14.1%) but less it is thought that this is primarily a problem for Southern Africa, although the figure for India is 0.9% this represents approximately six million people.

27. Measures are needed to safeguard education; to care for teachers suffering from HIV; to prevent sexual harassment and activity within schools; to meet the shortfall of teachers brought about by death and sickness and to ensure that all children get the opportunity to go to school. In this regard, one of the indicators of the MDG target to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS is to improve the ratio of school attendance of orphans to that of non-orphans in the 10-14 year old age group.

28. At the same time education has a major role to play in limiting the spread of AIDS through a range of interventions, formal and non-formal that ensure that the behaviours that give rise to AIDS are identified, understood and acted upon. This may be enshrined in national AIDS strategies, in education plans and included in education budgets.

Education Sector Policies and Plans

29. There are no shortages of policy statements and education plans in Commonwealth countries. The advent of Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSPs), EFA Plans, FTI-related plans, regional plans and the call from the Millennium Project and the Abuja Commitment for Action for bold strategies to be put in place in 2006 means that planning is a growth industry.

30. In low income countries there is an emphasis on medium to long-term sector or sub-sector planning, in many cases developed with donor agencies with a view to attracting budget support in systems that are far from being self-financing. In middle income and high income countries there is less evidence of overarching, sector wide plans but more attention to specific policy issues including quality, literacy, equity across particular groups and regions and gender equality, and the strategies and programmes to address these issues.

31. Eighteen Commonwealth countries have or are preparing PRSPs. One recent survey (not specific to the Commonwealth) concluded that while the education chapters in the PRSPs have improved there was insufficient attention to country specific contexts and a failure to set education into other wider social and economic policies. It also suggested that domestic financing plans were overly optimistic while at the same time being reliant on aid for the initiation of major reforms.

32. A study for UNESCO notes that there is some tension in the planning process arising from whether the two MDGs or the full EFA agenda set the priorities. It is argued that where donors want to support a sector wide approach it is invariably with a single ministry – the Ministry of Education – and that this results in some neglect of the non-UPE goals such as adult literacy which are often the preserve of other ministries. On the other hand, the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report notes, there is growing evidence of attention in sector plans and strategies to the most disadvantaged and excluded.

The Financing of Education in Commonwealth Countries

33. The 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report records that 62 out of 106 countries for which data are available have increased education's share of GNP. For 34 Commonwealth countries for which 1999 and 2004 data are available, 17 countries have increased their share, nine of them by more than one percentage point. If 5% is accepted as an approximate but necessary threshold, 25 Commonwealth countries are above this limit and 13 lie below. Four countries are below 3%.

34. While it is true that some countries have shown significant improvements in levels of enrolment in primary education over the past years without significantly increasing levels of education spend this is the exception to the rule. And if quality is to go hand in hand with access and systems are to grow and develop beyond primary education then education requires a bigger share of the national budget.

35. In this context the share of the education budget that goes to different levels and parts of the education system is crucially important. Only four out of 23 Commonwealth governments spent over 4% of GNP on primary education in 2004. This figure was below 2% in 13 countries and was as low as 0.7 in Bangladesh (where there is large measure of NGO provision in basic education).

36. A particular problem for low income countries is to find the financing that is needed to improve the quality of education when a very high proportion of the education budget is devoted to teachers' salaries. It is not unusual for salaries to be over 90% of public current expenditure on primary education in countries where there is a shortage of teachers, low enrolment and poor learning outcomes.

37. In addition to inequalities across countries, there are inequities in the allocation of public expenditures on education and basic education within countries. These may be disparities across States in federal countries, between rural and urban districts; and at the micro-level in relation to different communities and groups. If poor rural populations are likely to receive less per capita than better off higher income groups in urban centres this is not a firm base from which to reach some or all of the EFA goals.

37.

Aid for Education in the Commonwealth

38. Between 2000 and 2004, 45 out of 53 Commonwealth countries have been in receipt of bilateral aid for education. In 2004, this totalled just over US\$2.9 billion. Two-thirds of this aid went to Asian Commonwealth countries, 80% of it for basic education. Sub-Saharan Africa received just under one third of the total of which 37% is reported as being for basic

education. A negligible amount of aid went to basic education in the Pacific countries, but the figure approached 50% of total bilateral aid for education in the Caribbean.

Aid for education from Commonwealth donors

39. There are four main bilateral donors to education in the Commonwealth: Australia, Canada, New Zealand and The United Kingdom. In the period 2002-2004, the four donors together made an average annual ODA commitments of almost US\$7.5 billion of which US\$650 million was for education, representing around 12% of both total DAC bilateral aid and of aid to education respectively.

40. Total bilateral aid from DAC countries to basic education averaged around US\$ 1.5 billion over the period 2002-2004; almost 75% higher than in 1999-2001. Together the four Commonwealth donors accounted for 23.3% of the total. But while Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom reported a significant increase over the five years, Australia's level of commitment fell by nearly 50%, although the proportion of aid to basic education rose within a declining aid budget.

41. Together the four donors commit more than 50% of their total ODA in Commonwealth countries. This percentage is higher in education and even higher in basic education. This pattern is common to all four donors with the exception of New Zealand where the percentage of aid given to Commonwealth countries is higher in education than in basic education.

42. The four donors give aid to education to a total of 105 countries and to all 45 ODA eligible countries within the Commonwealth. Four countries receive 75% of Australia's aid to education. In Canada, the number rises to twelve. In all four cases Commonwealth countries are prominent recipients. For New Zealand and Australia this is notably regional in the Pacific and East Asia but aid for education from Canada and the United Kingdom is much more dispersed geographically.

Recipients of aid for education in the Commonwealth

43. Approximately one third of all bilateral aid to education from DAC countries goes to Commonwealth countries; 90% of it to 15 countries, all of which are low income countries with the exception of South Africa and Sri Lanka. Two countries – Bangladesh and India - are the recipients of almost 40% of bilateral aid to education. No other country receives more than 10%. Countries such as Pakistan, Ghana and Nigeria with large numbers of children out of school receive a relatively modest share of the overall aid allocation to education.

A changing aid context

44. Aid trends and patterns for the first few years of the new millennium need to be set in the context of new aid and debt relief commitments made in 2005. European Union and G8 member countries promised to increase aid by an additional US\$50 billion per annum by 2010 (a 60% increase) with further increases thereafter to 2015. In addition, it was pledged that the debts owed to the IMF, IDA and the African Development Bank by up to 46 countries would be paid off.

45. These developments are potentially important for education, in low income countries in particular. But significant improvements in aid for education for all are by no means guaranteed. In the period 2001-2004, 70% of the increase in overall aid was accounted for by debt relief, technical cooperation and emergency and food aid. However, the share of education in total sector allocable aid did increase from 10.6% in 2000 to 13.6% in 2004 and education's share of total sector allocable aid in the least developed countries increased from 12.7% to 17.3%.

46. One recent estimate suggests that an additional US\$10 billion in aid will be required to deliver universal access to primary schooling alone by 2015. This represents 20% of the 2005 commitment of an additional US\$50 billion. A further US\$4-5 billion is proposed for the expansion of secondary education and US\$1 billion for adult literacy programmes. Together this comes to US\$15 billion a year of additional aid which will require a larger proportion of aid to education than hitherto and a greater proportion of aid to education going to low income countries, particularly where out of school numbers are high and literacy rates are low.

The Next Ten Years: Challenges and Opportunities

47. Commonwealth Heads of State continue to make clear the *centrality of education to development and democracy; the need to allocate the resources necessary to meet the education MDGs* and that *gender equality and women's rights are essential preconditions for the achievement of development*.¹

48. To achieve these longstanding goals of development, democracy and gender equality continues to require a strong focus on access to quality education for all, which is the central theme of the 16th CCEM. This paper has demonstrated that there is uneven progress towards this vital but complex goal while the main theme paper for the conference sets out some important and challenging questions about the directions that need to be taken to ensure quantitative and qualitative progress over the next ten years.

49. In concluding this report and as a complement to the main theme paper, a set of ten key challenges and opportunities are set out based on the main findings of the preceding sections. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, rather it is offered as a simple framework of some critical higher order issues, none of which can easily be separated one from another.

50. None of these challenges is entirely new as any backward glance at the last 50 years would show. But even if it is not new it is still real, important, urgent and necessary if a less troubled, prosperous and equitable world is to emerge.

¹ Extract from the 2005 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting: Final Communiqué. See too the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Gender Equality 2005 – 2015

Box 1 Ten challenges and opportunities for improving basic education

	Challenges	Opportunities
1	To meet the right of 27 million children in Commonwealth countries who are out of school to benefit from a full cycle of quality primary education.	Examine the policies of countries that are committed and successful in this regard through abolishing fees, and providing vouchers, stipends and school meals among other demand side measures.
2	To finally ensure that gender is not a bar to enrolment, retention and completion in primary and secondary schooling.	Learn from the policies of countries that have integrated gender equality through all of their policies, plans, sector budgeting and programming. See for example, the work of the United Nations Girls Initiative (UNGEI - http://www.ungei.org/ and the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/04 <i>The Leap to Equality</i> .
3	To stop failing large numbers of children – especially those from the poorest households - as a result of poor quality schooling	Put children’s learning and school improvement at the heart of education sector policy. The techniques are known – it is bringing them together in schools that matters. Learn from successful school improvement programmes.
4	To recognise that the EFA and MDG goals for education are starting points and not finishing lines.	Learn from countries that have broad-based, well integrated and sequenced sector wide plans and budgets. Ensure that all aspects of EFA are covered as well as secondary and tertiary education.
5	To ensure – in all countries – that education HIV/AIDS strategies are integrated into the mainstream of education planning and financing.	Good practice is emerging of education as the “social vaccine” for HIV/AIDS. Learn from the experience of bodies that are researching these issues including UNESCO IIEP’s HIV/AIDS Impact on Education Clearing House http://hivaidsclearinghouse.unesco.org/ev_en.php ; UK Consortium on AIDS and International Development http://www.aidsconsortium.org.uk/Education/educationworkinggroup.htm and the World Bank’s data base on school health and HIV/AIDS. ²
6	To have long-term horizons with short to-medium-term carefully costed and managed programmes.	There are numerous national PRSPs and education sector plans. Draw from the experience of countries that have developed medium term expenditure frameworks and have strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms.
7	To give real attention to adult literacy; do not assume that the problem will go away with universal schooling.	This is the UN Decade for Literacy, Tap into its activities. Ensure adult literacy is part of sector planning and not a poor relation.
8	To recognise that a suitably remunerated, trained, motivated and well-managed teaching force is the key to quality in all educational activities.	Learn from countries that have well defined teachers policies that incorporate recruitment, deployment professional development and management into a single and coherent strategy
9	To build alliances across countries, including in areas such as educational assessment.	Build topic specific alliances. For example, although not necessarily easy politically, learning over time from being a member of an international assessment programmes provides insights into policies that are making a difference in improving quality and test scores.
10	To utilise aid for education in a much more coordinated and well sequenced way.	Apply the OECD-DAC Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness to education. Support FTI’s efforts on donor harmonization. Ensure that the promises of more and better aid for basic education are met.

² See

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20298959~menuPK:613702~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282386,00.html>

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