
22nd Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers

Chair's Statement

London, United Kingdom, 16-17 May 2024

Strengthening Education Resilience and Advancing SDG4 Goals: proposed action plan

1. A statement by the Government of Kenya in their capacity as Chair of the 22CCEM which met at Marlborough House on 16-17 May 2024. This Chair's Summary and the recommendations from the ministers' caucus and ministerial breakout sessions (to be added) seek to reflect the discussions held, as well as set out key considerations which were noted for further time bound actions, including priorities to accelerate efforts towards SDG4 goals and beyond 2030.
2. **Reaffirm Commitment to Prioritising Education:** Ministers commit to prioritising education as a fundamental component of sustainable development, reaffirming their dedication to the recommendations of the 21st Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (21CCEM), which highlighted the imperative of addressing inequality in learning opportunities, including gender and disability related disparities, and adapting education to meet the demands of a rapidly advancing technological landscape. Ministers commit to tackling violence in and around schools and ensuring that education settings are safe for all.
3. **Values and Principles in Education:** Ministers agree that national education systems in Commonwealth member states should now, more than ever, be underpinned by values and principles of dignity, fairness, respect, and compassion, as embedded in the Commonwealth Charter. These core values are essential for fostering inclusive and equitable societies, preparing students to become responsible global citizens, and ensuring that education contributes to the holistic development and well-being of every individual.
4. **Address NCDs:** Additionally, ministers acknowledge the intrinsic link between education and health, especially in combatting Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and associated risk factors. They pledge to exploring collaborative endeavours in these areas including initiatives focused on health education.
5. **Promote Education Financing:** Ministers pledge to promote both domestic and international education financing to bridge existing gaps in educational access and quality. They commit to exploring innovative financing mechanisms tailored to national contexts to effectively support education initiatives.
6. **Increase Climate Finance for Education:** Ministers advocate for a significant boost in climate finance investment in the education sector, aiming to triple the current allocation of USD 70 million from the Building the Climate Resilience of Children and Communities (BRACE) initiative. This includes strengthening climate education through initiatives like the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH) to

ensure education systems are adequately equipped to navigate a climate-resilient future.

7. **Embrace Greening Education Initiatives:** Ministers welcome the Greening Education Partnership (GEP) and express readiness to explore the adoption of Green School Quality Standards and Curriculum Guidance to foster environmental stewardship and sustainability.
8. **Common Agenda for Education and Climate:** Ministers note the Declaration for the Common Agenda for Education and Climate (COP28). Those who are already partners commit to undertake actions to adapt, mitigate, and invest in and through education systems. Those who are not, commit to explore joining the Declaration in due course.
9. **Facilitate Local Research Collaborations:** Ministers pledge to foster collaborations among educational institutions, local research organizations, and communities to research the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on educational outcomes. This involves funding research projects, granting access to data and resources, and supporting interdisciplinary initiatives to identify local challenges and opportunities for resilience-building.
10. **Prioritise Human Capital Development:** Ministers emphasise the centrality of human capital for sustainable development and commit to investing in education and skills across all ages. Focus areas include ensuring foundational learning and foundational skills for all learners, improving outcomes for disadvantaged students, promoting 21st-century skills, enhancing teacher development and school leadership, and strengthening research and development capabilities.
11. **Address Skill Gaps through TVET:** Ministers commit to bridging skills gaps in sectors critical to the green economy through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems. These systems aim to equip learners with the knowledge and competencies necessary for sustainable and responsible participation in low-carbon economies.
12. **Harness AI for Inclusive Education:** Ministers acknowledge the profound economic and societal implications of artificial intelligence (AI) and commit to proactively addressing its impacts within the education sector. They pledge to ensure inclusive AI development to mitigate digital divides and harness transformative technology for a sustainable future.
13. **Promote Digital Transformation:** Ministers prioritise digital transformation in enhancing the resilience and inclusivity of education systems, emphasising considerations such as cyber resilience, data protection, and data sharing. They commit to addressing the digital divide through education, especially for underserved populations, as well as data gaps within the education sector to drive inclusive educational policies and initiatives.
14. **Enhance Multilateral Collaboration:** Ministers emphasise the critical need for ongoing collaboration among diverse stakeholders to foster global growth, particularly in the realm of post-secondary education. They commit to accelerating joint efforts to promote a sustainable, digital, and inclusive future through robust international cooperation and enhanced multilateralism.
15. **Take Decisive, Agile Policy Actions:** Ministers agree on the need for decisive, well-calibrated, and agile policies tailored to country-specific circumstances to

strengthen the resilience of education systems. They commit to proactive, collaborative action in this uncertain global context, aiming to ensure access to education and learning opportunities for all individuals, especially the most vulnerable populations.

16. In conclusion, policymakers endorse immediate and mid-term actions aimed at fortifying national education systems and advancing SDG4 goals. They recognise the importance of proactive collaboration and decisive policy actions to navigate challenges and seize opportunities for building resilient education systems and fostering sustainable development. They also aim to ensure that national education systems are underpinned by the values and principles of dignity, fairness, respect, and compassion, as embedded in the Commonwealth Charter.
17. This Chair Summary will be included in the key documents for the upcoming Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to be held in Samoa in October 2024.
18. Annexes

Annex 1 - Remarks and recommendations from Parallel Sessions on: *Strengthening the Case for Education*

Session 5A: Advocating for Education in the Commonwealth

This session generated actionable recommendations for prioritising education with the Commonwealth and CHOGM2024 and beyond.

Cameroon, Cyprus, Kenya, Lesotho, Samoa, Seychelles, Tanzania, Zambia, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Association of Commonwealth Universities, Commonwealth Consortium for Education and the Commonwealth Youth Council raised the following issues and recommendations.

Main Issues:

- There is need for prioritisation in education, which doesn't focus only on emerging issues like Artificial Intelligence.
- Basic concerns such as gaps in early childhood care, support for parents, the effects of child labour, nutrition, conflict still need to be addressed in many contexts
- There is a lack of political will for deeper education transformation. There is concern that education only becomes prominent in political narratives during election times; and there is apathy around education financing.

Main recommendations:

1. Address the root causes of learning challenges - e.g. poor nutrition, remoteness, conflict
2. Develop a campaign to raise visibility of education at CHOGM 2024
 - Establish a working group to identify the Commonwealth's area of comparative advantage - it's unique value-added - amongst other international organisations
3. Strengthen human and financial resourcing of education section in Secretariat
4. Ensure Commonwealth programmes and toolkits can be tailored for us in any of the diverse cultures and political settings of the 56 member countries.
5. Develop, with participation of young people, an "adaptive curriculum" for quality education that is measured by metrics for student engagement and real-world adaptability (i.e. measures more than completion rates); and that is regularly reviewed and updated.

Session 5B: Mobilising Resources for Education

- This session discussed the mechanisms for mobilising financial and non-financial resources to support education initiatives.
- The following issues and recommendations were raised by Fiji, Barbados, Nigeria, Kiribati, United Kingdom, Kenya, Mauritius, Cameroon, Malawi, Kiribati, South Africa, Zambia, the Bahamas, Papua New Guinea who met with representatives from CARICOM, ActionAid and the Commonwealth Students Association.

Main Issues:

- Proposals to expand taxes to finance education conflict with IMF advice to reduce public expenditure. There is a need to focus on more efficient systems (including collection) that do not burden disadvantaged.
- Explore debt renegotiation as a strategy for financing education, recognizing expenditure on health and clean water may also contribute to good educational
- Payment of school fees is seen as regressive. When the public schools decline, the price of private schools also spirals which affects all classes.
- The group did not agree on a definitive area for focusing expenditure (e.g. whether primary, secondary or tertiary).

Main Recommendations:

1. Four main S's should guide financing strategies
 - The share of money on education should be increased
 - The size of the resources should increase
 - Sensitivity in allocation
 - Scrutiny is needed where money has been spent
2. Use expanded taxation (enforce collection of taxes) as source of financing
3. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation of results from investment in education (there are models developed by UNESCO which could be used as a basis)
4. To reduce brain drain (a significant drain to return on investment) encourage common accreditation of tertiary level schools and a preferential common fee structure for Commonwealth students studying abroad in a Commonwealth country. This will encourage education mobility, mutual support for maintaining standards and recognition of qualifications across the Commonwealth
5. Encourage collaboration between health, education and finance ministries for better budgeting and policymaking

Session 5C - Strengthening Partnerships for Education

- This session discussed the challenges and opportunities for fostering collaboration and partnerships among Commonwealth countries and stakeholders to advance education goals.
- The issues and recommendations were raised by Samoa, South Africa, Nigeria, Malawi, Bangladesh, SAARC, Commonwealth Education Consortium, Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network, Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, Commonwealth Youth Council and other youth representatives, and the Commonwealth Teachers' Union.

Main Issues:

- A lack of trust among stakeholders, perhaps due to the distance created by the pandemic, has reinforced a siloed way of working.
- Digital divide/limited digital connectivity hinders relationship building.
- There is need for a unified vision for education.
- Young people are excluded from decision-making on education transformation and students with disabilities are still excluded from the system, particularly higher education.

Main Opportunities:

- There are existing declarations/agreements/MoUs which now need to be acted upon.
- There was an ISO 44001:2017 standard framework developed for the Commonwealth which focused on collaborative business relationship management systems. This could be revisited as a tool to be applied to strengthening educational partnerships.
- There are examples of good practice all over the Commonwealth to draw from.

Main Recommendations:

1. A set of empty rooms should be made available at CHOGM in Samoa for face-to-face meetings to broker new relationships, discussing new ideas
2. Undertake a partnership mapping exercise which outlines the assets of various stakeholders and aligns them by opportunity/potential to collaborate. Ensure key groups are included including teacher trade unions, students (including with disabilities)
3. Pursue mutual recognition of higher degrees across the Commonwealth and promote more Commonwealth fellowships (including in key areas of mental health, climate change) as means of strengthening global collaboration
4. Develop action plans on a few priority areas - e.g. youth advocacy and innovation; disability inclusion - which have accountability mechanisms built and monitored by an interdisciplinary working group focused specifically on advancing implementation.
5. Compile examples of good practice and good leadership from within the Commonwealth family and facilitate forum and online hub for sharing.
6. Deepen regionalised frameworks for action.

Annex 2 - Remarks and recommendations from Sessions on: *Foundational Skills for Inclusive and Equitable Learning; Greening Education and Climate Change Education for Resilient Systems; Rethinking Education for Skills, Youth Employability & Decent Work; Digitalisation and the Future of Education.*

Session 8A: Foundational Skills for Inclusive and Equitable Learning

Chair: Hon. Conrad Sackey, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Sierra Leone

Participating Countries: Sierra Leone, Malawi, British Virgin Islands, Belize.

Observers: Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum, Commonwealth Council of Education, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Commonwealth Consortium for Education, UNESCO, UCL Institute of Education, AfCE, OpenDev.

Overview of Session:

- Reading, writing, numeracy, and socioemotional skills are foundational to a child's education and critical for unlocking their full potential.
- However, there is a global crisis of learning poverty, with more than two-thirds of children under10 unable to read and comprehend a simple text.
- The delegates discussed the goals, recommendations and actions needed to address this crisis, reimagine education systems, and revitalize efforts to ensure that all children have the foundational skills they need to thrive.

Key Questions:

- What goals, recommendations and actions are required to advance foundational learning?
- How can education systems be redesigned to ensure that foundational learning becomes a fundamental right for all children, regardless of socio-economic background or geographical location?
- What innovative strategies and interventions have shown promise in addressing learning poverty and promoting early literacy and numeracy skills?
- How can governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders collaborate to mobilize resources and investment for foundational learning initiatives?
- What role can technology and digital innovations play in improving access to quality foundational learning resources and tools?

Summary of Discussion:

1. Peer Learning is critical to advancing solutions
2. Education needs to be truly inclusive....for ALL
 - a. Those out of school; those with visible and invisible disabilities and special needs
 - b. The data that drives our decision-making must also be inclusive
3. Focus on readiness to learn in earliest years (- 0 to 3)

- a. Foundational learning strategies should include pre-natal and pre-primary school care > and focus on facilitating learning and not just education
 - b. Include STEM and civic education from birth
4. A multisectoral approach is critical
 5. How will it be financed?

Recommendations:

1. Review the Early Childhood Toolkit to address pre-school years, integrate STEM and civic education; and share widely digitally.
2. Community of Practice/ Learning Community on inclusive education
3. Establish Working Group on Foundational Education with Ministers, Council of Education, civil society and the private sector.
4. Facilitate interministerial dialogue - health, education and social care Ministers.
5. Ensure innovative and sustainable financing.

Session 8B: Greening Education & Climate Change Education for Resilient Systems

Chair: Hon Alexander Teabo, Minister of Education, Kiribati

Participating Countries: Barbados, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, South Africa, Dominica

Observers: CYC, Association of Museums, Council of Education in Commonwealth

Overview of Session:

1. Good practices around 'Greening Education'
2. Case Studies and examples of climate integrated education systems
3. Role of Ministry of Education and Ministries responsible for climate in pioneering the 'Greening Education' agenda
4. Importance of Youth engagement in determining national approach to 'Greening Education'.

Key Questions:

- What are the countries' good practices as well as the challenges and opportunities in greening education?
- How countries plan to develop and promote the role of education in tackling climate change and how can Greening Education Partnership support these efforts?
- What challenges have impeded previous initiatives to promote sustainability in schools, and what specific forms of support are essential from policymakers, educators, and international organizations to advance these efforts effectively?

Summary of Discussion:

- Discussed Greening Education Partnership's Greening Curriculum Guidance and a Green School Quality Standard as an opportunity for member states to review existing programmes and practices.
- Greening Education Partnership: Opportunity for member states to be part of a collaborative platform to join cost-free with an expectation of working to Greening national education systems.
- Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub: As a tool to support member states especially in Small Island Development States to improve targeted climate education initiatives. CCFAH support, capacity building and training to access funding and investment.

Recommendations:

1. Cross-Ministerial Approach: Ministry of Education need to engage with other Ministries including those responsible for Environment and Climate Change
2. Education Ministers to be involved in review of nationally determined contributions/national climate plans that are currently taking place.
3. Resilient Infrastructures: To build capacity and invest in Climate Resilient School Infrastructure
4. Develop age-appropriate Climate Change Curricula starting at an early age up to tertiary level and life-long learning.
5. For member states who have not joined the Greening Education Partnership to do so including the Commonwealth Secretariat itself.

Session 8C: Rethinking Education for Decent Work and Employability

Chair: Hon Minister Pierre Gomez (Gambia)

Overview of Session:

- This session discussed 'Rethinking Education for Decent Work and Employability'.
- Education, training and access to employment are powerful drivers for the empowerment of people, social mobility and the reduction of vulnerabilities.
- There can be no rapid change in behaviour, consumption and production patterns without education and without training.
- Youth unemployment remains a challenge around the world despite a sharp rise in enrolment rates.

Key Questions:

1. How can educational curricula be adapted to better align with current and future job market demands?
2. What skills do young people have to be equipped with to bridge the gap between education and employment?
3. What successful case studies exist of countries successfully adapting the education systems to fit the local contexts?
4. What partnerships are necessary between educational institutions, governments, and the private sector to enhance employability?

Summary of Discussion:

1. Case studies from Gambia, Bangladesh, Barbados, Dominica, British Virgin Islands, Malawi of how education systems have been updated and adapted to the evolving demands of the local context and labour market- incorporating STEM education, practical skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurial training.
2. The barriers that students face in accessing quality education and training, including financial constraints, cultural biases including stigma of TVET education, and geographical limitations.
3. The importance of soft skills alongside technical skills, proposing methods to integrate these into educational programs through project-based learning and real-world internships.
4. The importance of collaboration between educational institutions, businesses, and government bodies in ways that can improve employment outcomes for students.

Recommendations:

1. Develop Adaptive Curricula: Educational institutions should work with industry leaders and assess their local context to regularly update curricula to reflect the skills and knowledge most in demand.
2. Implement Early Skills Development Programs in Education Systems: It is essential to start skills education from a young age. Educational institutions should integrate practical skills training into the curriculum starting at the primary level including soft skills, life skills, enterprise and employability skills.

3. **Strengthen Industry/Business-Education Partnerships:** Foster collaborations between educational institutions and industry to ensure curriculum relevance and practical skill acquisition.
4. **Promote Lifelong Learning and Flexibility:** Encourage continuous education and adaptability in curricula to meet evolving industry needs and personal development goals.
5. **Empower Through Education:** Focus on women's education and literacy as a cornerstone for social and economic development.
6. **Challenge and Change Cultural Perceptions of TVET:** Enhance the appeal and perceived value of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Commonwealth countries, by implementing national campaigns that highlight the benefits and success stories of TVET. Reform higher education institutions to mainstream TVET.
7. **Share Best Practices:** A need for Commonwealth countries to establish platforms that enable the sharing of best practices and forge partnerships. E.g. a Commonwealth Education Best Practices Hub.
8. **Increased Financing for TVET:** Strengthen financing for TVET programmes to enhance the quality of education received as well as improve conditions for teachers and learners.

Session 8D: Digitalisation and the Future of Education

Chairs: Hon Ismail Shaffeeu, Minister of Education Maldives

Dr. Justin Valentin, Minister of Education, Seychelles

Technical Lead: COL

Participating Countries: Seychelles, Malawi, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Barbados, Malaysia, Maldives

Overview of Session:

- Discussed the limitations and challenges to traditional education systems, and explored how technology could help mitigate this.
- Discussed the digital divide, and its impact on various Commonwealth member states.
- Reflected on positive experiences in deploying appropriate technology, and how discussed how these initiatives were scaled.
- Discussed the need to establish a Digitalisation Working Group

Key Question:

- How can we overcome traditional limitations to educational systems?
- How can we ensure equitable access to technology-enabled learning, in a sustainable way?
- How can we learn from the experiences from member states in implementing technology at scale?

Summary of Discussion:

1. Continuous training of teachers were emphasised, as some member states raised concerns about gaps capability and skill.
2. Importance of creating strong policies and legislation to govern the integration of Ai in the sector. Emphasis was also made on made on data protection policies.
3. Working to eliminate the digital divide is vital, and much can be done by leveraging key partnerships with organisations such as COL.

Recommendations:

1. An interest to establish a Digitalisation Working Group.
2. To collate a collection of reflective case studies of practice and advance a research agenda.
3. Greater collaboration between member states in terms of addressing digitalising processes, digital content and overcoming the digital divide.