

Memorandum to the Committee of the Whole (UK, October 2013) and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (Sri Lanka, November 2013)

Growth with Equity: Inclusive Development

Harnessing the power of education for inclusive and equitable Commonwealth development

Submitted by: the Council for Education in the Commonwealth
& the Commonwealth Consortium for Education

Summary

1. We believe that quality education is a prerequisite to building more equitable and inclusive societies
2. We urge Heads to promote actively the adoption of the Commonwealth's Post-2015 Development Framework for Education
3. We encourage the Commonwealth to build consensus on international protocols to further equity and inclusion in transnational education
4. We call on the Commonwealth to work through the Commonwealth of Learning to use ICT to promote equity, inclusion and lifelong learning for all, via open and distance learning approaches
5. We suggest that the work of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan should be better aligned with and supported by the Commonwealth Inter-Governmental Organisations (IGOs)
6. We urge adequate resourcing and staffing of the Secretariat's Education section to ensure meaningful policy and service delivery
7. We are disappointed by the omission of reference to education from the Agenda of the Commonwealth People's Forum in Sri Lanka
8. We regret Commonwealth IGOs' lack of a coordinated Educational strategy and the absence of a jointly agreed framework for collaboration with accredited and non-accredited civil society organisations
9. We call on Commonwealth governments to commission an early review of the scope for enhanced educational co-operation among Commonwealth education stakeholders

Detail

1. We welcome the theme for Commonwealth Heads of Government deliberation in Colombo. Inclusion and equity are central goals of social development and of the recently agreed Commonwealth Charter. At a time of widening social inequalities, quality education is a prerequisite to building more equal societies and has a key role in inclusive and equitable Commonwealth development across all sectors.
2. We applaud the Commonwealth for advocating a Post-2015 Development Framework for Education, integrating equity, inclusivity and quality, and promoting free basic education, accessible to all. We welcome the international recognition the Framework has received and Commonwealth efforts to ensure developing country engagement in its formulation. In a separate memorandum, we have urged Heads to advocate the adoption of the Framework, across the wider Commonwealth and international community.
3. As processes of globalisation increasingly affect education, we believe that the Commonwealth is well placed to further equity and inclusion in transnational education by building consensus on, for example, intellectual property rights; international recognition of qualifications; education of migrants, refugees and other displaced persons; protocols governing the establishment and ownership of schools and colleges across national boundaries; and equitable treatment of internationally mobile teachers and students, including those on distance education courses.
4. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) make quality educational programmes and materials universally available. But, ICTs can also widen access gaps, favouring the already privileged, to the detriment of those less able to access hardware, software or connectivity. The Commonwealth, working through the Commonwealth of Learning and the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation, should harness its strong capacity in open and distance learning to ensure lifelong learning for all.
5. Educational development should be holistic, with equity and inclusiveness given full weight, not only in basic education, but also at secondary, higher, vocational and adult community learning levels. The Commonwealth has significant comparative advantage in higher education, evidenced by the continuing salience of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, now in its Centenary year. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan is a flagship of Commonwealth educational endeavour, promoting equity and inclusion through transnational educational opportunity. We call for its activities to be better aligned with those of the Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations (IGOs) and for the Secretariat to play the more supportive role recommended by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG).
6. We endorse the place accorded to education, alongside health, in the Social Pillar of the Secretariat's Strategic Plan, 2013-2017, but remain seriously concerned at the reduction of Secretariat educational capacities during its prolonged transition period. We ask Heads to ensure that the Secretariat's social development programmes are properly resourced and staffed, with close co-ordination between their various human development remits in education, health, gender and youth.
7. Given the Secretariat's reaffirmation of its commitment to education within the Social Pillar, and the centrality of education to both this year's Commonwealth theme, and the post-2015 development agenda, we regret that the agenda of this year's Commonwealth People's Forum in Sri Lanka omits any reference to education.
8. We endorse the Secretariat's recent commitment to a new collaborative framework on partnerships, but note a lack of co-ordination between the Commonwealth IGOs in terms of their educational priorities and activities. Delay in developing plans for interaction with Commonwealth Accredited Civil Society Organisations has frustrated civil society in all sectors of development, limiting the scope of the more productive working relationship envisaged by the EPG (Report pp125-126). We welcome the Foundation's resolve to reach out to a wider range of Commonwealth civil society stakeholders, but regret their decision to withdraw from regular institutional contact with accredited organisations. This decision has fundamental implications for the way in which the wider Commonwealth deals with civil society and offers access to Commonwealth spaces. We call for a sense of urgency and early purposeful action from all three IGOs to resolve these coordination issues.
9. As a major element in this process we call on Commonwealth Governments to commission an early review of the scope for enhanced educational co-operation in the Commonwealth and of the contribution this would make to the realisation of Commonwealth goals and cohesion. The review should examine the diverse roles and objectives, strengths and capacities of the different Commonwealth inter-governmental, governmental and non-governmental bodies and ways to create rich and productive partnerships between them.