

20th CONFERENCE OF COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION MINISTERS (20CCEM)

Outcome Statement from the Integrated Partners' Forum (IPF)

Nadi, Fiji
19-22 February 2018

Preamble

The Integrated Partners' Forum (IPF) met at the 20CCEM in Nadi, Fiji, 19-22 February, in parallel with the Ministers' Conference. Given that partnership was an essential focus of this CCEM, teachers, higher education, civil society, students' and young people's representatives formed an Integrated Partners' Forum attended by about 345 participants from 23 countries.

In the Commonwealth, we are united by our common values and strengthened by the diversity of language and culture. This is a richness which the Commonwealth should both jealously guard and draw upon as it works to achieve social justice and human rights.

Meeting in Fiji, participants were alive to the impacts of climate change which affects every country but poses a particular threat to the Commonwealth's many island and coastal regions. It behoves all Commonwealth countries to prioritise climate action.

Deliberations focused on *Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?* Areas addressed included accountability, culture, employability, financing, inclusion and quality.

Key Issues

Forum discussions were permeated by issues of sustainability and resilience, the overarching theme of the Forum. While environmental and climate change were at the forefront, given the location of the Forum and the threat to small island states posed by sea-level rise and diverse natural disasters, sustainability and resilience are essential conditions for effecting long-term improvements in every field of human endeavour, including the education sector itself.

Inclusive and quality education requires leadership capacity, quality teachers and environments, enabling tools and frameworks. Quality education should be fit for purpose and transformative. The curriculum should reflect the Commonwealth's priorities - peace, prosperity, people and planet - through the development of critical thinking, problem solving and working collaboratively. We recognise the shared responsibility of the state, school leaders, teachers, educators, parents, students and civil society actors for accountability in education.

Too often educational reforms are imposed on teachers with little consultation, including changes to education systems and the school curriculum. This approach does not capitalise on their expertise and experiences. Teachers' current conditions and remuneration seldom enhance their professional status. In addition, across the Commonwealth, nearly 19 million more teachers are needed by 2030. Teachers are key to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and serious insufficiency of teacher supply will make achievement of that objective impossible.

We remain deeply concerned about the national and international funding gaps in education including for early childhood education, for the most marginalised, and for education in emergencies (including for refugees and persons with disabilities). Lack of adequate funding undermines the right to education for millions across the Commonwealth.

Achieving gender parity in universal basic education remains a challenge. Due to several factors including poverty, economic insecurity, discriminatory social norms and lack of safety, fewer girls than boys are going to school. Millions of children and young people are out-of-school or dropouts due to early pregnancy, child marriage or child labour. School and campus-related gender based violence is a significant issue, rooted in power-relations, gender-based discrimination and stereotypes. Education is key to empowering girls and women, working with boys and men, and promoting gender equality.

State-funded free, quality, public early childhood and compulsory education is the route to guaranteeing the achievement of SDG 4 and education for all, particularly for those at risk, marginalised and left behind.

Education viewed from the perspective of resilience and sustainability is important to enhance employability, entrepreneurship and to fulfill everyone's potential.

Higher education makes an essential contribution to sustainable development, through both teaching and research. Increasingly, tertiary and higher education will be an essential component of curious, flexible, resilient and ethical individuals able to play a full role in Commonwealth societies. Stronger higher education systems will be required to meet the challenges of changes to the nature of employment, building respect and understanding in societies, and respond to climate change. Universities directly affected by climate change and natural disasters can offer a distinctive contribution to support the resilience of universities, communities and economies vulnerable to disasters. The value of higher education to society in the Commonwealth is enhanced by international collaboration and partnerships which focus on building the capacity of all partners. This includes the promotion of student and academic mobility through the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

Education and life-long learning are important not only for the development of skills and knowledge required for the fast changing world of work but also for the inter-generational transmission of culture, language and traditional knowledge which have been important vehicles for promoting sustainability and resilience. Education institutions should assist learners to draw on their own rich heritage by according full recognition to the place of arts and culture in the curriculum and drawing on the valuable educational resources represented by museums, galleries and libraries.

Welcome as some aspects of the process of globalisation and the spread of social media are, in forming and maintaining connections between peoples and cultures, the concentration of power represented by the dominance of a few multinational companies poses risks of the imposition of cultural and linguistic uniformity. The maintenance of cultural identity and diversity is of key importance for sustainability and resilience, and we believe the Commonwealth is well placed to be an international standard-bearer for the safeguarding and development of indigenous cultures and languages, ensuring the sustainability of their best characteristics.

We acknowledge the synergies of non-formal and informal education in contributing to the resilience of people through skills development for children and youth. Equitable access to appropriate post-secondary pathways, including technical and vocational education and training, higher education and life-long learning should be available to all.

There is a need to mainstream and operationalise student engagement in all decision making processes in education, as committed in the Nassau Declaration. This would not only be by association and representation, but also by developing mechanisms which ensure student views are actively considered by policy makers, from grassroots to national levels.

Recommendations

The IPF recommends that:

1. In recognition of the central importance of education to the future wellbeing of the Commonwealth community, the Secretariat should develop a forward strategy for educational co-operation based on partnership between the Commonwealth inter-governmental organisations, governments, Commonwealth Associations and other civil society bodies. The strategy should incorporate a consultative policy framework, including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), to ensure participation at all levels of decision making in education.
2. The Secretariat should increase opportunities to share skills and best practice through south to south, north to south and south to north co-operation, whether virtually or on a face-to-face basis. Such opportunities might for example include the establishment of university networks to build resilience and promoting Commonwealth-wide student mobility through the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, including consideration of Climate Change Resilience Scholarships. Mindful of the Paris 2012 Open Educational Resources Declaration, we encourage Ministers to enable the sharing of education resources as open content.
3. Education Ministers should develop and strengthen genuine partnership arrangements with teacher unions and other stakeholders. Teachers should be engaged in education policy development and be supported and trusted to develop curricula which enhance their capacity to educate all, beginning with early childhood education. Ministers must address the teacher shortage, increase investment in teacher training, use best practice for teacher recruitment and retention, including terms and conditions of employment and strategies for increased mobility.
4. Commonwealth governments should meet or exceed internationally agreed benchmarks of 4-6% of GDP or 20% of national budgets for education. At the national level, governments should establish multi-sectoral consultative fora which address the financing of education. At the Commonwealth level, a meeting of Education and Finance ministers should be convened to realise this funding commitment. Governments should increase domestic revenue collection through fair progressive taxation and measures for tax justice requiring multinational companies to pay taxes in the countries in which they generate revenue. Particular funding priority should be given to early childhood education, the most marginalised and to education in emergencies.
5. Governments should ensure that Commonwealth young people have access to gender inclusive and sensitive quality education, with relevant curricula, which prioritises holistic learning methods and equips them with the relevant skills and resilience to successfully transition to decent work, equitable employment opportunities or entrepreneurship, as well as prepares them to participate successfully in today's knowledge-based society and as active citizens. Young people should feel and be safe and secure in learning environments.
6. The Commonwealth Education Ministers Action Group should explore with students themselves, representatives from higher education institutions and the private sector the issues around higher education for skills and employment. This must consider the critical skills required by students to both create and respond to new economic opportunities; the expansion of technical and vocational education and training (TVET); and life-long learning to ensure equitable access for all in adapting to the future requirements of work. This should also include exploring mutual recognition of qualifications within the Commonwealth countries, entrepreneurship education from an early age, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields for girls.

7. Ministers acknowledge the synergies and benefits of non-formal education and commit to supporting and resourcing the role of youth and community workers in the delivery of non-formal and informal education. Ministers should ensure formal recognition and certification of knowledge, experiences and competencies gained by people, through non-formal and informal education.
8. Reflecting the cultural diversity within the Commonwealth, Ministers should ensure the proper recognition in the curriculum of local culture and traditional knowledge which can make an important and central resource in building resilience and sustainability. This calls for close co-operation with non-formal providers and for support to the education of indigenous populations through provision of scholarships and in other ways.
9. Commonwealth governments fulfil their commitments under the Nassau Declaration and confirm their recognition of students as partners in education through funding and technical support; as well as facilitate the establishment of national student organisations. Governments should provide greater allocation of resources and funding in the implementation of strategic plans for the Commonwealth Student Association to enable capacity building for national student organisations.

We collectively affirm the significance of education and call on the Education Ministers to ensure the sustainability of an adequately resourced Education Section within the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Adopted by the Integrated Partners Forum on 22nd February, 2018, Nadi, Fiji.