

Civil Society Stakeholders' Submission

This submission was prepared by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education coordinating inputs from Commonwealth education organisations and the Regional Education Learning Initiative coordinating inputs from the East African region (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania).

Overarching Recommendations

- **Enhanced investment in education and training.** [The GEM report \(2021\)](#) estimates that only a third of Commonwealth countries have met the international benchmarks of either 15% - 20% of national public expenditure or 4-6% of National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spending on education. We call on member states to commit to progressively fund education at levels consistent with international benchmarks. To support these commitments, diagnostic tools on financing for the sector should be strengthened, and transparent, user-friendly platforms established to allow all stakeholders to track and monitor education spending.
- **Prioritise education and training within the Commonwealth.** Restore and adequately fund professional education capacity within the Commonwealth Secretariat and, to maintain momentum following the necessarily foreshortened 21CCEM in April 2022, commit to a fully-fledged 22CCEM, incorporating stakeholder-led parallel fora, before the end of 2023.

Thematic Recommendations

Thematic area 1: Lessons learned from COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies

- **Education and training are key to societal and human well-being and must form part of an interconnected human development approach to economic, social and cultural recovery from the pandemic.** As the Covid-19 crisis has underlined, schooling, from birth onwards, is essential for learners' socialisation and physical and mental well-being. Learning and schooling, health, nutrition and sanitation, livelihoods and household income are inextricably interlinked. Compartmentalisation and competition for resources between human development sectors has serious negative consequences and must give way to partnership in the common cause of improving human welfare and achieving the SDGs.
- **Build resilience and adaptability into our education and training systems through targeted, funded contingency planning, and provision of safety nets for disadvantaged learners.** Weathering future crises requires investment in capacity (especially ICT and remote learning facilities) and continuous updating of emergency response plans. These should include provision of 'catch-up' and 'second-chance' incentives and support packages to minimise drop-out and make good learning lost through school and college closures, and support for/validation of learning undertaken in non-school/college modes and settings. To ensure continuity of learning at all levels during emergencies, governments should establish funded education contingency plans and approaches.
- **Strengthen parental, stakeholder and community engagement with the provision of education and training.** Partnership with parents, community groups, faith groups, NGOs, private sector, and economic enterprises helped mitigate the damage to education caused by the pandemic and ensured some continuity of learning. Fresh attention is needed to provide parents with guidance and practical help to support home learning. This includes investing in strategies that strengthen linkages between home and school; in hybrid learning strategies; and in reviewing and adapting local resources to promote life-long learning.

Thematic area 2: Rethinking education for work and employment

- **Build skills and knowledge through competency-based curriculum reforms relevant to national development priorities.** Critical skillsets for learners include foundational skills; 21st century and entrepreneurship skills; digital skills; STEM skills; and technical and vocational skills, including skills required as countries transition to greener economies. 21st century and entrepreneurship skills are developed through learner-centred interactive pedagogies and require skilled teachers to deliver; STEM instruction should be made more relevant to young people's daily life. Reforming assessment so that it provides insights into student learning and tests for the application rather than the acquisition of knowledge is necessary, accompanied by improvement in teaching practices to support learning across the skills range. Greater priority should be given to 'second chance' and programmes that enable working adults to update their skills or reskill as workplace needs change. Career guidance should be a key part of all curricula.
- **Capacity building of teachers, educators, non-teaching staff and education administrators at all levels and decent working conditions are a pre-requisite for education and training improvement.** Countries should invest in building the capacity of teachers to impart foundational and relevant future work skills to learners. This requires greater investment in both pre-service and in-service training and increased focus on the use of ICT to support teaching in all training. Better working conditions for teachers in all parts of the education system from early years to higher education, and in both formal and informal settings are essential. Attention is required not just to improved remuneration, but also to the provision of professional support and creation of career structures that provide progression and reward the acquisition of skills and experience.
- **Expand work experience schemes and apprenticeships.** Enabling a smooth transition from learning to work is a challenge for every country. It is all the greater in countries with rapidly growing populations which have fewer labour market niches in relation to jobseekers. Education and training institutions should seek to develop ongoing close contact with the local labour market, employers, and self-employed entrepreneurs, with a view to aligning formal learning content more closely with future working life. Firms and public sector bodies should be incentivised to provide and expand apprenticeship opportunities for labour market entrants.

Thematic area 3: Redefining learning spaces: multiple pathways and flexible approaches

- **Promote learning throughout life by better integrating formal, non-formal and informal education and training.** Address learning needs from the crucial early years, through to retirement within an integrated system. Modifying traditional distinctions between formal and informal, virtual and face-to-face will permit easier transfers between different learning paths and enhance equality of status and respect for both educators and learners in all branches of education. Increased advocacy and awareness around the concept of 'learning ecosystems', 'socially networked schools' and the value of conscious engagement within communities will help access additional resources and learning opportunities.
- **Education systems must respond to the full diversity of learners' needs.** Curricula need to move beyond a 'one size fits all' approach and respond flexibly to the special needs of marginalised populations (e.g. persons living with disabilities, refugees, minority cultures, mobile and remote populations). This could include consideration of calls for a decolonised curriculum which values local, cultural ways of knowing and doing. This could also include modifying normal patterns of cohort progression to allow mainstream learners to catch up and capitalising on the potential of ICT to enable flexible dual-mode (in person/virtual) course delivery and mainstreaming accelerated/remedial learning approaches to ensure all children learn. It may also include addressing context-specific issues with high dropout

levels and NEET (not in education, employment and training) youth in particular gender groups – youth and adolescent girls in some settings, youth and adolescent boys in others. In this regard we note the efforts of the Girls Education Challenge co-sponsored by Kenya and the UK to enhance provision for Commonwealth girls.

Thematic area 4: Financing of education and training, including innovative financing

- **Commonwealth Education Ministers should seize this opportunity to build on existing commitments**, notably the Kenyatta [Call to Action on Education Finance](#) in 2021 and the [Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education](#) in 2018, and push forward within existing agreed frameworks. Forward steps should include action on tax, debt relief, public sector wage bills, and transparent tracking of on-budget and off-budget education and training spending at all levels and outcomes. Commonwealth Ministers should affirm the urgency of increasing the [share, size, sensitivity, and scrutiny](#) of education budgets. We call on Ministers to take this crucial education agenda forward in global education forums, particularly in the UN Secretary General’s high-level Transforming Education Summit scheduled for September 2022.
- **Commit to practical action on raising domestic tax revenues and reducing international debt burdens** in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). We see this as the surest route to expanding resources for education and training. Commonwealth countries should endeavour to introduce ambitious and progressive tax reforms to increase tax-to-GDP ratios by five percentage points by 2030; and seek to renegotiate external debts when debt servicing obstructs education and training spending.
- **Manage with care the injection of resources into the public education and training system by non-state partners including through ‘innovative financing’**. Such initiatives may provide welcome additional resources for education and help enhance access; but should be subject to safeguards. In general, the surest way of securing the public interest in education and training is through state provision. Where non-government entities (e.g. local communities, faith groups, civil society, private sector) are encouraged or permitted to own and manage schools, they should be required to conform strictly with government policies, standards and guidelines designed to ensure that all children enjoy the right of access to good quality education and training as laid down under the [Guiding Principles](#) on the human rights obligations of states. Governments should develop robust policy frameworks backed by effective administrative machinery for enabling, registering, monitoring, and regulating non-government provision of education. We see this as a fruitful area for Commonwealth countries to share relevant experience.

Thematic area 5: Education for sustainability and a peaceful, cohesive Commonwealth

- **Education and training systems have a leading role in promoting sustainability, inclusion and non-violence**. Education and training have an acknowledged critical role in teaching about urgent issues of sustainability and peacebuilding and instilling in learners a commitment to build a better world. Additionally, it is not enough for education and training to teach values of sustainability and peacebuilding through the curriculum, crucial though that is. The education system is itself responsible for a large share of consumption of resources. More attention should be given to ‘greening’ our education systems; planning education infrastructure to reduce fossil fuel consumption in school and college buildings; and to minimising daily vehicle travel. Moreover, institutions of learning should ensure they not only teach tolerance, respect, and inclusion but practise them by providing peaceful, safe, and welcoming environments free from physical violence, coercion, and bullying.

- **Ensure education systems are built to withstand the shocks we know are coming.** COVID-19 exposed the fragility of education systems, but it is neither the first nor last disruption to education that millions of children throughout the Commonwealth do and will face. Education systems must be prepared to support displaced and migrating children, including those affected by conflict, crises, and climate change. To do so, governments should strengthen education systems through a variety of measures including (but not limited to) integrating disaster risk reduction and taking anticipatory action to mitigate impacts on education systems; supporting learning continuity programmes to prevent disruption during displacement; and facilitating reintegration in recipient communities to minimise the time children spend out of school.
- **Recommit to prioritising and funding Commonwealth education and training partnerships.** Mobilising networks of supportive and engaged actors, from communities to governments, contributes to the sustainability of education and training. As the 2018 Nadi Declaration stressed, partnership working among Commonwealth stakeholders is key to unlocking Commonwealth potential in building back better towards achieving the SDGs and creating a more cohesive Commonwealth. These partnerships can be made fully effective if articulated and connected through a strengthened Education Team in the Commonwealth Secretariat.