



The Commonwealth

Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers

Concept Note

Nairobi, Kenya, 27 - 28 April 2022

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21st Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (21CCEM) Concept Note

Theme:

Rethinking Education for Innovation, Growth and Sustainability post-Covid-19

Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat

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Rethinking Education for Innovation, Growth and Sustainability post-Covid-19

Background

At the 25th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in the UK on 19-20 April 2018, Heads discussed how the Commonwealth could contribute to a future that is fairer, more sustainable, more secure and more prosperous.

Given that 60 per cent of the Commonwealth's population is under the age of 30, Heads of Government encouraged the implementation of specific actions to provide the opportunity for at least 12 years of quality education and learning for girls and boys by 2023, by investing in skilled, motivated and supportive teachers and educational facilities, and focusing on education reforms. Marginalised groups, especially disadvantaged girls, children and adolescents with disabilities, those who have dropped out of school, refugees and migrants, and indigenous, nomadic and minority populations - all need to transition from primary to secondary education, and acquire knowledge and skills through appropriate policies, programmes and strategic partnerships.

Pre-COVID-19, over 258 million young people were out of primary and secondary school. Globally, about 617 million students are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in literacy or numeracy (UIS, 2017), with 202 million in Africa. In South Asia, about 58 percent of children in the region are in 'learning poverty', unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 (World Bank, 2019a). The youth literacy rate (15-24) is 91.73%, meaning 102 million youth around the world still lack basic literacy skills. Only six in ten young people will be finishing secondary school in 2030.

Yet, it is estimated that there will be 377.4 million students by 2030 in formal post-secondary school, an increase of 281% over the 30 years from 2000 to 2030. Almost three-quarters of the expected global growth for the population aged 18 to 23 from 2015 to 2035 will be concentrated in 10 countries, six of which are members of the Commonwealth: Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda and Tanzania.

The onset of COVID-19 has exacerbated and highlighted existing educational inequalities, not only with mass school and university closures, but also with educational opportunities and attainment affected by lockdowns, variable home-learning facilities, and changing assessment methods. The long-term impact of lost earnings on young people, leaving school in a period of economic recession and gearing up for a most probable coming economic recession, is yet to be quantified.

In many low-income countries, there are signs that school closures as a result of the pandemic will have a lasting impact on increasing inequality, especially where there were already pre-COVID-19 inequalities in access to quality education between children and young people in urban and rural localities as well as those with special needs, and those from parents with higher and lower socio-economic status. In many countries, there are limited mechanisms in place to ensure that all children can learn from home.

Home-schooling is particularly challenging for first generation school going children and adolescents.

With rapid and continuing youth population growth, it is necessary to expand opportunities in the education sectors. However, COVID-19 has hindered progress and caused millions of children to miss out on an education. Other recorded effects of the pandemic include more young girls becoming vulnerable to early marriage, with 7.6 million girls at risk of not returning to school, as well as increased child labour and violence. Furthermore, many Commonwealth countries continue to experience boys' underachievement, untrained teachers, and a lack of implementation capacity.

Online learning drives greater inequality as it is not a realistic prospect for hundreds of millions of children. Connectivity in the absence of good quality teaching is not effective in driving learning. As budgets fall and as attention is focused on online learning, there is an increased risk that poor and marginalized children will be left even further behind.

The shock brought about by the pandemic and other disasters have highlighted challenges that call for a rethink of learning and education, its spaces and processes such as engagement of parents and communities, connectivity and internet coverage, children and young people in the most disadvantaged households, safeguarding concerns for out-of-school children and adolescents, as well as increased workload and stress for teachers and school leaders.

Equity is the critical metric of values and reforms at virtually all levels of society and the economy. It calls for inclusion and resilience, especially for the disadvantaged with fewer opportunities and prospects for growth, employability and decent work. It also calls for charting an accelerated or new path, albeit nonlinear, towards quality learning and education, while reinforcing education as an equaliser of opportunities, a key contributor to socio-economic growth and a cornerstone of democracy, peace and social cohesion.

The 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM) held in February 2018 in Nadi, Fiji, brought together Commonwealth Education Ministers and senior government officials, stakeholders, educators and teachers and development partners under the theme of 'Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?'

Ministers in Fiji reaffirmed that education was a fundamental human right and indispensable to the achievement of sustainable development. Ministers committed to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and to promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

It is proposed to hold a Commonwealth Meeting of Ministers of Education, in hybrid format from 27 to 28 April 2022, prior to the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting to be held from 10-11 May 2022. The purpose being to strengthen the relevance of the contributions on education made by accredited organisations before the Communique of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is developed or revised.

The high-level Meeting will bring together ministers of Education from the 54 member countries as well as partners and stakeholders, to address educational priority issues towards the 2030 Agenda. The proposed sessions or roundtables will focus on critical areas for recovery post-Covid-19 and rethinking education in the Commonwealth: financing of education; inclusive digital transformation; effective governance; transition from school to

work. Ministers and stakeholders will discuss concrete and decisive actions; the roundtables/sessions will present good/promising examples, including highlights from the 2022 Commonwealth Education Awards for Good Practice, as well as what remains to be done.

The Meeting will be structured around 4-5 key subthemes and accompanying guiding questions. The proposed subthemes could include:

- i. Lessons learned from COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies
- ii. Rethinking education for decent work and employability
- iii. Redefining learning spaces: multiple pathways and flexible approaches
- iv. Financing of education including innovative financing
- v. Education for sustainability and a peaceful, cohesive Commonwealth

These will address key issues that countries need to tackle for learning and skills development such as: rethinking education systems; addressing transitions and vulnerabilities; harnessing technology to enhance education quality and learning; technical vocational education and training for decent life and work; and addressing the persistent barriers for access and inclusivity in education.

Moving towards sustainable, inclusive and resilient education systems and pathways to learning that prepare children and young people to face multiple challenges and uncover opportunities, requires effective policies and high-level commitment.

The Meeting will further build on existing commitments from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2018 to leave no one behind, with an emphasis on equitable and inclusive education, and therefore to support marginalised groups, especially disadvantaged girls, children with disabilities, and those who have dropped out of school to progress through secondary education and training through appropriate policies, advocacy and strategic partnerships.

Outcomes on policy proposals from this meeting are also expected to inform discussions at the upcoming CHOGM expected to take place in June 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda.

Objectives of the Meeting

The proposed hybrid meeting will provide Commonwealth Education Ministers the opportunity to:

- Review and assess progress towards SDG 4 at regional and national levels; identify persistent bottlenecks preventing the achievement of the goal, and implications for the future of the education sector, including for learners and the workforce. It will include, in light of COVID-19, assessing the shocks of school closures and economic recession on learning recovery and education outcomes. As well as sharing and exchanging good practice strategies, solutions and models for a sustainable recovery and to ensure preparedness of the education sector against climate related shocks, future pandemics and disasters.
- Reflect on education system resilience through investing in education work force; as well as exploring new financial mechanisms and other strategies.
- Consider approaches and strategies for education to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity in line with the Commonwealth Charter.
- Identify priorities and formulate recommendations ahead of the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June 2022.

- Acknowledge the importance for urgent and accelerated Commonwealth-wide action for post-COVID education systems recovery and achievement of SDG4.

Expected Outcomes

- Ministers support strategies to accelerate inclusion and equitable access to education for growth and employability.
- Ministers consider domestic financing of education as the most sustainable form of funding, with a view to maintain or reach spending on education above 20% of overall national expenditure.
- Ministers adopt a Commonwealth framework or charter on citizenship education.
- Deliberations and recommendations inform the Secretariat's education plan and that of stakeholders and partners.

Expected Output(s)

The expected output(s) of the meeting could include:

- A ministerial statement with a summary of conclusions and recommendations endorsed by the participants of the Meeting. The ministerial statement will outline policy options and commitments for member states to adopt, implement and share progress on periodically. This also includes key recommendations to Commonwealth Heads of Governments on equitable access to education, strengthening education systems and other pan-Commonwealth education priorities.

Structure and Format

The meeting will be chaired by in-coming Chair of the Education Ministerial Action Group (EMAG), Professor George Magoha, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of Kenya. The meeting will be in a hybrid format and will last for a total of approximately seven (7) hours divided into eight (8) key sessions, including a session on regional reviews and outlooks, ministerial roundtables, and a 'business' session. Commonwealth Ministers of Education will be invited to be physically present on-site in Nairobi, Kenya for the in-person sequence of the meeting; ministers who are unable to travel to Kenya will participate remotely via an online platform or follow proceedings via a webcasting. The Chair will be on-site in Nairobi, Kenya.

The meeting will have a combination of plenary and ministerial breakout roundtables to allow for meaningful engagement and focused thematic exchanges.

There will be pre-arranged regional presentations focused on progress towards SDG 4, key lessons learnt in response to the pandemic and recommendations for Commonwealth-wide actions.

There will also be the opportunity for Ministers to make brief interventions, propose questions, or make recommendations on the substantive proposed themes including:

- Equitable access to learning and education
- Education and the future of work in the Commonwealth
- Redefining learning spaces, innovations, and multiple pathways to learning

- Financing of education
- Education for sustainability and a peaceful, cohesive Commonwealth
- Strategies to promote innovative solutions (including remote learning and digital products) and sharing information among member states.

Ministers will be able to share pre- and post-reading materials including country updates, briefs/statements. Ministers will also be able to ask for the floor in advance of the meeting to make brief interventions.

In advance of the meeting, a draft ministerial statement will be circulated.

Stakeholders' Consultative Meetings

It is proposed that each stakeholders' group (students, teachers, higher education, civil society) be invited to send a maximum of 2 representatives to attend the in-person meeting in Kenya. Should they need to travel they would be required to cover the costs of their travel and full stay in Kenya and will be responsible for securing their visas before travelling.

To allow for an inclusive process, stakeholders' groups are invited to hold a series of consultative meetings with their respective groups in view of providing a maximum of two recommendations for consideration for a Chair Statement. Recommendations should be per stakeholder group (not per organisation). Alternatively, stakeholders' groups may opt to hold multi-stakeholders' consultations and contribute recommendations that are multi-stakeholder shaped. Stakeholders will be invited to make a brief 5-minute report with any additional recommendations they may have during a dedicated business session of the 21CCEM. They may also submit a written paper (1-2 pages) to be included in the Conference documentation.

Administrative arrangements

A note on administrative arrangements will be circulated and will outline the technical and logistical arrangements for joining and participating in the meeting.