

Nairobi conference of Commonwealth education ministers kicks off with renewed calls for rebuilding resilient education systems

The 21st Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers is now underway in Nairobi, Kenya. Delegates are set to address educational priority issues towards the 2030 Agenda, at a time when the world is recovering from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

27 April 2022, Nairobi - The 21st edition of the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) opened today in Nairobi, Kenya, with a call from ministers for urgent strategic actions, innovative solutions, and renewed commitments to rebuilding better, resilient, and inclusive education systems that can withstand future crises.

Hosted by the Government of Kenya in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and Kenya's Ministry of Education, the two-day conference will focus on the theme, **'Rethinking Education for Innovation, Growth and Sustainability post-Covid-19'** and will offer ministers, policymakers, civil society, and development partners the opportunity to engage with one another, share knowledge and good practice, and explore trends and innovative approaches that can be adapted by member countries to develop sustainable and resilient education systems.

The conference kicked off with a minute's silence in honour of the late Kenyan President, H.E. Mwai Kibaki, who was a champion of education reform in Kenya during his tenure and will be remembered most notably for introducing free primary school education - a policy that has benefitted millions of children across Kenya.

Opening the forum, the outgoing Chairman, the Fijian Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Hon. Premila Kuma, said, "It has been a great honour to chair the Education Ministers Action Group over the last four years and to work with member states and the Secretariat to deliver on the policy recommendations made in that meeting (20CCEM) despite COVID-19", before officially handing over the Chairmanship to Kenya.

Incoming Chair, Hon. Prof. George Magoha, Kenya's Minister of Education, said:

"The shock brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and other disasters have highlighted challenges that call for a rethink of learning and education, learning spaces and processes such as engagement of parents and communities, access to quality learning of children and young people in from the most disadvantaged households, remote learning with connectivity and internet coverage, safeguarding concerns, especially for out-of-school children and adolescents, as well as increased workload and stress for teachers and school leaders.

In line with this year's theme...we will acknowledge the importance of urgent and accelerated Commonwealth-wide action for post-COVID education systems recovery and achievement of SDG4."

In her welcoming address, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC, thanked the people and Government of Kenya for their efforts in hosting the conference. She also paid tribute to the late President Mwai Kibaki who "made a dramatic

difference to the lives of millions of children in Kenya by introducing free primary education and chartering public universities in the country on an unprecedented scale.”

With regards to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education, she said:

“We gather here...at a time of great change and challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the global learning crisis, with many learners losing access to their classrooms. Recovery from the pandemic and transition back to regular schooling is slow, and there is a need to catch up.”

To drive progress, the Secretary-General recommended “transforming education systems into resilient and inclusive spaces - able to absorb shocks and crises and cater to the needs of everyone.”

“Technology enabled education to continue during COVID-19 lockdowns in many places - but not for everyone: globally, at least 30% went without learning continuity. Post-COVID, we must make sure that the poorest 30% are included in the group of primary beneficiaries,” she concluded.

She also highlighted five priority areas on which member countries should focus to accelerate efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A keynote address by the President of Kenya, H.E. Uhuru Kenyatta, was delivered by Dr Fred Matiang’i, the Minister of Interior and Coordination of National Government, who also noted that:

“We are at a moment in history when we have a unique opportunity to build better and more resilient education systems and to accelerate learning for all. It is a moment to make our education systems more responsive to the changing nature of work and to transform education into a more effective tool for socio-economic change.

This is a task that puts education ministers on the cusp of history. I challenge you to seize the moment and emulate other sectors.

We are looking to you, our education ministers, to lead the sector into a new post-covid re-imagined education frontier.”

Delegates also heard a powerful poem from school children under the name “Rich Brains”, who brought their own message to education ministers and stakeholders about the future of education policy.

Over 200 delegates from 38 Commonwealth countries are attending the conference, which runs until 28 April 2022 covering a range of key issues relating to the present state of education systems within the Commonwealth as well as 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, and addressing the persistent barriers for access and inclusivity in education.

For the first time, the Conference was held in a hybrid format with some ministers and delegates attending the in-person event in Nairobi, while the rest joined virtually. The meeting marked the first time the Commonwealth education family came together in Nairobi since 1987 when it hosted the 10th Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers on the theme of ‘Vocational orientation of education’.

At the conclusion of the conference, a ministerial statement will be issued with policy proposals which will inform discussions at the upcoming [Commonwealth Head of Government Meeting \(CHOGM\)](#), scheduled to take place in June 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda.

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About The Commonwealth Secretariat:

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About the Conference:

Held every three years, the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) is the second-largest meeting organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat, after the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Conference is open to Ministers of Education of all 54 Member States, as well as educators and teachers, development partners, civil society, and policymakers. The 21st CCEM will be held in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 - 28 April 2022 under the theme, '*Rethinking Education for Innovation, Growth and Sustainability post-Covid-19*'.

For further information about the Conference visit <https://21ccemkenya.go.ke/>