

Commonwealth Collaborative Partnerships

To advance the 15CCEM Plan of Action and Edinburgh Communique

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Welcome to our newsletter!

In this, our second newsletter, we draw attention to our continuing commitment to the implementation of the Edinburgh Action Plan. Since the 15CCEM last year, staff from the Education Section have organised and attended a number of conferences, seminars and meetings in all regions of the Commonwealth. These have addressed our key Action Areas.

Quality was the theme of the Conference on Early Childhood Education (ECE) held in Jamaica in April. The value of ECE was noted especially on a child's development, formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviour. This Conference was also the launch of a series of meetings on aspects of 'best practice', the second being in Mombassa, Kenya on Quality Universal Primary Education. These discussions will feed into Commonwealth Awards on 'best practice' to be presented at 16CCEM in 2006.

Gender in Education has a high profile in all our work, addressing not only girls' access and inclusion in schools, but also boys' retention. In the Caribbean, Malaysia and

elsewhere, boys are voluntarily exiting from schools and from the opportunities of further and higher education. We wonder where 'best practices' reside in this Action Area?

Various meetings have addressed the possibilities of 'scaling up' good practice: the Newsletter refers to a policy consultation with many collaborative partners held in Kenya in June, to a report from Uganda on HIV/AIDS and to the relevance of Rights-based WHO guidelines on SEN. All are evidence of the important work of our own and collaborative partners' activities.

Finally, our colleagues from COL note that a new 'knowledge finder' is available and give information on how to access this and other learner-oriented 'objects'.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of the Newsletter. Through these pages we hope to exchange ideas and develop knowledge of good practice in our six Action Areas.

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Scaling Up Good Practices in Girls' Education in Africa

By Dr Henry Kaluba, DD&Head, Education, Commonwealth Secretariat

Global players in international education-World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, Commonwealth Secretariat, FAWE, AfDB and selected African education ministers and education NGOs met in Nairobi, Kenya 23-25 June to look at best practices in girls education and strategies for scaling up. The meeting received several case studies from the field, these included ComSec's commissioned case studies conducted by FAWE in Africa and the Institute of Education, University of London. One case study looked at the complex interrelationship between member countries' political, economic, and social factors such as good democratic governance and strong activism for gender equality all help to create enabling conditions for sustainable access and retention in education for girls. The Institute's case study has therefore developed

a Score Card to assess the standing of some of the Commonwealth countries in girls' access to education.

Other examples of good practice highlighted at the policy consultation meeting were: FAWE's Centres of Excellence Schools; Performance and Achievement of Girls in Tanzania; Promoting Girls' Education in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Swaziland; Re-Entry Policy of Adolescent Mothers into school; Providing Girls Education in Conflict Situation, Providing Girls' Education in Nomadic Communities. The meeting paid attention also to mainstreaming and scaling up good practice in contexts of sector-wide reform programmes. The key issues looked at here included: policy changes, strategy design, implementation plan, local budget allocation, external

sector, funding, capacity building, management, monitoring and evaluation.

The Nairobi meeting provided an opportunity for the UN Girls' Education Advisory Committee (UNGEI) to discuss among other issues: setting up UNGEI Africa Regional Advisory Committee; Regional collaboration and networking with UNGEI partners, and resource mobilisation. The Commonwealth Secretariat is a member of UNGEI and other organisations promoting girls' education globally.

As a follow up to the Africa meeting, the Commonwealth Secretariat is scheduled to hold its own Asia meeting on Best Practices in Girls' education in India 20-23 September 2004.

The 15CCEM Action Plan drew attention to the 'gender MDG', to eliminate gender disparities in education'. In many Caribbean countries, it is boys' underachievement that concerns Ministries of Education. It is notable that boys begin to self exclude from around the age of 12 years so that by university entrance, 70-80% of entrants are female.

Ministries of Education in the Caribbean are introducing various strategies to try to retain boys in schooling.

In Barbados, for example, computers are being used in teaching and learning situations, this in the hope that boys will find computer graphics and the internet of interest and will maintain their contacts with school. In Jamaica, the Jamaica Teachers' Union, has voiced concern at the loss of boys from secondary school classrooms. They, like the Ministries of Education in the Caribbean, would like to hear of successful strategies for maintaining boys in schools. Do you have any answers?



School children enjoying lunchtime in Trinidad's Botanic Gardens



Staff from the Ministry of Education, Barbados, from left: Permanent Secretary, Mrs Athlene Haynes, Mrs Idahay Denny, Mr Glenroy Cumberbatch and Mrs Wendy Griffith-Watson

HIV/AIDS and Education in Uganda

HIV/AIDS in Uganda was first identified in mid-1980s. Through emaciation and loss of weight, local people came to call this strange ailment ‘Slim’. Some rural communities by then associated it with magic and bewitchment. This was like taking a leap on the saddle of superstition. It was not until it started wiping out entire families that medical efforts were made to carry out research and establish the cause of ‘Slim’.

With the intervention of World Health Organisation and UNAIDS in the latter half of the 1980s, leadership in Uganda chose to go open and to admit that there was a potential health problem in the country. President Yoweri Museveni took up the challenge and led the campaign against HIV/AIDS.

In 1988, the government, through the Ministry of Health, established the AIDS Control Programme. With increased reporting and screening of HIV/AIDS sufferers, the Ministry of Health soon realised that HIV/AIDS was posing a phenomenal challenge beyond its capacity to manage alone. Government declared that HIV/AIDS was a gigantic health problem, was swiftly spreading, and was a real threat not only to development goals but to the very life of Ugandans.

Multi-sectoral Approach

The human loss which HIV/AIDS was exerting on the population, called for the formation of the Uganda Aids Commission. The Commission adopted a multi-sectoral approach to the management of the pandemic. This ensured that all resources, human, financial, scientific, political and religious were marshalled into a single national campaign strategy.

Education Sector Responses to HIV/AIDS

Whilst struggling to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and to cope with the debilitating effect the pandemic has had on the population, the government of Uganda established the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme. The programme was first introduced in 1997 and later enmeshed with the

government’s commitment to the Millennium Development Goal – to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

The establishment of UPE programme was met with overwhelming enthusiasm in Uganda. A total of 2.5 million pupils enrolled for school in the initial year and currently 7.2 million pupils are at school under the UPE programme.

However, there are many challenges, not least the fact the teacher-pupil ratio is very high, with average class sizes of 92.1. Further, classroom buildings and text books are not sufficient for the rising number of pupils.

But the greatest challenge must be the impact of HIV/AIDS on the Education Programme. As in all cases, it affects teachers, parents and most crucially, pupils, especially when they are orphaned.

Strategic Interventions

In all these aspects, the major challenge in HIV/AIDS initiative is survival. The ‘stay alive’ campaign in Ugandan schools has had tremendous impact among the youth. They are encouraged to abstain from pre-marital sex and urged to concentrate on studies in order to survive.

The Presidential Initiative on AIDS and Strategy for Communication to the Youth (PIASCY) Project has been launched. In this initiative, as a window of hope, the President requested the Ministry of Education take the lead in prevention and

spread of HIV/AIDS among school children. Emphasis is placed upon increasing stakeholders’ participation in activities that increase awareness, enhance information gathering and assist dissemination.

In deed, dissemination of guidance and counselling information to schools through radio shows, including live radio broadcasts, has had tremendous results. Newspaper columns, such as ‘Straight Talk’, where sex issues for the youth are discussed by youth in an open but subtle manner, have delivered stunning impacts on the behaviour of the youth particularly on the strategy of abstinence.

Policy Intervention

A policy has been formulated on education for disadvantaged children, and guidelines on delivery of guidance and counselling services has been sent to schools. These guidelines contain a module on HIV/AIDS education and a counselling manual to be used by senior teachers.

Conclusion

The Government of Uganda recognises the important social demand for education both as a means to development and poverty eradication. However, although there are huge constraints on resources it remains clear that through partnerships like those with the Commonwealth, achievements are possible.

We continue to believe that good practices approach, such as tolerance, openness, no stigmatisation, communication and counselling, will provide the rock base for the success of our programme.

Fred Tushabe

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CCEM Action Plan – Collaborative Partners

The 15CCEM was a landmark Conference for Commonwealth Education. It enabled Ministers to meet with representatives of civil society organisations, attending the Parallel Symposium, and with youth delegates to the Youth Summit. In their final Communique, Ministers asked the Commonwealth Secretariat and its partner organisations to monitor and report on the implementation of the Edinburgh Action Plan.

The Action Plan addresses a number of key concerns for education in the Commonwealth, notably Achieving Universal Primary Education, Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education, Improving Quality in

Primary and Secondary Education, Promoting Multi-Delivery Mechanisms for Open and Distance Education, Re-establishing Education Systems after Social Upheaval, Mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on Education Systems.



Representatives of qualifications authorities attending the conference in New Zealand.

In addition to these six Action Areas, Ministers agreed to develop a shared understanding of the elements which constitute an excellent education system and requested that, in a spirit of co-operation, the more developed countries should facilitate greater opportunities for higher education and skills training for Commonwealth citizens.

One shared initiative has been interest in an 'Association of Commonwealth Qualifications Authorities'. Since a ground-breaking conference which was held last year in New Zealand, representatives from a number of Commonwealth countries – including Australia, New Zealand, Malawi, Fiji, Scotland, Botswana, South Africa – are poised to formalise an 'Association'. This would build upon the Commonwealth niche in qualifications and would work alongside other collaborative frameworks, be they regional or international.

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Early Childhood Education

When Ministers agreed that 'Achieving Universal Primary Education' should be carried forward as one of the six Action Areas for the Commonwealth Secretariat Work Plan 2003-2006, there was awareness that Quality Early Childhood Education (QECE) is the key to success.

The Secretariat was pleased, therefore, to work on a QECE Conference in April 2004, with a valued Collaborative Partner, the Jamaica Teachers' Association, a wing of the Caribbean Union of Teachers and the Commonwealth Teachers' Grouping.

The keynote speaker, Dr Peter Laugharn, Executive Director of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, drew attention to the EFA Goal, 'expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged

children.' Participants were reminded that whilst governments remain committed to early childhood programmes, teachers are central in the implementation of programmes. Research has shown the value and impact of early stimulation programmes on the child's development, the formation of intelligence, personality and social behaviour.

This was the launch pad for a series of conferences which will take place in Africa, the Pacific, Asia and the UK on relevant aspects of 'best practices' in achieving Quality UPE (QUPE). Indeed, the second conference on QUPE took place shortly after this, and was held in Mombassa, Kenya in June.

Dr Roli Degazon-Johnson
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Special Needs Education by Dr Amina Osman

Disability and Special Needs¹

It is too often wrongly perceived that mental disability is something one is born with. Rather, mental disability can affect anyone at any time.

Children and parents who have known the trauma of civil conflicts or natural disasters may become mentally disabled. So too may the increasing number of AIDS orphans, the roaming street children and youths, these forming the sad category of 'child adults'.

Most children with disabilities are out of school. It is difficult to assess the numbers but the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 1 in 10 children in developing countries have special needs in education – at least 60m school aged children. UNESCO estimates that only 3% of those with disabilities are literate and that the literacy rate for disabled girls and women is closer to 1%.

Access, Equality and Inclusion

Disability is a Human Rights issue, yet in developed countries, whilst well over 90% of children and adults with intellectual disabilities will receive special assistance, only 20% in developing countries will receive such care.

Very few children who have disabilities will receive any form of basic education, let alone special education. The most vulnerable and marginalised of all being the children in rural areas. Frequently, these difficulties are compounded by mental barriers such as prejudice and superstitious beliefs. Consequently, children and adults with intellectual

disabilities may not be given the same opportunities to join in the life of the community and of learning to be a productive member of families.

How then can a better life for people with intellectual disabilities be created? How can we ensure that the rights proclaimed in international norms and legislation are translated into concrete actions?

International Working Group on Disability and Development (IWG-DD) and Inclusion International (II)

Through membership of the IWG-DD, the Secretariat has been able to make a number of contributions to meeting the needs for inclusive education of persons with disabilities. The IWG-DD has consistently advocated policies of inclusion through its literature and through meetings which have been held at the UN, UNESCO, World Bank and other venues.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has hosted meetings of the IWG-DD, attended by representatives of a wide range of development agencies. In November 2004, there will be a Joint Roundtable which will report on and evaluate progress accomplished to identify strategies for empowering parents, officials and civil society.

Empowerment

Empowerment entails awareness, understanding and implementation of a whole series of Declarations and International conventions. These provide frameworks for action. They include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of

Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993) and Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1993). The latter states that 'Disabled children have the right to special care, education and training that will help them to enjoy a full and decent life with the greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible.'

A Human Rights-based Approach to Disability

A Human Rights based-approach entails a greater focus on advocacy to bring about changes in national and sub-national policies. Governments have major responsibilities to ensure that human rights are fully respected, facilitated, protected and fulfilled.

The two-pronged approach of II – informed advocacy at governmental and international levels achieved through examples coming from grassroots organisations – ensures that communities and individuals are involved in the process of respecting the rights of all persons including those with disabilities. Their needs are identified as well as the role of government and others in the provision of education, training and health care.

In this respect, local partners of II have covered substantial groundwork in the Migori District (Lower Suna, Kenya), which may well turn out to be a role model in promoting the disability issue. It could be adapted and replicated in other districts and states for multiple barriers faced by people with disabilities in accessing the labour market, social services and education.

¹ Defined by DFID as "a permanent or temporary loss of function that leads to social or economic disadvantages and limits opportunities to take part in the community on an equal footing with others".

There is a clear need to chalk out strategies to influence and convince governments and equip leaders with the skills and knowledge needed to directly support actions to realise the rights of disabled children and adults. The right to equal opportunity, the right to play an active role in society,

has been agreed upon by Commonwealth Governments and through the UN. The Dakar Framework for Action (Dakar, Senegal 2000) and the Jomtien Declaration (1995) on Education For All stress these rights. Indeed, the UN provides major tools and instruments to

monitor the compliance of states when it comes to rights and disabilities. It is our intention to work with our Commonwealth and international partners to ensure that these frameworks and instruments are adhered to, grounded and developed.

Knowledge Resources for Education

Ministers and partners may be interested to hear of a few of the rich resources that are quality assessed and available on the Internet. The Commonwealth of Learning hosts a services called the “knowledge finder” which keeps track of about one million documents from quality assessed sources. All documents included in the collection are free to access and may be accessed from the Commonwealth Secretariat’s website at www.thecommonwealth.org/edknowledge

Education institutions in many parts of the world have been moving toward the implementation of “learning object repositories” – the name used for databases that contain learning content. Educators may download thousands of “objects” that may be used in lessons. Learning objects range from a single item such as a photograph, to a lesson or course. Each learning object carries a range of “meta data”, or information about the learning object, that helps educators find the items they need. A network of these repositories is beginning to emerge around the world such as eduSource (Canada), MERLOT (USA), EdNA (Australia), NIME (Japan) ARIADNE (Europe). With the Canadian repository software being made available as free open source software, the way has been opened for institutions and countries to join in a global network to share content with other countries. Most countries do not only want to be consumers but wish to also contribute knowledge and skills from their own country to the rest of the world. Examples of learning object repositories are available at www.edusource.org.

When an institution or Government establishes a repository, it can choose which other repositories it would like its users to be able to search. The free open source software is available at:
http://edusource.licef.telug.quebec.ca/ese/en/install_erib.htm

COL: elearning skills

The Commonwealth of Learning recently hosted a workshop to enhance eLearning skills in Nairobi, Kenya. Policy makers and practitioners from eleven countries participated. During the workshop, policy-makers created a framework for drafting an eLearning policy in their organisations, considered decision support tools for selecting learning management and other systems and discussed change management issues. Practitioner focussed on developing skills in creating learning objects and facilitating learners in an online environment. Enquiries: Paul West, Education Specialist in Knowledge Management (pwest@col.org/www.col.org).

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