

Commonwealth Collaborative Partnerships

To advance the 15CCEM Plan of Action and Edinburgh Communique

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Welcome to our newsletter!



School girls in Sierra Leone

Happy New Year to all our readers! 2006 is already well underway, and the work across the Commonwealth has already got into gear following a very busy last few months in 2005. Since our last issue of Collaborative Partnerships, the final 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM) Mid-Term Review was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, for the Africa/Europe Regions. The meeting was well-attended by Education Ministers and participants from some of our development partners. This issue provides a report on the main outcomes of the meeting.

Sierra Leone provided an excellent opportunity to look more closely at the difficulties of delivering education in a post-conflict setting. Drawn from the country's experience, Collaborative Partnerships has a special feature on the dynamics of challenge and opportunity that can arise when attempting to reconstruct an education system in such circumstances. The Review also provided an excellent opportunity to assess challenges towards achieving the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals within the African continent. A thought-provoking article by the Secretariat's Advisor in Education and Gender takes a look beyond the issue of just gender parity alone to the much broader one of monitoring overall gender equality in education.

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) were also in Sierra Leone to present on their work within the region in Open and Distance Learning. With over 5 million teachers needed in Africa, the role of ODL is becoming increasingly important if the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved.

The role of teachers is a strong feature in this issue. An update has been provided on the gains in the advancement of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol at major international forums in 2005. This is accompanied by further details of research currently being conducted into teacher recruitment and qualifications by the Commonwealth Secretariat and its partners, and other articles on teacher training and professional development.

With two more Commonwealth countries endorsed for the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative in 2005, Collaborative Partnerships has taken the opportunity to look more closely at the FTI: what it is, how it works, and what the Commonwealth stake is within the programme. Additionally, with the inauguration of the Commonwealth/UNESCO Professorial Chair in AIDS Education at the University of the West Indies, an excellent introduction by Professor David Plummer on the current landscape of HIV prevention helps to outline some of the work that needs to be done for the future.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue of Collaborative Partnerships. Contributions from across our readership for future issues are always welcome. Please contact:

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Next Stop: 16CEM

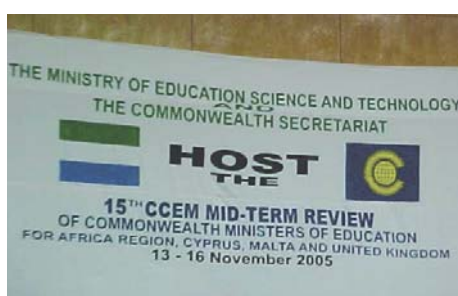
Final Mid-Term Review in Sierra Leone Closes a Busy Year and Heralds the Start of Another

The final months of 2005 saw the end of a busy year as the third and final 15th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers Mid-Term Review was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, for the Africa/Europe Region. The Asia/Pacific and Caribbean/Canada Reviews had already been held earlier in the year. Ministers from the region gathered between the 13th – 16th November to discuss progress on the six Education Action Areas agreed in 2003 at the 15th Conference of Commonwealth Ministers in Edinburgh.

Officially opened by President Alhaji Dr Ahmad Tejan Kabbah of Sierra Leone, the meeting was attended by 13 African Ministers, the United Kingdom, a guest Minister from Tonga, and the Deputy Secretary General of the Commonwealth Mr Winston Cox. Also in attendance throughout the meeting were Ann Keeling, Director of the Social Transformation Programmes Division at the Commonwealth Secretariat, and Sir John Daniel, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

Reporting on progress since 15CEM, the status of the six Action Areas showed gains within the Africa region, although this was tempered by the magnitude of what still has to be done in order to achieve the education MDGs by 2015. In the area of Universal Primary Education, Ministers reported significant percentage increases in net enrolment rates, but stressed continuing problems in access and retention, particularly amongst the poorest and most marginalised sectors of the population. These reports were particularly highlighted in view of the region’s record on access and retention for girls at both primary and secondary levels. While a few countries have managed to increase gender parity significantly, girls still comprise the overwhelming percentage of out of school children in the region due to social and cultural barriers and resultant attrition as they progress through the school system.

Sir John Daniel of COL presented on the work being done in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in Africa, emphasising in turn the role that ODL has to play in facilitating each of the other five Action Areas. A crucial focus area highlighted by



Sir John was teacher training. With Africa desperately in need of some five million teachers in order to have a hope of achieving its educational aims, facilitating more distance education is considered a priority.

Also present at the meeting were representatives from the World Bank, UNICEF, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, the Commonwealth Business Council, the Commonwealth Consortium for Education, and the Commonwealth Teachers Grouping. Observers included Actionaid and VSO.

Mercy Tembon of the World Bank presented on the growth of the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative, and reported to the meeting that Lesotho had recently had their Education Sector Plan approved, enabling them to join the initiative. Cream Wright of UNICEF also presented at the meeting and urged Ministers to seriously consider a plan of action for the future that would include “bold initiatives” towards achieving EFA and the MDGs, such as the abolition of school fees.

A feature throughout the meeting was the host nation’s own educational progress following eleven years of civil conflict. The Minister of Education for Sierra Leone, Hon. Alpha T. Wurie,

presented on the education reconstruction and recovery programmes that have been underway since the end of the civil conflict. Delegates were given the opportunity to visit schools within Freetown at the end of the two and a half day meeting, and to see for themselves what has been achieved. They were also able to talk to students and teachers on their experiences and future hopes.

This final regional Mid-term review meeting in Sierra Leone not only saw the end of a busy year evaluating progress on the 15CEM Action Points, but also more broadly the culmination of a year focused globally on African Development. Dedicated work will be needed to ensure that the aims of 2005 as the “Year of Africa” continue to be carried through into 2006 and beyond.

Commonwealth-wide it is perhaps therefore apt that the Sierra Leone Mid-term also heralds the acceleration of preparations for the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers which will take place in Cape Town, South Africa from 11th-14th December this year. Planning is already underway for what promises to be the biggest CCEM ever, and possibly the largest event within the Commonwealth Secretariat calendar for 2006. In addition to the Ministerial Conference, 16CEM will feature a Teachers Forum for the first time, alongside parallel events for youth, civil society and the private sector.



Dr. Alpha T. Wurie, the Minister for Education Sierra Leone



Reconstruction Challenges: Re-Building Education in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone

By Fatimah Kelleher

The Sixth Plenary on Education in Difficult Circumstance at the 15CCEM Regional Mid-Term Review for Africa/Europe was presented by Dr. Alpha T. Wurie, Minister of Education, on providing education in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone. His talk showed that the country provides a strong case study of the severe challenges and unique opportunities that can arise when rebuilding an educational system in extreme circumstances.

The need for education in both conflict and post-conflict circumstances is generally agreed upon, although the integration of education as a comprehensive part of emergency and relief programmes still has some way to go. Education is a fundamental right that all children are entitled to, but it can also play an instrumental role in conflict scenarios by providing stability, normalcy and productivity in otherwise extreme times. Schools can be a place to address the psychosocial needs of communities and children affected by war, and can also be a secure arena to spread messages regarding landmines, HIV/AIDS, protection from personal abuse, and peace and conflict resolution. At the very core, education is essential to the eventual economic and social recovery of any war-torn country.

Interestingly, Minister Wurie's presentation started by outlining how – in the case of Sierra Leone – the imbalance of education distribution was partly responsible for some of the grievances that eventually led to the outbreak of conflict. Although being widely acclaimed as the “Athens of West Africa” in acknowledgment of its exemplary tertiary institutions, and despite having opened the very first secondary school in 1845, it took over a hundred years, until 1953, before a secondary school was built that allowed access to the less privileged. Education in Sierra

Leone had been a preserve for the sons and nominees of Chiefs, and had also been overly concentrated in the more developed Western region, neglecting the hinterlands. By independence in 1961, the literacy rate stood at just 8%. An inadequate and unfair school system that results in unemployment leads to frustration and socio-cultural disruption that can lead to disaffection.

During conflict, whatever educational infrastructure that does exist is often among the worst affected. School buildings and compounds are common targets in conflict zones, with military forces either destroying them or utilising them as bases. Resources are diverted away from the education sector to war budgets, and the displacement of qualified teachers – often to neighbouring countries – creates a lack in the skills base that hinders educational systems for years. In Sierra Leone 40% of all rural primary schools were destroyed during the 11 years of war. Neighbouring countries hosted hundreds of Sierra Leoneans fleeing the conflict, many of whom were among the most qualified teaching staff. With the ushering in of a post-conflict era, an education system must cater for a school-going populace that has been out of school for months, sometimes years. Resulting gross enrolment ratios (GER) well over 100% will have to be catered for by poorly

trained, fast-streamed teachers, while resources that are already stretched to cover other recovering sectors must nonetheless be sourced to provide for the recurrent costs of a sustainable educational system.

The prevalence of child soldiery in many civil conflicts today also presents a major challenge for a recovering educational system. On the one hand the school environment can act as a great forum for reconciliation – Dr. Wurie's presentation highlighted the role sports had played in school as a unifier of child soldiers who had previously fought on opposing sides. But the considerations run deeper on several levels: (i) Providing an education system that will adequately rehabilitate them into society and cater effectively to their needs as traumatised aggressor/victims; (ii) Preparing adequately for the enormous over-subscription at all levels of basic education that will ensue. Another major concern – and unfortunately one that is not always highlighted adequately – is catering to the special needs of victims of rape and other sexual abuses, and the problems that arise when trying to re-integrate these victims within the school community alongside other children/youths who were the perpetrators.

Child soldiers and youths involved in the conflict epitomise in many respects the disaffection that exists within a society without options for the poor and other marginalised groups. Reconciliation is a sensitive procedure, and often one that requires assurances of future opportunities that will prevent the re-surfacing of grievances. Truth, forgiveness and reconciliation can certainly be put-forward as cure-alls when the peace has been won, and yet the real peace often depends on the most basic of bread and butter issues. In this respect, education, employment and tackling poverty must go hand in hand.

It is within this volatile and devastated environment that reconstructing an education system must take place. The challenges are myriad, but there is also an argument that suggests post-conflict contexts can provide an opportunity to address the old inequalities in the previous structure and effectively start afresh. Sierra Leone has partly provided those opportunities to the young through

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Monitoring Gender Equality in Education

By Jyotsna Jha

The Commonwealth Secretariat's second Action Area, which is also an MDG, focuses on achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education. In the past it has been quite common to use the notions of gender parity and equality interchangeably in the context of education. However, the two are now being increasingly seen as linked but having different connotations.

The Education for All (EFA) initiatives recognized gender equality as separate from gender disparity by making a clear distinction between the two in its Dakar declarations in 2001 while formulating the goal V:

Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement of good quality

(Dakar Declarations; Education for All, 2001)

The national and international commitments made by countries to the above goal make it important to have a framework for monitoring the progress towards that direction. However, it is not easy to monitor progress towards gender equality as, unlike parity, it is essentially a qualitative concept. It is also important to realise that a focus on gender equality does not mean ignoring the issue of parity. Attaining gender parity in participation rates for various stages of education remains crucial but that alone is not enough to attain gender equality in education. Gender equality in education can be defined in several ways. Taking a cue from the capability approach, gender equality in education can be defined as ensuring equality of entitlement, equality of opportunity and equality in the capacity to exercise the entitlements and use opportunities for both girls and boys belonging to diverse social, ethnic, linguistic or economic groups. The notion of equality also refers to relational aspects and is linked to the issue of justice and freedom.

Gender is a social construct, referring to the ways in which societies distinguish men and women and assign them social roles. It is often mistakenly equated with the biological category, women. Gender

is a conceptual category referring to masculine and feminine qualities, behaviour patterns, and roles and responsibilities. Femininity does not exist in isolation from masculinity. The construction and power of the one determines the construction and power of the other. This also leads to various forms of inequality and disparity between men and women impacting on their capacities and lives in a significant manner.

It is in the interest of both men and women to move away from existing unequal relations of gender. Education can be and is often perceived as a process of expanding human capacities to contribute to the making of a just, equal and compassionate society.

However, education is not necessarily always a process of empowerment and transformation. It has equal potential to be a process of socializing learners into existing norms, values and power structures and reinforcing unequal relations. The challenge lies in stopping education being a process for naturalizing existing unequal relations, and making it a process of empowerment.

In this context, it is important to note that gender equality is not viewed in isolation from other forms of inequality that exist in different societies. Also important is to recognize that such a definition of gender equality in education implies moving beyond access and moving beyond only instrumental arguments in favour of girls' education. Education of women is often justified in the interests of supplementary income generation, lower fertility rates and population control, better mothering skills, and improving familial and social cohesion. These are important but most of these interests locate women and girls within family as mere functional units. The role of education in the cultivation of knowledge

and empowerment of self is not given much importance. In such situations, even when the access opportunities improve, education does not necessarily play an empowering role.

Suitable indicators need to be developed for all the above in order to monitor progress. It is possible that equality exists in one case but is not supported in others, and hence the pace of change is slow. The presence or absence of a compulsory basic Education Act that ensures that all children in a particular age-group would receive education is an indicator of entitlement. However, converting the entitlement into real opportunity would require that both boys and girls belonging to all social

Monitoring progress towards gender equality in education therefore requires monitoring whether:

- (i) the education system clearly defines entitlements and rights;
- (ii) adequate and appropriate opportunities have been created to ensure that entitlements and rights can be translated into real opportunities;
- (iii) interventions are designed in a manner that all, especially those who are vulnerable for any reason, are enabled to access the opportunities;
- (iv) education processes are empowering and provide space for reexamining existing norms and relations; and
- (v) the larger environment is enabling enough for both boys and girls, and men and women to apply their choices and transform society into a more equal and compassionate one.

and economic groups have access to functional schools. This might mean special provision for certain groups. For instance, if a particular ethnic group does not consider it safe to send their adolescent girls to co-educational schools, it is critical that single sex girls' schools are provided. The education process could be such that in the long run, the parents stop demanding single sex girls' schools for their daughters, and that would be an indicator of the learning process being empowering and geared towards transformation. The need for specific rules and counselling facilities in schools is necessary in areas where pregnancy is common among adolescent girls. It is obvious that merely having a school does not mean having adequate and suitable schooling opportunities in different situations. The availability of



Graduates in Brunei Darussalam

different kinds of courses and subjects and encouragement to both boys and girls to opt is a big challenge for many education systems.

Therefore, a detailed monitoring framework needs to be developed to monitor progress towards gender equality in education. This frame has to be based on a common understanding of gender

equality and its application to education. The issue of measurement is often raised in the context of qualitative indicators. It is true that measurement is more complex and somewhat subjective in the case of qualitative concepts, but it is also possible to develop qualitative indicators if the definition is clear and the objectives well-defined. A bigger challenge is to accept the notion of gender equality and building a commitment to the fact that education is a process of empowerment and transformation.

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Promoting Open and Distance Learning in Africa

By Rod Tyrer, COL

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) has been responsible for taking forward the sixth Action Area on Open and Distance Learning since 15CCEM in 2006

Africa faces enormous challenges – war, extreme poverty, an epidemic of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and illiteracy. Of all the areas of the world, this continent of more than 620 million people will benefit most from progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

When the African Ministers of Education met in Dar es Salaam in December 2002, they deliberated on the education challenges facing Africa and noted that Open and Distance Learning (ODL) should be considered an important strategy in addressing these challenges.

Learning: What is ODL?

Open learning describes policies and practices that permit entry to learning with as few barriers as possible. Distance education is the delivery of learning or training to people who are separated, mostly by time and space, from those who are teaching and training.

Some of the advantages of ODL include:

- Flexibility – ODL can be integrated with

traditional approaches to education to create flexible learning. It can also operate independently.

- Adaptable – ODL employs a range of media and technologies, including radio, teleconferencing, video, audio and computers.
- Reach – ODL can reach marginalized and under-represented groups, whether their barriers to education are social, political or geographical.
- Consistency – ODL can be uniformly conducted at scale. ODL can widen access to education and raise the quality of education at the same time.

COL's ODL work in Africa

COL has been handling Open and Distance Learning in Africa by addressing each of the other Action Areas. In achieving Universal Primary Education, COL has worked throughout the continent in setting-up open schools and assisted in the development of school nets. The crucial area of teacher training

is acutely felt in Africa, where some 5 million teachers need to be recruited if the UPE MDG is to be achieved.

In the area of eliminating gender disparity in education COL have made some key contributions, such as extensive work with development partners including UNESCO and others, and with FAWE to create a virtual library of gender resources. In the area of improving quality in education, COL has made links between South Asia and Africa and has strengthened learner support systems at the National University of Nigeria. Management has also been targeted in this Action Area with training events for senior staff.

Supporting education in difficult circumstances has also been pursued through the work of nomadic education initiatives, community radio, and lifelong learning for farmers. The Virtual University for Small States has seven participants from Africa: Botswana, The Gambia, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, and Swaziland, along with 17 other non-African countries.

The overall ODL work in Africa has also been strong with Gambia, Ghana, Zambia, Mozambique, and Tanzania all containing ODL provisions, while all 18 Commonwealth countries in the continent have seen some improvement in ICTs.

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Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol Taken Forward at UNESCO, CHOGM and ILO Meetings

By Roli Degazon-Johnson and Fatimah Kelleher

The Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol (CTRP) was taken forward at several international forums towards the end of 2005.

Recent advocacy of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol marks significant steps forward since its adoption in 2004 towards wider dissemination beyond the Commonwealth. Collaborative Partnerships Issue 5 notified readers of the endorsement of the Protocol by Education Ministers at the Organisation of American States in August 2005, while it was elevated to a further international level by a resolution brought to the floor of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris last October. The resolution recalled that the CTRP was “aimed at balancing the rights for teachers to migrate internationally against the need to protect the integrity of national education systems”, and also recommended that “countries work together to assist developing countries, particularly Small

States, in the training and retention of teachers”. The Protocol was also noted in the Communique of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) of November 2005.

At the ILO Southern African Policy Forum on “Teachers for the Future”, held in Tshwane, South Africa between 6-8th December, paragraph 29 of the resulting “Pretoria Declaration on Teachers” called upon Southern African Development Community Forum countries to use “the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol as a development model” in addressing the licensing and recruitment of teachers across borders. The Pretoria Declaration was carried to the African Union Education Ministers conference in January 2006.

Presenting on the developmental process of the Protocol since Caribbean Ministers of Education first raised the issue of teacher loss at the Savannah Accord in 2002, the Commonwealth Secretariat also reminded the gathering that the ILO had put into place international conventions which sought to protect the migrant worker – the group under which recruited teachers would fall.

The three-day Forum’s plenary sessions included strong presentations and discussion on the present and future status of teachers in Africa, and sought to further provide insight into the issues and concerns surrounding teacher retention, recruitment, attrition and migration from Sub-Saharan Africa.

Speaking specifically on South Africa, Professor Mary Metcalf of the University of Witwatersrand addressed the requirements of Quality Education for All and the fact that attitude and motivation of teachers is also an essential element of ensuring quality teaching. She revealed that not only is there not an adequate supply of teachers in South Africa to meet EFA demands, but that between 2003-4, 21,000 state-paid teachers departed from teaching in South Africa. Additionally, 4,000 teachers were lost to HIV/AIDS in South Africa in 2004.

Jacques Guidon of BREDA Dakar, who also heads the ADEA Working Group on Distance Learning in Education, addressed the African post-Dakar EFA situation in terms of teacher training by pointing out that four million primary/basic teachers are needed in the Sub-Saharan Africa by 2015 if an attempt is to be made to meet the EFA goals. With the majority of Sub-Saharan African countries therefore in crisis, he further pointed out that in an African Small State like Lesotho, 67% of teachers are unqualified, while Secondary Net Enrolment stands at a mere 28%.

The Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol has now also been translated into French and Portuguese.

Teachers and HIV/AIDS

The impact of HIV and AIDS across all sectors of society has clearly been devastating in many developing countries. Africa has borne the brunt of this onslaught, carrying nearly two-thirds of the world’s HIV-positive population, although the region contains little more than 10% of the world’s population.

Education Sectors have been acutely affected, perhaps no more clearly seen than in the teacher numbers that have been culled as a result of the epidemic. A 2002 World Bank Report on Education and HIV/AIDS identified teachers as the professional group most at risk. School Administrators are also being lost. Teacher absenteeism has increased significantly as a result of HIV and AIDS, with not only death but illness causing increased periods of absence from class. Teachers will also take time-off to support sick or dying relatives, along with trying to cope with the trauma of the epidemic itself.

Rural areas are most affected by the situation, where teacher numbers are already scant. Many affected teachers may also take the option of closer proximity to the urban areas, where healthcare is more readily available. The loss of skilled professionals within the teaching fraternity as a result of the combined phenomena of outward migration and HIV/AIDS becomes increasingly harder to counteract. Education Ministries are left with the task of having to recruit new teachers, many of whom do not have adequate qualifications to teach. And for the children, the effects of continuously changing teaching staff has a destabilising effect, often an additional one to other HIV/AIDS related issues that they may face among their own family members.

Along with expanding and improving preventative programmes among teachers, many have urged the introduction of free ARVs to teachers and nutritional support as means of addressing the tragedy. However, cost implications as a result of HIV/AIDS on the Education Sector are already great, with budgets having to accommodate increased new teacher training and hiring, and the payment of full salaries for both official and unofficial absences.

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Research on Commonwealth Teachers

The Commonwealth Education Section is conducting research into the organised recruitment of teachers following a request by Commonwealth Education Ministers at the adoption of the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol in September 2004 to monitor their status, numbers, recruitment practices, and to evaluate the application of the Protocol and its impact on developing countries.

In response to this requirement, the Education Section has designed a three-pronged approach to the research,

combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The University of Bradford will be assisting through the development of an interview schedule/questionnaire for teachers from Commonwealth countries who have been recruited overseas. Recruiting countries where the migrant teachers will be interviewed are the United Kingdom, South Africa, Botswana, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States.

Ministries of Education will also be asked to provide data on the status of their teachers at primary and secondary levels with regard to: total required complement; total actual complement; total leaving the profession with reasons; total joining the profession; and numbers recruited from overseas and from within other sectors of the

economy. The Ministries will also be requested to evaluate the application of the Protocol in their countries, including uses to which it has been put and the changes it has brought about.

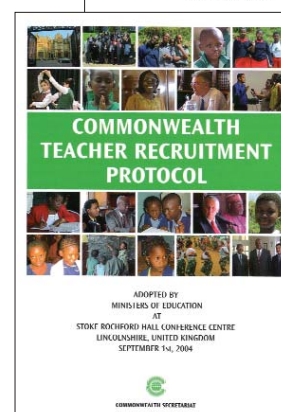
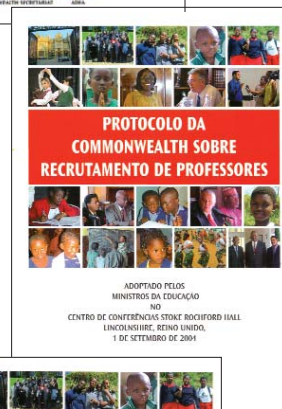
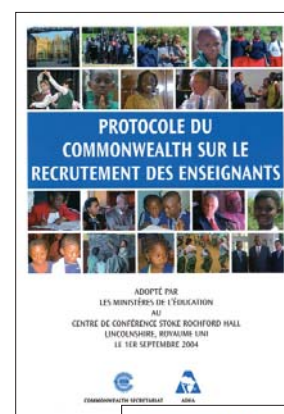
The final aspect of this research will be carried-out by the South African Qualifications Authority, who will be conducting research into teacher qualifications and professional registration across Commonwealth Member States. The study will report on the extent to which teacher qualifications and teacher professional registration are recognized and transferable across Commonwealth Member States. In this regard the development of national and regional qualifications frameworks will receive particular emphasis.

First Teacher Forum at 16CCEM

The 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, due to be held in December 2006 in Cape Town, will see the first Teacher Forum as part of several parallel symposiums that will accompany the main Ministerial Meeting. 15CCEM saw the first ever Youth Parallel Symposium in Edinburgh, 2003, and this year, under the coordination of the Commonwealth Teachers Grouping, a meeting will be held to allow teachers from across the Commonwealth to have their say on the matters being discussed by Ministers. The Forum will close with the acceptance of a joint statement for submission to the Minister's Meeting, and a formalisation of the Commonwealth Teachers Grouping.



Teachers in Sierra Leone



Education for All-Fast Track Initiative: A Commonwealth Interest

By Fatimah Kelleher

The Education For All (EFA) Fast Track Initiative (FTI) is a major global partnership aimed at accelerating progress towards the achievement of Universal Primary Completion (UPC) by 2015.

Officially started in 2002, the EFA-FTI is geared towards better coordinating and harmonising the delivery of aid to low-income countries for education through the endorsement of credible Education Sector Plans (ESP) and an approved Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) or equivalent. Although not a global fund, the EFA-FTI also aims to help increase donor flows in the long-term.

Currently six low-income Commonwealth countries have been endorsed for the FTI as of December 2005: The Gambia, Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Lesotho and Mozambique. Four of these are recipients of the Catalytic Fund, an initial fund allocated by the FTI Secretariat for those endorsed countries that are short on in-country donor presence. Another 22 Commonwealth countries are eligible on the basis of their low-income status.

The underlying premise of the FTI can be interpreted as mutual accountability for effective and efficient use of aid flows between donors and recipient countries towards an accelerated but sustainable attainment of UPC. The need for an ESP is grounded in the promotion of country ownership of programmes. A credible Plan is expected to fulfil certain criteria, including strategies for HIV/AIDS, gender equality, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation. From the donor side, they are expected to fully support the Plan upon endorsement, allowing for increased communication and sharing between programs within a harmonised approach that leads to a more sustainable impact. Both donors and recipient governments are expected to comply with monitoring and evaluation regimes.

However, there has been criticism of the FTI from the start. The eligibility and endorsement criteria were viewed by many within the international development community as too inflexible. Approval of the ESP is also dependent on an Indicative Framework that details formulae for factors such as sub-sector budgetary allocations, teacher salaries, pupil-teacher ratios, and repetition rates.

Disagreements over crucial areas include recurrent budgetary commitments to the Primary sector (often argued by countries as too high and neglecting quality within the Secondary sub-sector), and teacher salaries as a percentage of GDP, which are often difficult to reduce immediately if standards are to be maintained. These stalemates have contributed to the slow expansion of an Initiative that should be accelerating progress of the most needy countries towards attaining UPC. Poor dissemination of the Initiative has also been alleged as having difficulties, not just the endorsement process but also continued uncoordinated practices, post-endorsement.

But the EFA FTI has evolved over the last four years following a series of evaluations. Although there is still some concern over the FTI's ability to increase aid flows to low-income countries as initially envisaged, and wrangles continue over the parameters of the Indicative Framework, the overall management structure of the Initiative and the endorsement process has improved. For the Commonwealth, this has resulted in the endorsement of more countries. But there is still some way to go if those eligible Commonwealth countries outside of the Initiative are to be endorsed. Most importantly, the Commonwealth membership holds within it the majority of out-of-school children who need to be in school by 2015. Of the five countries identified by the FTI Secretariat in 2003 as being in need of extra consideration due to their high population density, four of them – Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nigeria – are Commonwealth.

With Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia consistently being noted by international reports as critical regions in overall achievement of UPC, the Commonwealth stake within the FTI is clear. Commonwealth linkages provide the opportunity to address improved communication about the FTI, within a history of shared systems that can facilitate cooperation towards successful

endorsement of those eligible countries still outside of the FTI.

The recent December 2005 FTI Partnership Meeting in Beijing outlines steps that the FTI Secretariat would be taking in the up-coming year. Recommendations from the Partnership Committee Co-Chairs included a general expansion of endorsed countries and increased participation of the FTI in education meetings at the regional level, while increased support towards knowledge sharing among countries towards FTI expansion was a strong thread throughout the meeting. From a Commonwealth perspective such developments are in keeping with the Secretariat's focus on technical assistance, negotiation, and South-South cooperation, and provides exactly the sort of forum within which these ideals can be realised.

An interesting development in the South-South cooperation dialogue is the role that a country like India could play. Although low-income and FTI eligible, India's own ability to coordinate and harmonise donor funding provides valuable lessons that can be utilised by other Commonwealth countries. Ultimately of course, those Commonwealth countries that have been endorsed so far can be called-upon to share some of their successful practices in entering the FTI among other Commonwealth nations.

The future of the FTI is therefore closely linked to the future of Commonwealth approaches to Education policy towards the attainment of UPE. Expansion of the FTI cannot be allowed to overlook member countries that are in need of more effective delivery of education funding that the Initiative promises. Commonwealth States are also in a position collectively to encourage the kind of collaboration and support to one another that the evolving FTI mechanisms seem willing to adopt. Perhaps more than just an interest, the Commonwealth's right to stake a claim in the FTI is also a responsibility to those members who will be impacted by it.

For further information on the EFA-FTI in the Commonwealth, please contact:

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First annual workshop on capacity building of teacher training institutions in French-speaking Africa

Dakar, Senegal 12 – 16 December 2006

By Virgilio Juvane, Education

Teaching is arguably the strongest school-level determinant of student learning and achievement. After many years of debate on the relative effect of schools and teachers on learning achievement, as compared to other socio-economic variables, it is now widely acknowledged that schools and, within schools, teachers can make a great difference on student achievement.

Consistent with country efforts to achieve quality Universal Primary Education (UPE), 43 participants from 9 African countries took part in the above-named workshop. The workshop was the result of an institutional partnership on professional development of teachers, under the patronage of the consortium including the Commonwealth led Working Group on the Teaching Profession, of the ADEA; the Paul-Gérin-Lajoie Inter-University Center for International Development in Education at the University of Quebec in Montreal; the UNESCO International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa; and the African Virtual University.

“The reforms in the training of primary school teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa in the framework of EFA programs” was the theme of this inaugural workshop. This session was specifically aimed at:

- Drawing up an inventory of the initial and continuing training systems for teachers in the participating countries and elsewhere;
- Promoting the sharing of knowledge and practices in teacher training, notably in basic subjects and ICTs;
- Promoting research on teacher training; and
- Setting down the foundations for a broader institutional partnership on teacher training, including the setting up of tools and observation mechanisms for the teaching profession in the countries concerned.

Taking note of the Education for All (EFA) national plans developed and adopted by the respective governments and recognising that teacher training is a central base of any strategy for improving the quality of education, the participants of the first workshop have decided to collaborate in a network bringing together all their institutional and individual expertise, it being understood that such a grouping of capacities and resources is likely to guarantee the success of the various interventions in the framework of EFA programs. The participants agreed also to take appropriate measures to open, in the short term, the network to English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries.



Workshop participants in Dakar

The following themes were selected for future years:

- Teacher training partnerships to achieve the results of the EFA programs.
- Connection between initial and continuing professional development of teachers in the improvement of quality of education.
- Place of secondary education in the achievement of EFA objectives.
- National languages in EFA: implications for teacher training.

The Dakar workshop is part of the increased recognition of the role of teacher professional development – a topic that has become a critical issue for many countries struggling to achieve quality Universal Primary Education. It is now predicted that the trend towards hiring teachers with limited general education and/or without professional preparation will continue or even increase. This will result in the deterioration of the teaching workforce, a phenomenon that can potentially undermine the fabric of the profession, resulting in staff instability which, in turn, may affect quality negatively. That is why reforming teacher training curriculum and programs, strengthening and articulating pre-service and continuous teacher professional development and support mechanisms become imperative for the countries in question in the medium-term.

Virgilio Juvane is an Education Adviser at the Commonwealth Secretariat and Coordinator of the ADEA Working Group on the Teaching Profession

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Surveying the Landscape of HIV Prevention

By Prof. David Plummer, Commonwealth/UNESCO Chair in AIDS Education, University of the West Indies.

The following summary extract from a paper by Professor David Plummer looks at some of the key issues of stigma, preventative measures and social encoding within the current landscape of HIV/Prevention dialogue.

While the HIV epidemic seems to be expanding relentlessly, a parallel and growing sense of unease with HIV prevention has emerged. This unease is linked to a realisation among workers in the field that high AIDS awareness levels are often not accompanied by corresponding behaviour change. This observation raises a number of key issues.

First, these experiences remind us of something that we have known for a long time: that knowledge alone does not guarantee behaviour change. And confronted with this realisation, we must revisit many of our assumptions about the roles that knowledge, rational thought and education play in our HIV prevention strategies. Indeed, a close analysis reveals that surprisingly little, if any, biomedical knowledge is needed to interrupt HIV transmission – simple modifications of sexual practices, no matter what meanings they have for people, are all that are required.

However, this conclusion begs the question as to whether modifying sexual practices really is that simple. For example, what about the possibility that our prevention strategies are no match for powerful sexual drives? On the surface this would seem plausible, because regardless of whether sex is a 'drive' or whether it is socially constructed or both, sexuality does exert a powerful influence on human lives.

To understand these issues better, we could turn to cases where sustained, protective behaviour change actually has occurred. Indeed, even being able to identify a single case of effective prevention would be both significant and instructive – if for no other reason than it proves that prevention is possible! One such case that I was personally involved with, is the dramatic decline in HIV incidence that

occurred in the mid-1980's in Australia. This is one of the clearest examples on record to demonstrate that large-scale prevention is both possible and that it can be sustained.

So given that sustained, widespread protective behaviour change is possible, further questions follow. What factors contribute to making change possible? And what factors make populations resistant to change?

Early in the epidemic, it became clear that direct personal experience with HIV/AIDS assists in changing behaviour. Conversely, it follows that factors that contribute to keeping the epidemic hidden will undermine prevention. Of these, without a doubt, stigma is the pre-eminent social factor that forces the epidemic into hiding.

There are at least 3 major ways that stigma exerts its adverse effects on HIV control: (1) by hiding the epidemic, stigma facilitates denial and leaves risks unchallenged; (2) by isolating people, stigma disrupts life-saving social support networks and undermines access to vital health care; and (3) by creating scapegoats and critical blind spots in our public discourse, stigma licenses antisocial responses to HIV and ultimately undermines the social fabric. For all of these reasons, a major project for the next few years in the Caribbean must be a courageous investigation of stigma with the ultimate aim of rooting it out (and it goes without saying that this includes the role that homophobia plays in increasing the risks for everybody – gay and straight.)

Preventive measures: is anything safe?

We have at our disposal a range of measures that research has shown can

stop HIV transmission. These measures are commonly known as the 'ABCs': abstain, be faithful and use condoms. Yet more often than not, the ABC formulation becomes a platform for a tug-of-war between condoms and abstinence and advocating for one approach is often no more than a code for excluding the alternatives. However, public health principles suggest that we should deploy all available methods necessary to stop the epidemic. To preclude any of these possibilities in the protection of our young people is nothing short of unethical.

There is also unequivocal evidence that all three approaches have their weaknesses. As a result, we all have a further ethical obligation to support and promote the proper use of these methods. There is nothing more cynical than a half-hearted commitment where services claim to support prevention, but there is not a poster, instructional pamphlet or condom in sight.

At this point, I do not want to get mired in a debate which positions condoms in direct competition with abstinence. Such an approach can only advantage the spread of HIV (and in my opinion has already done so in too many parts of the world). However, I do want to acknowledge two key issues: first, that every parent would prefer their child to abstain from sex prior to forming a committed relationship; and second, that the realities of adolescence and young adulthood mean that this often doesn't happen (and for that matter neither did it occur in their parent's generation). It is here in particular that the stark contrast between idealism and reality emerges (and in my opinion, we must steadfastly stick to dealing with the realities of HIV/AIDS).

Social embeddedness and connectedness

A theme that I hoped to draw out from this discussion is that HIV prevention is deeply influenced by social, political and cultural contexts. Indeed, there is now an extensive body of literature that confirms that risks themselves are deeply socially and culturally embedded and this is a key reason why change is resisted in the face of compelling evidence and high levels of awareness.

A pre-eminent example of risk being deeply socially encoded can be found in gender. Gender-power relations lock both men and women into risk in different

ways. For women, their relative lack of power in key situations limits their ability to negotiate sexual risks and often leaves them vulnerable and unaware of the risks they are exposed to. For men, the importance of projecting masculinity and of not losing face by backing away from sexual opportunities makes life risky too, particularly when the critical gaze of powerful peer groups means that harsh homophobic penalties are an ever-present possibility if men fail to measure up. It is in these socially constructed dynamics that we start to identify some of the deepest drivers of a recalcitrant epidemic.

On the other hand, what research consistently demonstrates is that a

combination of clear messages, established norms and social connectedness can influence both risky and protective behaviours. These findings are in effect the ‘flip-side’ of the social embeddedness paradigm – because they confirm that both protective behaviour change and resistance to change are both very much outcomes of the norms, the connections and the social contexts in which people are located.

What is needed right now is a vision of where we need to go. It seems to me that we should start by revising our three basic goals: prevention should be transformed into effective prevention; care should become quality care; and we particularly

need to move beyond the old ‘deficit’ paradigm of ‘impact mitigation’ to a more positive vision for a better, healthier, more just and thriving society. Amid its many challenges and its toll on everyone, there is an often-overlooked possibility that HIV presents us with: AIDS offers an exceptional opportunity to imagine a better future, and for society to respond and to grow in spite of the adversity. A better, more caring, more compassionate, healthier world is not only possible, it is achievable. Future generations will judge us on this factor alone.

A VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE:

Fostering Cross-Commonwealth Expertise at COMSEC

By Rokubua Veronika Naiyaga, Chief Planning Officer (Social Sector) Policy Analysis Unit, Office of the Prime Minister, Fiji.

One Secondee gives an account of her three-month stay at the Secretariat

“At the end of 2004, the Commonwealth Secretariat extended an invitation to the Fiji government for a senior official to be attached to the Commonwealth Secretariat for a period of three months. It was in response to this invitation that I was seconded to London in September, 2005. The objective of the three-month attachment is to give officials exposure to an appreciation of the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

“Because of my background and work as social policy adviser in the Prime Minister’s Office in Fiji, it was decided that I was to be based in the Social Transformation Programmes Division (STPD) and located in the Education Section. My attachment included several divisions in the Secretariat, but for the purpose of this article, my discussion will focus on the Social Transformation Programmes Division’s, Education Section where I spent the most part of my attachment.

“When I arrived in September, the Education Section was full of activities. The Section was busy with the three 15 CCEM Mid –Term Reviews. They had just completed two reviews; one in Fiji, in May, the second in the Bahamas in July and they were preparing for the final one in Sierra Leone in November. The results of these reviews would be fed into the 16 CCEM that will be held next year.

“With the Section’s focus so strongly on Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Eliminating Gender Disparity in Primary and Secondary Schools, I engaged quite early in discussing the Secretariat’s capacity in assisting Early Childhood Education (ECE), and in the parameters of what constitutes basic education in terms of indicators and competencies that go simply beyond number of years completed at school. These are areas that the Section would like to do much more in. I had wondered how the goals of UPE and Gender Parity are achieved by the Secretariat. It was explained to me that the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat is advocacy, to act as a broker, to be a catalyst and to facilitate networking. It does not implement at country level but it advocates, facilitates and acts as a catalyst to encourage countries to adopt policies and strategies that would bring about the achievement of these goals in

their own countries. Further, through networking, the Secretariat facilitates exchange of information and the identification and transfer of good educational practices in Commonwealth countries.

“The attachment has given me many ideas on how to deal with issues and challenges at home, in education, health, gender, planning, political affairs, civil society, good governance, youth development, human rights and meeting the MDGs. Also, it has given me a connection to experts in diverse fields who I can access for advice and assistance in the future.

“They say that travelling is not about changing places, but about changing people. Travelling to the other side of the world from my country has broadened my horizon, increased my knowledge of international issues and allowed me to share with some of the most experienced people in their own fields in the Commonwealth. I came to the Secretariat in September with a local perspective, the Secretariat has given me an international perspective and I go back with a deep appreciation of both.”

Reconstruction Challenges: Re-Building Education in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone

By Fatimah Kelleher

Continued from page 3

an increased stress on technical and vocational education, although convincing parents that a skills emphasis is not necessarily short-changing their children will be an ongoing challenge. Ensuring that the building of these new centres of learning is extended quickly to the provinces is also a primary concern for averting a repeat of old grievances.

There is a need for a post-conflict Ministry of Education to commit financially in a way that reflects a more equitable and sustainable educational system for all, and to maintain a balance between recentralising and decentralising the system. Major legislative changes at the centre are required to broaden access

and institute new educational bodies, but steps must also be taken towards devolving sufficient responsibility to local authorities for the day to day running of primary and secondary schools, empowering communities.

Underpinning all of this, the issue of poverty comes to the fore. Even when schooling is free, many parents are unable to meet the costs of educating their children, whether those costs include uniforms, textbooks, or the loss of the labour a child provides in the home or farm by going to school. For many girls in particular, traditional norms of a girl-child's value (as a bride or carer in the family home), continues to prevent equitable access to school. These factors

are not specific to post-conflict contexts but are nonetheless contributory in terms of the relationship between poverty, social inequities and the tensions that can remain palpable in the aftermath of a civil war. Acknowledging the inequality that existed within an educational system as part of the root cause in a civil conflict is a first step. Rebuilding along principles that aim to redress that imbalance is the challenge that remains, both in terms of political will and sustainable financing.

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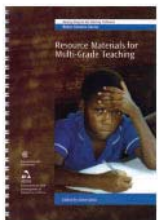
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