

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

18CCM

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“NOT MONEY BUT EDUCATION – VALUING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE FACE OF FINANCIAL CRISIS”

*Conference Theme: “Bridging the gap as we accelerate towards
achieving internationally agreed goals”*

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[Protocol Acknowledgments]

Ladies and gentlemen,

THE WARMTH OF KWÉYÒL PEOPLES

Good morning. I am extremely pleased to be with you here in Mauritius, *the Star and Key of the Indian Ocean*, at the start of this, the eighteenth Meeting of Commonwealth Education Ministers. Mauritius has long been a rendezvous point for the small states and islands of the Commonwealth. It hosted, in 1985, a meeting of minds committed to the specific education agenda for small states, and it has been a pioneer by example, in our quest for education for all.

Furthermore, in many respects, and even though we are oceans apart, the Caribbean and Mauritius could easily be transplanted, without more into each other's domain. The warmth in Port Louis and in Port Castries, in Saint Lucia, is shared freely, in consonance with our similar histories, cultures and common Kwéyòl, a tongue fashioned by the syncretism of the languages of France, England and Africa. I therefore wish to thank the Government and People of the Republic of Mauritius for their immense and genuine hospitality, and of course the Commonwealth for inviting me here to deliver this keynote address.

I must confess, with dispatch, that it is difficult to sum up the breadth of the challenge that is at hand in such a brief

moment, but I wish to provide you with some thoughts upon which we can explore later.

This Conference has been asked to focus on how all member states might achieve the *Education for All* and the *Millennium Development Goals* that were promulgated around the year 2000.

BRINGING IN THE LAST TEN PERCENT

One of the major focus areas has been primary education for all boys and girls. In this regard, it is generally accepted that the world has made some impressive strides. Specialised programmes like the *Education for All Fast*

Track Initiative have helped many disadvantaged countries in coming closer to the targets.

Indeed, the UN 2010 status report has indicated that we have achieved a global enrolment in primary schools of about ninety percent (90%). This means that one in ten children still do not get into a school and stay in school until then end. Even with the last ten percent (10%) in sight, *given our current trajectories*, we would *still* not realise this goal of universal primary education.

Of course, what makes this extremely challenging is the reality that confronts the last ten percent. This “ten

percent” may well be the dispossessed. They are likely to be extremely poor by way of resource, or impact from the state. They are likely to have many complex familial and societal realities that negatively impact their opportunities. They may well be affected by disability. They may well speak another language than the majority, or may be in some socio-cultural minority within their respective states. They may be affected by war or climate-related disasters, be it drought or flood. Their parents may be disempowered, marginalised and without a voice politically. They may live in remote and isolated circumstances, cut off from transport or communications networks. These are not the “quick win” successes of the past and as such our discussion of how to provide access

to the last ten percent must go beyond the notions of a school building and providing teachers, but rather to the heart of an integrated approach towards poverty alleviation.

NOT MONEY BUT EDUCATION

This has long been the paradox of cyclic poverty. It is a matter that greatly concerned William Arthur Lewis, one of the founding fathers of Development Economics, who was also the first principal of the University of the West Indies, the first president of the Caribbean Development Bank, and the Nobel Laureate for Economics in 1979. I refer to Sir Arthur Lewis, not only because he is a Saint

Lucian, but because he was an ardent believer in the life-changing power of education. On his tomb is etched his personal belief: *“The fundamental cure to poverty is not money, but education.”*

However, while we may initially conjure images of economic poverty, Sir Arthur Lewis spoke to more than mere material scarcity.

EDUCATION IS THE CRUX OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The poverty which concerns us and these Millennium Development Goals comes in many varieties: there is the poverty of scarcity of resources, of course; but also the

poverty of exclusion from the world; the poverty of not knowing or not knowing how to; and, indeed, the poverty of the absence of voice, conscience and spirit. Indeed, poverty in all its senses is an aberration of our humanity.

Individually and collectively, these manifestations of poverty can only be overcome by education. This conduit of thought is what conceives education as the crux of human rights, for it enhances our ability to exercise the right to speak, the right to assemble, the ability to access and interpret knowledge, and indeed the ability to sustain livelihoods. The development and empowerment of each human mind is at the centre of poverty elimination of all aspects of life and endeavour.

THREATS TO FINANCING EDUCATION

Yet, ladies and gentlemen, we must concede the paradox that the state must find money to finance its education costs, even while believing that money is *not* the cure to poverty. Simultaneously, we observe that education spending invariably competes with other state priorities which may well also be tied to poverty elimination. For example, the provision of healthcare and housing; and utilities such as water, electricity, telecoms and roads are all required by a modern population. However, states should not have to sacrifice one for the other.

More so, what has stretched the financing gap in meeting the *internationally agreed goals* [IAGs] is that of provisioning for education in the face of new uncertainty.

The global financial crisis now poses new and emerging challenges to all of us. Expenditure for education is now threatened, not only in the capitals of Europe but in many countries of the Commonwealth. This is certainly not unique to either developing or developed countries. The temptation to cut or reduce expenditure on education is everywhere, in our capitals and in the organisations we have created to transform our societies and our countries.

Finance ministers are often faced with immediate needs to provide economic stimulus and tighten spending, and invariably the cost of education is an attractive target. Furthermore, given that much of the funding towards achieving the *Internationally Agreed Goals* would likely have to be obtained through donor contributions, convincing cash-tight economies to increase contributions is not without angst, disappointment and exhaustion.

VALUE PROPOSITIONS MUST BE MADE

As such, one of your major tasks as education administrators will be to build sufficient political capital at the global, national and local levels to convince

countries, both yours and donors, to resist the temptation to reduce spending on education, even when some see such expenditure as having long-horizon accruals with little immediate economic impact.

And so, at all levels, financiers and stakeholders must be persuaded that education is central to the success of all other investments. In that context, I wish to offer five value propositions that could be considered from the level of the international organisation, to that of national governance inclusive of the education ministry, and also for the wider society.

COMPETITIVENESS AND COMMITMENT

The first value proposition that must be made, primarily to the global community, is that it will be almost impossible to tackle sustainable development and climate change, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and expand food production and agriculture without educated populations throughout the world. Knowledge and technical skills are needed in *all* societies. Education, in its broadest sense, and as espoused by the *Education for All* goals, is the gateway for empowering people to deal with these global challenges.

GROWING GLOBAL EDUCATION SERVICES

The second value proposition to development partners is that a strong commitment to basic education in every country grows the demand for further education globally.

In fact, many developed countries already see the global educational services sector as the answer to maintaining cash-tight tertiary level education and research institutions. However, this juxtaposed to the hope of technology transfer as expressed in the eighth *Millennium Development Goal* [MDG-8] presents a stark contrast.

In this regard, it will become increasingly important for the Commonwealth, which has shown so much

commitment through its scholarship programme to expand these life-changing opportunities, particularly through the use of ICTs and online tertiary level programmes.

Moreover, education continues to serve as a global visa for many, promoting migration flows, to the point that some countries now actively source non-national graduates.

As we move beyond 2015, we must plan for better management of global education including the issues of quality and accreditation and make the argument that the

whole world benefits when one more child gets an education.

NATIONAL CONSENSUS AND CREATIVITY

My third value proposition is targeted to the national arena: if you are expecting to leverage funding towards education, you must generate at the national level, strong political capital. For instance, this can be gained by embracing stakeholders as core agents to the cause of education. Events such as this Conference's Parallel Forums should not be left for international conferences. While teachers are generally well represented through unions, the larger population, particularly parents and

youth must feel that they are active participants in their education ecosystem. This then strengthens your clout with the Finance Ministry. Simply remember that *political will* tends to come much easier in the face of *political fears*.

Even with cash strapped conditions, states must also craft creative responses to show that education can be a financial stimulus for employment, growth and development. School feeding programmes can support farming communities with incomes while keeping children in school healthier and attentive. School constructions and renovations create jobs. Put another

way, the budget spending in all other ministries *could* support education-related initiatives, and therefore *should*.

EDUCATION IS ABOUT TODAY

The fourth value proposition is, perhaps self-evident: that education is transformational. It can make immediate impacts on societies and economies. For this to thrive, education must be technology-driven and relevant. Now this is possible, more than ever before.

I think most of us accept that in today's world, knowledge is pervasive and ever expanding. Therefore, as has been uttered before, what is needed increasingly more in the

real world are people who can think, solve problems, create, innovate, imagine and adapt.

In particular, developing into knowledge-based economies is the only realistic future for many resource-poor small states like Mauritius and the Caribbean states. Our states already spend a higher percentage of GDP on education than others, given our relative size. And so, the best way we can leap frog towards quality, equitable education systems is through the pervasive adoption of technology as one of the bases for learning.

A farmer or fisher knowing how to use a mobile handset to check the weather forecast or find their geographic location is now just as basic and relevant as performing mathematical operations.

Information and Communications Technologies must now become core curriculum subjects and engrained in existing subjects. The technology is available for ICT to be the foundation for change in education provisioning: from the classroom to the ministerial committee room; from the way teachers relate to their students, to the increasing of parental involvement in schools. Education in all our states ought to be about today's reality and that reality centres on the use and development of technology.

Furthermore ladies and gentlemen, ICT use can realise savings and value-for-money in our education systems. As I speak, many parents back home in Saint Lucia are perhaps having nightmares over providing their children with school books for the new academic year. When I see these tablet computers that participants have been given, I see a vision for the future that expands access and equity in learning. A future complete with the use of e-books, broadband everywhere, computer-based lessons, mobile apps for fun learning, online educational resources, learning management systems to the classroom level, a world connected, conscious, curious, and creative.

And this time, we can be helped on our own with the emergence of innovative giants within our midst. India has now produced a tablet PC for less than one hundred US dollars. So what then if it was possible for India to create a tablet of e-books so that all the textbooks could be a screen touch away? That libraries the world over could become available to children in from Kigali to Karachi? Could a wider use of translation technologies obtain the breakdown of language barriers? Our education systems must become dream factories that give our people the tools to create a better reality for all. Technology can help to make this happen.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen chalk and talk must walk into the past. We must not be afraid to *leap frog* the gaps before us and build our bridges from both ends. As the World Bank has elucidated in its new Education Strategy 2020, we must all *invest early, invest smart and invest for all*. This financial crisis should not be a time to invest less in education, but rather to invest smarter.

EDUCATION IS PRICELESS

Ladies and gentlemen, my fifth and final value proposition is a simple yet profound one if we are to have sustained, worldwide commitment to education. It comes from words shared with me by a most distinguished

gentleman in our midst. And so, in the words of the President of the Republic of Mauritius, shared during my short conversation with him a few days ago: for all countries and to all peoples “*education is priceless.*” This underscores the unquantifiable value and transformational power of education to our world. I may suggest that this irrevocable tenet be embraced as we journey towards 2015 and beyond.

LET THE BELLS NOT BE RUNG IN VAIN

Ladies and gentlemen, all over the Commonwealth, from the Mascarenes to the Maldives, from Cardiff to Kolkata, the bells are chiming. Some mark the beginning, and

some the end, of a new school year; a new day, a new period of learning. Let these bells, whether electronic or shaken by hand, be not rung in vain.

Let us be assured that the last ten percent will be happy to hear these bells for the first time and know that it rings for them. Let us ensure their education does not end prematurely and that they have the opportunity to realise the fullness of human potential just like any child should. Let us ensure that their parents too are learning, and are supporting them, by being living examples of life-long learning.

The Commonwealth and all its actors in the business of education have made, and can continue to make a difference for the millions of children who will be waking up for a day at school; a day that should be fun, energised, interactive, certainly not to be had on an empty stomach, and undoubtedly filled with hope for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all and wish you an enlightened eighteenth Triennial Conference here in Mauritius.