

**15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers  
Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom, 27-30 October 2003**

**THE EDINBURGH COMMUNIQUÉ  
AND ACTION PLAN**

1. Education Ministers and representatives from forty-eight Commonwealth countries met in Edinburgh, Scotland, United Kingdom from 27-30 October 2003 for the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM).
2. The essence of the Conference can best be encapsulated in the following statements:

*I am a beautiful, confident, strong, educated young woman... We need more of us.*

*Carolanne Makakaufaki, Tonga, Youth Summit Delegate*

*If we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure.*

*Professor Amartya Sen, Keynote Speaker*

3. Unique about this Conference was the input of a Youth Summit and a Parallel Symposium, which fed directly into the Ministerial Conference. Ministers engaged in discussions around the theme of the Conference and the six Action areas in break-out sessions with the Parallel Symposium and the Youth Summit. The range and complexity of the discussions are summarised in Annex A, attached. Summaries of the Conclusions of the Youth Summit and the Parallel Symposium are attached at Annexes B and C.

4. Ministers reviewed progress in education across the Commonwealth in the context of the main theme of the conference - *Closing the Gap: Access, Inclusion and Achievement*. They identified key issues, challenges and opportunities that needed to be addressed if their educational aspirations were to be achieved.
5. They identified six Action Areas where work would be taken forward to address these challenges: Achieving Universal Primary Education; Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education; Improving Quality in Education; Using Distance learning to Overcome Barriers; Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances; Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS in Education.
6. The key point made by delegates from the Youth Summit was that young people should be directly involved in developing education systems, including participation in Youth Councils, and involvement in the selection of teachers and in the design and evaluation of resource materials and the curriculum.
7. Running through the recommendations made by the Parallel Symposium was the recurring theme of Partnership without which, they suggested, future action on all six Action Areas could not be taken forward successfully. Such partnerships should be formed at the widest level between and among governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community; and at ground level between pupils, teachers, head teachers and parents.
8. They also recommended sharing knowledge through a network of Best Practice. To show the importance that the Commonwealth places on this, they recommended the creation of an award for Best Practice in each of the six Action Areas, which would be presented for the first time during 16CCEM.
9. Ministers affirmed that education is a crucial means for adapting to and directing change; reducing poverty, ensuring security; improving health and well-being; enhancing economic prosperity and personal security and safety; promoting fairness, justice, and peace; and achieving environmental sustainability.
10. Ministers noted with satisfaction the progress made on taking forward the Action Areas identified in the Halifax Statement, and the need to work with vigour if they were to meet the targets of the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Eliminating Gender Disparity (EGD). To do this, combined efforts and vision will be required from all governments, other public sector stakeholders, civil society and the private sector, including support for policies that enhance and facilitate building capacity and achieving these goals, while avoiding practices that may impede progress.

11. Welcoming delegates to Scotland, First Minister the Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP, said that *Scotland has a long tradition of valuing and investing in education. I hope that we can all learn from the ideas, expertise and experience from around the world which is collected here this week.*
12. The UK Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP, opened the 15CCEM with the statement that *education is at the centre of the Commonwealth.* He launched the Global Gateway, an on-line system to promote and enable partnership working to support Commonwealth education.
13. Ministers affirmed the unique value of the Commonwealth recognising that it is ideally placed to share expertise, resources and best practices in education as a vital component in attaining the individual and collective goals and aspirations for their countries. Noting the significance that Youth Summit delegates placed on meeting together as members of the Commonwealth, it is important to provide opportunities for young people to learn about the Commonwealth and its values.
14. Education Ministers discussed the critical issue of cross-country teacher recruitment. This was viewed by Ministers as one of the most urgent issues to be addressed in “closing the gap”. They established a working group on this issue, to be chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, to develop appropriate and ethical codes of conduct. The working group is to report to all Ministers by the end of April 2004, and an ad hoc group of Ministers will finalise the document by September 2004.
15. Ministers emphasised the importance of ongoing, lifelong professional development for all teachers including the leadership development of head teachers.
16. Ministers accepted the new structure of the Commonwealth Secretariat. They recognised that it complements the already existing Commonwealth advantages, namely, the broad similarity amongst educational systems, the almost universal use of the English language, and the multiplicity of civil society organisations and professional associations that exist at a Commonwealth level and which contribute to Commonwealth education and training. Ministers approved the Education Section’s Work Plan which focuses on the new role of advocacy, brokering and acting as a catalyst.
17. Having made notable progress with the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, Ministers gratefully received Malta’s declaration to become the fourteenth country to agree to fund a Fellowship under the Plan. Ministers recognised that smaller states need more scholarships and fellowships.

18. Ministers supported the establishment of the Centre for Commonwealth Education, a partnership between the Commonwealth Institute and Cambridge University as a significant additional asset in meeting the educational challenges facing the Commonwealth. They welcomed the announcement of a £1.25m private donation to the centre for carrying out some of its future activities.
19. Ministers complimented the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) on its work and accomplishments of the past three years. They approved the 2003-06 business plan and pledged financial support. In view of the impending retirement of President Gajaraj Dhanarajan, they recorded their appreciation for his significant contribution to the Commonwealth through his many years of dedicated work. They also welcomed the new Chair, Mr Lewis Perinbam.
20. Ministers endorsed the proposal, requested at the 14CCEM, for a Virtual University for Small States, designed to offer opportunities for expanded access to education, teacher training and upgrading, and which may also benefit other regions and states of the Commonwealth. Ministers decided that COL should take leadership of this capacity-building initiative, and collaborate with existing resource institutions in member countries. In order for this initiative not to be a burden on COL, Ministers directed COL to work with the Commonwealth Secretariat to identify sources of funding to take this concept forward.
21. Education Ministers agreed to the attached message to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), to be held in Abuja, Nigeria in December 2003 emphasising the importance of mobilising a broad range of Commonwealth resources in meeting educational targets by 2015, as a contribution to social reconstruction in the Commonwealth.
22. Ministers were unanimous in voicing their appreciation for the outstanding hospitality and warm welcome extended by the UK and the Scottish hosts.
23. Ministers warmly welcomed the suggestion that the next Conference be held in Malaysia, subject to confirmation by the Malaysian Government.
24. Based on the Conference's rich dialogue and exchanges, Ministers agreed to a set of actions around the six Action Areas. Ministers asked the Commonwealth Secretariat and its partner organisations to monitor and report on the implementation of the Edinburgh Action Plan.

## **THE EDINBURGH ACTION PLAN**

29 October 2003

MINISTERS AGREED:

25. To meet with Youth Summit delegates from their own country to consider the outcomes of 15CCEM.
26. That every future CCEM will have a Youth Summit where Ministers inform delegates on progress and consult them on future actions. As the Youth Summit said, *We can't do it ourselves, but you can't do it without us.*
27. That a Working Group be established to consider cross-country teacher recruitment, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, to report back to Ministers in April 2004; and that an *ad hoc* group of interested Ministers would then meet not later than September 2004 to agree action.
28. Recognising that many countries regard education as a public good and that there is widespread concern that the inclusion of education under the WTO and GATS as a service could lead to its commodification, Ministers agreed that Commonwealth Heads of Government should affirm the paramount importance of safeguarding the values, standards and quality of education.
29. That the Commonwealth as a whole, and most particularly the wealthier countries within it, use their influence within the G8 and elsewhere to ensure that the Dakar commitments are adhered to by the international community, in particular within the framework of the fast track initiative.
30. To develop mechanisms to include learners in decisions about their education.
31. To individually and collectively promote education by:
  - a) Sponsoring an international commonwealth education day where the funding raised will be used to train young people as peer educators in HIV/AIDS
  - b) making awards for good practice in the six Action Areas, to be presented at 16CCEM
  - c) Promoting teaching as a career and encouraging teacher representation at parallel forums at 16CCEM
  - d) Introducing and/or strengthening initiatives to promote the involvement of parents and guardians in education..
32. Ministers agreed to develop a shared understanding of the elements which constitute an excellent education system, recognising that education must be of high quality if it is to make a positive difference to the lives of young people and their communities.

33. That the more developed countries should be requested to facilitate greater opportunities for higher education and skills training for Commonwealth citizens, in a spirit of co-operation and sharing.
34. To ask the Commonwealth Secretariat to take stock of best practices in eliminating gender disparity.
35. To share best practice and expertise in supporting children in difficult circumstances.
36. To include compulsory age-appropriate HIV/AIDS education in the curriculum of every education system within the Commonwealth, including teacher education.

Commonwealth Secretariat  
Edinburgh, Scotland  
30 October 2003

## **ANNEX A**

### **SUMMARY OF THE KEY POINTS RAISED IN THE DISCUSSION ON THE THEME OF THE CONFERENCE AND THE SIX ACTION AREAS**

#### **ACCESS**

1. Ministers recognised that too many children in the Commonwealth are still denied access to education. The barriers to access were identified as culture; lack of finance, proper infrastructure and teachers. In order to address the problem, Ministers recommended development of partnerships between governments, civil society, donor organisations and the international lending agencies. In order to increase access at tertiary level the more developed countries needed to offer university places to Commonwealth students at concessionary rates.

#### **INCLUSION**

2. Ministers fully recognised that inclusion is a critical issue in education; that is inclusion of each individual in the educational process. Accordingly, barriers to participation should be identified and removed and provision made for each individual to obtain high quality relevant education. There should be equality of opportunity irrespective of gender, religious belief, ethnicity, socio-economic status, colour or disability. Every student should have access to good quality education at least to the end of primary school.

29 October 2003

3. Ministers identified the development of the necessary policies, strategies and legislation as critical and urged governments which have not yet taken the necessary actions to do so urgently.

## **ACHIEVEMENT**

4. Ministers felt that a key action in addressing achievement was the development of a clear definition of achievement. They felt that since achievement was likely to mean different things to different members, each country should articulate its own definition and then identify clear standards for measurement. Ministers also strongly suggested that measures of achievement must be based on the full value added as a result of education and not simply on academic outcomes.
5. They were also of the view that whereas there were many variables which impinged on achievement, school leadership, teacher quality and parental involvement were critical variables for which training must be provided.
6. Ministers also noted that whereas the scourge of HIV/AIDS has been noted and was being addressed, other impediments to achievement like illegal drugs needed to receive similar attention.
7. Ministers noted the importance of developing instruments for measurement and the development of standards.

**Ministers took a particular note of the six Action Areas for specific focus leading to 16CCEM and they vowed to work in harmony with broad range of commonwealth resource capacity to address these areas:**

## **UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

8. Ministers stressed that poverty is the biggest barrier to the provision of universal primary education. Poverty can only effectively be addressed if governments face the requirement to modify the existing international trade and finance regimes to create a more level playing field.
9. Ministers reaffirmed the priority to be given to the UPE but insisted it be set in the context of the Dakar consensus on Education for All (EFA) that stressed the importance of basic education. They emphasized that the issue must not be restricted to the concept of access, but more importantly to completion. Moreover, quality education is essential if learners are to have a realistic expectation of a productive future.
10. Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, along with the training of new teachers is essential for both the provision and the

quality of education. Given the massive requirements, open and distance learning should be seen as a key means to address these requirements. In addition, ODL may be a means to address the particular needs of marginalised and mobile minorities, including Nomads.

11. One of the main groups not participating in primary education is girls, so increasing their attendance is essential. Security and the need for separate facilities were considered critical for girls to access school-based education. Community and family support could play key roles.
12. In addition, if there is to be universal access, those with special needs must be included.

### **ELIMINATING GENDER DISPARITY**

13. Ministers were keen to achieve the UN millennium target date of 2005 to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Ministers recognised the importance of women having access to tertiary education so that they can become role models for younger girls and women. They also noted the continued need to encourage girls into non-traditional areas of study such as mathematics and science, and women into leadership levels of education. Moreover, they appreciated the benefits to family welfare from better educated mothers.
14. While girls' access and completion remain a challenge, boys' under-achievement is a growing concern. A close review of policies, cultural practices, and curricula in Commonwealth countries would assist in addressing all gender-related issues.
15. Ministers agreed it was important to share best practice both in terms of policy and its subsequent translation into action. They felt a stock-taking of progress to date of evidence based best practices, available at country level, would be a useful starting point for the Commonwealth Secretariat to undertake. A more formal information sharing should be explored with other Commonwealth agencies such as COL for broader outreach.
16. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on gender mainstreaming in education policy and related national development plans including poverty reduction strategies as critical to the required resource allocation in reducing gender disparities.

### **IMPROVING QUALITY IN EDUCATION**

17. Ministers stressed the importance of improving education outcomes for all learners. This will be achieved using a variety of mechanisms to

enhance quality, including the strengthening of Commonwealth qualifications, accreditation frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms.

18. Ministers agreed on the importance of increasing teacher quality. They identified the issues of teacher selection, training, retention and ongoing professional development as vital to the improvement of education outcomes. They look to the Commonwealth Centre for Education in Cambridge to play a key role in this respect.
19. Ministers also pointed to the need to ensure that quality leadership exists at the school, regional and national levels. They stressed the importance of the professional development of head teachers and senior education officials. Moreover, they agreed on the urgency of improving the status of teachers so that they are in the position to “recapture the glory of teaching”.
20. Ministers further committed themselves to ensuring the availability of quality resources, appropriate to the needs of students and reflective of the local environment.
21. Lifelong learning should play a vital role in the provision of quality education, as should access to higher and vocational education.

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

22. Ministers noted the importance of addressing policy issues and designing strategies that position open and distance learning (ODL) to be a key instrument for enhancing access and inclusion. There is a need to invest in the development of the skills and infrastructures required for the delivery of quality ODL. Ministers understand the value of sharing Commonwealth best practice, policy and plans, and noted that the role that ODL can play in delivering education and training to geographically separated populations and to those requiring flexible learning options. There are benefits to be derived by strengthening Commonwealth networks and by adjusting intellectual property rights protocols so that they recognise education and education products as social goods, perhaps by developing Commonwealth conventions designed to reduce the costs of moving knowledge products amongst Commonwealth jurisdictions.
23. Ministers recognized the importance of addressing the risk that the use of technology to deliver education across borders could lead to the treatment of education as a commercial commodity subject to GATS rather than as the public good that it is.

## **EDUCATION IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES**

24. Many countries in the Commonwealth have to provide education to millions of children living in very difficult circumstances: poverty, unemployment, homelessness, war, famine, and of course, HIV/AIDS. The Commonwealth countries have ratified international treaties to address these issues: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ILO Convention, the Dakar Framework for Action and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The challenge now is for all Commonwealth countries to put these commitments into action.
25. There are many examples in the Commonwealth of actions that make a difference and which should be shared. To do so, it was recommended that a knowledge sharing system of best practices be set up, to share expertise, including databases to know where all children are and avoid 'invisible' children; the development of national indicators on improving participation by children in difficult circumstances; and the setting of targets and reporting on them.

## **EFFECTS OF HIV/AIDS IN EDUCATION**

26. Ministers addressed multi-sectoral issues related to the spread of HIV infection and the impact of AIDS. They noted the urgency of accelerating educational responses, particularly the need to improve curricula and materials and the value of involving young people in this process. Teaching and learning must share information and promote

understanding, but also focus on the necessary changes in social and sexual behaviour.

27. Ministers agreed to take urgent action in the area of HIV/AIDS education. They noted the importance of anticipating and preparing for the impact of AIDS on future numbers of orphans and students in the education system and on the supply and demand of teachers. They also requested international assistance to curtail the spread of the pandemic. EFA would not be achieved without tackling HIV/AIDS.

## **ANNEX B**

### **Mitigating the Effects of HIV/AIDS**

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**The issue of HIV/AIDS education and awareness has not yet been properly addressed in all Commonwealth countries. There is a need for the leaders of the Commonwealth to publicly recognise that HIV/AIDS is one of the biggest crises facing the future of our nations. Lack of education concerning the factors that cause the spread of HIV/AIDS has resulted in numerous problems.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**Ministers across the Commonwealth must act now to improve education on HIV/AIDS.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Compulsory inclusion of HIV/AIDS education in the curriculum.**
- 2. Train all teachers to teach this aspect of the curriculum.**

- 3. Involve young people who have knowledge and/or experience of HIV/AIDS in this education programme.**
- 4. Create HIV/AIDS Action Committees.**

## Universal Primary Education

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**The profile and benefits of education are not emphasised enough across the Commonwealth.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**They place greater emphasis on raising the profile and benefits of education amongst the Commonwealth peoples.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Develop and support youth councils and involve them directly in curriculum design and decision-making in education.**
- 2. To create an international Commonwealth Education Day on which every school can raise the profile of education and raise resources to go into a central fund that can be used to help develop peer education in less fortunate schools.**
- 3. Provide central access points in war-torn and rural areas to promote education to parents and children.**
- 4. Encourage parents to return to education with incentives for them to stay in education.**
- 5. Honour teachers more and promote them as important in, and to society.**

## Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**Education Ministers publicly acknowledge the issue of female exclusion from education. This leads to young woman becoming second class citizens in their own country.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**Ministers make greater effort to improve access for girls and young woman into education and make this access easier.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Create Commonwealth partnerships to share good practices in dealing with gender issues in school across countries that share similar cultures.**
- 2. Develop policies and strategies which create safe environments for girls in schools.**
- 3. Set up community outreach programmes to promote the benefits of women receiving education.**
- 4. Fund research to investigate the reasons for the exclusion of girls from education in different Commonwealth countries so that positive action which respects local culture can be identified.**

## Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**Consistent underachievement and lack of motivation in education by boys in some Commonwealth countries. We are concerned about the long-term social consequences that will result.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**Ministers put in place clear policies and strategies to ensure that both boys and girls are motivated to achieve their full potential in their chosen fields.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Revise curricula so that they respect that individuals learn at different paces and in different styles, and find different subjects relevant to their life choices.**
- 2. Promote effective use of role models to inspire the educational development of young people.**
- 3. Use the public media to raise the profiles of young people who have achieved in education against adversity.**

## Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**There are many young people in the Commonwealth that suffer from physical and emotional special needs and that education in the Commonwealth does not provide adequate access for these students with special needs.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**Ministers develop and maintain appropriate access and inclusion for special needs students to improve their opportunity to achieve.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Ensure that all teachers in the Commonwealth have basic training in special education, with more teachers trained specifically in special physical and emotional needs.**
- 2. Develop and / or promote a special needs support unit within the Education Ministries which involves youth in developing the support structures for those with special needs.**
- 3. Establish and maintain the infrastructures in education to accommodate young people with special needs.**
- 4. Enforce education legislation in every Commonwealth country against discrimination based on disability.**

## Improving the Quality in Education

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**In many areas of the Commonwealth, there is an insufficient number of qualified and trained teachers. Moreover, the standard of their training is impeding the improvement of the quality of education.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**Ministers create positive incentives throughout the Commonwealth to recruit quality people into the teaching profession and provide them with a high standard of training so they can do their job effectively.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Include learners in the process of training and selecting teachers.**
- 2. Ensure that teachers of specialist subject areas are properly trained.**
- 3. Include child psychology, conflict resolution and non-violent discipline approaches in teacher training.**
- 4. Raise the profile of teaching as a respectable and worthwhile profession.**

## Using Distance Learning to Overcome Barriers

The 15CCEM Education Youth Summit is concerned that:

**All Commonwealth countries have not got access to open and distance learning infrastructure and resources, including human resources.**

The Youth Summit recommends to the Commonwealth Ministers of Education that:

**Ministers make measurable progress towards achieving access to open and distance learning infrastructures and resources for all Commonwealth countries before the next CCEM.**

The Youth Summit believes that this can be achieved through the following actions:

- 1. Teachers should be trained to use the technologies required for open and distance learning.**
- 2. There is consistency in the delivery of open and distance learning across communities' centres.**
- 3. Ensure that donated resources are allocated appropriately and equitably.**

## **ANNEX C**

### **15CCEM Parallel Symposium Recommendations to Ministers**

#### **Introduction**

We will present the findings of the Parallel Symposium under six headings:

1. Universal Primary Education
2. Gender Disparities in Education
3. Improving Quality in Education
4. Using Distance Learning to Overcome Barriers
5. Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances
6. Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education Systems

In the brief time we have, Amina and I will touch on key trigger points which, if discussed further, would lead to the Symposium's deeper views. We will present these issues jointly so please join us as we tango our way through the findings of the Parallel Symposium.

#### **Universal Primary Education**

- In order to ensure we achieve the delivery of EFA, all countries and the international community should revisit and re-commit to the Dakar EFA goals. Attention to the Dakar goals will ensure the achievement of the MDGs.
- International commitment to providing free basic education of high quality needs to be followed up with concerted action at the national level that ensures that constitutional and legislative mechanisms are put in place to remove this barrier to education.
- Both the Dakar framework for action and the MDGs explicitly underscore the importance of partnerships in the sustainable delivery of basic education. Partnerships need to be consolidated

at all levels with civil society, the private sector and the international community. The principal stakeholders must develop common understandings of the definition and scope of basic education. Governments must recognise that all pupils, parents and teachers are stakeholders in this process. There is no “one size fits all” approach to partnerships, and local solutions may vary.

## **Gender Disparities in Education**

- Without a doubt, the actualisation of the gender goal by 2005, Eliminating Gender Disparities, is essential not only to the Dakar framework and DFA but to the achievements of all the 8 MDGs.
- National governments are called upon to ensure that they have the necessary institutional and financial capacity to plan for the mainstreaming of gender, boys and girls, into policy and strategies for implementation in partnership with civil society.

## **Improving Quality in Education**

- Central to achieving the 2015 goals and to improving the quality of education is lifting the quality of teachers and their leaders. This process must involve the teachers themselves and their organisations so that they help to provide the solution rather than be part of the problem.
- Ministers should develop programmes which build the capacity of head teachers. High-quality schools require high-quality leaders.
- Teaching needs to be re-established as a desired, sought-after profession, viewed by communities and governments as a profession of high status. Pay and conditions of service are critical factors in this regard. Governments need to coordinate their policies on teacher supply and professional development, and recognise the impact internationally of these policies. We all need to work together to recapture the glory of teaching, for without an adequate supply of well-trained, well-led and motivated teachers no country will be able to achieve its education goals.
- The impact of a relevant curriculum is essential to the quality of learning inputs and outputs in the classroom both at the level of the teacher and the child. Emphasis on innovative curriculum reform that reflects country realities especially in federal systems and the achievement of the Dakar goals must be supported at both international and national levels.

- While funding alone will not deliver a quality education, the availability of adequate funding in recurrent and capital budgets needs to be prioritised at national level while the international community must deliver on funding the gaps to support government efforts.

### **Using Distance Learning to Overcome Barriers**

- ICT offers a wonderful opportunity to help close some gaps. It can reach people in remote or rural areas, for example, and can be used to deliver the curriculum in flexible ways to suit the varied needs and lifestyles of citizens everywhere. Governments should develop strategies to make the best use of ICT in their country so that it is used to close the gaps not to widen the digital divide.

### **Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances**

The education of children in difficult circumstances takes on two dimensions. One is the familiar context of marginalised groups such as the nomads, traders, HIV/AIDS-infected, while the other one deals with environments created by the absence of human and child rights.

- National governments and international partners must strive to design and provide non-formal structures to accommodate the same quality inclusive education as for those in formal education.
- National governments must ensure conventions signed by them in support of human and child rights are enacted into law at country level, thus creating an environment where there would be zero tolerance for crimes against the child and women.

### **Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS on Education Systems**

- The threat of HIV/AIDS is extremely serious in some countries now, and potentially serious in all countries. Education about HIV/AIDS should start at the early childhood stage and should involve parents. Young people themselves need to be involved in developing reproductive health programmes.
- Governments need to support research and development into HIV/AIDS and its impact upon their education system. Countries

have much to learn from one another by the transfer of information, knowledge, experience and expertise on this vexed issue.

In conclusion, there is an urgency to make ACTION our watchword if we are to tend to our youth, which is tomorrow's future. We need to, as critical friends, engage in open and transparent dialogue that will enable the monitoring of all stakeholders in the delivery of EFA. We must build on the strengths of the Commonwealth and ensure we share knowledge through a network of best practice.

At this juncture we would like to recommend that the Ministers create awards for best practice in each one of the six areas shown on the screen to be awarded at the 16CCEM.

We hope we have provided constructive recommendations that you, our honourable Ministers, will be able to act upon and carry forward to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting being held in December this year. We thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your Ministerial sessions as they conclude tomorrow.

Finally, we have the pleasure of handing over the interim report from this Parallel Symposium. We hope that it will contribute to the formulation of the action plans which are being prepared.

## **MESSAGE TO CHOGM FROM COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION MINISTERS**

We, the Commonwealth Education Ministers, held our 15<sup>th</sup> triennial Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland from 27 to 30 October 2003 to review progress in education across the Commonwealth in fulfilment of the mandates from the Halifax 14<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in the nine Action Areas.

We affirm that education is central to the Commonwealth and fundamental in developing democratic values and good governance. To this end we believe it would be important to provide young people with opportunities to learn about the Commonwealth. Education plays a major role in reducing poverty, creating wealth, enhancing human security, improving health and enabling active participation in political processes.

We affirm that in an increasingly divided and insecure world education has a critical role in creating a culture of peace, tolerance and mutual respect.

We noted with satisfaction the progress made on taking forward the action areas identified in the Halifax Statement, and the need to combine our efforts with our partners in the public sector, civil society and the private sector to meet the targets of the Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We identified key issues, challenges and opportunities that need to be addressed if our educational aspirations in the main theme of the Conference "*Closing the Gap: Access, Inclusion and Achievement*" are to be achieved.

We identified action areas where work would be taken forward to address these challenges: achieving universal primary education; eliminating gender disparities in education; improving quality in education; using distance learning to overcome barriers; supporting education in difficult circumstances; mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS in education; and promoting Commonwealth resource networks.

We endorsed the 15CCEM Youth Summit recommendation that we must act now to improve education on HIV/AIDS. We commit ourselves to take urgent action to mitigate the impact of AIDS on education, including orphans, students and teachers.

We noted with satisfaction the proposal of the Commonwealth Institute to establish a Centre for Commonwealth Education in partnership with the University of Cambridge as an additional Commonwealth resource in education. The Centre will support primary and secondary education and teacher training in the Commonwealth. We urge you to endorse the establishment of this Centre.

29 October 2003

We strongly endorsed the concept of a Virtual University for Small States to help improve access to education and training opportunities across the Commonwealth and we urge the President of COL to take the leadership with the Commonwealth Secretariat in the identification of resources necessary to take this initiative forward.

We commended COL on its work and approved its three-year plan 2003-2006 supporting its target of \$9m annually.

Recognising that many countries regard education as a public good and that there is widespread concern that the inclusion of education under the WTO and GATS as a service could lead to its commodification, we agreed that Commonwealth Heads of Government should affirm the paramount importance of safeguarding the values, standards and quality of education.

We discussed the major challenges faced by small and developing Commonwealth countries in ensuring that they have a sufficient number of well-qualified teachers to ensure universal access to a quality education. We discussed ways in which the Commonwealth could work together to improve the situation.

We recognised that to assist in Closing the Gap in Access, Inclusion and Achievement, the application of distance education is a critical factor in improving the quality of teachers and we applaud the efforts of the COL in this regard.

We discussed the urgent need for Commonwealth countries to develop a clear code of conduct for teacher recruitment in the Commonwealth. Ministers formed a Working Group of Commonwealth senior officials to take this matter forward, concluding their work by September 2004.

We benefited from the conclusions of the Parallel Symposium and the Youth Summit and commend the manner in which these linked into our own deliberations. We recommend that the consistent and successful integration of the three events at 15CCEM should serve as a model for future CCEMs.

We urge Heads of Government to recognise the intrinsic worth of human capital and the role that education and training play in contributing to governments' efforts to meet targets set in education by 2015. To this end, we recommend that education be a key consideration at all Commonwealth ministerial meetings, and in particular urge Commonwealth Heads of Government to support levels of funding required to meet the targets of EFA and the MDGs.