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The Sustainable Development Goals for Education; Commonwealth Perspectives and Opportunities

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Abstract

The Commonwealth is well placed to play a key role in catalysing both sustainable educational development (SED) and education for sustainable development ESD. SED generates the conditions under which education systems can deliver rights to education and provide infrastructure, learning materials and teachers for high quality learning. ESD engages with the question learning for what? It challenges educators to develop curricula that will shape the 15,000 hours children spend in school and help the next generation are to manage the many threats to planetary and personal wellbeing. In 2012 the Commonwealth Minsters set up a Sub-Committee on post 2015 educational development. It produced a framework of Commonwealth Goals and Targets (CMGT). This influenced what became Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. This paper is in five parts. First, it offers a descriptive analysis of key features of Commonwealth education systems. Second the Commonwealth Post 2015 framework for education is described. Third, the interrelationships between the framework and the SDGs are discussed. Fourth, the opportunities for the Commonwealth to show leadership in developing their own agenda for the sustainable development are highlighted. Fifth a possible programme for action is outlined.

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Biography

Keith Lewin is the Emeritus Professor of International Development and Education at the University of Sussex. He has worked extensively on education and development in Asia and Africa for over 45 years for the World Bank, UNICEF and UNESCO and several bi-lateral agencies, and has coordinated a series of multi-country research projects. He was the technical advisor to the Commonwealth Ministers Sub-Committee on the Post 2015 Framework for Education. Until recently he was director of the UK DFID funded Research Centre on Educational Access and Equity (CREATE). Currently he is an Executive Advisor to the African Development Bank. His publications include more than 150 journal articles and books and he has supervised over 50 PhD students. He is a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences and a Chartered Physicist, and is Chair of the Trustees of the UK Forum for International Education and Training.

The Sustainable Development Goals for Education; Commonwealth Perspectives and Opportunities

Keith M Lewin

Introduction

The Commonwealth is an association of States well placed to play a key role in catalysing both sustainable educational development (SED) and education for sustainable development ESD. SED generates and sustains the conditions under which education systems can deliver rights to education and provide infrastructure, learning materials and sufficient teachers for high quality learning to be available to all. This has to be achieved without a destructive burden on planetary ecology. ESD reflects engagement with the question learning for what? It challenges educators to undertake the kind of curriculum and pedagogic reforms that are needed to determine how the 15,000 hours children spend in school needs to change if the next generation are to behave differently and revalue the future.

The Commonwealth Minsters have been meeting since 1959. SED and ESD may well be the biggest challenge that they have confronted. The 20th CCEM asked the question "Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?" There is probably not much more than a decade to get a definitive answer. In 2012 the Commonwealth Minsters set up a Sub-Committee on post 2015 educational development. It produced a framework of Commonwealth Goals and Targets (CMGT) and illustrative indicators[1]. This fed into and influenced what became the Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. This paper reflects on this process and the challenges that now lie ahead.

First, the paper offers a descriptive analysis of key features of Commonwealth education systems to set the scene. Second the Commonwealth Post 2015 framework for education is described. Third, the interrelationships between the framework and the SDGs are discussed. Fourth, the opportunities for the Commonwealth to show leadership in developing their own agenda for the sustainable development are highlighted. Fifth a possible programme for action is outlined[2].

Education in the Commonwealth

The Commonwealth is very diverse and Commonwealth Member States (CMS) include the very rich and the very poor. About 14% are Low Income Countries (LICs), 28% Low Middle Income Countries (LMICs), 32% Upper Middle Income Countries (UMICs) and 26% are High Income Countries (HICs). Surprisingly to some, the Commonwealth mirrors the global

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[1] This paper draws on the analysis and documentation generated in preparation of the 18th CCEM and 20th CCEM for its discussions of the CMGT. (Commonwealth Secretariat (2012 a, b and c) and Commonwealth Secretariat (2018).

[2] This paper is abridged from a longer version which includes more data on Commonwealth education systems. This is available at https://www.keithlewin.net/downloads

distribution of countries in terms of national income fairly closely. Regionally 34% of CMSs are in Africa, 14% in Asia, 24% in the Americas and the Caribbean, 6% in Europe and 22% in the Pacific. Average per capita incomes in LICs, LMICs, UMICs and HICs are about $640, $2,360, $8,000, and $30,900 respectively showing extreme differences in wealth and financial resources. Inequalities are great within countries.

Over 80% of all people in the Commonwealth (2.5 billion) are in LMICs. Overall about 10% of all children are in LICs, 82% in LMICs, 4% in UMICs and 3% in HICs. India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, which are all LMICs, account for 65% of all young people in the Commonwealth. In Africa 40% of young people are in LICs and the rest in LMICs and UMICs. More than half the population in the poorest countries are below national poverty lines. The richest countries have population growth below 1 per cent and are likely to have fewer children than adults in the population and declining enrolment in schools. The poorest countries have population growth over 2.5 per cent, with a doubling of the number of children every 25 years or so. They have many more children than working adults.

Commonwealth countries have high enrolment rates at primary level, with average gross enrolment rates (GERs) well over 100 per cent. In LICs and LMICs between 20 and 30 per cent of primary school children are over age by two years or more. Being over age compromises their learning and disadvantages them in high stakes selection examinations (CREATE 2011). Where many schools are small, as in India, unless there are multi-graded schools many will drop out (Little, 2004). Gender parity in enrolment has largely been achieved at primary level with an average of 49% girls and 51% boys across the Commonwealth with more girls enrolled in richer countries. Only one country – Pakistan – has a ratio of girls to boys below 47 per cent according (UIS, 2017). In every country in Africa that takes the Southern African Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality assessments, girls are on average now younger than boys, suggesting they enter earlier and progress faster.

Enrolments at secondary level are yet to reach universal levels and in LICs the GER average is only 36 per cent, and in LMICs it is 69 per cent. GERs in UMICs exceed 93 per cent and those in HICs are over 100 per cent. Considerably more children appear overage in secondary than in primary, with between 45 and 29 per cent overage in LICs and LMICs. The problem is non-existent in HICs. In LICs many students fail to make the transition from lower to upper secondary. Gender issues persist and now take many nuanced forms and multidimensional poverty affects both boys and girls. Generally, while the poorest girls face many barriers to accessing education, once in school their retention is better than that of poor males (UNESCO, 2016a). High and middle income girls are more likely to be enrolled than poor girls and high- and middle-income boys (UNESCO, 2015). Poor countries in the Commonwealth have lower and upper secondary completion rates of only 26 per cent and 14 per cent, and LMICs of only 52 per cent and 30 per cent, respectively.

The UNESCO Institute of Statistics data indicate that about 13 million Commonwealth children of primary education age, and 22 million of secondary age, are out of school. If this is true, this represents about 10 per cent of all Commonwealth children below the age of 15 years. Most are in South Asia. If those in school and not learning are included, the numbers will be much larger.

About 45 million students are registered in tertiary institutions in the Commonwealth and participation rates are growing faster than at other levels. LICs have a GER of about 6 per cent and LMICs a GER of 15 per cent at tertiary level. About a third of young people in UMICs and nearly 60 per cent in HICs now access tertiary programmes. In all Commonwealth countries except the poorest, more girls than boys are now enrolled at tertiary level. In LMICs, UMICs

and HICs there are as many as 40% more girls than boys enrolled according to UIS data.

Educational financing is taking new forms across the Commonwealth and the appetite for aid to education is softening; new donors have new priorities and self-interests; and aid dependence stubbornly persists in some of the poorest countries bring into question the efficacy of some types of aid (Burnett 2012, Easterly 2013, UNESCO 2016, Lewin 2017). The basic dilemma of public education financing of recurrent costs of education systems is evident. LICs and LMICs allocate about 16% of public budgets to education and collect about 17% of GDP in tax. On average they spend about 4% of GDP on education but would need to spend more than 6% to achieve the SDG targets (Lewin, 2017). This requires a substantial increase in domestic revenue, and an increase in the proportion of this allocated to the education budget. In order to allocate 6 per cent of GDP to education, domestic revenue would need to be about 24 per cent of GDP and educational expenditure would have to be 25 per cent of total government spending (25% of 24% = 6%). This is well above current levels.

The Commonwealth Post 2015 Framework

In 2012 the Commonwealth Ministers established a Ministerial Working Group on the Post 2015 Development Framework which the author had the privilege of advising. This met several times in 2012 and 2013 and produced a position paper on "Commonwealth Recommendations for the Post-2015 Development Framework for Education" (Commonwealth Secretariat 2012a). The framework is reproduced below. The recommendations were widely circulated around multilateral partner organisations (e.g. UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP) and bi-lateral donors for education (e.g. DFID, CIDA and AusAid) on the basis of an advocacy plan (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013).

The Chair of the Ministerial Working Group was Mr RP Ramlugun, Acting Senior Chief Executive, Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Mauritius. Participants included high level representatives from Bangladesh, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Jamaica, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone and Uganda. Other stakeholders and Commonwealth associations took part in deliberations including representatives from the Brookings Institution, Centre for International Education (University of Sussex, UK), Commonwealth Consortium for Education, Commonwealth Foundation, Commonwealth Secretariat Youth Affairs Division, Council for Education in the Commonwealth, Education International, Open Society Foundations, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) and UNESCO).

The Commonwealth Framework for Education

Commonwealth Ministerial Working Group on the Post-2015 Development Framework for Education
Marlborough House, 12-13 December 2012

Principal goals	Indicator	Target
1. Every child completes a full cycle of a minimum of 9 years of continuous, free basic education and demonstrates learning achievement consistent with national standards	% of boys and girls who complete a minimum of 9 years of basic education, to the appropriate national and, where appropriate, international, standard of completion, by the age of 15	100% of boys and girls within xx years
2. Post-basic education expanded strategically to meet needs for knowledge and skills related to employment and livelihoods	% of students of senior secondary/TVET/tertiary age (15-25) who complete an accredited qualification	X% of boys and girls within xx years, depending on country starting point
3. Reduce and seek to eliminate differences in educational outcomes among learners associated with household wealth, gender, special needs, location, age and social group	% of children from the bottom 20% of household income achieving x% in national learning assessments (NLAs) compared to those from the top 20% Comparative achievement of boys compared to girls in NLAs Comparative achievement of those with special needs in NLAs Comparative achievement of those in disadvantaged geographic locations in NLAs Comparative achievement of those from marginalised social groups in NLAs	X% of boys and girls within xx years

Cross-cutting themes	
Education in Emergencies	Conflict and disaster risk reduction integrated into all national education sector plans
Migration	All migrants of school-age or who are education professionals recorded in monitoring of education goals by the host country to inform policy formulation
Gender	All reporting and evaluation of the development goals disaggregated by sex and analysed through a gender lens
Education for Sustainable Development	Education for sustainable development mainstreamed in all education policies, teacher and school leader preparation, and curricula

Subordinate goals	Goal	Indicator
i. Early childhood education and development	Reduce and seek to eliminate early childhood under-nutrition and avoidable childhood disease, and universalise access to community based ECE/D and pre-school below age 6 years	Basic health and child development Body Mass Index, immunisation rates, childhood diseases Participation rates in organised ECE/D and pre-school by age
ii. Basic education	Universalise an 'expanded vision of access' to a full cycle of a minimum of 9 years of continuous basic education Successful achievement of national learning outcomes in cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains for both primary and lower secondary cycles at age appropriate levels up to the age of 15 years	Enrolment at Grades 1-12 Completion rate by age at Grades 1, 3, 6, 9 and 12 Trained and qualified teacher rate Trained and qualified school leader rate National Learning Assessment standards at Grade 3, 6, 9 and 12 Yield (Level of achievement * % of age group achieving level)
iii. Post-basic and post-secondary education	Invest strategically in expanded and equitable access to post-basic and tertiary level education and training linked to wellbeing, livelihoods and employment and the transition to responsible adult citizenship	Enrolments by grade at secondary level % of age group enrolled by Grade Transition rates Completion rates All disaggregated by wealth quintile, location, gender, age and social group
iv. Non-formal education and lifelong learning	Eliminate illiteracy and innumeracy amongst those under 50 years old Provide education opportunities for young people and adults who have not successfully completed 9 years of basic education	Literacy and numeracy rates at ages 15-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36-40, 41-45 and 46-50 using samples and graded tests Trained and qualified non-formal education facilitators
v. Participation	Reduce and seek to eliminate disparities in participation in education at school level linked to wealth, location, special needs, age, gender and social group and ensure all children have equal educational opportunities and reduce gaps in measured outcomes	Participation rates by Grades 1, 6, 9, and 12 by wealth quintile, location, gender, special needs, age and social group Distribution of: - pupil-teacher ratios and class size - distance to school - achievement levels
vi. Infrastructure	Provide adequate infrastructure for learning according to national norms for buildings, basic services, safety, learning materials, and learning infrastructure within appropriate distances of households	% of schools meeting standards for: - sanitation - furniture and equipment - clean water - electricity - building quality/learning space/safety - security - learning materials - access to relevant technologies - recreation facilities

There were various dissatisfactions across the Commonwealth with the international architecture that emerged from the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 [3] and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [4] adopted by the U.N. in 2000. These were captured in a plenary address to the 18th CCEM in Mauritius (Lewin 2012). In sum it was felt that:

- Patterns of investment by development partners had become heavily skewed towards increasing access to basic education in general and primary education in particular. This reflected the priorities of some Commonwealth member states (CMS) but not many others. Basic education was often privileged for investment despite the fact that some post-conflict and fragile states needed to rebuild their cadre of middle and high level officers and employees to manage reconstruction. Though improved quality was explicitly included in the Dakar Targets (DTs), as it had been in the earlier *World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs* in 1990, the reality was to privilege enhanced access over improved quality and learning outcomes.

- The approach adopted by the UN failed to differentiate between countries in terms of starting points and was largely blind to aspirations that fell outside the "Washington consensus" of what needed to be done. The goals and targets de facto were intended to apply most to LICs and LMICs in need of development assistance. De jure they applied to all UN member states though the OECD member countries mostly assumed that they themselves had already met any educational target of value.

- Though equity was stressed in the EFA rhetoric very little was enacted that would enhance equity. By 2015 the chances of those from the lowest decile of household income of completing secondary school were often one fifth and sometimes less than one tenth of those in the richest decile. There was also evidence that expanded enrolment in post basic education had mainly benefitted those in the middle of the income distribution not the poorest.

- Investment in educational infrastructure lagged behind enrolment expansion as did provision of learning materials including textbooks. Paperless schools remained common in the poorest CMSs not because of the internet and applications of information technology but because there really was no paper and no means to buy it.

- Many observers felt that part of the problem with the Dakar Targets (DTs) and the MDGs was that there was too much distance between the "target setters and the target getters". Disembodied officials drafting goals and targets endorsed by politicians most of whom were not in office five years later presented a tough call for implementation with passion. Surprised target getters felt themselves signed up to aspirations that were sometimes impossible to realise.

- Rights based approaches were beginning to be challenged and not only by the long march of neo-liberalism. Rights cannot be realised without the development of fiscal states that can afford to provide public goods like education and health from domestic revenue. The alternative is aid dependence. In some countries development happened

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[3] The Dakar Goals and Targets are available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1681Dakar%20Framework%20for%20Action.pdf
[4] The Millennium Development Goals are available at:
https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

and created fiscal states that could finance their education systems. India now does not seek grant aid and proudly announced recently that it gave three times as much aid as it received. By contrast aid still provides more than a third of government income in CMS LICs. New approaches were needed that could support fiscal reform and solve the problem of financing mass education systems without dependence on aid.

- Lastly the DTs and MDGs were static and were lists not recipes. Putting them all into a tin and baking them together held no guarantee that a perfectly formed cake would emerge. Though laudable in themselves each aspiration interacted with others, trade offs were not recognised, contradictions were common and some ingredients lacked definition. Most worryingly the Goals and Targets (G and T's) were ossified by the bureaucrats pen and blotted ink, with no intention to revisit the G and T's before 2015. Between 2000 and 2015 events intruded including 9/11, the Iraq, Afghanistan and Syrian wars, energy independence from the Gulf in North America, an increase in China's GDP by ten times, global inequality leading to 25 people having as much wealth as the poorest 50% in the world, and general acceptance that global warming is a persistent threat to life on earth that needed a new approach to development.

In 2012 the Commonwealth Ministers working group's deliberations resulted in the new formulation of goals known as the Commonwealth Goals and Targets for 2030 (CMGT). This fed into the global deliberations on the SDGs and added to the weight of opinion that there should be a separate set of goals for education which some thought was no longer necessary. The final recommendations were then presented to representatives of the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in London in December 2012. The Commonwealth Framework was disseminated into the UNESCO led SDG consultations on Post 2015 Goals. It was presented at various regional fora that channelled country, NGO and agency proposals into the series of meetings that led from regional consultations to the Oman Conference on the SDGs and to the World Education Forum in Incheon in 2015.

The Commonwealth Ministers discussions around the Post 2015 Goals recognised the three possibilities identified by the Economic Commission for Africa. These were

- *Retaining* the current MDGs and extending the timeline;
- *Restructuring* the MDGs, to eliminate overlaps and include issues originally omitted ('MDG-plus');
- *Replacing* the MDGs completely with an alternative framework that would focus on transforming the economies of developing countries, educational reforms to improve access and quality, and greater reliance on domestic resources and revenue (UNECA, 2012: 131).

Retaining the MDGs was never going to satisfy needs for novelty and retreading the 15 year old millennium omnibus was judged to be a marketing challenge. The ever lengthening critiques and the sense of inevitability of not achieving the goals in 2015 in a good number of countries led to a fatal fatigue with the brand and the appetite to refresh it. Neither the Commonwealth nor the UN processes turned out to have sufficient courage or imagination to discuss seriously the radical options of *replacing* the dominant development paradigm. Nor did it take long to reject the option of simply abandoning a global architecture in favour of a country led, bottom up, collection of differing approaches to educational development reflecting a myriad of differing priorities and preferences. This left *restructuring* as the front runner which would allow rebranding, admit new priorities, and allow variation to reflect

diversity of aspirations and realistic trajectories to sustainable development.

Three structural possibilities were identified for the Post 2015 Commonwealth Goals and Targets (G and T):

- G and T 'lite': a two-tier framework, with high level goals linked to regions/groups and context, and lower level goals defined at national or regional level.
- G and T 'heavy': a standardised framework with detailed global specifications linked to performance and funding.
- G and T 'Rest In Peace': termination of a global framework to be replaced by separate national, bilateral and multilateral projects.

Each of these options had advantages and disadvantages (Lewin 2012). The proposed two-tier goals (G and T lite) introduced a layer of differentiation in priorities. This structure of Goals and Sub-goals was included in the CMGT but not SDG 4. It was intended to allow more realistic national or regional level goals responsive to different initial conditions, national priorities, and available resources to be set. Some differentiation based on contextual realities is necessary to successful attainment (Crossley and Watson, 2003). Differentiation might take the form of different attainment levels, or of different timescales for achieving targets, or of different prioritisation of goals. Differentiated goals make specific targets more achievable, measurable and more accountable. Country-specific targets would allow greater specificity in indicators, and allow for secure national ownership within a global framework.

"G and T" heavy was not initially favoured because of the widespread sentiment that the new goals and targets should be grown and owned, rather than given and borrowed from global development agencies. Post 2015 the SDG4 global framework has gravitated towards "G and T" heavy as development support has increasingly been framed by performance related aid that relates tranche releases to narrowly defined and measurable outcomes. There are signs of increased standardisation, aid conditionality, and global convergence in expectations. This risks a lack of situation specific relevance, limited resilience and conflict over divergent in aspirations.

"G and T" Rest in Peace may have been the preference of some of the delegates who toiled late into the night at the many SDG related meetings. But it was not a preference of the development partners who needed the global framework to define their programming. As low income countries become richer, as development assistance plateaus and as populist politics in rich countries undermines the appetite for more aid, it will become clear whether global goals and targets for education are demand driven by countries or supply led by development partners.

In 2015 SDG 4 was endorsed at the WEF in Incheon. The result was a set of SDGs that closely resembled the goals and targets of Education for All in 2000, or even EFA in 1990. Several of the existing goals were retained or rolled over from the DTs and MDGs. SDGs 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 have clear analogues in the EFA architecture. They emerged early in the Commonwealth deliberations too which added weight and refinement to their later inclusion in the SDG4. The Commonwealth framework also anticipated the inclusion of preschool participation in its sub-ordinate goals, adequate teaching staff to support higher level of participation, and included a concern for education related directly to livelihoods and employment.

The Commonwealth Framework and the SDGs

Several points stand out that illustrate interaction between the CMGT Framework and SDG4

The CMGTs endorsed the commitment to a full cycle of 9 years of free continuous basic education leading to learning achievement in line with national norms. SDG4 is now widely interpreted as requiring states to provide 12 years of formal education to all citizens. In LICs This implies retaining children in school when well over the legal minimum age for work in many CMSs. The SDG has created an apparent anomaly – 54% of children out of school according to the GEMR are 16 years old or older, and 75% at 14 years or older. These are global aspirations transplanted to countries where the trade offs necessary to achieve the goals look very different to those in rich CMCs. Rich country levels of provision need rich country demography and revenue raising commitments.

The CMGT were deliberately designed to cover the full range of formal education rather than just one sub-cycle. There was a view in part of the World Bank and UNICEF that a single simple goal at the level of early grade achievement would provide a universal focus for reform but this narrow view was rejected partly as a result of influence from the CMGT. SDG4 has blended commitment to universal access at both primary and secondary level into one goal. The CMGT deliberately kept basic education up to grade 9 separate from post basic education. to reduce the pressure in LICs to commit to unrealisable goals in of universal levels of participation for children through upper secondary school and up to their late teens. Unlike SDG4 which has three Targets for TVET (4.3/4/5), the CMGT has a single goal that emphasises the importance of a full range of post basic education having relevance to employment livelihoods and well being.

Learning outcomes were stressed in the CMGT as being inseparable from access and national aspirations. The SDGs appear to be privileging international achievement testing over national curricula priorities. This has some merit but also largely ignores the need to develop national curricula that are not all the same, especially at higher levels.

In addition the CMGT deliberately drew attention to the importance of age appropriate progression rates in low income countries where over 30% of children can be two years over age or more with measurable consequences for drop out and levels of achievement. Full enrolment means absence of age grade slippage. This is now the concept being used by UIS as an indicator for SDG 4.

Equity was felt to be so important it warranted its own Goal statement in the CMGT (Goal 3). The ambition was to shift the focus to persistent inequality in outcomes. The SDGs emphasise inequalities of access more than inequalities of outcome, though it is the latter that determine life futures.

The CMGTs included commitment to ECD and preschool as a Subgoal. The SDGs give it prominence as a headline goal, as did the Dakar Targets in 2000. In contrast SDG 4.7 on global citizenship was not anticipated by the CMGT which was more concerned with national citizenship especially of the growing number of migrants. This was judged more important than a loosely defined concept of global citizenship that assumes a cross-cultural consensus on values and political economy that remains elusive.

Opportunities for the Commonwealth Member States to Lead on the SDGs

It is time for the Commonwealth to revisit how helpful SDG4 is and develop its own more nuanced goals that reflect the realities and priorities of CMSs. The diversity of the Commonwealth indicates how ambitious the SDGs are in attempting to generate a single list of goals equally relevant to all countries. The list of current concerns about SDG4 echoes the criticisms that led to the CMGT. These issues could form the basis of a new agenda for Commonwealth Ministers initiative that seeks to take control of the global development framework in ways that match Commonwealth conditions and national priorities. Key issues are discussed below.

First, the preference of development agencies towards investments in basic education remains albeit with an ambitious extension to the whole of the secondary cycle. This is driven by a rights based approach more than a coherent theory of development. The problem is that this approach suits some developmental conditions but not others. It is becoming clearer and that sustainable development in most CMS does not require more aid but more investment in fiscal reforms, greater efficiency and effectiveness, and better management of economic growth. The most successful CMSs can provide examples of the pathways that need to be followed to develop financially sustainable systems (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia, Botswana, Barbados).

Second, increasingly the global emphasis on measuring learning of the SDGs is being translated into internationally standardised testing in the early grades which assumes global curricula convergence and does little to recognise different starting points and preferences for outcomes not captured by the tests. Improved quality is not being captured or promoted by such testing and more measurement delinked from classroom level formative assessment is simply replicating findings of under achievement in LICs and LMICs that are well known. High performing CMSs can illustrate how bespoke assessment systems can minimise destructive examination backwash on learning and teaching and how formative assessment linked to pedagogic intervention can improve the management of learning. More international comparisons are unlikely to raise levels of achievement since they are low stakes and attempt to homogenise achievement within an increasingly diverse student population.

Third, there has been no widespread attempt to address questions of equity related to household income or location and there is some evidence that exclusion related to poverty may actually have increased in some CMSs despite growth in GDP. Gender equity has been addressed and across the CMSs school participation rates are close to parity. It is increasingly common to find girls out enrolling boys. The most equitable CMSs can demonstrate how reducing gender gaps in participation and achievement can contribute to social justice and economic growth.

Fourth, it has proved very difficult to close the digital divide of access and capability between the rich and poor CMSs not least because the leading edge moves so fast. CMSs, especially small island states, can collaborate to show how these gaps can be managed at affordable costs. More generally managing and regulating the internet and social media and safeguarding young people is a Commonwealth wide problem. If the Minotaur and the Hydra are to be reigned in the architects and owners of information technologies have to be reminded by governments that with power comes moral responsibility. An coordinated approach across CMSs will have more influence than ad hoc legislation in separate states.

Fifth, the SDGs, like the MDGs and DTs, appear frozen in aspic. There is no on going Commonwealth dialogue that seeks to treat SDG4 as a dynamic framework that changes over

time to reflect the importance of "events, dear boy, events[5]". Neither have the SDGs been domesticated to reflect different contexts, ambitions and realistic possibilities. One of the key texts on the SDGs wrestles repeatedly with tensions between a globalized approach to development, and an enduring attachment to the nation as the indivisible unit of development with many special and unique characteristics justifying special consideration. The flavour of the SDGs, and their format, which volunteers few opportunities to modify, adapt or otherwise locate the goals and targets in different country circumstances, can easily be seen as symbolic of a "one size fits all" message emanating from the centre of a Washington consensus. The CMSs should grasp the challenge of national level Sustainable Development Goals for education, and insist on developing and owning national goals that can evolve over time to reflect changing priorities and achievements. If these goals are shared between CMSs so much the better.

Sixth, the distance between target setters and target getters does not appear to have diminished. As the implementation of the SDG 4 has unfolded the delegation of assessing progress towards goals and targets has led to a dislocation. Political systems have been displaced by bureaucratic and highly technical indicator systems that nevertheless create pressure on CMSs to conform to global norms. This reifies the SDGs and invests nearly all the time of the international community in considering how to measure complex outcomes, and very little time considering whether the outcomes have developmental significance. It is not clear what decisions by whom will make use of the big data sets being collected. Curiously the UNESCO Institute of Statistics has published a "Cheat Sheet for SDG4 Indicators" using the language of high stakes assessment and convergent global goals to implying somehow that they constitute a mantra to be remembered and repeated on request (UNESCO 2019). CMSs with a clear idea of their national development strategies may wish to develop there own "cheat sheet" of what is important lined to a coherent theory of development that can shape investment decisions. This at least would mean the target setter and target getters spoke the same language.

Seventh, The formulation of SDG 4 gives no indication and provides no environmentally sustainable targets or indicators for educational development despite the fact education is one of the largest sources of employment, non renewable energy use, and polluting commuting. It is also one of the few places that can provide disinterested insight into the challenges of planetary husbandry to change attitudes and develop understanding of sustainability in the next generation. The CMSs could seek to develop planet friendly environmental protocols for educational development.

Eighth, though SDG 4.7 is concerned with global citizenship it just scratches the surface of the need to transform learning goals and plan education systems to minimise the burden on future generations. It is conspicuously not concerned with national citizenship which many think is a precondition for global citizenship. Within the CMSs there are millions of people whose citizenship is compromised and ambiguous. This includes internal and cross border migrants, excluded social groups, those with disability, and those without adequate documentation. The CMGTs noted migration as a cross cutting theme and stressed the importance of more inclusive approaches to citizenship, especially of children. The issues of citizenship in CMS are central to sustainable development.

Ninth, many in the low income CMS will have noted that the "learning crisis" flagged by the World Bank in 2018 is actually more of a financing crisis than a sudden discovery that children

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[5] Attributed to Harold MacMillan probably apocryphally. MacMillan was UK Prime Minister when the first Commonwealth Minsters Conference took place sixty years ago in 1959 in Oxford.

are not learning at OECD levels in CMS LICs and LMICs (World Bank 2018, Lewin 2018). Many more children are in school and much more learning is taking place in CMSs than in 2000 or 1990. This is a very good news story. So also is the fact that many CMS are becoming fiscal states. The appetite for more aid to education appears to have been softening partly for these reasons. In 1990 Africa received twice as much in aid as it generated in domestic revenue. By 2015 the opposite was true. This rewrites the map of external assistance to education into the future. If the purpose of aid is to accelerate development and this works as a strategy then the number of recipients should fall as countries develop and become fiscal states. Some CMSs have led the way in showing that this can happen by becoming less and less dependent on aid. This is one area where Ministers of Education along with Minsters of Finance can demonstrate how to achieve sustainable educational development without more aid and more debt.

A Programme for Action towards 2030

A programme for action for CMSs can be built from the issues identified above and fed into the next CHOGM in 2020 and the 21st CCEM in 2021 and the follow up to the CCEM20 in Fiji in 2018. Specific solutions are needed at national level that capture the essence of both sustainable educational development (SED) and education for sustainable development (ESD). SED is concerned with the conditions that enable states to realise rights to education without post-colonial dependence on external assistance or acquiring unsustainable debt. It is concerned with educational infrastructure and the maintenance and development of systems for learning and their financing from domestic revenues. In contrast ESD is a response to the urgent need to transform educational curricula and learning outcomes to lead not lag changes in environmental stress points, demographic transitions, employment and threats to social and economic wellbeing.

The Issues Paper for CCEM 20 was focused on Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver? (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2018) In the medium term, both resilience and sustainable development mean that education systems must be financed from domestic revenues. This includes both income from taxation on individuals and corporate entities, and investment from the private sector and contributions from philanthropists. SED depends on fiscal reform that enables core public goods like education to be financed from domestic revenue. This, along with enhanced levels of efficiency and effectiveness, is a major reason why high performing CMSs can support mass participation in quality education systems. This is the only method of achieving SED. Fiscal reforms are at the heart of the next generation of educational financing and can share the mechanisms that have most potential to contribute to the transition to fiscal states of those CMS that are still aid dependent.

Achieving large increases in domestic revenue where these are low will not be easy but is feasible over time. It requires substantial fiscal reform that reduces avoidance and evasion, fraud and deliberate transfer pricing to minimise tax. Gains from educational reforms that promote greater efficiency and effectiveness could be substantial. This may be the most cost-efficient way of generating more resources. Critically aid should never be used to finance recurrent expenditure (e.g. teachers salaries) which is the main element in all education budgets. Higher levels of external support, especially if they are needed indefinitely, create aid dependence and distort domestic decision-making. Aid dependence makes sustainable development financed from domestic revenue more elusive.

It is time to cease directing concessional finance to "filling gaps". Instead aid investments

should be directed to increasing efficiency and effectiveness at system level. The most efficient and effective education systems in the CMSs deliver universal access though to grade 9, and some to grade 12, at levels of financial commitment that are similar to those where less than half of children complete secondary school. Efficient systems have cost per student at secondary no more than 50% greater than at primary. Inefficient systems have a ratio of cost of more than four to one. Similarly higher education costs per student in high income countries CMSs are generally only twice those of primary school places. In low income CMSs costs can be more than 15 times greater (Lewin 2015).

Fiscal reform is therefore a high priority in countries where revenue collection is very low. To deliver quality education around 6% of GDP is needed and as much as 20% of government budgets. To do this implies that revenue collection that finances government has to be 30% of GDP (20% of 30% is 6%). Many LICs and LMICs average half this amount. This is not because they are poor so much as because they do not collect revenue, and because avoidance and evasion are commonplace. In poor countries many of the richest citizens pay little or no tax, nor do extractive industries or foreign domiciled multinationals. There is no sustainable educational development without fair and inclusive fiscal reforms that replace the politics of underfunding education and aid with the politics of a social contract between tax paying citizens and governments charged with providing public goods. The next generation of aid and South-South cooperation in the Commonwealth has the opportunity to share insights and strategies on how to become fiscal states that manage SED into the future. This will not emerge from the SDG architecture. CMSs need to set their own educational goals and targets with a firm commitment to both SED and ESD.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) needs consensus on its meaning. The most commonly used definition for sustainable development is in the 1987 Brundtland Report. This argues that sustainable development "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This valuing of the future over the present is essential to environmental protection and the ability of humanity to manage its planetary burden so that it does not irreversibly deplete geological, agricultural, maritime and atmospheric resources. This requires fundamental shifts in patterns of consumption, and a new economics of production, pollution and recycling. It needs an understanding that sustainable solutions require global consensus and cooperation.

ESD is more than anything else a curriculum challenge and requires curriculum development to ensure environmentally informed citizenry, encourage changes in consumption preferences, promote social cohesion and manage learning effectively. Curriculum reform especially at secondary level has been widely neglected and more frequently driven by the exigencies of high stakes assessment than by needs to allow all citizens to understand the vulnerabilities of the planet and the risk to well being from air pollution, water contamination, solid waste disposal and greenhouse gases. Curricula must lead learning assessments not follow from the demands of high stakes testing. Effective formative assessment that leads to better management of learning will have more impact on achievement than massive investment in international assessments.

If there is a learning crisis the solution lies in the curriculum. A resilient curriculum is one that is managed so that learning is cumulative, children always have teachers, and learners are never left behind. Commonwealth countries share curriculum challenges for ESD. They also share language, curricula and pedagogic traditions, and have commonalities in assessment systems. They are well placed to collaborate on ESD and take advantage of the synergies that can exist across cognate clusters of CMS.

The 20th CCEM Issues Paper (CCEM20 2018) highlighted the importance of resilience in the next phase of educational development. Central to resilience is diversity, as any mono-cropping farmer is likely to know. If the CMSs are to own the new architecture of education and development framed by SDG 4 then a fundamental change is needed in how national and global goals and targets are generated. Ownership of the SDGs means ownership of the targets and indicators as well as the Goals. The distance between target setters (who rarely have long term responsibilities for meeting targets, and target getters (who rarely are invited into global consultations in a meaningful way, must be reduced. It is time to call the bluff that globalised goals need to be translated into targets and indicators at ever increasing levels of detail and smaller units of analysis.

SDG4 is being monitored by the UN system and by the Global Education Monitoring Report. After five years in 2020 the Commonwealth should do its own review independently on its own account. If it does it might well conclude that some of the SDG4 targets were not fit for purpose and did not match country circumstances. CMSs might also ask, given that the SDG is a list not a strategy, what was missed from the list? Is there another better list that is a better fit for purpose? What is not included in SDG 4 (e.g. a serious engagement with the development of both sustainable educational development and education for sustainable development) and what should be included in country level goals, targets and indicators validated by governments legitimated by their citizens rather than distant supra-national bodies. The recent UN Global Assessment (UN 2019) emphasise how the impact of humanity on the plant is now approaching a critical and irreversible phase.

It is time for Commonwealth countries to act and transcend SDG4. This process can co-exist with engagement with SDG4 up to the point where choices can be made as to which development agenda best suits national and international aspirations for sustainable development. It may be time to reboot the SDGs from the bottom up. CMSs could take on the challenge and show how SED and ESD can be achieved using the flexibility that comes from dynamic not static approaches to goal setting and target getting owned by, not sent to, CMSs.

After 60 years of meetings of the Commonwealth Ministers the 20CCEM asked the question "Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?" The answer is yes if sustainability is understood to be diverse in definition and aspiration across different clusters of member states, and resilience is embedded in educational delivery systems that are designed to capture the essence of both Sustainable Educational Development and Education for Sustainable Development. This generation of the Commonwealth's children and environmental activists are watching to see if the previous generation can deliver on its promises to value the future over the present. The next CHOGM and CCEM should send signals that the Commonwealth is in the vanguard of the response and is not bringing up the rear.

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