

## CONFERENCE OF COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION MINISTERS (CCEM) 27- 28 APRIL 2022

### THEME: RETHINKING EDUCATION FOR INNOVATION, GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY POST-COVID-19

#### CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDER'S SUBMISSION TO 22CCEM

*This submission was prepared by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education coordinating inputs from Commonwealth education organisations and the Regional Education Learning Initiative coordinating inputs from the East African region (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) and beyond.*

#### Background and Introduction

At the 25<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in the UK on 19–20 April 2018, Heads discussed how the Commonwealth could contribute to a fairer, more sustainable, more secure, and more prosperous future. Given that 60 percent of the Commonwealth's population is under the age of 30, Heads of Government encouraged the implementation of specific actions to provide the opportunity for at least 12 years of quality education and learning for girls and boys by 2023 by investing in skilled, motivated and supportive teachers and educational facilities, and focusing on education reforms. Marginalized groups, especially disadvantaged girls, children and adolescents with disabilities, those who have dropped out of school, refugees and migrants, and indigenous, nomadic and minority populations – all need to transition from primary to secondary education and acquire knowledge and skills through appropriate policies, programmes and strategic partnerships.

Due to varied challenges, many children and youth continue to miss out on education opportunities. For example, UIS (2017) notes that 202 million African students are not achieving minimum proficiency levels in literacy or numeracy. The youth literacy rate (15-24) is 91.73%, with only six in ten young people expected to complete secondary school in 2030. It is estimated that there will be 377.4 million students by 2030 in formal post-secondary school. About 75% of these youth will be concentrated in 10 countries. Six are Commonwealth countries: Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Uganda and Tanzania.

With rapid and continuing youth population growth, it is necessary to expand opportunities in the education sector. However, with COVID-19, millions of children miss out on education, become vulnerable to early marriage, child labour, and violence, whereas 7.6 million girls are at risk of not returning to school; many Commonwealth countries continue to experience boys' underachievement, untrained teachers, and lack of implementation capacity.

The challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and made actors rethink education provision. The areas of concern are virtual learning spaces, equity in education, employment, financing, and employment.

#### **The Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM)**

The 20<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (20CCEM), held in February 2018 in Nadi, Fiji, brought together Commonwealth Education Ministers and senior government officials, stakeholders, educators, teachers, and development partners. The theme for the conference was

'Sustainability and Resilience: Can Education Deliver?' Ministers reaffirmed that education is a fundamental human right and indispensable to sustainable development. Ministers committed to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

As a follow-up, another Commonwealth Meeting of Ministers of Education is being planned. It will happen in a hybrid format from 27 to 28 April 2022, prior to the Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting to be held from 10-11 May 2022. The conference will strengthen the relevance of the contributions to education by accredited organisations before the Communique of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is developed or revised. The conference will convene ministers of education from the 54 member countries, partners and stakeholders to address educational priority issues towards the 2030 Agenda.

The Meeting will be structured around five key subthemes. The proposed sub-themes could include:

- a) Lessons learned from COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies;
- b) Rethinking education for decent work and employability;
- c) Redefining learning spaces: multiple pathways and flexible approaches;
- d) Financing of education, including innovative financing;
- e) Education for sustainability and a peaceful, cohesive Commonwealth.

The Meeting will further build on existing commitments from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2018 to leave no one behind, emphasizing equitable and inclusive education. Therefore, to support marginalised groups, especially disadvantaged girls, children with disabilities, and those who have dropped out of school to progress through secondary education and training through appropriate policies, advocacy and strategic partnerships. Outcomes on policy proposals from this Meeting are also expected to inform discussion at the upcoming CHOGM expected to take place in June 2022 in Kigali, Rwanda.

## Efforts by Pan-African Civil Society Organizations

[The Regional Education Learning Initiative \(RELI\)](#) is a member-driven initiative working to ensure inclusive learning for all children in East Africa. RELI has a vision of a Kenyan society where all children receive a quality education regardless of race, colour, creed, or ability. Towards achieving its mandate, RELI has a window of opportunity to make a joint submission on behalf of its members through the Commonwealth Consortium for Education (CCfE).

The CCfE was established by a group of Commonwealth NGOs to coordinate their efforts on behalf of Commonwealth education, stimulate more coherence in their work and provide a collective mechanism for interaction with ministries and official Commonwealth organizations.

## Overarching Recommendations

1. **Enhanced investment in education and training** [The GEM report \(2021\)](#) estimates that only a third of Commonwealth countries have met the international benchmarks of either 15% - 20% of national public expenditure or 4-6% of National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) spending on education. We call on member states to progressively make legal and policy commitments to fund education at levels consistent with international benchmarks. To support these commitments, diagnostic tools on financing for the sector also need to be strengthened, alongside transparent, user-friendly platforms to allow all stakeholders to track and monitor education spending.
2. **Prioritise education and training within the Commonwealth.** Restore and adequately fund professional education capacity within the Commonwealth Secretariat and, to maintain momentum following the necessarily foreshortened 21CCEM in April 2022, commit to a fully-fledged 22CCEM before the end of 2023.

## Thematic Recommendations

### Thematic area 1: Lessons learned from COVID-19 mitigation and recovery strategies

1. **Education and training are key to societal and human well-being and must form part of an interconnected human development approach to economic, social and cultural recovery from the pandemic.** As the Covid-19 crisis has underlined, schooling, especially in the early years, is essential for learners' socialisation and physical and mental well-being. Learning and schooling, health, nutrition and sanitation, livelihoods and household income are inextricably interlinked. Compartmentalisation and competition for resources between human development sectors have serious negative consequences and must lead to a partnership in the common cause of improving human welfare.
2. **Build resilience and adaptability into our education and training systems through targeted contingency planning and investment and provision of safety nets for disadvantaged learners.** Weathering future crises requires investment in capacity (especially ICT and remote learning facilities) and continuously updating emergency response plans. These should include

the provision of 'catch-up' and 'second-chance' incentives and support packages to minimise dropout and make good learning lost through school and college closures, and support for/ validation of learning undertaken in non-school/college modes and settings. To ensure continuity of learning at all levels during emergencies, governments should establish education contingency funds.

3. **Strengthen parental, stakeholder and community engagement with the provision of education and training.** Partnership with parents, community groups, faith groups, NGOs, the private sector, and economic enterprises helped mitigate the damage to education caused by the pandemic and ensured some continuity of learning. Fresh attention is needed to provide parents with guidance and practical help to support children and young people studying at home including investing in strategies that strengthen the linkages between home and school, as well as hybrid learning strategies.

## Thematic area 2: Rethinking education for work and employment

1. **Build skills and knowledge through competency-based curriculum and training reforms and revised curricula to increase their relevance to national development priorities.** Critical skillsets for learners include foundational skills; 21<sup>st</sup> century and entrepreneurship skills; digital skills; STEM skills; and technical and vocational skills. 21<sup>st</sup> century and entrepreneurship skills are developed through learner-centered interactive pedagogies and require skilled teachers to deliver; STEM instruction should be made more relevant to young people in their daily life. Reforming assessment to provide insights into student learning and tests for the application rather than acquiring knowledge is necessary, accompanied by improvement in teaching practices to support learning across the skills range. Greater priority should be given to second-chance programmes that enable working adults to update their skills or reskill that match the workplace needs.
2. **Capacity building of teachers, educators, non-teaching staff and education administrators at all levels and decent working conditions are a prerequisite for education and improvement.** Countries should invest in the capacity building of teachers to impart foundational and relevant future work skills to learners/trainees. This will require more significant investment in pre-service and in-service training and increased focus on using ICT to support teaching throughout all training. In all parts of the education system, better working conditions for teachers from early years to higher education and in formal and informal settings are essential. Attention is required not just for improved remuneration but also for providing professional support and creating career structures that provide progression and reward the acquisition of skills and experience.
3. **Expand work experience schemes and apprenticeships.** Enabling a smooth transition from school and college/university to work is a challenge for every country, especially for countries with rapidly growing populations that have fewer labour market niches in relation to job-seekers. Education and training institutions should seek to develop ongoing close contact with

the local labour market, employers and self-employed entrepreneurs to align formal learning content more closely with future working life. Firms and public sector bodies should be incentivised to provide and expand apprenticeship opportunities for labour market entrants.

4. **Incorporating career guidance into the education system.** Governments should make a deliberate effort to provide a comprehensive developmental program designed to assist individuals in making and implementing informed educational and occupational choices.

### **Thematic area 3: Redefining learning spaces: multiple pathways and flexible approaches**

1. **Promote learning throughout life by better integrating formal, non-formal and informal education and training.** Address learning needs from the crucial early years, with a focus to critical foundational literacy and numeracy skills, to retirement within an integrated system. Modifying traditional distinctions between formal and informal, virtual and face-to-face learning will facilitate easier transfers between different learning paths and enhance equality of status and respect for teachers/educators and learners in different education levels. Increased advocacy and awareness around the concept of 'learning ecosystems,' 'socially networked schools,' and the value of conscious engagement within communities will help additional access to resources and learning opportunities.
2. **Promote community learning.** A key lesson learned during COVID-19 was that parents and other community members are critical players in supporting education. Learning can and should occur everywhere, including within families and communities and at all stages of life. Despite critical roles played by parents and guardians, they are not adequately prepared to support learning. Governments should invest in building the capacity as active partners in learning and training.
3. **Education systems must respond to the full diversity of learners' needs.** Curricula need to move beyond a 'one size fits all' approach and respond flexibly to the special needs of marginalised populations (e.g., learners with disabilities, refugees, minority cultures, mobile and remote populations). This could include modifying normal patterns of cohort progression to allow mainstream learners to catch up and capitalize on the potential of ICT. This can enable flexible dual-mode course delivery, using in-person and virtual side-by-side, and mainstreaming accelerated/remedial learning approaches to ensure all children learn. It may also include addressing context-specific challenges with high dropout levels and in particular gender groups – Youth and adolescent girls in some settings, youth and adolescent boys in other settings. In this regard, we note the efforts of the Girls Education Challenge co-sponsored by Kenya and the UK to enhance the provision of education for Commonwealth girls.

## Thematic area 4: Financing of education and training, including innovative financing

1. **Commonwealth Education Ministers should seize this opportunity to build on existing commitments**, notably the Kenyatta [Call to Action on Education Finance](#) in 2021 and the [Nairobi Declaration and Call for Action on Education](#) in 2018, and push forward within existing agreed frameworks. [Forward steps should include action on tax, debt relief, public sector wage bills, and transparent tracking of on-budget and off-budget education and training spending at all levels and outcomes](#). Commonwealth Ministers should *affirm the urgency of increasing the share, size, sensitivity, and scrutiny of education budgets*. We call on Ministers to take this crucial education agenda forward in global education forums, particularly in the UN Secretary General's high-level Transforming Education Summit scheduled for September 2022.
2. **Commit to practical action to raise domestic tax revenues and reduce international debt burdens** in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This is the surest route to expanding resources for education and training. Commonwealth countries should introduce ambitious and progressive tax reforms to increase tax-to-GDP ratios by five percentage points by 2030 and seek to renegotiate external debts when debt servicing obstructs education spending.
3. Make a case for **urgently addressing any shortages of professional teachers**, which will require bold steps to actively increase the percentage of GDP spent on the public sector wage bill and strong resistance to austerity measures that unnecessarily squeeze public finances. Ministers of Education should engage in a sustained strategic dialogue with Ministries of Finance, working alongside Ministries of Health and other key departments to deliver the SDGs to make a case for increased spending, particularly on the frontline public sector workforce.
4. **Manage the injection of resources into the public education system by non-state partners through 'innovative financing.'** Such initiatives may welcome additional resources for education and training but should be subject to safeguards and close monitoring to ensure human rights compliance ([Guiding Principles on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and to regulate private involvement in education](#) (Abidjan Principles) ). The surest way to secure the public interest in education and training is through state provision. Where non-government entities (e.g., local communities, faith groups, civil society and private sector) are permitted to own and manage schools, they should conform strictly with government policies and guidelines designed to ensure that all children enjoy the right of access to good quality education and training. Governments should develop robust policy frameworks backed by effective administrative structures for enabling, registering, monitoring, and regulating non-government provision of education. We see this as a fruitful area for Commonwealth countries to share relevant experiences.

## Thematic area 5: Education for sustainability and a peaceful, cohesive Commonwealth

- 1. Education and training systems have a leading role in promoting sustainability, inclusion and non-violence.** Education plays a critical role in teaching sustainability, peacebuilding and instilling in learners a commitment to build a better world. Additionally, it is not enough for education to teach values of sustainability and peacebuilding through the curriculum, crucial though that is. The education system is responsible for a large share of the consumption of resources. More attention should be given to planning education infrastructure to reduce fossil fuel consumption in institutions of learning and minimise daily vehicle travel. Moreover, education institutions of learning should ensure they teach tolerance, respect, and inclusion and practise them by providing peaceful, safe, and welcoming environments, free of physical violence, coercion, and bullying.
- 2. Recommit prioritising and funding Commonwealth education partnerships.** Mobilising networks of supportive and engaged actors from communities to governments contribute to education sustainability. As the [2018 Nadi Declaration](#) stressed, partnership working among Commonwealth stakeholders is key for unlocking Commonwealth potential in building back better towards achieving the SDGs and creating a more cohesive Commonwealth. These partnerships can be effective if articulated through a strengthened Education Team in the Commonwealth Secretariat connecting education stakeholders.
- 3. Incorporate and be guided by the principles of the right to education.** While private actors in education enhance access, there is a need for commonwealth countries to enforce stringent regulatory frameworks for improved monitoring of private actors and quality assurance support to ensure that private actors do not infringe on children's right to education. In recent years, we have witnessed a substantive growth of private provision in education, which has been proven to create and deepen inequalities, particularly in regions with insufficient public schools. We have observed that even small changes in chargeable fees lead to further micro-segregation amongst the poor. Children from high-income families attend expensive high-quality schools known to perform well. In contrast, children from the poorest and most vulnerable families are relegated to public and low-cost private schools that are grossly under-resourced. This, in turn, increases inequality in accessing education and deepens poverty and exclusion cycles. This kind of segregation hurts the overall quality of an education system. An [OECD analysis](#) shows that the highest-performing education systems combine quality with equity. We urge the Commonwealth to incorporate and be guided by the principles of the right to education as expounded by the [Guiding Principles](#) on the human rights obligations of States to provide public education and regulate private involvement in education (Abidjan Principles). This will ensure resilient education systems and peaceful and cohesive societies.

## Participants and Contributors

No	Name	Organisation	Email	Region
1.	Margaret Wawira	RELI Kenya	<a href="mailto:wmargaret@ziziafrique.org">wmargaret@ziziafrique.org</a>	East Africa
2.	Deborah Kimati	Dignitas	<a href="mailto:deborah.kimathi@dignitasproject.org">deborah.kimathi@dignitasproject.org</a>	East Africa
3.	<a href="#">Charlene Deacon</a>	JET Education Services	<a href="mailto:charlene@jet.org.za">charlene@jet.org.za</a>	South Africa
4.	Micheal Fredrick Ssenoga	ActionAid International	<a href="mailto:micheal.ssenoga@actionaid.org">micheal.ssenoga@actionaid.org</a>	Africa; Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania - based in Uganda
5.	Gaudence Kapinga	RELI Tanzania	<a href="mailto:gaudence.kapinga@hakielimu.or.tz">gaudence.kapinga@hakielimu.or.tz</a>	East Africa
6.	Ashina Mtsumi	GI-ESCR - Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	<a href="mailto:ashina@gi-escr.org">ashina@gi-escr.org</a>	Africa, Global
7.	Virginia Ngindiru	Zizi Afrique Foundation	<a href="mailto:vngindiru@ziziafrique.org">vngindiru@ziziafrique.org</a>	East Africa
8.	Ng'ang'a Kibandi	Dignitas Project	<a href="mailto:n.kibandi@dignitasproject.org">n.kibandi@dignitasproject.org</a>	East Africa
9.	Eldah Onsomu	KIPPRA	<a href="mailto:eldaho@yahoo.co.uk">eldaho@yahoo.co.uk</a>	Kenya, East Africa
10.	Mugoya Musa	Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER)	<a href="mailto:mugoyamusah@gmail.com">mugoyamusah@gmail.com</a>	Uganda - East Africa
11.	Elizabeth Owiti	Elimu Yetu Coalition (EYC)	<a href="mailto:elizabeth.owiti@elimuyetu.net">elizabeth.owiti@elimuyetu.net</a>	Kenya, East Africa
12.	David Archer	Action Aid	<a href="mailto:david.archer@actionaid.org">david.archer@actionaid.org</a>	Global
13.	Lesedi Matlala	JET Education Services	<a href="mailto:lesedi@jet.org.za">lesedi@jet.org.za</a>	South Africa
14.	Faith Muisyo	Dignitas	<a href="mailto:faith.muisyo@dignitasproject.org">faith.muisyo@dignitasproject.org</a>	East Africa
15.	Julie Juma	ActionAid	<a href="mailto:julie.juma@actionaid.org">julie.juma@actionaid.org</a>	Global - based in Malawi
16.	Nuru Luhindi	Little Innovators School	<a href="mailto:nuru.luhindi@littleinnovators.org">nuru.luhindi@littleinnovators.org</a>	East Africa
17.	Winy Cherotich	People's Action for Learning (PAL) Network	<a href="mailto:wcherotich@palnetwork.org">wcherotich@palnetwork.org</a>	East Africa





18.	Kennedy Oulu		<a href="mailto:kenoulu@gmail.com">kenoulu@gmail.com</a>	EAC
19.	Nathaniel Muthomi	Wisena Consultancy	<a href="mailto:nathaniel@wiseconsult.org">nathaniel@wiseconsult.org</a>	EAC
20.	Karen Arisa	RELI	<a href="mailto:Karisa@ziziafrique.org">Karisa@ziziafrique.org</a>	EAC
21.	Caroline Thiong'o	APHRC		
22.	Peter Williams	Commonwealth Consortium for Education	<a href="mailto:peterrcwilliams@btinternet.com">peterrcwilliams@btinternet.com</a>	
23.	Lucy Maina	GRIC	<a href="mailto:lmaina@gricafrika.org">lmaina@gricafrika.org</a>	EAC
24.	Robyn Whittaker	Africa Voices Dialogue	<a href="mailto:robyn@kaleidoscopelights.com">robyn@kaleidoscopelights.com</a>	Africa
25.	Asmara Figue	Action Aid	<a href="mailto:asmara.figue@actionaid.org">asmara.figue@actionaid.org</a>	Global
26.	Grace Mkosamali	AMUCTA/RELI TZ	<a href="mailto:gracemkosa@gmail.com">gracemkosa@gmail.com</a>	
27.	Elizabeth Ngumi		<a href="mailto:elizabeth.ngumbi6@gmail.com">elizabeth.ngumbi6@gmail.com</a>	